

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2022

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HM returns from Germany

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq returned home after a private visit to the Federal Republic of Germany on Sunday.

The Diwan of Royal Court issued a statement saying, 'Under the divine protection of the Almighty Allah, His Majesty the Sultan returned home today after a private visit to Germany.'

ONA

RO4.1bn stimulus to boost economy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The government allocated RO4.1bn to stimulate the economy in the last two years to counter the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This came in a statement by H E Dr Said Mohammed Ahmed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, to Majlis A'Shura which is hosting him for two days - Sunday and Monday - to discuss the challenges faced by the Omani economy in the last two years.

Majlis A'Shura discussed issues related to economic diversification as per Oman Vision 2040, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy, strategic programmes of the tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), and the ministry's short-term plans, including for jobseekers.

H E Dr Saqri stated that the Ministry of Economy evaluated economic policies and implemented stimulus programmes to the tune of RO4.1bn in the last two years of the ongoing pandemic.



The state's public revenues increased 28.71 per cent in 2021 over 2020 as a result of the rise in oil prices

H E DR SAID AL SAQRI

demic. The stimulus programmes targeted several sectors, including RO17mn in incentives related to taxes and fees, RO145mn to improve the business environment, RO24mn to support SMEs, RO12mn for the labour market and employment, and RO3.86bn to support the banking sector.

The minister informed that GDP grew by 12.7 per cent, oil

sector-related activities by 26.5 per cent, non-oil sector by 7.8 per cent, and the manufacturing sector by 25.8 per cent at the end of the third quarter of 2021 compared to the same period in 2020.

"Economic stimulus initiatives have shown several positive effects, such as reduction in layoffs of national workers in the private sector, revival of economic activities, revitalisation of the real estate sector, foreign investments and encouragement to entrepreneurs to start new projects," H E Dr Saqri said.

Elaborating on public finance performance, he informed that the state's public revenues increased 28.71 per cent in 2021 over 2020 as a result of the rise in oil prices.

Pointing to the challenges faced by the private sector due to fewer development and investment projects, H E Sheikh Khalid al Maawali, chairman of Majlis A'Shura, said, "The approval of credit finance indicates that only RO100mn has been approved for new projects this year."

TOURISM PROMOTION IN PARIS

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has launched a promotional campaign in France to showcase the beauty of Oman. According to the ministry, the mobile campaign highlights Oman aboard public transport buses in the most popular tourist sites, including the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, Eiffel Tower and Place de la Concorde. 'This campaign helps in promoting Oman as a distinct tourism destination that attracts European tourists, encouraging French tourists in particular, to discover Oman,' the ministry stated. Rania Khader, head of the Tourism Representation Office of Oman in France, informed that since the reopening of the sultanate to tourists on September 1, 2021, more than 12,000 French nationals visited Oman between September and December 2021.



(Supplied photo)

There will be no edition of *Muscat Daily* on March 1 on account of the Isra'a Wal Miraj holiday.

EU closes airspace for Russia, bans media

Brussels, Belgium - The EU on Sunday announced swingeing new sanctions against Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, closing its airspace to Russian aircraft and banning Russian state media outlets broadcasting in the bloc.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen, announcing the measures, also said the European Union was taking the unprecedented step of financing arms to Ukraine, and was hitting Russian ally Belarus with sanctions for facilitating the invasion.

The Russian army on Sunday admitted that there were "killed and injured" soldiers among its troops in Ukraine on the fourth day of its invasion of the country, without specifying how many Russians had died there.

See also Page 09



40 plots of land recovered from investors: MHT

Fixed-term contracts for Omanis in govt jobs

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omanis working in the government sector will be offered fixed-term contracts, instead of open-ended permanent jobs, according to a new decision of the Ministry of Labour (MoL).

As per the decision, both employer and employee can terminate the contract before it ends.

The decision, which is in line with Royal Decree No 89/2020, stated that Omanis will be employed in units of the state's administrative apparatus and other public legal offices through contracts.



tracts.

'Either of the two parties may terminate the contract before the end of the contractual period without stating reasons, provided that the other party is notified no less than three months prior to

the termination. During this time, the second party (employee) will remain in service,' it stated.

It added that the first party (employer) may waive the right of the second party to continue working after they have been no-

tified of termination, or ask them to continue to work until the end of their notice period, if circumstances so require.

'The second party (employee) is entitled to periodic bonuses on January 1 each year, according to their pay grade, and equivalent to their financial allocations, provided that at least six months have passed since the date of commencement of the contract,' the decision stated.

It added that an employee whose job performance is marked as poor will not be eligible for periodic increment the following year.

11 agreements worth RO20mn inked to boost food security



(Supplied photo)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning signed 11 agreements with several companies and private establishments to the tune of RO20mn on Sunday.

Five agreements were inked within the framework of the Food Security Lab, and six land usufruct agreements to set up agricultural projects. The projects will provide for the agricultural needs of the sultanate in a modern and innovative manner complying with food security regulations.

The projects include production facilities for white and red meat, eggs, vegetables, fruits, hydroponic produce and moringa oil, among others, to be set up in the governorates of North Batinah, South Batinah, North Sharqiyah, South Sharqiyah, Dhahirah and Musandam.

The agreements were signed by H E Dr Khalfan Said al Shuaili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, and representatives of the companies implementing the projects, in the presence of H E

Dr Saud Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The agreements include poultry projects - one in Ibri, Dhahirah, on an area of 70 acres and at a cost of RO900,000 to produce 46mn eggs annually, and another in Dhank, Dhahirah, on an area of 250 acres, at a total cost of RO1.5mn, to produce 6mn chicks annually.

An agreement worth RO350,000 will see the establishment of an incubator for entrepreneurs in Khasab, Musandam, on an area of 105 acres.

The usufruct agreements include one to establish a goat and sheep farm in Suwaig, North Batinah, on an area of ten acres at a cost of RO100,000, and two projects in Ibri, Dhahirah - a goat farm on an area of 63,000sqm at a cost of RO120,000, and fruits and vegetables farm on an area of ten acres at a cost of RO90,000.

An usufruct agreement in Jalan Bani Bu Hasan, South Sharqiyah, will see the establishment of a 20,000sqm poultry farm at a cost of RO45,000.

SAYYID ASAAD BIDS FAREWELL TO ENVOY OF SOUTH KOREA



On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Sayyid Asaad bin Tariq al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received in his office on Sunday Kim Chang-kyu, Ambassador of South Korea to Oman, to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty in the sultanate (ONA)



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Khalil al Tamimi
Communications officer

Prices of medicines are indeed very high in Oman. In times of emergency, we need to shell out extra even for basic medicines. It is high time the government and authorities took note of this.



Mohammad al Lawati
Ministry of Education employee

Medicines in Oman are priced very high compared to other GCC countries. I remember buying a medicine from India for around RO5. The same medicine cost RO20 here. There's a difference in medicine prices between Dubai and Muscat, too. It is ridiculous and a pressure on the common man.



Hussam Sameer
Bank employee

I do not see a big difference in medicine prices in Oman and other GCC countries. There's a very small difference compared to Qatar, Kuwait and the UAE. With the exception of a few rare medicines, there isn't much of a difference in prices of most basic ones.



Reema Bhatia
Teacher

The price of medicines is too high and out of reach for far too many. Lowering medicine prices is a pre-requisite to control healthcare, thus determining affordability and people's access to care. People in the private sector often have to pay an extremely high and unaffordable price for their wellbeing.



Mohan Anandan
Bank employee

As clarified by the Ministry of Health recently, prices of medicines in Oman are approved after making comparisons with the prices of more than 30 countries whose markets are similar to those of the Gulf countries. Hence, it is unfair to conclude that medicines are overpriced in Oman.



Jay Prakash
Private sector employee

Yes, medicines are overpriced here compared to other developing countries of Asia. Conducting regular raids on pharmacies and examining the stickers stuck over the printed price in medicines will keep medicine prices in check and make these accessible to low-wage earners.



? **NEXT ON
YOUR SAY**

How can public transport be improved in Muscat?

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

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	27	17
Doha	25	15
Kuwait City	25	15
Manama	22	15
Muscat	29	20
Riyadh	25	12

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	5.15am
Sunrise	6.30am
Duhr	12.24pm
Asr	3.45pm
Maghrib	6.14pm
Isha	7.24pm

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Omani researcher develops portable device for analysis of pesticides in food

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An Omani researcher has developed a portable device for analysis of pesticides in food and environmental samples.

The research, titled 'A novel and selective multi-emission chemiluminescence system for the quantification of deltamethrin in food samples', by principal investigator Iman al Yahyai from Sultan Qaboos University was among the 13 winning projects of the eighth edition of the National Research Award organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The project was awarded in the Cultural, Social and Basic Sciences category for Young Researchers.

Iman and her team developed a portable device for on-site testing of pesticides in environmental and food samples by creating a chemiluminescence (CL) sys-



Iman al Yahyai

tem for selective determination of deltamethrin (DM). The system is based on the enhancing effect of polyphosphate (PP) on graphene quantum dots (GQDs) - potassium permanganate (KMnO₄) CL reaction.

According to Iman, the novelty of this system is its ability to emit light from more than one emitting source at different wavelengths under the same experimental conditions. A paper cutting fabrication tech-

nique was used to make the simple square shaped device. Several experimental parameters were thoroughly optimised, including the paper size, the order of injecting the analyte and CL reagents, and concentration and volume of reagents.

Elaborating further, Iman said DM analysis can be carried out at a minimal cost as a result of using small volumes of reagents and inexpensive materials. The CL system was fully optimised and applied successfully in determining DM concentrations in fruit juices. This method is a new analytical detection system for on-site screening purposes and can be extended to other analytes.

Iman noted that much effort has been devoted to food analysis, and that both government institutions and citizens, especially farmers, face several challenges in the analysis of different food samples either for monitoring

purposes or for certification.

Iman informed that the portable analytical device has been introduced to reduce the burden on citizens, as well as the government, in analysis of pesticides in food and environmental samples.

The device can also facilitate the government in monitoring food quality by performing on-site analysis at low cost and faster, while decreasing pressure on laboratories.

The device was applied successfully on different fruit juice samples collected from local markets. Results were promising and all samples were free from DM, increasing the confidence of customers in the quality of products in local markets.

The research was conducted Dr Haider al Lawati and Dr Javad Hassanzadeh, besides Iman, and published in the *Sensors and Actuators B: Chemical* journal which has an impact factor of 7.460.

18 acres freed from encroachment in N Sharqiyah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

North Sharqiyah Municipality has removed encroachment on 18 acres of land in the wilayat of Bidiyah.

A statement issued by North Sharqiyah Municipality said that its specialists recorded a number of violations in Bidiyah. 'The violations included encroachment on 75,995sqm (18 acres) of land mostly for agricultural purposes. The municipality has taken all legal and procedural measures for their removal.

'Dealing with these violations vary from case to case. Violators are made aware and guided to stop their encroachment. In the



(Supplied photo)

event that the violator fails to comply, immediate action is taken to remove these occupants

in accordance with regulations or referred to competent authorities to end these violations.'

North Sharqiyah Municipality removed the encroachments after verifying that there are no documents proving legal ownership of the plot.

'A board is placed at the site urging the encroacher to appear before the municipality with his documents proving ownership of the land.'

In case the violator fails to appear, the sheikh of the area is contacted to find the owner. If the encroacher is still not contactable, a violation is filed against the unknown person by the follow-up department of the competent directorate. The remaining procedures are completed and referred to the Public Prosecution to issue a ruling for removal.



صندوق مزون الأول
The First Mazoon Fund

P.O. Box 1137, PC 111 - CPO, Sultanate of Oman, CR No. 1279406, Tel: +968 24949001, Fax: +968 24949099, Email: fmf@u-capital.net, Web: www.u-capital.net

Invitation for Annual General Meeting

The First Mazoon Fund takes the pleasure in inviting all the unitholders to attend the Annual General Meeting which will be held on Monday March 14, 2022, at the company's Head Office located at Ominvest Business Center - Madinat Al Irfan - Building No. 95-seventh floor, at 3 pm via the electronic platform to hold general meeting which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om). If the quorum to convene the annual General Meeting is not complete the second general meeting will be held on Monday March 21, 2022, at the company's Head Office located at Ominvest Business Center - Madinat Al Irfan - Building No. 95-seventh floor, at 3 pm via the electronic platform to hold general meeting which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om), to decide on the following:

Agenda of Annual General Meeting (AGM):

- 1) Review and approval of the Fund Management's Report for the year ended 31st December 2021.
- 2) Review and approval of the Auditors Report and the audited Balance Sheet and Profit and Loss Statement for the year ended 31st December 2021.
- 3) Unit holders' consideration and approval for directors sitting fees for the financial year ended 31 December 2021 and fix the sitting fees for the year 2022.
- 4) Unit holders' consideration and approval for director's remuneration OMR 20,000 for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
- 5) Unit holders' consideration and approval regarding incentives for investment management team for OMR 10,000, for the financial year ended 31 December 2021 and to be paid in Q1, 2022.
- 6) Unit holders' consideration and approval for cash dividend of 15% (0.150 Baisa Per unit).
- 7) Unit holders' consideration for the related party transactions during the year ended 31 December 2021.
- 8) To elect the Board member - Nominations forms should be submitted 5 days prior to the AGM date to the Company and any Nomination forms submitted after Tuesday, 8th of March 2022 shall not be accepted.
- 9) To appoint auditors for the financial year 2022 and fix their fees.

According to the Fund Article of Association, and the controls for holding General Meetings using modern technology issued by Capital Market Authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- a. A legal person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the general meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCD.
- b. Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than 3 days before the date of the general meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meetings. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be cancelled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the general meeting.

For any inquiries please contact on telephone No 24949061

Chairman

Auditors

Legal Advisor

40 plots of land recovered from investors, says MHT

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Forty plots of land that were given the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) for investment have been withdrawn after the investors failed to set up proposed projects, according to H E Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism.

In an interview with Oman TV, H E Mahrouqi said, "Forty plots of lands were withdrawn due to the lack of seriousness of investors," indicating that this measure came with the aim of organising and developing the tourism sector and giving an opportunity to serious investors.

Talking about the lack of avenues for local tourists, H E Mahrouqi said that around RO700mn is spent outside the country by citizens on foreign tours. "It is our responsibility to reduce this through the establishment of entertainment projects that attract Omani tourists," he added.

He elaborated that Oman Vision 2040 depends on many aspects in the tourism sector, such as attracting investment, financial sustainability, and the contribution of sectors that aim to diversify the economy.

H E Mahrouqi said that over the next two years there will be a change in the level of services provided at various tourist sites. "Oman will open the largest entertainment project - Al Sharq by mid-2024 in Barka. The other new projects include Al Nakheel



(Supplied photo)



The government seeks to attract investments worth RO3bn by 2023 with a focus on developing public beaches in partnership with SMEs

H E SALIM BIN MOHAMMED AL MAHROUQI

Tourism Resort in Barka as well as another one in Quriyat."

The government seeks to attract investments worth RO3bn by 2023 with a focus on developing public beaches in partnership with small and medium enterprises (SMEs), said H E Mahrouqi.

He said that 90 per cent of SMEs around the world work in the tourism sector, and therefore supporting these institutions in the governorates through concessional financing programmes and low interest loans will contribute to the development of the tourism sector significantly.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has proven that it is necessary to develop infrastructure for domestic tourism and provide quality services and options. There are projects that will be implemented in the coming khareef season in Dhofar, including facilities in Attin Hamreer Plain, Al Mughassil and Darbat, and the construction of a zipline in Musandam."

According to H E Mahrouqi, MHT will also soon announce tenders for the management and operation of tourism sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List, such as Qalhat and Bat, under which investors will need to provide

basic services and guidance to visitors. "The ministry has finalised the guiding principles and special controls for stimulating adventure tourism. The ministry will work on restoring the Omani tourism sector in foreign markets, including European countries."

He confirmed that there is co-ordination between MHT and the concerned authorities to regulate the activities of tourist guides and control unlicensed practices by expatriates. He added that the Tourism Law will be launched soon to keep pace with the plans of Oman Vision 2040.

Book on diversity of Dhofar environment launched

Muscat - The Diwan of Royal Court launched a book titled *Dhofar: Monsoon Mountains to Sand Seas*. It was launched as part of activities of the 26th edition of Muscat International Book Fair.

The book is written by Dr Andrew Spalton and Dr Hadi Mus-salam al Hikmani.

Dr Hikmani, wildlife specialist and co-author of the book, said it has eight chapters, in addition to a general introduction. He explained that the first chapter of the book considers the great variety of natural landscapes in Dhofar, from fertile green mountains in the south to the towering sand dunes of the Empty Quarter desert in the north.

Other chapters describe the diverse flora and fauna, the climate, water resources and the traditional livelihoods of the people of the governorate. The final chapter is on environmental sustainability.

Spalton, a wildlife expert and former environmental affairs advisor in the Diwan of Royal Court, said that though Dhofar has been known since ancient times as the Land of Frankincense, it is today better known for its khareef season. "Dhofar is home to many



species of wild plants and animals that are not found elsewhere in the world."

He added that Dhofar has a long history, dating to nearly 13,000 years. "Until the end of the 20th century, the people there depended on land and sea to provide their livelihoods. Livestock grazing was the main activity of most communities, while fishing was the principal activity of the coastal communities."

Today, the people live very modern lives but remain deeply connected to their traditional livelihoods, he added.

The book is the first comprehensive documentation of environmental diversity in the governorate, documented in rare pictures and supported by rich text and accurate information about plant and animal life, nature, climate and the people in the region.

ONA

ROP NEWS

One arrested for drifting in Batinah: ROP

Muscat - Royal Oman Police (ROP) arrested a person for drifting and endangering others in Batinah governorate.

In a statement, ROP said, 'A driver put others

in danger. Legal measures have been taken against him.'

Drifting is popular among the youth but ROP has been urging all to refrain from it.

COVID-19 UPDATE

Muscat - The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Sunday announced 1,763 new COVID-19 cases registered in three days - Thursday, Friday and Saturday - taking the total number of cases in Oman to 381,381. Four more deaths were reported during this period.

'The total number of COVID-19 related deaths reported in the country now rises to 4,242,' an MoH statement said.

1,763
NEW CASES

The ministry added that the total number of recoveries is 367,204 after 4,404 recoveries were reported on Sunday, accounting for a recovery rate of 96.3 per cent.

'There were 39 new hospitalisations in the past 24 hours. The total number of COVID-19 patients currently in health institutions is 248, including 57 in intensive care units,' it stated.

INVITATION TO TENDER



Sohar Aluminium LLC (SA), PO Box 80, PC- 327, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman hereby invites qualified Suppliers/Contractors for the following tender:

Tender No. : RFP 22-002

Tender Title : Provision of Potline Basement Cleaning Services

Scope : Sohar Aluminium invites experienced service providers who can provide the complete services including skilled manpower and equipment's to carry out the Potline basement material cleaning scope. A detailed scope will be issued to the interested bidders after validating their company profile and ability to perform the services as per required standards.

Tender No. : RFP 22/003

Tender Title : Provision Potline Pot Tending Services

Scope : Sohar Aluminium invites experienced service providers who can provide the complete services including skilled manpower and supervision to carry out the Potline Pot Tending services. A detailed scope will be issued to the interested bidders after validating their company profile and ability to perform the services as per required standards.

Tender No. : MM20-007

Tender Title : Sale of mobile equipment

Scope : Sale of mobile equipment which includes forklifts, Road sweepers and other Aluminium smelter related mobile equipment. Equipment is available on as is where is basis.

Kindly send your email and company profile to: tender@sohar-aluminium.com
For list of active tenders visit: <https://www.sohar-aluminium.com/en/content/tender-listing>



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UBHAR GCC FUND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2021

The Chairman's Report For December 31st, 2021

On behalf of the Investment Committee Members, I am pleased to present the financial results of Ubhar GCC Fund for the year ended December 31, 2021.

A brief summary of financial results is as follows:

Figure 1:	For the year ended December 31, 2021 (OMR)	For the year ended December 31, 2020 (OMR)
Total Income	1,480,115	324,686
Total Expenses	(290,442)	(148,282)
Profit (Loss) for the Period	1,189,673	176,404
Profit (Loss) per Unit	0.237	0.033

Fund Performance:
For the year ended December 31, 2021 the performance of Ubhar GCC Fund is as follows:

Figure 2:	December 31, 2021	December 31, 2020
Net Asset Value (OMR)	5,360,062	5,630,311
Number of Outstanding Units	4,936,687	5,153,522
Net Asset Value per Unit*	1.240*	1.055
UBGCC Fund Performance for the period	23.38%	4.02%
Benchmark Performance for the period	31.43%	-1.71%

*NAV per unit for 2021 is after cash dividends and bonus units, and net of performance fees

Market Performance:

GCC markets witnessed a great performance in 2021, as the S&P GCC Index registered the biggest gain in 13 years, soaring by 31.43%. Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange was the best performer in the region with a staggering gain of 68.24%. The Saudi Exchange (Tadawul) came second with strong returns of 29.83%, closely followed by Dubai and Kuwait markets with returns of 28.25% and 26.24%, respectively. Bahrain index rose by 20.64%, while Muscat and Qatar Exchanges registered moderate gains of 12.87% and 11.40%, respectively.

Gains for both Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia were driven by listing of several state-owned firms, while several new initiatives were taken in the region to diversify economies away from oil. Generally speaking, the region's stock markets were buoyed by healthy economic recovery, higher oil prices, and stronger corporate profitability. Oil prices continued to support the recovery of the markets, as Brent crude finished the year with a gain of +50% and closing at USD 77.78 pbl.

Figure A: Index Returns

The following table illustrates the performance of GCC indices for the year ended December 31, 2021

Index	Q4 2021	FY 2021
Abu Dhabi Securities Market	10.26%	68.24%
S&P GCC Index	1.00%	31.43%
Saudi Stock Exchange (Tadawul)	-1.86%	29.83%
Dubai Financial Market	12.31%	28.25%
Boursa Kuwait	2.60%	26.24%
Bahrain Bourse	5.38%	20.64%
Muscat Securities Exchange	4.74%	12.87%
Qatar Exchange	1.22%	11.40%

The MSCI World index had a wonderful year, ending the year higher by 20.14%. On the other hand, the emerging market index fell short and logged a loss of 4.59%.

The global economy experienced a strong finish in 2021, with economic performance accelerating in the absence of most pandemic restrictions. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected 5.9% global growth for 2021. The US economy had a very strong fourth quarter, with GDP expanding at a rate of 6.9% and annual GDP growth estimated at 5.7%. China's economy expanded 8.1% in 2021, while eurozone GDP growth should reach 5.2% (OECD). Estimates of GDP growth for India's fiscal year, which extends through March of 2022, are around 9.0% (IMF).

Markets Outlook:

At the beginning of 2022, outlook on stock markets across the globe is somehow unstable, due to the geopolitical tensions across different regions, the threat of the Omicron variant, and the rising global inflation figures. The geopolitical uprising is threatening to spike oil and gas

prices, and further fuel inflation concerns. Also, supply chain disruptions will continue to create price pressures across numerous sectors.

While many central banks around the world have already started raising interest rates, the US Federal reserve is still lagging, but is expected - according to analysts - to have seven rate hikes in 2022. On the other hand, the IMF is estimating global economic growth to moderate from 5.9% in 2021 to 4.4 in 2022, while MENA economic growth is expected to be slightly more than forecasted earlier for 2022.

On behalf of the Investment Committee
Chairman
February 23, 2022

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income For 31 December 2021

	2021 RO	2020 RO
Income		
Dividend income	194,180	175,294
Interest income	9,674	27,963
Other income	6,058	35,551
Total income	209,912	238,808
Net realised gain/(loss) on sale of financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	915,622	(226,329)
Net unrealised gain on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	354,581	312,207
Net investment income	1,480,115	324,686
Expenses		
Management fees	(88,834)	(76,441)
Administration fees	(10,000)	(8,115)
Custody fees	(25,762)	(22,683)
Performance fee	(96,030)	-
Transaction cost	(50,691)	(23,960)
General and administrative expenses	(19,125)	(19,083)
Total expenses	(290,442)	(148,282)
Profit and total comprehensive income and increase in net assets attributable to the unitholders for the year	1,189,673	176,404
Profit per unit	0.237	0.033

Statement of financial position As at 31 December 2021

	2021 RO	2020 RO
Assets		
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	5,783,010	4,788,926
Cash and cash equivalents	566,342	822,233
Other receivables	10,710	19,152
Total assets	6,360,062	5,630,311
Liabilities		
Payables and accruals	111,740	9,291
Amount due to brokers	126,777	184,721
Net assets attributable to the unitholders	6,121,545	5,436,309
Total liabilities and net assets attributable to the unitholders	6,360,062	5,630,311
Net assets per unit attributable to the unitholders	1.240	1.055

For more information please contact:
Ubhar Capital SAOC, P.O. Box 1137, Postal Code 111 CPO, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24 949 032/030, Fax: 24949099, Email: ubhargccfund@u-capital.net, website: www.u-capital.net

MSX inches down; volumes surge

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) was marginally down by 0.02 per cent at 4,035.96 points on Sunday.

Trading activity improved from the previous session as

turnover jumped by 34.18 per cent to RO3.67mn and volumes surged 116.1 per cent to 27.23mn shares.

While Financial index fell 0.36 per cent, Industrial and Services indices rose 0.44 per cent and 0.48 per cent, respectively. The MSX Shariah Index closed up by 0.44 per cent at

488.97 points.

Market breadth remained positive as 13 companies closed up, while seven companies closed down.

The rest 22 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were United Finance (3.8 per cent), Barka Desalination (3.45 per cent),

Oman Fisheries (2.9 per cent) and Renaissance Services (2.75 per cent).

Top losers were Dhofar Generating Co (-6.9 per cent), Al Ahlia Insurance (-6.17 per cent), Al Batinah Development & Investment Holding Co (-2.44 per cent), BankDhofar (-1.72 per cent).



Barka Desalination listed on MSX following successful close of IPO

Muscat - Following the successful close of the initial public offering (IPO) and the strong response generated with oversubscription achieved in both tranches for the retail as well as for the large and institutional investors, Barka Desalination Company (BDC) successfully listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on Sunday under the ticker BRDE.

The IPO transaction was successfully executed through a book-building process for institutional and large investors with the live display of order book, participation of banks as well as brokers in the collection of application and the E-IPO process for applications by retail investors, according to a press release.

Murtadha Sultan, BDC's chairman, said, "This is indeed a

proud moment for all the founder shareholders as it marks an important milestone in the successful journey of Barka Desalination Company."

"Congratulations to the entire team that has been part of the Barka IWP project, and specifically this IPO. I would like to take this opportunity to extend our sincere thanks to the CMA for their continued guidance right through the IPO process, and MSX and MCD for their incredible support," he added.

Commenting on the achievement Patrick Thienpont, chief executive officer of BDC, said, "The listing of Barka Desalination on MSX is a time to reflect on the success of the company, and the importance of water as a valuable resource for the development of the nation. Barka

Desalination is committed to continue its strong performance to deliver value for our existing and new shareholders. Thanks to the regulators, and also special thanks to all our IPO partners who are part of this success - Bank Muscat Investment Banking, legal advisors AMJ and all the collecting agents."

In spite of the geopolitical events which have impacted global as well as regional markets in the last few days, BDC stock consistently traded at a premium to the IPO price of 145bz on the day of its listing.

The scrip opened strongly at 150bz and touched a high of 152bz during its first day of trading. According to market data, more than 3.1mn shares of BDC were traded on the day of its listing.

GCC requires \$50bn grid-related investments for clean energy

Dubai, UAE - The GCC could require nearly US\$50bn of grid-related investments to support proposed capacity additions from renewables, according to Clean Energy - Going Beyond the Grid, a whitepaper prepared by Frost & Sullivan for Middle East Energy, the MENA region's most reputable and comprehensive event for the energy sector.

The whitepaper revealed that for the GCC to diversify its power mix, investment in large-scale renewables capacity additions is required and would need corresponding increased investment in transmission and distribution networks to eliminate inadequacies, according to a press release.

In line with the expected increase in grid-related investments, a report titled 'Global Power Transmission and Distribution Equipment Industry' has highlighted the transmission and distribution equipment industry is expected to top US\$312.8bn globally by 2026, further underscoring its importance as a central theme when Middle East Energy, formally Middle East Electricity, returns to the Dubai World Trade Centre from March 7-9.



Azzan Mohammed

Azzan Mohammed, exhibition director, Global Energy & Utilities Forum and Middle East Energy, said, "At the very centre of harnessing renewable energy and making it available for consumers is effective transmission and distribution networks, which is why the sector continues to play a prominent role at the Middle East Energy exhibition and during dedicated conference sessions."

"With the value of the transmission and distribution equipment industry continuing to grow exponentially, a range of market leaders have already confirmed their attendance at Middle East Energy and will be showcasing the latest technology

and innovations supporting the delivery of renewable energy to end-users and, ultimately, delivering on the regions net-zero commitments."

Exhibitors, including DUCAB, Lucy Electric, Rittal, Emirates Transformers, Eaton, Riyadh Cables, Tesar and Bahra will provide insights into the latest breakthrough technologies, upgraded services, and solutions driving higher efficiency and flexibility within the sector.

In addition, a range of in-depth sessions as part of the Global Energy & Utilities Forum, including Grids of the Future, will address pressing industry issues, such as digital technologies for stabilising grids during the energy transition; the role of machine learning and AI in future grids; and the rise of the 'prosumer', someone who both produces and consumes energy, and their impact on grid development.

Visitors will have the opportunity to hear from experts regarding technologies in energy storage for the grid, clean technologies in the microgrid, and leveraging residential EVs for grid stability, among others.

شركة صناعة مواد البناء (ش.م.ع.ع) Construction Materials Industries (S.A.O.G)

P.O. Box: 1791, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: 26752247/26752287, Fax: 26750867

BOARD OF DIRECTORS REPORT

Respected shareholders of Construction Materials Industries,
Peace, mercy and blessings of God ..

On my own behalf and on behalf of the members of the Board of Directors, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the forty-fourth ordinary Annual General Meeting of your esteemed company and I am pleased to present to you the report of the Board of Directors in addition to the annual report of the auditor for the financial year ending on 31/12/2021.

Achievements and significant events that affected the company during the year 2021

The year 2021 was a year of unprecedented change and challenges as a result of the Corona Virus (Covid-19) pandemic, as almost all countries in this world witnessed a wave of closures to limit the spread of the virus, which affected the rise in oil and energy prices such as fuel, electricity and raw materials used in production. These adverse impact on some of our customers in the local and foreign markets and despite the other difficulties that the company faced, such as the lime kiln with a capacity of (100 tons) stopped working due to periodic maintenance for a period of more than a month, and the major maintenance of the lime stone grinding mill for a period of more than six months due to the main gearbox breakdown.

The persistence and commitment of the management and the company's work team had a great impact, which contributed to transforming challenges into achievements. Despite these adverse conditions, the company was able to overcome this crisis and achieve a record increase in sales volume over last year by 9.0% compared to the previous year (Sales Income 2021: RO.4,041,630/-, 2020: RO.3,707,553/-).

As a result of the continuous perseverance the year 2021 also witnessed an increase in net profits after taxes of 126% compared to the net profits of the previous year (Net Profit After Tax 2021: RO.500,798/-, 2020: RO.221,651/-).

We are also pleased to inform you that some of the direct and indirect expenses were reduced during the year, such as gas consumption and direct raw materials. A new product, (dolomite), was also introduced in the local market recently which had a significant impact on improving the company's performance during the year.

The following is the geographical analysis of sales as of 31/12/2021.

Total foreign sales, domestic sales, the statement :-

Total	Export Sales	Local Sales	Particulars
RO. 4,041,630 /-	RO.1,183,883/-	RO. 2,857,747 /-	Sales

Future Plans and Challenges for the company for the coming year:

The company's management is continuing its hard work to develop the company to achieve the best results during the coming period by following up all the obstacles faced by the company and working to follow them up with the relevant government agencies. Company management is persistently striving to reduce the cost of production to increase the ability to compete in local and foreign markets by taking care of the following :-

- Consistent follow-up with the government agencies concerned for raising the company's share of natural gas in order to be able to operate both lime kilns at full production capacity.
- Regular interaction with the concerned authorities to complete all the requirements for operating the Al-Jazi quarry in the state of Sohar.
- Follow-up with the concerned authorities to obtain the mining license for the quarry in Al Dhahirah Governorate - Wilayat Dhank .
- Further improving of production processes in order to reduce production costs.
- Increase the company's share in the local and regional markets, to reflect it in our business results.
- Steady and continuous exploration of new markets with a better profit margin.
- Finding new sources of raw materials at a lower cost.

Internal control:-

The company has an internal control system to ensure the progress of work in accordance with the controls issued by the Authority for the capital market.

Donations and contributions paid by the company during the year 2021

The company is committed in implementing all environmental standards and requirements, as the company's factories are operating in line with these environmental standards and requirements. The company has also made donations and contributions to serve the local community during this year by RO.1,486/-.

The company's contribution to serving the environment and the local community

The company is committed to implementing all environmental standards and requirements as the company's factories are being operated in line with these environmental standards and requirements.

The company's policy for distributing profits to shareholders:-

The company has not announced any dividends for the year 2021 due to the accumulated losses from previous years.

Reservations in the reports of the auditor:

The external auditors (Baker Tilly) do not have any reservations on the company's financial report for the year 2021.

As stated the above, I am pleased and honored to take this opportunity to extend my sincere thanks and deep appreciation to the supreme place of His Majesty the Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, may God preserve him and his patron, for his noble and sound guidance, his patronage, and his continuous support for the advancement of the national industry, to the various ministries and government departments in the Sultanate to support and participate in serving our beloved country and the Generous and Kind People of Oman.

In conclusion, I also take this opportunity to express my deep thanks and appreciation to the shareholders of the company, its customers and suppliers, and to all employees of the company for their efforts to raise the level of the company and work to continue achieve the best results based on the plan set for the year 2022.

Peace, mercy and blessings of God, ..

Khalid bin Abdullah Al-Jabri
Chairman of Board of Directors

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2021

	2021 RO	2020 RO
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	4,359,643	4,591,904
Right-of-use assets	452,421	332,652
Total non-current assets	4,812,064	4,924,556
Current assets		
Inventories	1,301,708	1,279,482
Trade and other receivables	804,426	786,439
Cash and cash equivalents	958,861	299,162
Total current assets	3,064,995	2,365,083
Total assets	7,877,059	7,289,639

EQUITY AND LIABILITIES

Equity		
Share capital	8,500,000	8,500,000
Legal reserve	352,474	302,394
Accumulated losses	(2,250,485)	(2,701,203)
Total equity	6,601,989	6,101,191

Liabilities

Non-current liabilities		
Non-current portion of term loans	-	19,387
Non-current portion of lease liability	436,834	321,646
Employees' end of service benefits	119,016	107,874
Deferred tax liability	154,002	144,629
Provision for decommissioning costs	14,621	13,268
Total non-current liabilities	724,473	606,804

Current liabilities

Current portion of term loans	-	111,197
Current portion of lease liability	45,737	28,718
Trade and other payables	477,597	441,343
Bank borrowings	47	386
Tax provision	27,216	-
Total current liabilities	550,597	581,644
Total liabilities	1,275,070	1,188,448
Total equity and liabilities	7,877,059	7,289,639
Net assets per share	0.078	0.072

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2021

	2021 RO	2020 RO
Revenue	4,041,630	3,707,553
Direct costs	(2,992,916)	(2,983,042)
Gross profit	1,048,714	724,511
Other income	2,290	20,374
General and administration expenses	(394,209)	(335,985)
Selling and marketing expenses	(85,709)	(92,182)
Provision for slow and non-moving inventories	-	(56,820)
Operating profit	571,086	259,898
Net finance charges	(33,699)	(37,121)
Profit before taxation	537,387	222,777
Income tax expenses	(36,589)	(1,126)
Net profit for the year	500,798	221,651
Other comprehensive income	-	-
Total comprehensive income for the year	500,798	221,651
Basic and diluted earnings per share	0.0059	0.0026

Note: The complete accounts either in English or Arabic will be sent to any shareholder by mail within 7 days of receipt of request




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UAE aims to increase size of economy to AED3tn

Sharjah, UAE - Abdullah bin Touq al Marri, Minister of Economy, said the UAE aims to increase the size of its economy from AED1.4tn to AED3tn by 2030.

This goal requires adopting new economic diversification strategies, in addition to supporting new economic sectors, including embracing the Fourth Industrial Revolution and employing advanced technologies to advance the national economy, increase research capacities, ensure future industries and encourage foreign direct investments (FDI), he added.

Marri made this statement during the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Ministry of Economy and the Sharjah FDI Office (Invest in Sharjah) to promote cooperation, as part of the first edition of the Investopia Investment Summit, which will take place on March 28.

In 2020, the UAE attracted FDIs worth some US\$20bn, an increase of 17 per cent compared to 2019, he added. The UAE was ranked 15th globally and first, in



the Middle East, North Africa and West Asia in terms of investment flows in the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) World Investment Report 2021.

He also said the UAE was ranked 13th globally in terms of foreign investments, stressing that it aims to attract foreign investments worth AED550bn in the coming years.

The agreement was signed by

Abdulla al Saleh, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy, in the presence of Minister of Economy; and Mohamed Juma al Musharrakh, chief executive officer at Sharjah FDI office (invest in Sharjah), in the presence of Marwan bin Jassim al Sarkal, executive chairman of Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq).

Saleh, said, "In line with the vision and 'Principles of the 50', Investopia is the first platform that

unifies all national investment opportunities and development projects from all seven emirates. Accordingly, this MoU with Sharjah FDI reflects the sixth principle from Principles of the 50 about UAE as one economic destination, one tourist destination, one industrial destination, one investment destination, and one cultural destination."

WAM

Alibaba says profit fell 74% in 'volatile' environment

Shanghai, China - Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba on Thursday said profit in the October-December period fell 74 per cent, the company's third straight quarterly drop as it faces myriad challenges including a government crackdown, slowing sales growth and intensifying domestic competition.

Hangzhou-based Alibaba Group cited a 'complex and volatile market environment' in announcing net income of US\$3.2bn, a fall of 74 per cent on-year.

Revenue grew just 10 per cent to 242.6bn yuan, the smallest percentage increase reported by the company since it went public in 2014, according to Bloomberg financial news.

Alibaba's Hong Kong- and US-listed shares have lost half their value over the past 12 months due to the company's troubles, headlined by a wide-ranging crackdown by Chinese regulators on alleged anti-competitive practices by Alibaba and other domestic tech giants.

The scrutiny, which kicked off in late 2020, caused a record-breaking planned IPO by Alibaba's digital-payments affiliate



Ant Group to be pulled at the last minute, while Alibaba was hit with a record US\$2.75bn fine for the alleged unfair practices.

Other tech giants were also hit with fines and various business restrictions.

The government has taken aim at allegations of abuse of user data and monopolistic business practices, and authorities have signalled concern that Ant Group's foray into online lending could fuel worrisome debt levels in the economy.

But the crackdown also appears motivated in part by the wider perception that Chinese

Big Tech had become too powerful and under-regulated.

The pressure comes as Alibaba's days of massive jumps in sales and earnings growth appear numbered.

The quarter is highlighted by China's annual Singles' Day shopping spree which climaxes on November 11.

The world's biggest shopping festival, it was patterned on - but now dwarfs - the Black Friday promotions in the United States. But sales the latest time around, while still a record, grew at a slower-than-usual pace.

AFP

Engines giant Rolls-Royce back in profit, seeks chief executive

London, UK - Rolls-Royce, the British maker of aircraft engines, announced a return to annual profit in 2021 after it slashed costs, adding that its long-serving chief executive would step down.

Rolls posted net profit of £120mn last year, compared

with a loss after tax totalling £3.2bn in 2020.

That year it axed thousands of jobs and launched a major divestment programme to navigate damaging pandemic fallout across the aviation industry.

Rolls on Thursday said that Warren East would leave his role

as CEO at the end of 2022 after eight years in the top role.

'As a result, the board will now launch a thorough and extensive search for his successor,' a statement said.

The announcement of his departure, coupled with Russia's military attack on neighbouring

Ukraine, sent shares in Rolls tumbling 14 per cent in early London trading on Thursday.

"Even though markets were already in a bad mood because of... Ukraine, shares in Rolls-Royce fell by even greater magnitude as investors reacted really badly to the resignation of CEO

Warren East," noted Russ Mould, investment director at AJ Bell.

"East has been at the helm of Rolls-Royce for a comparatively long time and while progress may have been slower than the market may have liked... he was given the benefit of the doubt in

a slow rehabilitation of the business."

Mould pointed to 'a string of damaging profit warnings in the early 2010s and a serious cash flow problem'.

East said Rolls benefitted last year from a restructuring programme ahead of schedule, 'po-

sitioning civil aerospace to capitalise on increasing international travel' as economies reopen after pandemic lockdowns.

In the military defence sector, Rolls has 'seen growth driven by strong demand in all' its markets.

AFP

TENDERS ADVERTISEMENT

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) Announce the following Tenders:

Sr.No	Tender No.	Tender Name	Last Date for Obtaining Tender Documents	Closing Date	Grade	Tender Document's Fees (Including VAT) (RO)
1	05/2022	Travel Agency Services for 4 years (2022-2026)	14/03/2022	12/04/2022	Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate.	236.250
2	06/2022	Providing Maintenance for the UPS & Cooling System in OETC Head Office for Three years	14/03/2022	12/04/2022	Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate.	157.500

Participation:	Interested Companies may obtain Tender Document with the necessity of sending a valid Tender Board certificate in the same required field.
Buying the Tender:	The documents required for the purchase of the tender are sent by e-mail to the Tenders, Procurement and Contracts Department, to ensure the authenticity of the documents before purchasing the tender during the official working days from 8.00 hr am - 01.00 pm hr.
Fees:	Against non-refundable payment as mentioned above against each set of document. (Payment Through Bank Transfer)
The deadline for clarification:	Before (21) Days from closing date.
Submission:	Each bid should be submitted in a separate sealed envelope addressed to The Chairman of tender committee mentioning Tender Number and Name on the top of the envelope.
Terms and conditions:	- No other writing or any reference thereto should be mentioned on the envelope. - The bid should be valid for not less than (90) days from closing date. - The Tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the bid value and should be valid for (90) days from closing date, addressed to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC). - Any bid not comply with the required guarantee, will not be accepted. - OETC is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offers.
Offer:	The complete bid documents should be deposited in Tender Box No. (1) at the company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission of the Tenders.
Company Address:	Muscat - Al Mawaleh Road No: 2153 - Building No. 423 O Block No: 321 - Contact Details: 91777378 - 92217856
Email Website:	tenders@omangrid.com www.omangrid.com



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P.O. Box 1389, Al Khoudh, PC 132, Sultanate of Oman
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إعلان طرح مناقصات

تعلن الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء عن طرح المناقصات التالية :

م	رقم المناقصة	عنوان المناقصة	آخر موعد للحصول على مستندات المناقصة	آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات	الدرجة	لن الوثيقة (شامل ضريبة القيمة المضافة) (ارغ)
١	٢٠٢٢/٠٥	تقديم خدمات مكاتب السفر لمدة 4 سنوات (2026-2022)	٢٠٢٢/٠٣/١٤	٢٠٢٢/٠٤/١٢	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال والمسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول .	٢٣٦,٢٥٠
٢	٢٠٢٢/٠٦	توفير خدمات الصيانة لنظام وحدة توفير الطاقة و نظام تبريد مركز البيانات في المكتب الرئيسي للشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء لمدة 3 سنوات	٢٠٢٢/٠٣/١٤	٢٠٢٢/٠٤/١٢	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال والمسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول .	١٥٧,٥٠٠

الاشتراك	يمكن للشركات والمؤسسات المتخصصة الحصول على مستندات المناقصة مع ضرورة ارسال شهادة مجلس المناقصات سارية المفعول وفي نفس المجال المطلوب .
طريقة الشراء	يتم إرسال المستندات المطلوبة لشراء المناقصة عن طريق البريد الإلكتروني إلى دائرة المناقصات والمشتريات والعقود . وذلك للتأكد من صحة المستندات قبل شراء المناقصة وذلك في أيام العمل الرسمية من الساعة ٨:٠٠ ص - ١:٠٠ م .
الرسوم	مقابل دفع المبلغ المحدد أعلاه للنسخة الواحدة - لا ترد (الدفع عن طريق التحويل البنكي)
آخر موعد للإستفسارات	قبل (٢١) يوم من تاريخ آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات
تقديم العروض	تقدم العروض في مظاريغ مغلقة ومعنونة بإسم رئيس لجنة المناقصات مع تحديد رقم وعنوان المناقصة فقط . • عدم تحديد اسم صاحب العطاء أو ما يشير إليه على المظروف. • أن تكون العروض سارية المفعول لمدة لا تقل عن (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء . • إرفاق تأميناً في صورة ضمان مصرفي من أحد البنوك العاملة في البلاد قدره (٪١) من قيمة العطاء ساري لمدة (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء . ومعنونة بإسم الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء . • كل عطاء لا يستوفي التأمين المطلوب لن ينظر فيه . • الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء غير مقيدة بقبول أقل العروض أو أي عطاء آخر .
العرض المقدم	يجب وضع العروض في صندوق المناقصات رقم (١) بمبنى الشركة قبل الساعة ١١ صباحاً من التاريخ المحدد لتقديم العطاءات .
عنوان الشركة	عنوان الشركة: محافظة مسقط - الموالج رقم المسكة ٢١٥٣ - مبنى رقم ٤٢٣ - تفاصيل التواصل ٩٢٢١٧٨٥٦ - ٩١٧٧٧٣٧٨
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Zubair Corporation organises 2nd Human Resources Forum for empowerment

The Zubair Corporation recently conducted its second Human Resources Forum, which aims to empower human capital by promoting constructive communication between the various Human Resources departments of the Group.

The second edition of the HR forum was in cooperation with the Public Authority for Social Insurance and saw the presence of several legal specialists from the authority alongside various members of the institution's senior management and the heads of Human Resources from the Zubair Corporation's group companies, a press release said.

The forum witnessed the launch of a programme called 'Employee Benefits', which aims to provide a range of services and special offers for employees and is within the framework of the organisation's interest towards its staff.

This programme is one of the main pillars of the group's strategy in managing and developing human resources across all



group companies. Commenting on the forum, Hilal Omar al Siyabi, Chief Corporate Services Officer at The Zubair Corporation, said, "The first human resources forum at The Zubair Corporation and its group of subsidiaries has been the cornerstone for empowering human capital by promoting constructive communications between the various human resources departments of the group. The results of the first forum contributed significantly to sev-



eral decisions that were taken since the meeting with the stakeholders from the Public Authority for Social Insurance touched

base on the outcomes of the first forum." Mazin Abdullah al Tobi, head of the Inspection Department for

Work Injuries and Occupational Diseases at the Public Authority for Social Insurance, said, "First and foremost, we would like to

thank The Zubair Corporation for the opportunity to talk about the social security law with the group's human resources man-

agers. We believe that this will enhance the insurance culture and knowledge of human resources employees by having knowledge of the social insurance law.

"I was pleased to participate in the session and to respond to many inquiries from human resources managers at The Zubair Corporation and its subsidiaries, which shed light on a number of issues and matters related to the employee's relationship with the Public Authority for Social Insurance."

The forum highlighted the rights of employees in the social insurance sector.

The Heads of Human Resources asked many questions and inquiries about the rights and duties of the employee and other matters related to the insurance sector.

The forum concluded with a discussion session that included providing suggestions from the participants, which aims to develop cooperation between human resources departments.

UAE to host major international defence conference

Under the patronage of H H Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, United Arab Emirates Vice-President and Prime Minister, and Ruler of Dubai, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has announced the hosting of the inaugural International Defence Industry, Technology and Security Conference (IDITSC), which will take place at the Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre (ADNEC), on March 2 and 3.

The conference's strategic partners are G42, a leading Middle East artificial intelligence (AI) and cloud computing innovator based in the UAE, and EDGE Group, an advanced technology group for defence and beyond and one of the top 25 defence contractors globally as Diamond Partners. ADNEC is a Platinum Partner and Tawazun Economic Council is a Gold Partner.

The first such conference to be held anywhere in the Middle East to concentrate on the nexus between the defence sector and technology advancements, IDITSC is a forward-looking, knowledge-based event that addresses the latest in defence technology and defence technology security (DTS). It convenes leaders from

the international defence industry, policymakers, leading technology researchers and academics as well as international DTS experts.

The conference provides a multi-track agenda showcasing the latest research and advances in the areas of Robotics and Autonomous Systems; Space; Quantum Technologies, Artificial Intelligence; and other Emerging Technologies, and discusses their implications on and applications for defence. In total, over 70 UAE and international speakers are set to participate in the official programme, contributing to more than 55 insightful sessions and engagements.

In parallel, the conference tackles the current DTS frameworks and controls, and the latest agreements in multi-domain technology security. It will include Mohammed Ahmed al Bowardi, UAE Minister of State for Defence Affairs, said, "International Defence Industry, Technology and Security Conference is an important gathering to host, given the state of the world from a defence, technological, geopolitical, and socio-economic perspective.

Defence delegation visits Special Economic Zone

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) organised a visit for the delegation of the 9th National Defence batch, headed by Air Vice Marshal Eng Saleh bin Yahya al Maskari, Commandant of the National Defence College (NDC) and a number of faculty members, to the Special Economic Zone at Duqm for three days.

Upon their arrival at the headquarters of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), the delegation met with H E Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, chairman of the Public Authority for Special



Economic Zones and Free Zones, and a number of officials from

SEZAD and companies operating in the zone, a press release

said. The delegation was briefed on

the different capabilities of SEZAD in a number of sectors, most notably the renewable energy sector (green energy), logistics, and others. Further, the delegation toured around the different projects and facilities in the Zone, including the port and dry dock, and energy projects such as Duqm Refinery and central facilities.

The defence delegation also visited several other projects in SEZAD, such as the multi-purpose Fishing Port, Port of Duqm, the dry dock, Karwa Motors factory, the tourist zone and Rock Garden.

INFINITI advances on a bright new journey ahead

Infiniti confirms one of the global assembly locations that will build all-electric vehicles for its future. The vehicle assembly plant in Canton Mississippi is announced as one of the locations that will build Infiniti models that deliver on the company's Ambition 2030 vision to empower mobility and beyond for a cleaner, safer and more inclusive world.

Nissan Motor Corporation will invest US\$500mn to modernise and transform the plant, incorporating the latest in EV



manufacturing technology and automation in advance of producing all-electric models for

both the Infiniti and Nissan brands, a press release said. "By 2030, we envisage that

the majority of Infiniti models sold globally will be electrified," said Infiniti chairman Peyman

Kargar. "In confirming one of the future locations where our new generation of electric products will be built, we progress towards achieving this goal."

In support of the announcement INFINITI released a tantalizing glimpse of the bright direction that lays ahead for the brand. It's a future that will bring to life INFINITI's unique approach to modern Japanese luxury with a focus on thoughtful hospitality while seamlessly integrating technology and innovation into its vehicles.

LuLu announces winners of 'Mom & Me' promotion

LuLu Oman announced the winners of its Mom & Me promotion which was held across all its branches in the sultanate.

The promotion, held from January 20 to February 5, featured an extensive range of best maternity and baby products at affordable prices, a press release said.

The winners were selected through an e-affle draw held at LuLu Bausher on February 16. Fifty shoppers won LuLu shopping gift cards worth RO100 each, 50 others received LuLu shopping gift cards worth RO50 each and 100 customers took home LuLu shopping gift cards worth RO25 each.

Customers purchasing cosmetics and selected baby products worth RO5 or more at any of the LuLu outlets in Oman or



through online shopping were eligible to participate in the e-affle draw.

Speaking about the promotion, Shabeer K A, regional director - LuLu Hypermarkets,

Oman, said, "We have been organizing this promotion every year to offer parents the best

products from renowned brands that are finest in terms of safety and quality.

He remarked, "It's obvious that becoming a parent can be expensive. From strollers to di-

apers, the cost of baby products often requires new parents to take a hard look at their budgets.

Through this promotion, we offer our shoppers the best deals on maternity, baby, and parenting products that will help make life easier and more affordable."

LuLu Hypermarkets have always set the best example of how to provide customers with the best shopping experience and maximum value for money. The hypermarket takes pride in catering to every need of its customers at every season.

The special offers and exclusive seasonal promotions are part of LuLu Hypermarket's initiative to continuously bring the best of the world to their customers.



Bank Muscat recognised for excellence in fund transfers

Bank Muscat was recently recognised by the New York headquartered multinational banking giant, Citibank, for its operational excellence in the field of dollar payments processing. Bank Muscat won the Straight-through-processing (STP) award from Citibank for outstanding performance in dollar-denominated fund transfers in both Commercial payments and Treasury payments, a press release said.

The award recognised Bank Muscat's exceptional quality of SWIFT messages on dollar payments and maintaining an out-

standing error-free rate for remittances. The award was based on evaluation of the quality and accuracy of SWIFT payment messages routed through Citibank, which was above 98 per cent for Treasury payments and above 95 percent for Commercial payments. Citibank is among Bank Muscat's most prominent correspondent banks for dollar payments.

Speaking on the occasion, Zuwaina Abdullah al Sharji, assistant general manager – Central Operations and Change Management, Bank Muscat, said, "We are delighted to win

this award once again, which affirms Bank Muscat's commitment to meeting the highest standards of quality in fund transfers. The bank's exceptional quality in the delivery of commercial payments and transfers, facilitated by a state of the art in-house payment architecture, helps to consistently maintain high SWIFT standards for automated processing throughout the payment chain, and this is backed by our highly customer-centric services."

Citibank representatives commended the operational teams involved in processing dollar

payments at Bank Muscat for the error-free rate, which was maintained consistently throughout the year. With emphasis on multiple channels and new products that cater to different sectors, the bank is focused on maintaining its leadership in offering cutting-edge products and services, including electronic payment and online services.

Bank Muscat's customer-centric vision and the adoption of global best practices have resulted in numerous accolades in the past.

The bank's performance has been consistently lauded by the

international financial and banking community for decades, with the bank winning similar awards from Wells Fargo, Standard Chartered and JP Morgan in the past. Bank Muscat was also recognised as one of the 'Top 100 Companies in the Middle East' and as one of the 'Top 50 banks in the Region' by Forbes Middle East in 2021.

It also won a number of awards from prestigious international publications like Global Finance, Euromoney, The Banker, and EMEA Finance for its different lines of business in the recent past.

Investment experts participate in 3rd IFID forum



Rasheed al Maraj



Hassan Jarrar

The 3rd Annual Islamic Finance Innovation Day (IFID) Forum launched today with participation from more than 300 regional and international attendees, including senior Fintech, banking, regulatory, legal and investment experts engaging in dynamic discussions on 'How Fintech Innovation is Transforming the Investment Industry'.

The hybrid event, which was held under the patronage of the Central Bank of Bahrain (CBB), took place in the Kingdom of Bahrain at the Gulf Hotel and was opened with remarks from H E Rasheed al Maraj, Governor of the CBB, who highlighted the important role of Fintech in industry transformation and the ongoing development of the investment sector, a press release said. Hassan Jarrar, CEO of BisB, the Forum's exclusive banking partner, delivered the morning's first keynote address looking at 'The Next Phase of Digital Innovation'. Discussing the evolution of the industry and where banks must focus today.

He emphasised, "To remain in pace with this rapidly advancing phenomenon of a digital-first society, and approach the future with confidence, we, as financial service providers, need to operate with agility and flexibility.

We need to look beyond the technology and think about the people it impacts, whether be it our customers, employees, or partners."



Anouar Adham

Anouar Adham, CFA co-founder and CEO of CrowdTo-Live, a leading UK-based, FCA regulated Fintech offering an innovative and unique way to access the real estate asset class, and a Forum Partner, delivered a presentation highlighting how fractional ownership can provide a non-debt solution both for investing and financing real estate transactions around the world.

Adham said, "Historically, real estate has been a prime asset class for debt financing. However, the continuous price rise of residential properties around the world created a serious affordability crisis, non-debt solution is an answer to this challenge".

Two interactive panel discussions followed covering the role of new cutting-edge digital solutions and how they are revolutionising the investment industry with senior experts looking at the resulting challenges and opportunities and overall developments from a holistic perspective covering the regulatory and legal fronts.

Shotokan Karate Centre get set for 7th competition

Shotokan Karate Centre is completing preparations for holding the 7th Shotokan Karate Centre International Competition under the umbrella of the Oman Karate Committee. The competition will be hosted by Al Amal Sports Club in Ghala, on March 4 under the patronage of H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Humaid al Ghabshi - Wali of Al Amerat, a press release said.

On the tournament and preparations for its establishment, the head of the Shotokan Karate Centre, Sensei Navas Mokeri, said, "This international tournament comes within the centre's annual plans, where 24 clubs, centres

and academies practising karate have been registered, represented by 345 male and female players of different age groups and weights.

Sensei Youssef al Siyabi, secretary of the Shotokan Karate Centre, stated that what distinguishes this version of the tournament is the participation of clubs from seven countries - Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Egypt, Sudan, and Iran, besides Oman, which creates competition between the players of the participating clubs and the exchange of experiences in the field of karate.

Regarding the management of the seventh international competition, Sensei Hilal al Ab-

dali, a member of the Shotokan Karate Centre and head of the referees committee of the Oman Karate Committee, said that the championship, in its seventh edition, will be run by a selection of referees holding international and continental badges, in addition to a group of national and resident referees.

It is worth noting that the Shotokan Karate Centre will hold a lecture for the coaches on the sidelines of the tournament on March 3, in the lecture hall of Al Amal Sports Club to raise some points that the club coaches should follow with their players during the competitions.

Adventures Box ties with Specialised Bicycles

Adventures Box has signed a final agreement with Specialised Bicycles, an American company specialised in manufacturing all types of bicycles including mountain, road, family, and children bicycles. This step coincided with the end of the eleventh edition of Oman Tour 2022.

The agreement was signed by Dr Hilal bin Saif Al Dhameiri, board chairman of Adventures Box and Sam Kesha Zadeh, founder and partner at The Cycle Hub Company as a representative of Specialised Bicycles. The signing ceremony held at the headquarters of The Cycle Hub Company in Jumeirah, Dubai, was attended by Bassam bin Saif al Dhameiri and Musaab bin Saif al Dhameiri, a press release said.

The agreement addressed some aspects of added value



that will contribute to promoting the hobby of bicycling in the sultanate through training, technical support, marketing, and supplying different types of bicycles to ensure the provision of a world-class service.

This achievement comes after a series of successful negotiations that contributed to bringing the best and highest quality types of bicycles to the Omani market. The American Specialised Brand enjoys a great reputation as it is the most widely spread brand worldwide, thanks to its high quality and outstanding characteristics, particularly the mountain and road bicycles.

It is worth noting that Adventures Box is an Omani company established about five years ago to provide online services. The first showroom of the company was opened at Al Khoudh in the Wilayat of Seeb in 2021. The official inauguration ceremony was held under the patronage of retired Omani goalkeeper Ali al Habsi who launched an electric mountain Specialised bicycle during the ceremony.

Dr Dhameiri said, "Our Company seeks assiduously to establish a new showroom that will be the biggest of its kind in the sultanate. The showroom will provide some services that will serve all athletes and adventurers."

Changan CS75 Plus impresses with premium design

With its premium design, comfortable automotive interior, and highly intelligent configuration, the compact crossover Changan CS75 Plus, which comes in luxury and sport variants, offers a host of special features.

A spokesperson for Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment (AGAE), part of Bahwan International Group, is official distributor of Changan brand in Oman said, "Ever since its launch in the Oman market, Changan CS75 Plus has been astounding car enthusiasts for its promising quality of innovation,



aesthetics, functionality and stability. The model makes driving feel like winning with its stunning design, premium interior and intelligent features. The CS75 Plus is loaded with smart and innovative features that aim to elevate the confidence and sophistication in every drive."

The Changan CS75 Plus 2WD features a more sloped roofline and more power. Under the hood, it has a 2ltr turbocharged 4-cylinder engine, mated to an 8-speed automatic transmission with a power of 224hp and torque of 360Nm. With a wheel-

base of 2710mm, and it measures 4700mm in length, 1865mm in width and 1710mm in height, a press release said.

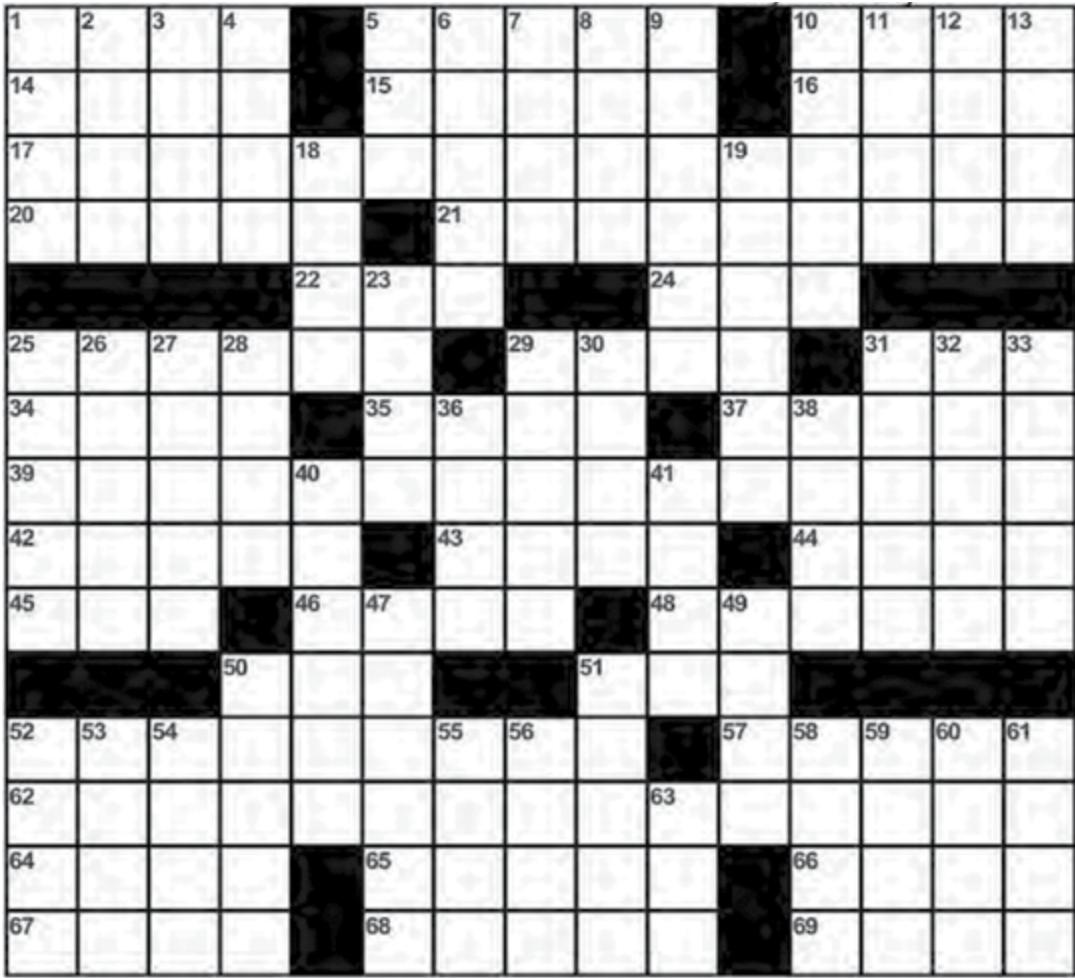
Standard features in the CS75 Plus include power windows, central locking, cruise control, dual-zone auto A/C, 8 speakers, multifunctional steering wheel, USB+AUX ports, 12-inch screen, Bluetooth, 360 camera, leather ventilated seats, sunroof, fog lamps, parking sensors LED headlamps, panoramic roof, keyless entry and start, and 19-inch wheels. Safety features includes dual front, side and curtain

airbags, ABS, and hill assist.

Its Blue Core Powertrain Technology, based on the principles of power, clean and quiet, provides owners a highly efficient and energy saving performance.

Intelligent Adaptive Cruise Control provides a safer and more pleasant driving experience. IACC facilitates smart driving features including heavy traffic assisted driving, lane keep assist, automatic deceleration during turns, intelligent speed limit assist, and voice-activated cruise speed setting.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Beach goers catch them
5) Hair-raising place?
10) Milky, iridescent gem
14) Object of worship
15) Hatchet man's opposite
16) One of the sexes
17) Bids adieu
20) Hardly underplay on stage
21) Engages in chit-chat
22) Noisy bustle
24) Madam of 2-Down
25) Kind of chop
29) Edible root of the taro
31) Uncle of an entire country
34) "Planet of the_"
35) Like old recordings
37) Lobe in the mouth
39) What all drivers should be
42) DNA strand's shape
43) Display intense anger
44) Creative mental spark
45) Equip for war

46) 24-can unit
48) Some pole bearers
50) Put on TV
51) Slop spot
52) Most vigorous and cheerful
57) Accumulate
62) Go "humph!"
64) Japanese soup
65) Brownish gray
66) Like many horror films
67) One-dish meal
68) Exposed publicly
69) Type of terrier

DOWN

1) "All_!" (court phrase)
2) First mate?
3) Toy that does tricks
4) Coin opening
5) That girl
6) '50s TV "Kid"
7) Jason's fabled craft
8) Author Uris
9) Shown to be true
10) Game played with a deck of 40 cards
11) Reduces debt
12) On the safe side, at sea
13) With a discount of

18) Tidy
19) Gobble up
23) Audition tape
25) Buckwheat porridge
26) More fitting
27) Coin of the_ (a country's money)
28) Spumante lead-in
29) Follow as a consequence
30) Gloom partner
31) Glove material, sometimes
32) Change to fit
33) "You_ well" ("Why not?")
36) Does in, gangland-style
38) A sundial hour
40) Cause enthusiasm
41) Better than good
47) Noble prefix with "crat"
49) Burmese currency
50) Cupid's projectile
51) Mining excavation
52) Does some tailoring
53) Departure
54) Church area
55) Son ofIsaac, in Genesis

56) Cottontail's tail
58) Capacity units, these days
59) Run_ (go nuts)

60) Agile
61) Eyelid affliction
63) Flanders on "The Simpsons"

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Be prepared to be amazed by someone's total selflessness today. You didn't expect it from this person. For now, sit tight. Wait and see what's in store. If it happens to come from an authority figure, you'll be able to repay them in short order. And if not, repayment may not be necessary. This person just wants to see you live a happy, productive life. Just embrace the moment and appreciate the person's efforts. They just want to do good.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Secrets are definitely in the air, secrets of all kinds. Do your due diligence and try to uncover the furtiveness before you commit to anything. If you've known this shady person for a long time and you tend to trust them, don't get carried away, especially if you don't have all the facts. If you're not quite sure about them based on past history, you still shouldn't make rash judgments. Go with your gut. Ask around if you still don't feel comfortable.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

You're in the mood for secrets, mysteries and the kind of people who can pick a lock one minute and dress up in formal attire the next. If you're looking for your partner in crime, make the call. You're ready to pull a disappearing act, but you don't want to do it alone. And you don't have to. This person is more than willing to come along on whatever adventure (or leisure activity) you have planned.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

At the moment, you have an awful lot to share. Even if you don't, the look on your face says it all. So why hold it back? Let everyone know what's on your mind. You're not good at holding your tongue anyway, especially when you feel a good air-clearing session is the best solution. Just don't intentionally try to hurt anyone's feelings. Be generous with the kindness and skip on the sarcasm.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

When it comes to romance, don't rush into anything (or to anyone) you're uncomfortable with. After all, you've always been attracted to intense, not to mention exciting, people. Someone who answers that description will be along shortly. They'll set off all your alarms but in an urgent way. You want to like this person, but something's just off. Take your time. You'll eventually see what your gut is trying to tell you.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

If anyone can sweet-talk their way into an extended conversation, it's you. And you're an expert at putting others at ease. This skill will come in handy today when you meet a stranger who maybe isn't such a stranger at all. You're so intrigued you can't believe you never made an effort to get to know this person before. If this is someone you want to know even better, exchange life stories.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Whenever there's a problem at work, at home, or just about anywhere, people come to you for solutions. And you normally don't mind. You enjoy being the Switzerland of situations. After all, you're good at it. But helping is one thing; enabling is quite another. You're not thrilled about the current position you've been put in. Do what you can, then excuse yourself. You can only do so much.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You're smart enough to know that a change of scenery can work wonders, and you've never been afraid to create distance between you and a persistent issue, interpersonal or otherwise. So now that you've decided you're just about done putting all your energy into a potentially no-win situation, isn't it time for a trip? Just a quick one? You may come back with a fresh perspective, just what you need to solve this conundrum.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You won't stand for anyone who wants to play games or gives you anything less than 100 per cent. It's all about depth, intensity, and focus for you now, and that goes for even the most casual encounters. Anyone who knows you will understand you're not in a lighthearted mood as soon as they set eyes on you, but don't go all aggro on complete strangers. They won't be prepared for your wrath.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Now that you've actually been given a chance to sit back and relax, don't mess around. You're officially off duty tonight, so why not indulge in some serious leisure, with lots of good food, stupid movies, and fun friends? And don't so much as lift a finger. That's what your guests are for. Let someone else pick up the slack for once. You've been working your tail off and deserve total and complete relaxation.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You're not in the mood to mingle much right now, but like it or not, here comes your crowd of fans. It's no use trying to hide any longer. Just buck up and do your best to be pleasant. After all, they've invested a lot of time and energy into being there for you in the past. And you can do the same. Once you get out there, you'll warm up to the social scene. Just be patient and take it slowly.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

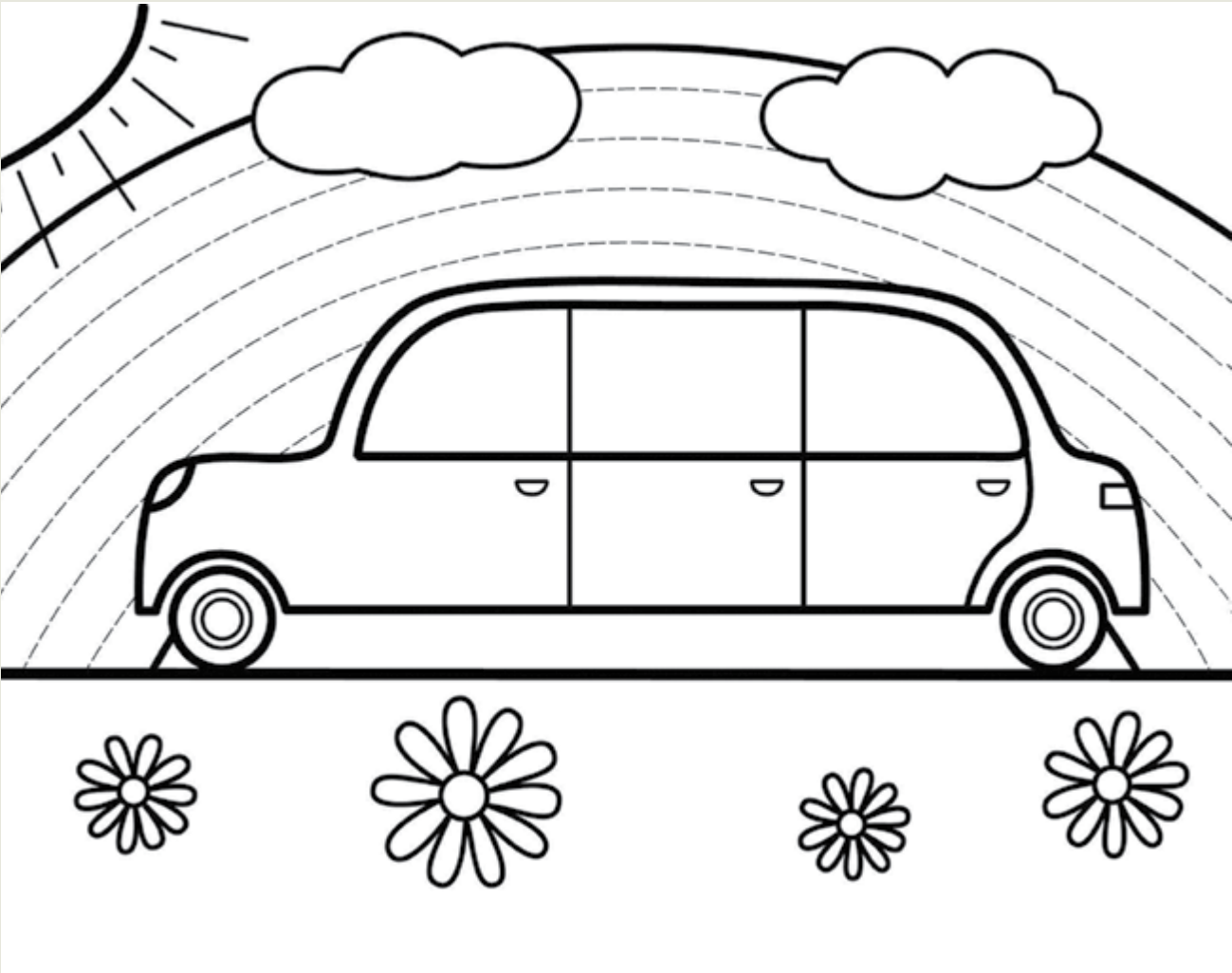
You need to figure out what's important to you and what's not. It's time to take stock of what's going on in your life. The good news is that your significant other, trusted friend, or mentor is more than willing to talk about it, and they'll have just the perspective you need. All you have to do is call that all-important meeting. Don't be afraid to put your heart and soul on the line.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Alidade, for example, a rotary dial for angular positioning on an astrolabe, is a term borrowed from which language?
- A. Italian
B. Greek
C. Arabic
D. Chinese
2. What is shigella?
- A. A species of rye
B. A Brazilian dance
C. A genus of bacteria
D. Pottery from the Bronze Age in Mesopotamia
3. Who discovered and named the element francium in 1939?
- A. Emmeline Pankhurst
B. Benjamin Franklin
C. William Pitt the Younger
D. Marguerite Perey

Answers: 1. C 2. C 3. D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

S	L	D	A
L	I	E	S
V	V	E	E
U	A	Qu	E

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Putin puts nuclear forces on alert; Ukraine for talks

A Ukrainian delegation set to meet Russian counterparts at the border with Belarus

Kharkiv, Ukraine - Ukraine said on Sunday it had agreed to talks with Russia after four days of conflict, as Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered his defence chiefs to put nuclear 'deterrence forces' on alert.

The conflict has already killed dozens of civilians, forced hundreds of thousands to flee and turned Moscow into a global pariah. President Volodymyr Zelensky's office said a Ukrainian delegation would meet the Russian one at the border with Belarus, which has allowed Russian troops passage to attack Ukraine.

The meeting is set to take place near Chernobyl - the site of the world's worst nuclear disaster. "The politicians agreed that the Ukrainian delegation would meet the Russian one without preconditions," Zelensky's office said in a statement after the president spoke to his Belarusian counterpart Alexander Lukashenko.

Ukrainian forces earlier said they had fought off a Russian incursion into Ukraine's second biggest city, Kharkiv, on day four of Russia's invasion.

As Western countries lined up to send arms into Ukraine and impose ever more stringent sanctions, Putin ordered his defence chiefs to put the country's nuclear 'deterrence forces' on high alert. He accused Western countries of taking 'unfriendly' steps against his country.



An Ukrainian Territorial Defence fighter examines a destroyed Russian infantry mobility vehicle GAZ Tigr after the fight in Kharkiv on Sunday (AFP)

Ukraine has reported 198 civilian deaths, including three children, since the invasion began. The UN has put the civilian toll at 64. "The past night in Ukraine was brutal," Zelensky said. "They fight against everyone. They fight against all living things - against kindergartens, against residential buildings and even against ambulances."

Airspace bans, arms pledges

Several European countries

meanwhile banned Russian airlines from their airspace on Sunday and many pledged arms for Ukraine but made it clear that they will not intervene militarily. In his traditional Sunday message to the faithful in St Peter's Square, Pope Francis called for weapons to 'fall silent' in the country and for the opening of humanitarian corridors.

A day after Berlin said it would send anti-tank weapons and Stinger missiles to Ukraine, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said

the world was in a 'new era' and warned of further sanctions.

'Will drive you crazy'

Machine gun fire and explosions were heard in Kharkiv earlier on Sunday and AFP later saw the wreckage of a Russian armoured vehicle smouldering and several others abandoned.

"Kharkiv is fully under our control," the head of the regional administration, Oleg Sinegubov, said on Telegram, adding that the army was expelling Russian

forces during a 'clean-up' operation. Moscow also claimed it was 'entirely' besieging the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson and the city of Berdyansk in the south-east. Both are located close the Crimea peninsula, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

Ukrainian officials also said that a gas pipeline in eastern Kharkiv and an oil depot near the capital Kyiv were targeted by Russian forces overnight.

Ukraine said it was fighting off Russian forces in several other

points and that 4,300 Russian troops had been killed.

None of the claims could be independently verified.

In Kyiv, many residents spent another night in shelters or cellars as Ukrainian forces said they were fighting off Russian 'sabotage groups', but Sunday was relatively calm compared to previous days. The city is under a blanket curfew until Monday morning though some residents ventured out regardless. Out for a walk in a park, 41-year-old Flora Stepanova said staying at home watching the news all the time 'will drive you crazy'.

On Saturday, Russia ordered its forces to advance further into Ukraine 'from all directions' but soldiers have encountered fierce resistance from Ukrainian troops

Western sources said the intensity of the resistance seems to have surprised Moscow.

Ukraine's army said it held the line against an assault on Kyiv, but was using the curfew to fight Russian 'sabotage groups' that had infiltrated the city.

On Sunday, Ukraine's general staff urged any foreigners to come to Ukraine 'and fight side-by-side with Ukrainians against Russian war criminals'.

'I was trembling'

The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) says more than 368,000 people have fled to neighbouring countries, while more than 160,000 are esti-

mated to be displaced within Ukraine. Pope Francis called for the 'urgent' opening of humanitarian corridors for Ukraine to allow even more to leave.

AFP saw stationary queues of cars stretching for dozens of kilometres on the roads to Ukraine's border crossings with Poland.

"Attacks were everywhere," said Diana, 37, who fled the Ukrainian capital. "My mother is still in Kyiv." Poland, Germany and Austria have said Ukrainians can ride for free on their trains until further notice.

In Romania, which also neighbours Ukraine, Olga, 36, was among hundreds to have crossed the Danube river with her three young children to safety. "My husband came with us as far as the border, before returning to Kyiv to fight," she said.

Responding to the invasion, the West said it would remove some Russian banks from the SWIFT bank messaging system, and froze central bank assets - hitting some of Russia's global trade. A senior US official said the measures would turn Russia into a 'pariah', adding that a task force would hunt down Russian oligarchs' assets.

The conflict has rattled particularly former Soviet satellite countries in Eastern Europe who fear their post Cold War democratic gains could be threatened by Russian aggression.

AFP

Polish border sees 200,000 arrivals from Ukraine

Warsaw, Poland - Poland's border guards on Sunday said nearly 200,000 people had crossed into the EU member from Ukraine in the days since Russia invaded the ex-Soviet country.

The latest figure represented an increase of tens of thousands on what was reported only a few hours earlier, showing just how quickly Ukrainian refugees are flowing into their western neighbour. The interior ministry announced it was setting up additional reception centres for the refugees, including at the country's main train stations.

"Over the last three and a half days, nearly 200,000 people have received assistance on our territory," said Tomasz Praga, the head of the Polish border guard. He told reporters that on Saturday alone more than 77,000 people had crossed into Poland from Ukraine.



Ukrainian refugees arrive from the Medyka pedestrian border crossing, in Przemyśl, eastern Poland on Saturday (AFP)

Poland, which was already home to an estimated 1.5mn Ukrainians before Russia's invasion on Thursday and which has expressed steadfast support for Ukraine, has so far received the lion's share of the country's refugees. But thousands of others have fled to other countries

bordering Ukraine.

"The number of refugees from Ukraine who have crossed to Poland, Hungary, Romania, Moldova and other countries is escalating and is now 368,000," UN refugee chief Filippo Grandi tweeted on Sunday.

AFP

Russian official apologises for war in Ukraine

Paris, France - The Russian head of delegation at a major UN climate conference apologised for his country's invasion of Ukraine on Sunday, which he said lacked justification, according to several sources who heard him speak at the virtual meeting.

The surprise intervention from Russia's Oleg Anisimov at the closed-door meeting followed an electrifying live statement from his Ukrainian counterpart, Svitlana Krakovska, who spoke passionately about her country's plight.

"Let me present an apology on behalf of all Russians not able to prevent this conflict," Anisimov said at the closing plenary of the virtual, 195-nation forum, according to three sources who heard him speak.

Delegates and observers to the sometimes fraught meetings, which had been scheduled to end on Friday, were stunned by the back-to-back statements on Sunday, according to half-a-



Police officers detain a demonstrator during a protest against Russia's invasion of Ukraine in central Saint Petersburg on Sunday (AFP)

dozen participants.

Those who see what is happening, he added speaking in Russian, 'fail to find any justification for the attack on Ukraine'.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) provided simultaneous translation of

his comments into English. AFP did not have access to the original statement in Russian.

Ukraine's Krakovska, who has tried to continue working despite the assault on her country, addressed the conference on Sunday morning. "We will not

surrender in Ukraine, and we hope the world will not surrender in building a climate resilient future," she said in English, according to multiple sources.

"Human-induced climate change and the war on Ukraine have the same roots - fossil fuels - and our dependence on them," she added.

"Everyone 'in the room' was really moved," said one source, referring to online chats and informal conversations.

The statement by Anisimov - who expressed 'huge admiration' for the Ukrainian delegation - came as a particular surprise.

"He knows that there is a risk for him, it was a very sincere message," said another participant. When asked by AFP to comment, Anisimov said that his statements 'expressed my personal opinion and attitude', and should not be taken as an 'official statement of the Russian delegation'.

AFP

Guns, blasts and smiles in Kyiv under military curfew

Kyiv, Ukraine - Men with long guns peered out of slow-moving cars on Sunday after a night of booms and gunfire under Kyiv's state-of-war curfew - imposed with shoot-on-sight orders.

There was growing sense of a city under siege among the city's three million residents - or at least those who had still had not fled - fearful of coming under fire from either the Russians or their own security forces.

"What can you do?" Olena Vasylyaka asked, while dashing from her top-floor apartment to a basement sheltering her son and a few dozen neighbours.

"Of course we suffer. But it's fine, that's our life now," the 50-year-old said. "The sense of shock is wearing off."

Soldiers told AFP they were just as worried about a covert infiltration by disguised Russian soldiers as they were of the mortars and Grad missiles the Krem-

lin's army is lobbing at Kyiv.

The city imposed its curfew to clear the streets and make any such undercover invasion less likely. But it has added to a sinister sense of paranoia on Kyiv's near deserted streets.

The night began with cracks of gunfire - a sign of either soldiers firing warning shots at pedestrians or of actual fighting on the streets.

Ambulances raced across some avenues and armed men in olive uniforms filled unmarked cars driving at a crawl.

Birds chirped in the still sunshine, then scattered from a thumping boom or the occasional cracks of gunfire.

Flora Stepanova took it all in serenely while smoking a cigarette in the middle of an empty park in a city under military curfew.

"I can't say I'm not afraid. Of course it's a little dangerous," the



A civilian crosses Maidan square in Kyiv, on Sunday (AFP)

41-year-old said, with an odd smile.

"But I think if you are careful and look around, it's safer than staying in front of a TV and

watching the news all day, because that will drive you crazy."

'We are the coolest'

And yet an odd sense of pride is

also filling Kyiv that the city has still not been invaded.

"We like our army," Olena's 23-year-old son Oleg said down in the basement.

"We love them because they are doing things that were not expected of them. They are doing so much," he beamed, proudly. "We are the coolest nation in the world."

Yet the young man shows signs of strain and worry.

His little drawing book - a personal passion - is filled anxious-looking swirls that help him take his mind off things.

The basement is filled with families who dart quick glances at their phone screens while stretched out on floor mats and sofas.

'Calm and awful'

The streets above them featured often surreal scenes of a men strutting with assault rifles and couples carrying plastic bags full of emergency supplies.

One street was guarded by a soldier and an armed man who inexplicably covered the back of

his head with a Guy Fawkes mask - the symbol of the hacktivist group Anonymous.

A man smoked a cigarette outside a closed bank. A few armed men inspected the trunk of a family car a few steps away from him.

One dangerously swerving car raced down an empty boulevard before screeching to a halt and inexplicably racing back.

Its driver tossed out a full block of cigarettes to a few reporters and then sped off without barely uttering word.

He was soon followed by policemen and a few armoured vehicles trying to clear the streets.

"Everything is calm and everything is awful," a smoking man who identified himself only as Yuriy - for personal security reasons - said from his balcony.

"Who has it easy now? This is war."

AFP

Arabs fear for wheat supplies after Russia invades Ukraine

Cairo, Egypt - Russia's invasion of Ukraine could mean less bread on the table in Egypt, Lebanon, Yemen and elsewhere in the Arab world where millions already struggle to survive.

The region is heavily dependent on wheat supplies from the two countries which are now at war, and any shortages of the staple food have potential to bring unrest.

If those supplies are disrupted, 'the Ukraine crisis could trigger renewed protests and instability' in several Middle East and North Africa countries, the Washington-based Middle East Institute said.

The generals now ruling in Khartoum after an October coup have not forgotten: In 2019 one of their own, Field Marshall Omar al Bashir, Sudan's longtime autocrat, was toppled by his military under pressure from mass demonstrations triggered by a tripling of the bread price.

Sudan is already facing regular anti-coup protests but seems to have taken the initiative to avoid demonstrations over bread. When Russia's invasion began on Thursday, the second-highest figure in Sudan's ruling Sovereign Council was in Moscow to discuss trade ties.

Bread is already a luxury for millions in Yemen, where a seven-year war has pushed the country to the brink of famine.

'Most people can barely afford the basic foods', and the war in Ukraine will only 'make things worse', Walid Salah, 35, a civil servant in the rebel-held capital Sanaa, told AFP.

Russia is the world's top wheat exporter and Ukraine the fourth, according to estimates by the US Department of Agriculture. Moscow's invasion pushed the wheat price far above its previous record high in European trading to €344 a tonne on Thursday.

David Beasley, the World Food Programme's (WFP) executive director, said the Ukraine-Russia area provides half the agency's grains. The war, he said, 'is going to have a dramatic impact'.

'Supplies won't last'

WFP says 12.4mn people in conflict-ravaged Syria are also struggling with food insecurity.

Before its civil war began in 2011, Syria produced enough wheat to feed its population but harvests then plunged and led to



An Algerian employee prepares bread at a bakery in Algiers, on Sunday (AFP)

increased reliance on imports.

The Damascus regime is a staunch ally of Moscow which backed it militarily during the war.

"Syria imported some 1.5mn tonnes of wheat last year, largely from Russia," The Syria Report, an economic publication, said.

Damascus says it is now working to distribute the stocks

silos containing 45,000 tonnes of grain.

Lebanon's current stock, in addition to five ships from Ukraine waiting to be offloaded, 'can only last for one month and a half', said Ahmad Hoteit, the representative of Lebanon's wheat importers. Ukraine was the source of 80 per cent of the 600,000 to 650,000 tonnes of

In the Maghreb, where wheat is the basis for couscous as well as bread, Morocco's minister in charge of budget, Fouzi Lekjaa, told journalists the government would increase subsidies on flour to US\$400mn this year and stop charging import duties on wheat.

Nearby Tunisia, with heavy debts and limited currency reserves, doesn't have that luxury. In December, local media reported that ships delivering wheat had refused to unload their cargo as they had not been paid. Tunisia relies on Ukrainian and Russian imports for 60 per cent of its total wheat consumption, according to agriculture ministry expert Abdelhalim Gasmî. He said current stocks are sufficient until June.

'Bread riots'

Neighbouring Algeria, which says it has a six-month supply, is Africa's second-largest wheat consumer and the world's fifth-largest cereals importer.

Egypt imports the most wheat in the world and is Russia's sec-

ond-largest customer. It bought 3.5mn tonnes in mid-January, according to S&P Global.

The Arab world's most populous country has started to buy elsewhere, particularly Romania, but 80 per cent of its imports have come from Russia and Ukraine. Egypt still has nine months of stock to feed its more than 100mn people, government spokesman Nader Saad said. But he added: "We will no longer be able to buy at the price before the crisis." That is an ominous sign for the 70 per cent of the population who receive five subsidised breads a day.

The weight of the subsidised round food was reduced in 2020 and now the government is considering raising the price - fixed at five piastres (0.3 cents) for the past three decades - to get closer to the production cost.

When then-president Anwar Sadat tried to drop the subsidy on bread in January 1977 'bread riots' erupted. They stopped when he cancelled the increase.

AFP

Iran's chief nuclear negotiator returns to Vienna as talks reach critical stage

Tehran, Iran - Iran's chief negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani will fly back to Vienna on Sunday evening following consultations in Tehran, state media reported earlier on Sunday, as talks to revive the 2015 nuclear deal reached a critical stage.

Kani 'will return to Vienna this evening with clear instructions to pursue the negotiations with the aim of solving problems in order to reach an agreement', IRNA news agency reported.

The talks to restore the agreement known formally as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action involve Iran as well as Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia directly, and the United States indirectly.

On Saturday Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said Tehran was studying a rough draft of a deal to revive the nuclear deal.

Iran is 'seriously reviewing (the) draft of the agreement', Amir-Abdollahian said on Twitter, adding he had spoken by phone with EU foreign policy



Ali Bagheri Kani (AFP)

chief Josep Borrell who is coordinating the Vienna talks.

"Our red lines are made clear to western parties," the Iranian Foreign Minister said, adding that Tehran is 'ready to immediately conclude a good deal, should they show real will'.

The 2015 deal gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme, but the US unilaterally withdrew from it in 2018 under then-president Donald Trump and reimposed heavy economic sanctions.

AFP



Pakistan's traders and Afghan nationals gather at the Pakistan-Afghan border in Chaman on Saturday (AFP)

Pakistan-Afghan key border reopened

Quetta, Pakistan - A key border crossing between Pakistan and Afghanistan has reopened, officials said on Sunday, days after fighting between security forces left at least three dead.

Since the Taliban returned to power last year border tensions between the neighbours have risen, with Pakistan alleging militant groups were planning attacks from Afghan soil.

The Taliban deny harbouring Pakistani militants, but are also infuriated by a fence Islamabad is erecting along their 2,700km border, drawn up in colonial times and known as the Durand Line. "The border has reopened

for all sort of activities," a spokesman for Pakistan's paramilitary border force told AFP.

A security source said it came after 'successful talks' between Pakistani officials and the governor of Afghanistan's Kandahar province. Mahmood Azaam, spokesman for the governor, confirmed it had reopened.

Each side blamed the other for Thursday's clashes at the Chaman-Spin Boldak crossing.

Thousands usually cross every day, including traders, Afghans seeking medical treatment in Pakistan, and people visiting relatives.

AFP

Africa faces tough job not to become world's plastic 'dustbin'

Abidjan, Ivory Coast - What can be done to prevent Africa from becoming the world's biggest dumping ground for plastic?

That's one of the big questions facing United Nations members next week at a stock-taking on Earth's environmental woes.

From Antananarivo to Dakar via Nairobi and Conakry, African cities are scarred by huge landfills where plastic waste is measured in the thousands of tonnes.

The dumps are smelly and dangerous, releasing smoke and toxic particles. They are also a place where impoverished men, women and children pick through the filth to find enough to survive.

Blown by the wind or swept downstream in rivers, plastic waste pollutes the sea, forests and fields, threatening wildlife - and eventually humans too, because microscopic particles enter the food chain.

"The plastic bags are real

killers," said Hama Abdoulaye, a shepherd living near Niamey, the capital of the Sahel state of Niger. "The animals swallow plastic when they graze on the grass, and die slowly."

The UN Environment Programme, which hosts the three-day UN Environment Assembly opening in Nairobi on Monday, says plastic pollution in Africa is accelerating, driven in part by poor rubbish collection and lack of recycling facilities.

The problem poses 'a significant threat for the environment and the economies of the continent', it said in a recent report.

Some 300mn tonnes of plastic waste - the equivalent weight of the planet's human population - are produced each year.

But globally less than 10 per cent is recycled, a figure that anecdotally is far smaller in Africa, although reliable statistics for the continent are rare.

"If nothing is done in a few years, Africa will become a dust-



This file photo shows a woman walking on plastic waste, used to reclaim a swamp so that the land can be developed for housing, in the Mosafejo area of Lagos on February 12 last year (AFP)

bin of plastic bags and waste," said Ousmane Danbadij, head of an NGO called the Niger Network for Water and Sanitation.

Knock-on

In 2018, China decided to ban the import of plastic waste, a move followed by other Asian coun-

tries such as the Philippines and Malaysia.

This has raised fears of a knock-on effect - that wealthy economies will increasingly turn to Africa to dispose of their plastic rubbish. Africa is already a long-established destination for other hazardous products and

materials such as batteries or used electrical and electronic components, particularly Ghana and Nigeria.

"There is a great risk of seeing all the waste from industrialised countries dumped here in Africa," said Yves Ikobo, head of a grassroots organisation in DR

Congo called Planete Verte RDC. In Nairobi, African countries will try to reach a common position on banning the import of plastic waste into the continent, with a view to talks for an international agreement against plastic pollution.

Since the beginning of the 2000s, most of the states of sub-Saharan Africa have gradually adopted legislation prohibiting production, import, marketing, use and storage of plastic bags and packaging.

But the laws are routinely flouted or poorly applied.

In a letter to AFP, the Economic Community of West African States said it was 'finalising a draft regulation' on harmonising national rules among its 15 members.

However, member states 'have not yet agreed... on a deadline for the import of plastics', it admitted. "There is a lack of commitment from many states in Africa," said John Gakwavu,

head of a Rwandan environmental conservation NGO.

Danbadij, of Niger Network, agreed.

"We can't do anything against the proliferation (of plastic waste) because politicians are not really committed to the fight," he said.

Employment

But the lack of commitment is not just a question of weak governance. It is also linked to the economic and social impact of the plastics sector, which is a big employer in several countries.

"I don't think African countries will take exactly the same position" in Nairobi, said Nhlanhla Sibisi of Greenpeace Africa, based in Johannesburg.

South Africa is a case in point. Around 65,000 people are employed in the synthetics material business in the continent's biggest economy and the sector is a major tax contributor.

AFP

North Korea resumes weapons-testing blitz

The Sunday launch is Pyongyang’s eighth so far this year, including test-firing its most powerful missile

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea fired a ballistic missile on Sunday, Seoul said, resuming a weapons-testing blitz after a month-long lull during the Beijing Winter Olympics, with the world’s attention now focused on Ukraine.

The Sunday launch is Pyongyang’s eighth so far this year, including test-firing its most powerful missile since high-profile negotiations between leader Kim Jong Un and then US president Donald Trump collapsed in 2017.

Diplomacy has languished ever since. And despite biting international sanctions, Pyongyang has doubled down on military development, threatening last month to abandon a self-imposed moratorium on firing long-range and nuclear weapons.

Analysts had widely predicted Pyongyang would seek to capitalise on US distraction over Russia’s Thursday invasion of Ukraine with new tests.

South Korea’s military said on Sunday it had detected a ballistic missile fired towards the Sea of Japan at 07:52 local time (2252 GMT Saturday) from Pyongyang.

“The latest ballistic missile has a range of around 300km and an altitude of around



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

620km,” it added. Japan also confirmed the launch.

South Korea’s presidential Blue House expressed ‘deep concern and grave regret’, and criticised the timing ‘when the world is making efforts to resolve the Ukraine war’.

South Korea has said it will join international economic sanctions against Russia and, as a key US security ally, is closely watching Washington’s response to Moscow’s aggression.

Pyongyang, on the other hand, is ‘seizing the opportunity’ to

conduct weapons tests while ‘the US interest shifted to Europe over the Ukraine crisis and the UN Security Council unable to function’, Shin Beom-chul, a researcher at the Korea Research Institute for National Strategy, told AFP. North Korea sees this

as a perfect moment to ‘continue its development of necessary weapons and to strengthen its nuclear arsenal’, with a view to being recognised as a nuclear power, he added.

Ukraine, which emerged from the Cold War with sizeable So-

viet-era nuclear weapons stocks of its own, gave up its arsenal in the 1990s. North Korea this weekend accused the United States of being the ‘root cause of the Ukraine crisis’ saying in a statement on the Foreign Ministry website that Washington ‘meddled’ in the internal affairs of other countries when it suited them but condemned legitimate ‘self-defensive measures’.

Missiles ‘top priority’

North Korea is reeling economically from biting sanctions over its weapons programmes and a lengthy coronavirus blockade, but continuing its ‘ambitious schedule of military modernisation’ is a top priority, said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha Womans University in Seoul.

“The Kim regime’s strength and legitimacy have become tied to testing ever better missiles,” he added in emailed comments.

The pause in testing during the Beijing Winter Olympics was seen as a mark of deference to key diplomatic ally and economic benefactor China.

The latest launch also comes as South Korea gears up to elect its next president on March 9.

Outgoing South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who repeatedly pursued peace talks with the

North during his five-year term, has warned that the situation could easily escalate.

“If North Korea’s series of missile launches goes as far as scrapping a moratorium on long-range missile tests, the Korean Peninsula may instantly fall back into the state of crisis we faced five years ago,” he said in a written interview with international press, including AFP, this month.

Under Trump’s successor Joe Biden, the United States has repeatedly declared its willingness to meet North Korean representatives. Pyongyang has dismissed the offer.

Domestically, North Korea is preparing to celebrate the 110th anniversary of the birth of late founder Kim Il Sung in April, which experts say Pyongyang could use to carry out a major weapons test. Recent satellite images suggest that the North may be preparing a military parade to showcase its weapons to mark the key anniversary.

“North Korea will be prudent about testing an intercontinental ballistic missile since it’s the last remaining card that can put pressure on the United States”, Park Won-gon, a professor of North Korean Studies at Ewha Womans University, told AFP.

AFP



This file photo shows people shopping for groceries in the city of Kyrenia in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus on November 24 last year (AFP)

Breakaway north Cyprus reels from Turkish lira collapse

Nicosia, Cyprus - In the breakaway statelet of northern Cyprus, people are grappling with a perfect economic storm - spiking global commodity prices, hobbled tourism and, above all, the fallout from Turkey’s financial crisis. “Everything has become more expensive - bread, milk, water, electricity bills,” sighed Mehmet Cobe, a tailor in the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC).

Covering the northern third of the Mediterranean island, the tiny territory declared itself a state in 1983, nine years after Turkey invaded in response to a coup engineered by Athens that sought to annex the island to Greece.

The so-called TRNC remains recognised only by Turkey, leaving the 300,000 residents highly dependent on the largesse - and fortunes - of Ankara.

On top of that, coronavirus restrictions have hit the crucial tourism industry which lures visitors with seaside resorts and casinos. Turkey itself has been battered by a currency crisis that saw the lira lose nearly half its value against the dollar last year, as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan demanded interest rate cuts to spur growth, even while inflation shot up.

The lira’s slide, alongside surging global energy and food prices, sent inflation in northern Cyprus skyrocketing to 46 per cent last year. “Two days after receiving my salary, I’m left with nothing,” said a hotel worker

who asked not to be named.

Despite holding down jobs at two separate hotels, the 6,000 lira she brings home each month is now equivalent to barely 430 dollars, the worker said, leaving her dependent financially on her grown-up children.

‘Aid-dependent’

TRNC prime minister Faiz Sucoğlu said last week the economy was a ‘priority’ for his government, a coalition of right-wing nationalists who want outright secession from Cyprus.

The plunging lira, soaring inflation and an unemployment rate of 10 per cent have all fed into a disastrous economic performance, said Turgay Deniz, head of the TRNC’s chamber of trade and industry.

After the economy contracted by 16.2 per cent in 2020, output last year ‘continued to fall’, Deniz said, drawing on estimates for 2021 that are yet to be finalised.

The dependence of northern Cyprus on Turkey is stark, because no other country recognises the breakaway entity.

“The TRNC can only sign agreements with Turkey,” which funds 15 per cent of the budget, said Deniz. Other sources indicate that the statelet depends on Ankara for up to three of its spending.

Northern Cyprus is an ‘aid-dependent economy’, said Mustafa Besim, an economist at the publicly funded Eastern Mediterranean University in Famagusta.

AFP

Afghan universities reopen, but few women return

Kabul, Afghanistan - Afghanistan’s main universities reopened on Saturday six months after the Taliban returned to power, but only a trickle of women returned to now-segregated classes.

Most secondary schools for girls and all public universities were shuttered following the Taliban’s August 15 takeover, sparking fears women would be barred from education - as happened during the first rule of the hardline Islamists, from 1996-2001.

The Taliban insist they will allow girls and women to be educated this time around - but only in segregated classes and according to an Islamic curriculum. On Saturday Kabul University, the country’s oldest and biggest with a student body of around 25,000 last year, reopened without fanfare - and few students in attendance.

Taliban guards refused journalists access to the sprawling



Students walk through a pathway near the Kabul University after it was reopened on Saturday (AFP)

campus and chased away media teams lingering near the entrance.

AFP, however, spoke to some students away from the gates, who expressed mixed feelings after their first day back.

“I am happy that the university resumed...we want to continue our studies,” said an English major who asked to be identified only as Basira.

But she said there were ‘some difficulties’ - including students being scolded by Taliban guards for bringing their mobile phones to class. “They did not behave well with us... they were rude,” she said.

Another English student, Maryam, said only seven women attended her class.

“Before we were 56 students, boys and girls,” she said.

No students in Panjshir

There was also a shortage of lecturers, she said, adding: “Maybe because some have left the country.”

A similar picture emerged from campuses across the country, although no students returned to class at Panjshir University, in the heartland of a nascent resistance to the Tal-

iban’s rule.

“I do not know if they will come tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow, or not,” said Professor Noor-ur-Rehman Afzali.

Panjshir was the last province to fall to the Taliban, and Jaber Jibran, a faculty head, said several classrooms destroyed in that fighting had still not been repaired.

In Herat, the ancient Silk Road city near the Iranian border and once one of the Islamic world’s most important intellectual centres, students also complained about a lack of tutors.

“Some of our professors have also left the country, but we are happy that the university gates are open,” said Parisa Narwan, studying arts. Tens of thousands of Afghans fled the country as the Taliban stormed back to power - among them teachers and lecturers who had been vociferously critical of the hardline group.

AFP

Brazil tourism tries to rise from pandemic ashes

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil - With the glittering parades, towering floats and sultry samba postponed by the omicron variant, Brazil will have a carnival week without much carnival this year - bad news for a tourism industry already battered by the pandemic.

In a world without COVID-19, this would have been the week a deluge of tourists - more than 2.1mn in 2020 - descended on Rio de Janeiro for a free-for-all of street parties and spectacular, all-night parades.

Instead, industry experts predict Rio and other tourist destinations to be relatively low-key, with a smaller number of visitors - mainly Brazilians traveling domestically.

That is adding to the agony of a tourism industry only just starting to recover from near-collapse in 2020.

“It’s been very traumatic,” said Alexandre Sampaio, head of hotel and restaurant federation FBHA, citing official figures showing the tourism industry’s



A member of Imperatriz Leopoldinense Samba School performs during the ‘Opening of Carnival 2022’ event, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on Saturday (AFP)

revenues plunged 35 per cent in 2020.

The industry rebounded only partially in 2021, growing around 20 per cent.

Carnival week will still have concerts, parties and balls in Rio - limited to 70 per cent capacity, with vaccine and mask requirements. But omicron led authorities to cancel carnival street parties for the second straight year, and postpone the famed samba school parade competi-

tion until April.

“We’ll see some revenues” from the rescheduled parades, “but it won’t come anywhere near pre-pandemic levels,” said Fabio Bentes, an economist at the National Confederation of Trade in Goods, Services and Tourism (CNC).

Bentes predicts carnival-week revenues one-third below pre-pandemic levels.

His research indicates the tourism industry, which ac-

counted for 7.7 per cent of Brazil’s economy before the pandemic - US\$110bn in direct and indirect revenues in 2019 - has lost US\$94.1bn in the past two years, and more than 340,000 jobs.

‘Call of the journey’

Brazil is a bucket-list destination for many people, with the Amazon rainforest, the Pantanal wetlands, the colourful colonial capital of Salvador, the stunning waterfalls of Iguacu and myriad other must-sees - not to mention Rio and carnival.

But the country has been hit hard by the pandemic, with nearly 650,000 deaths - second only to the United States.

The numbers have improved with more than 70 per cent of the population now fully vaccinated. But visitors have been slow to return.

Flavio Miranda is waiting for business at the base of Corcovado mountain, where Rio’s iconic Christ the Redeemer statue spreads his arms over the city.

Miranda, a 52-year-old driver from a nearby favela, sells tours of the city’s attractions.

He spent eight months without work when the pandemic arrived, relying on food handouts to feed his family of four.

Tourists ‘are returning, but it’s slow’, he told AFP, saying his income is down about 80 per cent. “This place used to be bursting with tourists. Now there are hardly any.”

Nearby, Miguel Viana, a 27-year-old engineer on vacation from Portugal, was on his way to visit the statue.

“The call of the journey was stronger than the pandemic,” he said with a laugh.

But he is among the few. International tourist numbers remain at just five to seven per cent of pre-pandemic levels, Sampaio estimates.

Experts say the drop in foreign tourists has been partially offset by more Brazilians traveling domestically, themselves wary of flying overseas.

AFP

DIVING DEEP

Underwater playground

Discover some of the world's splendid, undiscovered diving hotspots in Japan



Traversing a distance of more than 3,000km north to south, the island nation of Japan is surrounded by vast tracts of sea, ranging from icy cold currents in the far north, to sub-tropical waters in the south. With so much water around, it's only natural that the country should offer exceptional diving.

Japanese divers have been exploring the country's dive sites for decades, but up to now they've largely been off the radar of all but the most adventurous international divers. For those looking to discover a diverse underwater playground, Japan cries out to be discovered. Dive right in - there's plenty to see.

Winter diving in Hokkaido

While most people may associate Hokkaido with skiing in winter, for the hardy few who are not afraid of the cold, the island presents spectacular opportunities for diving.

The Shakotan Peninsula is the only place offering boat dives in winter, and while it may be cold, the rewards for those who brave the low temperatures are many. Located on Hokkaido's west coast, three hours away from Sapporo, you're likely to encounter unusual marine life on a winter dive here.

Giant octopus, Steller sea lions, Okhotsk akta mackerel and lumpsucker fish are just some of the creatures that make these cold waters their home. Diving surrounded by steep snow-covered cliffs is an unforgettable experience.

For those looking for even more of a thrill, the Shiretoko Peninsula in the far northeast of Hokkaido offers a unique experience - drift ice diving. Drift ice starts its journey 1,000km away, forming on the Amur River on the Russia-China border, floating on top of the denser seawater, and drifting down to the

Sea of Okhotsk Sea off the coast of Hokkaido. The temperatures may be freezing, but there are plenty of onsen hot springs to warm up in afterwards.

Banded houndsharks in Chiba

Home to Narita International Airport and close to Tokyo, Chiba is the main point of entry for many travellers to Japan. While most just pass through, there are plenty of reasons for divers to spend some time here, including the exciting dive spot in Ito, at the tip of the Boso Peninsula, where you can be surrounded by hundreds of banded houndsharks.

This is not diving for beginners - it's easy to get bumped into by the sharks which, although harmless, can knock divers' masks and regulators off. Divers without intermediate skills should not embark on this adventure. But for those who have the skills and the confidence, it's one of the few places in the world where you can dive in such close proximity to many sharks. Keep an eye out for stingrays, too, and if diving in winter, you may be lucky to spot cormorants diving underwater for fish.

Japan's first National Marine Park

On Shikoku Island, the smallest of Japan's main islands, Kochi prefecture's Pacific-facing coastline is impacted by the Kuroshio Current, one of strongest ocean currents in the world, bringing warm, nutrient-rich waters northwards, creating a rich biodiversity that is sure to delight divers. In the waters off Kochi are corals, tiny creatures such as pygmy seahorses, large schools of amberjack and skipjack tuna, and it's also possible to see turtles and dolphins.

Tatsukushi, Japan's first national marine park established in 1970, is home to a number of dive sites with different attractions in each season. Head underwater in winter to



discover more than 100 varieties of colourful nudibranchs; dive in late summer and autumn for large schools of fish, including rainbow runners, damselfish and anthias.

Subtropical waters for novice divers

Okinawa, the chain of islands in the far south

Okinawa, the chain of islands in the far south of Japan, is blessed with warm waters that are a great place for beginner divers

of Japan, is blessed with warm waters that are a great place for beginner divers. Combined with exceptional clarity and a wide variety of marine life, it's one of the most loved places for underwater exploration in the country.

The 20 islands that make up the Kerama archipelago, 40km to the southwest of the

main Okinawa Island, are easily accessible by boat from Naha, the prefecture's principal city. The journey takes around 35-60 minutes by high-speed boat, but it's also worth overnighing in Kerama.

Almost 100 dive sites and incredibly clear waters here mean that you're guaranteed to see plenty, whether you choose to dive deep or merely snorkel on the surface. The Akajima Marine Science Laboratory has recorded 248 species of coral in the waters of Kerama, more than 60% of the total found in Japan.

The conditions here are perfect for beginners with calm waters and mostly gentle currents, and there are plenty of diving curses on offer. But more advanced divers will also be entranced by the opportunities to see manta rays and three species of sea turtles in the clear waters. There are also a number of artificial reefs here, attracting large schools of fish.

Just as Japan is famous for its four seasons above water, the different seasons below water each offer their attractions.

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BIRTHDAY WISHES



RIDA FATIMA RIZVI
FEBRUARY 28

Dear Rida,
Wishing you a Very Happy Birthday. May God bless you always!!
With lots of love and blessings -
Grandparents, Papa, Mamma & Ayaan



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HONG KONG VS SINGAPORE



People relax along the waterfront next to the Merlion statue in Singapore

Hong Kong and Singapore effect totally different virus responses with competing visions for their populace

TALE OF TWO Cities



A market place in Hong Kong

Rivals Singapore and Hong Kong have become pandemic polar opposites, the former opting to live with the coronavirus and reopen to the world while the latter doubles down on 'zero-Covid' and its international isolation.

For decades the two cities have jostled to be Asia's premier international business hub, offering low taxes, dependable legal systems and seamless global connections. Both adopted strict suppression tactics when the pandemic emerged, closing borders to keep infections low within their densely populated territories.

Now they present competing visions as they manage the highly transmissible Omicron variant - with Hong Kong floundering under soaring infections while Singapore offers a pandemic exit strategy.

In the heart of Singapore's financial district, analyst Camille Chautard sipped a coffee on a bench at Raffles Place during the busy lunchtime rush hour.

"Now that it seems the new variant is less deadly, or at least the infections are less severe, it's probably a good time for Singapore to lead the way in the region and open up," she said.

Earlier this week, health minister Ong Ye Kung said Singapore was moving closer towards normalcy, noting that "Omicron poses less of a risk".

Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam, on the other hand, had a starkly different message. Announcing compulsory testing for all 7.4 million residents, the tightest social distancing rules to date and plans to isolate all those infected, she said the city must 'win the war'.

"(Singapore) is miles ahead of Hong Kong in terms of dealing with these waves and especially mitigating the impact of the pandemic," Karen Grepin, a public health expert at the University of Hong Kong, said.

Openings vs closures

The differences were clear on the streets this

week. In Singapore, children are back in class, residents are free to gather in hawker centres or enjoy post-work drinks, and people fly in and out for business or pleasure.

For Hong Kongers, in-person classes are suspended, businesses like bars and gyms remain closed, restaurants are only allowed to serve takeout in the evening, and international travel is increasingly impossible and involves lengthy quarantines.

"Zoom calls cannot replace the people-to-people connection...so easing workplace restrictions definitely helps," Singaporean businessman Vaibhav Dabhadre said, adding, "I believe that we still have an opportunity to open more, but so far the approach has been fantastic."

Such upbeat commentary is hard to come by in Hong Kong. "The government's current zero-Covid policy seems to go against the trend," lamented a 39-year-old telecommunications worker, surnamed Wong, as he finished submitting to a COVID-19 test outside a shopping mall in Sha Tin district.

"Every country around the world is living with the virus," he added, describing the mass testing orders as a 'waste'.

Politics vs health

Hong Kong and Singapore are currently reporting thousands of infections per day and experts say the outbreak in both cities won't peak until sometime in March. But as Hong Kong's healthcare and isolation system collapses, Singapore has so far avoided such a fate.

The city decided last fall to transition away from zero-Covid after realising it was not sustainable to isolate and hospitalise all the infected, Grepin said.

"We can't constantly live in that sphere, and I think Singapore is much better off because they recognised this early on," she said.

One key difference is the vaccination rate among the elderly. Around 95 percent of Singaporeans aged 70 or above have received at least one dose of vaccine, while the figure in Hong Kong is 61 per cent despite ample supplies.



People have meals in a street along the Lau Pa Sat hawker centre in Singapore

Zoom calls cannot replace the people-to-people connection...so easing workplace restrictions definitely helps

VAIBHAV DABHADE
Singaporean businessman

That severely limits Hong Kong's ability to transition to living with the virus. But there is another reason the city's hands are tied - China. Over the last six months Beijing has increasingly called the shots, ordering Hong Kong to stick to zero-Covid and decrying mitigation as a failed 'Western' strategy.

Last week Chinese President Xi Jinping ordered Hong Kong to take "all necessary measures" to get the epidemic under control, reinforcing the reality that Hong Kong's post-pandemic future depends on Beijing.

"The decision to maintain a zero-Covid strategy after the advent of safe, effective vaccines is primarily a political decision, as opposed to a public health decision," Grepin said.

Travel vs isolation

Singapore's approach has also come in for criticism, with some complaining about ever-changing, confusing restrictions. And while the city's borders are slowly opening through quarantine-free travel with a number of countries, curbs are still tighter than in most Western countries, causing frustration for some foreign residents.

However, compared to Hong Kong, which dubs itself 'Asia's World City', travel ease is night and day. Singapore's most recent data showed around 400,000 air passenger arrivals in December, while Hong Kong saw just 27,000 passengers in that same period.

"The longer (Hong Kong) endures the relatively restrictive mobility patterns compared to other hubs, the harder it will be to maintain its dominant position," Standard Chartered chief executive Bill Winters warned in a Financial Times report.

Even established mega-chains headquartered in Hong Kong are feeling the sting - James Riley, chief executive of the Mandarin Oriental hotel giant, said most of their executive team members were now working outside the city.

"As a base from which to run a business, it's very, very poor today," Riley said.

AFP

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP



Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe (L) shoot and scores past Saint-Etienne's French midfielder Eliaquim Mangala during the French L1 match on Feb 26 (AFP)

Mbappe nets twice as PSG stroll over Saint-Etienne

Paris, France - Kylian Mbappe scored twice from Lionel Messi assists as an impressive Paris Saint-Germain came from behind to beat Saint-Etienne 3-1 and further extend their lead at the top of Ligue 1 on Saturday.

Denis Bouanga put the struggling visitors in front at the Parc des Princes only for Mbappe to equalise just before the interval, and the France striker struck again just after the restart.

He then set up Danilo Pereira to head in the hosts' third goal as Mauricio Pochettino's team bounced back after losing 3-1 away at Nantes last weekend

and moved 16 points clear of Nice and Marseille as they cruise towards the French title.

PSG were three goals behind at half-time against Nantes and they were punished for a slow start here, Gabon international Bouanga pouncing on a mistake by Pereira to fire past Gianluigi Donnarumma.

Yet the home side eventually came to life and Mbappe continued his outstanding recent run of form, with his brace taking him on to 24 goals in all competitions this season.

Mbappe has now scored 156 goals in a PSG shirt, equalling

Zlatan Ibrahimovic's tally from his four-year spell in Paris between 2012 and 2016.

Only Edinson Cavani, with 200, has scored more goals for the club.

"It is not easy to describe his performances. He is incredible. I am proud of him," said Pochettino.

Mbappe was withdrawn to a standing ovation late on at the Parc des Princes, where supporters kept themselves warm on a bitterly cold night by performing a Mexican wave as their team turned on the style.

The World Cup-winning

striker will now serve a suspension and so will miss next weekend's trip to Nice which will be followed by the second leg of PSG's Champions League last-16 tie against Real Madrid in Spain on March 9.

There Paris will defend the 1-0 advantage given to them by Mbappe's goal in the first leg.

Here he scored the equaliser three minutes before the interval, latching onto Messi's excellent pass and firing in a shot that Saint-Etienne goalkeeper Paul Bernardoni should have saved.

Messi then produced another terrific pass for Mbappe to em-

phatically fire in two minutes after the restart to put the home side ahead.

"He is magnificent. All that was lacking today was a goal," Pochettino told broadcaster Canal Plus of Messi's influence.

"We are gradually playing better and better."

The third goal arrived in the 52nd minute as Mbappe delivered a superb cross with the outside of his right boot for Portuguese midfielder Pereira to head in, and PSG then came close to adding to their lead on several occasions.

AFP



File photo of Chelsea's Russian owner Roman Abramovich (AFP)

Abramovich steps aside, hands over Chelsea control

London, United Kingdom - Chelsea said Sunday they were "praying for peace" following Russia's invasion of Ukraine after owner Roman Abramovich's decision to hand over control of the Premier League club.

The Russian-Israeli billionaire announced on Saturday that he was handing the "stewardship and care" of Chelsea to the trustees of the club's charitable foundation. But he will remain as owner.

There was no mention in his statement of the crisis in Ukraine.

Chelsea, who play Liverpool in Sunday's League Cup final, released a 24-word statement on their website on Sunday but there was no mention of Russia or its president, Vladimir Putin.

"The situation in Ukraine is horrific and devastating," the statement said. "Chelsea FC's thoughts are with everyone in Ukraine. Everyone at the club is praying for peace."

It is understood Abramovich, who allegedly has links to the Kremlin, took the decision to step aside in order to protect Chelsea from reputational damage as war rages in Ukraine.

Opposition Labour MP Chris Bryant, who said in the House of Commons this week that the UK government should seize

Abramovich's assets, wants stronger words from the Russian.

"I'm worried that the British press (with some notable exceptions) have fallen for the Abramovich line on ceding control," he tweeted on Sunday.

"Unless and until he condemns the criminal invasion of Ukraine I will continue to call for the UK to sanction him and

The situation in Ukraine is horrific and devastating. Chelsea FC's thoughts are with everyone in Ukraine.

CHELSEA

seize/free assets."

The Czech Republic have become the latest national side, after Sweden and Poland, to announce they will not play Russia in the 2022 World Cup play-offs due to the current situation.

If the Czechs beat Sweden on March 24, they are scheduled to meet the winner of the Poland v Russia match a few days later.

AFP



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Team France celebrating their 2018 FIFA World Cup win

France call for Russia to be thrown out of 2022 World Cup

Paris, France - Russia should be expelled from the 2022 World Cup after invading Ukraine, French Football Federation president Noel Le Graet told *Le Parisien* newspaper on Sunday.

On the fourth day of the invasion, Ukrainians and Russians said they were ready for talks to halt a conflict that has forced hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes.

France were crowned world champions in 2018 after beating Croatia in the final in Moscow.

"The world of sport, and especially football, cannot remain neutral. I certainly would not oppose the expulsion of Russia," said Le Graet.

Poland, Sweden and the

Czech Republic have all refused to play Russia in the World Cup play-offs.

Poland are due to play Russia in Moscow on March 24 and should the hosts win they would host the winners of the match between the Czechs and the Swedes on March 29.

Le Graet concurred with the trio's stance.

"In these dramatic circumstances, how can one envisage playing football against this country," he said.

FIFA have yet to take any action against Russia saying on Thursday they were "concerned" by the "tragic" situation with president Gianni Infantino saying the World governing body had the capacity to take

action on the play-off matches at "any moment".

European governing body UEFA did take action on Friday, stripping Saint Petersburg's Gazprom Arena of the Champions League final on May 28 and awarding the showpiece match to the Stade de France in Paris.

UEFA are also believed to be debating whether to cancel their sponsorship deal with Russian gas giant Gazprom, whose majority shareholder is the Russian state.

Gazprom renewed the contract in May 2021 to run to 2024. The deal to sponsor the Champions League is worth a reported 40 million euros (\$45 million) a year.

AFP



Marcelo Bielsa

Struggling Leeds sack manager Marcelo Bielsa

London, United Kingdom - Leeds United on Sunday sacked manager Marcelo Bielsa following a poor run of results that has left the Premier League side teetering just two points above the relegation zone.

Saturday's dispiriting 4-0 loss to Tottenham at Elland Road was their fourth straight defeat, a run during which their leaky defence has conceded 17 goals.

The 66-year-old Argentine remained convinced he could turn things around but the Leeds board decided they had to act to preserve their top-flight status.

The club intends to make an announcement regarding Bielsa's successor on Monday, with former RB Leipzig and RB Salzburg boss Jesse Marsch the heavy favourite to take over.

Chairman Andrea Radrizzani said he was forced to act due to the club's "precarious position" in the Premier League.

AFP

New Zealand hit back as South Africa reach 140-5 to lead by 211

Christchurch, New Zealand - After being outplayed for two days, New Zealand held a glimmer of hope that they could salvage the second Test as they reduced South Africa to 140 for five at stumps on day three in Christchurch on Sunday.

It gave the Proteas a lead of 211 with five wickets remaining after posting 364 in their first innings and then bowling New Zealand out for 293.

South Africa dominated the first two days but Sunday belonged to New Zealand after they were rescued from 91 for five by a 133-run stand between Colin de Grandhomme and Daryl Mitchell on the docile wicket.

"We're reasonably happy, not entirely happy," said Rassie van der Dussen, adding that a lead of 270-280 would put South Africa in a strong position.

"The main thing is the ball swings, that's the biggest challenge." But New Zealand believed that sort of target would be achievable.

"It's still a good batting wicket," said de Grandhomme, who scored a Test-best 120 not out. "If they set 270 we'll definitely back ourselves to get it."

De Grandhomme added there was nothing special about his innings in the conditions.

"It was a pretty good wicket so there wasn't too much to worry about, just see the ball, hit the ball," he said.

When South Africa started their second innings 71 runs ahead, New Zealand needed quick wickets and Tim Southee and Matt Henry obliged to have the tourists 38-3.



New Zealand's paceman Neil Wagner (C) celebrates his wicket of South Africa's Rassie van der Dussen (L) with teammate Will Young on day three of the second Test match (AFP)

A Southee inswinger beat Sarel Erwee's bat and trapped the opener in front after he had scored eight off nine deliveries.

Maharaj breakthrough
Southee then removed Dean

Elgar who was smartly caught one-handed by wicketkeeper Tom Blundell diving in front of first slip and was gone for 13.

Aiden Markram faced 25 balls before getting off the mark and gradually advanced to 14 before Henry, on a day when

the short ball had been favoured, pitched up a yorker and Markram was bowled.

Van der Dussen (45) and Temba Bavuma (23) steadied the South African innings with a 65-run stand in which van der Dussen was particularly hard on

Neil Wagner as New Zealand's short-ball specialist tried to tempt the batsmen into the hook shot.

He took 13 off one Wagner over and in the process took a little gloss off what was otherwise an outstanding day for de

Grandhomme.

After taking 10 runs off three balls, van der Dussen popped a straightforward chance to square leg and as Wagner began to celebrate, de Grandhomme dropped the ball.

However, Wagner won the

SCOREBOARD			
South Africa 1 st Innings 364			
New Zealand 1 st Innings 293			
SOUTH AFRICA 2 nd INNINGS			
Sarel Erwee	lbw b Southee	8	
Dean Elgar (c)	c !Blundell b Southee	13	
A Markram	b Henry	14	
R van der Dussen	c & b Wagner	45	
Temba Bavuma	c Southee b Wagner	23	
Kyle Verreynne	not out	22	
W Mulder	not out	10	
Extras:	(lb 4, w 1)	5	
Total:	(53 Ov, RR: 2.64)	140/5	
Fall of wickets:	1-12, 2-23, 3-38, 4-103, 5-114		
Bowling:	T Southee 14-4-28-2, M Henry 13-4-25-1, Kyle Jamieson 11-1-30-0, N Wagner 12-2-44-2, C de Grandhomme 3-1-9-0		

battle five runs later when he had van der Dussen caught and bowled and followed up with the dismissal of Bavuma.

New Zealand had resumed the day at 157 for five and with de Grandhomme leading the charge they put on 136 in 35 overs with the all-rounder's partnership with Mitchell doing much of the damage.

Elgar turned to Wiaan Mulder to snap their century stand but he lasted one over after de Grandhomme smacked back-to-back fours which led to the introduction of Keshav Maharaj.

Mitchell had looked comfortable against the pace bowlers but was less certain against Maharaj's spin.

After edging one ball short of the sole slip, he played outside the line to the next and was trapped plumb in front.

Kagiso Rabada and Marco Jansen mopped up the tail with Rabada taking five for 60 and Jansen four for 98.

AFP

Iyer stars as India record 12th straight T20I win



India's Sanju Samson (C) and India's Shreyas Iyer run for a during the third T20 against Sri Lanka (AFP)

SCOREBOARD			
SRI LANKA			
P Nissanka	c VR Iyer b A Khan	10	
D Gunathilaka	b M Siraj	0	1
C Asalanka	c Samson b A Khan	6	
J Liyanage	b Ravi Bishnoi	9	19
D Chandimal	c VR Iyer b Patel	22	27
D Shanaka	not out	74	38
C Karunaratne	not out	12	19
Extras:	(b 4, lb 14, w 6)	24	
Total:	(20 Ov, RR: 7.30)	146/5	
Fall of wickets:	1-1, 2-5, 3-11, 4-29, 5-60		
Bowling:	M Siraj 4-0-22-1, A Khan 4-1-23-2, H Patel 4-0-29-1, K Yadav 4-0-22-0, R Bishnoi 4-0-32-1		
INDIA			
S Samson	c Chandimal b Karunaratne	18	12
R Sharma	c Karunaratne b Chameera	5	9
Shreyas Iyer	not out	73	45
D Hooda	b Kumara	21	16
V Iyer	c sub b Kumara	5	4
R Jadeja	not out	22	15
Extras:	(w 4)	4	
Total:	(16.5 Ov, RR: 8.79)	148/4	
Fall of wickets:	1-6, 2-51, 3-89, 4-103		
Bowling:	B Fernando 4-0-35-0, D Chameera 3-0-19-1, L Kumara 3.5-0-39-2, C Karunaratne 3.4-0-31-1, Jeffrey Vandersay 2.2-0-24-0		

Dharamsala, India - Shreyas Iyer hit an unbeaten 73 to lead India to a record-equalling 12th successive Twenty20 international victory as they whitewashed Sri Lanka in the three-match series on Sunday.

Chasing 147 for victory, India romped home with 19 balls to spare propelled by Iyer's third successive unbeaten half-century. They won by six wickets in the Himalayan hill town of Dharamsala.

India, who climbed to number one in world T20 rankings after their 3-0 sweep of West Indies earlier this month, have remained unbeaten since the loss to New Zealand in the World Cup last year.

India drew level with Afghanistan, who won 12 straight T20I matches between February 2018 to September 2019. The bowlers set up the win, restricting Sri Lanka to 146 for five despite skipper Dasun Shanaka's unbeaten 74 off 38 deliveries.

In reply, India lost skipper Rohit Sharma, who became the most capped T20I player overtaking Pakistan's Shoaib Malik (124 matches), for five in the second over of the chase.

Iyer, who hit nine fours and one six in his 45-ball knock, then took charge to put on 48 runs with wicketkeeper-batsman Sanju Samson who fell for 18.

Iyer, who stands unbeaten in

the series after not out scores of 57 and 74 in the first two wins, kept up the pace to reach his fifty with a six off 29 deliveries.

Lahiru Kumara took two wickets including Deepak Hooda for 21, but Iyer remained unstoppable in a 45-run unbeaten partnership with Ravindra Jadeja, who made 22.

Earlier Sri Lanka lost their top four batsmen for 29 runs after they elected to bat, but Shanaka hit back with nine fours and two sixes in his blitz.

Shanaka, who made 47 not out in his team's second loss, went past his T20I best of 54 to hammer the bowlers and put on an unbeaten stand of 86 with Chamika Karunaratne, who

made 12.

Pace bowler Mohammed Siraj struck in the opening over as Danushka Gunathilaka dragged a short delivery onto to the stumps.

Then, Avesh Khan removed Pathum Nissanka, for one, and Charith Asalanka, for four, in his first two overs.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Dinesh Chandimal and Shanaka attempted to rebuild in a 31-run fifth-wicket stand that was broken by medium-pace bowler Harshal Patel.

Patel sent back Chandimal for 25. Shanaka stood firm to launch an attack as he reached his fifty with a boundary off Avesh.

AFP

Australia arrive for first Pakistan tour in 24 years with tight security

Islamabad, Pakistan - Australia flew into Pakistan Sunday for their first cricket tour in nearly a quarter of a century - and into a high-security bubble that will envelop them throughout their six-week stay.

Senior batsman Steve Smith posted a picture on Twitter of the 35-strong Australia tour party inside their charter flight's cabin after it touched down in the Pakistan capital, Islamabad.

Pakistan have struggled to

attract visiting sides since a fatal terror attack on the visiting Sri Lanka team's bus in 2009. Australia pulled out of a tour five years earlier after a suicide blast at a Lahore church.

They last played in Pakistan in 1998, winning the three-Test series 1-0 and blanking the hosts in the three one-day internationals.

Having been forced to play their home games abroad - mostly in the United Arab

Emirates - Pakistan appeared to have reassured international cricket authorities last year with both New Zealand and England scheduled to tour.

But the Black Caps hastily departed in September just minutes before their first match was due to start, citing security fears, and England postponed tours by both their men's and women's teams soon after.

AFP

Kohli's 100th Test to be played with no spectators due to COVID

New Delhi, India - Superstar cricketer Virat Kohli will play his 100th Test behind closed doors with no spectators because of a coronavirus outbreak in the northern Indian city of Mohali, an official told AFP on Sunday.

The Punjab Cricket Association (PCA) host the first of the two Tests against Sri Lanka starting Friday and the spotlight will be on former captain Kohli's landmark game.

"It is unfortunate that we can't have crowds in Kohli's 100th game due to COVID-19 cases in the city," PCA secretary Puneet Bali told AFP.

"But it is a historic occasion and we would felicitate the great batsman and also put billboards all across the city to celebrate the feat." Local media reported 19 new COVID-19 cases over the past 24 hours in Mohali. The virus has witnessed a decline



across the country.

The second Test, a day-night match in Bangalore, will have limited spectators to watch only the third pink-ball match that India's will have played.

Kohli, who was recently succeeded by Rohit Sharma as India's all-format skipper, will re-

turn for the Test series after taking a break from the current three-match Twenty20 series.

The 33-year-old, who has amassed 7,962 runs in 99 Tests since his debut in 2011, will become the 11th Indian to appear in 100 or more five-day matches.

AFP

Nadal claims Acapulco title, remains unbeaten in 2022

Acapulco, Mexico - Rafael Nadal continued his perfect start to 2022, beating Cameron Norrie 6-4, 6-4 to lift the Acapulco ATP title in his first tournament since winning the Australian Open.

Nadal needed one hour and 54 minutes to beat Britain's 12th-ranked Norrie for the fourth time in as many career meetings.

"Cameron is a very solid player, he's a tricky player, he makes you feel that you cannot play comfortable against him at all," Nadal said. "I had been going through some very difficult moments in the match."

But the world number five wasn't too unsettled to claim a 91st career victory, and his fourth in Acapulco after wins in 2005, 2013 and 2020.

As he did in 2020, Nadal won this week without dropping a set.

Nadal is undefeated since losing to Lloyd Harris in the third round at Washington on August 5, 2021. He ended his 2021 season after that because of a left foot injury.

He returned to win the Melbourne Summer Set Australian Open warm-up, then won the Australian Open for a second time to break out of a tie with Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic for most men's Grand Slam singles titles.

His victory over Daniil Medvedev in the Australian Open final was a classic, the Spaniard rallying from two sets down to triumph.

He beat the Russian again in the semi-finals on Friday, just a day after Medvedev was assured of rising to number one in the world thanks to Djokovic's early



Spain's Rafael Nadal wears a traditional Mexican mariachi hat while holding the winning trophy after defeating Britain's Cameron Norrie at the Mexico ATP Open final in Acapulco (AFP)

exit at Dubai.

"I'm very pleased," Nadal said of his week's work. "It was a very important title for me, so I can't be happier."

He started strongly against Norrie, putting 89 percent of his first serves in play in the first set

and winning 79 percent of those points.

Nadal pounced on his first break point in the fifth game of the first set, firing a forehand winner.

The Spaniard looked as if he could run away with the match

when he broke Norrie in the opening game of the second set.

But Norrie -- who was riding an eight-match winning streak that included a run to the title in Delray Beach last week -- hit back to level at 1-1, though he needed four break points to do it.

Down 0-40, Nadal saved three break points before Norrie came out on top in a 20-ball rally.

After Norrie held for 2-1, Nadal reeled off the next four games only for Norrie to strike back again as Nadal served for the match at 5-3, the 21-time

Grand Slam champion surrendering a break with two forehand errors. Nadal made no mistake on his second attempt to serve out, reaching match point with a volley winner before Norrie belted a forehand long.

AFP



Fernando Martinez celebrates after defeating Jerwin Ancajas

Martinez upsets Ancajas to seize super flyweight IBF world title

Los Angeles, United States - Unbeaten Argentinian Fernando Martinez ended Filipino Jerwin Ancajas' long International Boxing Federation super flyweight reign with a 12-round unanimous decision victory in Las Vegas on Saturday.

Martinez pressed the action in a bout outworking the champion to earn the upset victory, with two judges scoring it 118-110 and a third seeing it 117-111 for the 30-year-old challenger.

Martinez improved to 14-0 with eight wins inside the distance. Ancajas, who was making his 10th defense of the title he won in 2016, fell to 33-2-2 with 22 knockouts.

Ancajas, also 30, said after the fight he would take advantage of his contractual right to a rematch. Meanwhile, his plans to take on Japanese WBO champion Kazuto Ioka in a unification bout later this year were blown.

After an 11th round dominated by the aggressive Martinez, Ancajas appeared to need a knockout in the 12th to retain his title.

But he couldn't hurt Martinez, who continued to land solid punches to the head and body in the final round.

AFP



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Norway's Henrik Kristoffersen competes during the men's slalom event of the FIS Alpine Ski World Cup (AFP)

Kristoffersen completes slalom double in WC in Garmisch

Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany - Henrik Kristoffersen completed the double of slalom wins in Garmisch-Partenkirchen on Sunday with his second World Cup victory of the week-end.

"I'm super happy with another win, it's been a good two days," said Kristoffersen.

The 27-year-old Norwegian put in another commanding display in spring conditions on the

Gudiberg to post a winning time of one minute, 52.66 seconds.

Dave Ryding, who became the first Briton to win a World Cup race last month in Kitzbuehel, put in a superb second run to take second at 0.35 back with local favourite Linus Strasser of Germany third at 0.47.

This is the first time this season a male skier has won two slalom races on the World Cup circuit.

Kristoffersen is now 49 points clear at the top of the overall slalom rankings after a second win within 24 hours.

He admitted struggling on the first run, when the course was covered in shadow and the snow hard after a sharp frost which left him in eighth position.

"The first run was really difficult because of the snow conditions, I didn't feel good at all."

AFP

Nufer pulls off major shock in World Cup downhill

Crans-Montana, Switzerland - Swiss skier Priska Nufer pulled off a major surprise on Sunday winning the women's World Cup downhill race at Crans Montana for her first success at this level.

The 30-year-old edged out Saturday's downhill winner Ester Ledecka by 0.11sec with Olympic downhill silver medalist Sofia Goggia of Italy 0.23sec off the pace.

Nufer had never before even finished in the first three although she showed she was in good form by finishing fourth in Saturday's race - which prior to Sunday's run was her best ever finish.

Goggia, the 2018 Olympic downhill champion, extended her lead in the World Cup downhill standings to 75 points over Nufer's compatriot and Olympic champion in the discipline Corinne Suter, who finished fourth on Sunday.

Goggia is in a strong position with just one downhill to come on March 16 where the 29-year-old can afford to finish as



Priska Nufer rings bell during the podium ceremony (AFP)

low as 10th to retain her title.

Slovakia's reigning overall World Cup champion Petra Vlhova took advantage of the absence of Mikaela Shiffrin to draw level on points with her in the race for this year's crown.

Vlhova - who finished 16th in the downhill - has a slight edge due to having five wins to Shiffrin's four this term.

AFP

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