

HM receives envoys



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik receives credentials from Thomas Lid Ball, Ambassador of Norway

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received separately at Al Barakah Palace on Tuesday credentials of a number of ambassadors of friendly countries accredited to the Sultanate of Oman.

His Majesty the Sultan received credentials of the following ambassadors:

Thomas Lid Ball, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of King Harald V of the Kingdom of Norway, accredited to the Sultanate of Oman.

Mark Lawrence Donovan, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of President David Hurley, Governor-General of Australia, accredited to the Sultanate of Oman.

Coulibaly Drissa, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of President Dr Alassane Ouattara of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, accredited to the Sultanate of Oman.

Muhammed Jusic, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of President Zeljko Komsic, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, accredited to the Sultanate of Oman.

Hrachya Poladyan, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of President Vahagn Khachaturyan of the Republic of Armenia, accredited to the Sultanate of Oman.

Frederico Manuel dos Santos, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of President João

Manuel Lourenço of the Republic of Angola, accredited to the Sultanate of Oman.

Barney Richard, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of President Cindy Kiro, Governor-General of New Zealand, accredited to the Sultanate of Oman.

During meetings on the sidelines with His Majesty the Sultan, the envoys conveyed greetings and best wishes of their countries' leaders to His Majesty and the Omani people. They also expressed their honour and delight in presenting their credentials to His Majesty the Sultan and affirmed to exert their sincere efforts to promote relations of their respective countries with Oman in various spheres in a manner

that serves the joint interests of the Omani people and their countries' citizens.

His Majesty the Sultan welcomed the ambassadors, expressing his gratitude for their leaders' greetings and best wishes. His Majesty confirmed that they would receive support from him, the government and the Omani people to facilitate carrying out their duties.

The ceremony was attended by the Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Foreign Minister, Commander of Royal Guard of Oman, Head of the Royal Protocols, and Military Aides to His Majesty the Sultan.

ONA

See also Page 02

Royal Decree ratifies pact between Oman, US

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal Decree No 24/2022 on Tuesday ratifying an agreement between the Sultanate of Oman and the United States of America on work permit for spouses of official employees, signed in Muscat on April 18, 2022.

Article 1 ratifies the aforesaid agreement as per the version attached to this decree.

Article 2 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

ONA

Royal Cavalry to take part in UK Queen's Platinum Jubilee

Our Correspondent Muscat

Based on a Royal Order, the sultanate - represented by the Royal Cavalry of the Royal Court Affairs - will take part in the Royal Windsor Horse Show.

A statement issued by ONA said, 'The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Royal Court Affairs, will participate in the Royal Windsor Horse Show, which will be held in the United Kingdom on the occasion of the celebration of the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and President of the Commonwealth.'

The Royal Cavalry's participation, which is in response to a British Royal invitation, will showcase Omani musical and equestrian capabilities and the sultanate's cultural and civilisational heritage.

In 2022, Queen Elizabeth II became the first British monarch to celebrate a Platinum Jubilee after 70 years of service.



(Supplied photo)

Royal Cavalry will showcase Omani musical and equestrian capabilities and the sultanate's cultural heritage

The horse show will be held on the grounds of Windsor Castle from May 12 to 15. More than 1,000 participants - including knights, musicians and actors - will participate with 500 horses, performing equestrian sports, and military and musical shows.

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HM receives credentials of envoys



Mark Lawrence Donovan, Ambassador of Australia



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Muhamed Jusic, Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina



Barney Richard, Ambassador of New Zealand

Pact signed to promote Oman in Chinese travel market

Dubai, UAE - Continuing its efforts to stimulate the tourism sector and explore collaboration opportunities with international travel and tourism companies, Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group), participated in Oman Tourism Forum which was launched by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism on Tuesday.

The forum was held on the sidelines of the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2022 taking place in Dubai from May 9 to 12.

Omran oversaw the signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) by the national travel and tourism operator 'Visit Oman' with Beijing Spring Travel Services, one of China's leading travel and tourism operators.

The MoU focuses on promoting Oman in the Chinese travel and tourism market. 'Linking travel and tourism service providers and customers to the local travel and tourism sector, the Visit Oman platform will provide the necessary value-added services to give an impetus to the sector,' a press release stated.

Dr Hashil bin Obaid al



(Supplied photo)

Oman Tourism Forum has given us the opportunity to network and engage with regional and international pioneers in the travel and tourism sector

DR HASHIL AL MAHROUQI

Mahrouqi, CEO of Omran, and a number of officials participated in the forum's panel discussions highlighting Oman's tourism sector. Additionally, several Omran hotels participated in ATM, showcasing products, services and packages.

Mahrouqi emphasised Omran's continued commitment to building a supportive infrastructure for the sector and said, "Our participation in the forum is in line with our goal to boost Oman's tourism potential in various international markets. It has given us the opportunity to network and engage with regional and international pioneers in the travel and tourism sector. At the same time, we have also been able to showcase our forward-thinking investment strategies in a sector that's been steadily growing. This participation reflects the group's efforts to support the nation's desired diversification in tourism by delivering a broad mix of value-added services."

On the sidelines of the forum, Said bin Salem al Shanfari, CEO of Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, participated in a panel discussion highlighting opportunities for cooperation in the tourism, business and retail tourism sectors, while Shabib bin Mohammed al Mamari, managing director of Visit Oman, participated in a discussion on partnerships in Oman's tourism sector.



(Supplied photo)

PDO constructs multi-purpose hall in Izki

Muscat - Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) officially opened a multi-purpose hall in the wilayat of Izki on Monday in an event held under the auspices of H H Sayyid Kamil bin Fahad al Said, Assistant Secretary General for the Cabinet of the Deputy Prime Minister for Council of Ministers.

The 1,500sqm hall is located within the Izki Cultural Complex and includes a reception, lobby, an attached hall of 200sqm and a theatre that can accommodate more than 700 people equipped with the latest audio-visual equipment.

It also has the latest educational and training facilities for lectures and workshops. The multi-purpose hall will support cultural and social activities in the wilayat and its surrounding areas.

Abdul-Amir bin Abdul-Hussein al Ajmi, director of external affairs and value creation at PDO, said, "These community

projects are an embodiment of our endeavour to make our projects diversified and touch the various needs of the citizen - social, training, health, economic and others. On the other hand, we are keen to ensure that its benefits extend to all members of the community, whether inside or outside our concession area. All of this is in line with the United Nations sustainable development goals and the priorities of Oman Vision 2040. The project is also in line with the ninth goal of the United Nations related to strengthening the infrastructure of society."

The multi-purpose hall is part of PDO's Social Investment Programme which aims to contribute to the sustainable development of Omani communities and to address their specific needs through a variety of different projects executed in cooperation with government and non-government bodies.

PASI launches independent bank accounts for monthly contributions by companies

Our Correspondent Muscat

In its efforts to facilitate the payment of monthly contributions for insured private sector Omani employees registered in the social insurance scheme, Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) has started independent bank accounts for each company as a new payment channel.

The accounts are dedicated to individual companies and cannot be shared, assigned only for the monthly contribution payments.

Named 'One Account', the account numbers differ from company to company, each account linked to the company commercial registry included in the com-

pany monthly notice payment.

In a statement, PASI said the initiative includes all registered companies/employers, over 17,000 in all. 'The One Account cannot be shared with other companies because it is linked to the company register. Payments through the One Account of the PASI scheme are confirmed electronically with no human involvement,' PASI stated.

'Monthly contributions can be paid via direct transfers using the account number through local and international banks. Companies' 'One Account' numbers are displayed in monthly contribution payment slips. Payment through One Account is direct to PASI without third party involvement.'

WAREHOUSE FIRE IN S BATINAH; NO INJURIES



The Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulances has stated that its firefighting teams extinguished a fire that broke out in a warehouse in the wilayat of Barka, South Batinah governorate. It tweeted that there were no injuries (Supplied photo)

400 social security citizens to perform Hajj free: MoSD

Our Correspondent Muscat

As many as 400 citizens under social security will perform Hajj free this year based on a Royal Directive, the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) has stated.

The ministry, in coordination with the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, is pleased to announce to citizens of social security who wish to perform Hajj to register

through www.hajj.om,' MoSD stated.

Applicants must fulfil certain criteria, including good health, age (30 to 65 years) and not performed Hajj earlier.

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs has announced that citizens and residents of Oman who wish to perform Hajj this year can register starting from May 9 to 14 via the electronic system for pilgrims. Oman's quota for this year's Hajj is 6,338 pilgrims.

Japan's 'Order of the Rising Sun' conferred on Alawi

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a ceremony held in the Tokyo Imperial Palace in Japan on Tuesday, Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, former minister responsible for foreign affairs, received the 'Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun' from Emperor Naruhito of Japan. He was honoured in appreciation of his outstanding contributions to the development of friendly relations between Japan and Oman.

The Order of the Rising Sun,



Alawi was honoured for his outstanding contributions to the development of relations between Oman and Japan

one of the most prestigious decorations in Japan, was introduced in 1875. Conferring the recognition on non-Japanese nationals started in 1981.

Over the past decades, Oman has maintained a unique foreign policy characterised by independence and moderation which helped formulate a decision-making process highly respected by all.

Oman recognises the role played by Alawi, who stepped down as Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs in 2020 after steering Oman's diplomacy for over two decades. He is respected by world leaders and was instrumental in Oman's emergence as a key diplomatic player in the region.

Oman-India Joint Committee meet in Delhi today

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Oman-India Joint Committee will hold its tenth meeting on Wednesday in New Delhi, India.

The Omani side will be chaired by H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

The delegation includes several officials from the public sector with the participation of Oman Investment Authority, the Special Economic Zone Authority at Duqm, the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates - Madayn, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and a number of businessmen and representatives of major private sector companies in the sultanate.

The meeting will discuss ways to strengthen cooperation between the two countries in various economic, trade, investment and service fields, and raising the volume of trade exchange.

H E Yousef has stressed on the importance of the role played by the committee in creating new trade and investment partnerships and raising the volume of trade between the two countries.

The Omani side's visit will in-



H E Qais al Yousef

clude bilateral meetings with major companies from both countries in the targeted sectors to discuss opportunities for cooperation and investment and to facilitate conducting business. Omani companies representing the construction, manufacturing, retail, automotive, renewable energy, pharmaceutical and tourism sectors will be part of the meetings.

The committee's visit also aims to improve the business environment, attract investments, and work to achieve the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 in creating partnerships and investments opportunities that support the national economy. Additionally, it aims to mutually benefit from the expertise and capabilities of companies in the two countries.

KING OF JORDAN CONFERS MILITARY ORDER ON SAF CHIEF



King Abdullah II Ibn al Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has conferred the Order of Military Merit (1st Class) on Vice Admiral Abdullah Khamis al Ra'eesi, Chief of Staff of Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF). The order was handed over to the SAF chief by Major General Yousef Ahmed al Hunaiti, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Jordan, during their meeting in Amman on Tuesday

(Supplied photo)

MoE inks agreement for Scientific Exploration Centre in N Sharqiyah

Muscat - The Ministry of Education (MoE) has signed a co-operation agreement with Oman LNG Development Corporation to finance a project to develop the Scientific Exploration Centre in North Sharqiyah governorate.

The agreement was signed at the ministry's headquarters on Tuesday and attended by H E Majid bin Saeed al Bahri, Undersecretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs in MoE, and Amer bin Nasser al Mataani, CEO of Oman LNG Development Corporation.

On the importance and objectives of the project, H E Bahri said, "The use of renewable energy preserves the integrity of the environment, and affects the social aspects of education and health, as well as the economic aspects and the development of



(Supplied photo)

industry. The Scientific Exploration Centre aims to link educational entities with the practical aspect of clean and renewable energy development."

The agreement entails financing of the project to the tune of RO38,806. "This project will educate students and the community about the benefits of renewable energy and its role in preserving the environment."

The centre will consist of nine sections dedicated to solar energy, hydropower, wind energy,

kinetic energy, hydrogen energy, a scientific models corner, a virtual reality corner, and a section for interactive screens.

More than 15,000 students are expected to benefit from the centre annually.

Bassem bin Nasser al Batashi, Acting Director General of Social Responsibility at Oman LNG Development Corporation, said, "The signing of this agreement will support the ministry's programmes and help achieve Oman Vision 2040."



Dhofar Cattle Feed Company (S.A.O.G)

P.O. Box 1220 PC 211 Salalah – Phone 23225381 - Fax 23225258

Un-Audited Financial Statements Consolidated for 31st March 2022

Chairman's Communique

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to place before you the unaudited group results of your company for the 1st quarter ended 31st March 2022.

Financial Performance

Group

The group revenue for the period ended 31st March '22 was RO 9,017 Million, as compared to RO 10,045 Million achieved during the first quarter of previous year. Group's gross profit for the period under review was RO. 1,383 Million as against RO.2,088 million achieved during first quarter of previous year. The loss after tax for the period under review was RO.(524K) as against a net profit after tax of RO. 336K during the same period last year.

Company

The company achieved a Revenue of RO.7,488 Million during the period under review, compared to RO 8,487 Million with decrease by 11.7% compared to the previous year. The sale revenue decrease due to feed mill sale decrease for 1st quarter after sale price adjustment to compensate international grain price increase started at second Quarter 2021, which has high impact to period revenue and profit.

The gross profit for the period reduced to RO. 1,066 million compared to RO. 1,541 million achieved during the same period of previous year.

The macro-economic indicators shows reduced level of liquidity, slow pace of investment and government projects delay and increasing interest costs. The company achieved loss after taxes for the period under review of RO. (464k) as against a profit of RO 283k, compared to the first quarter of the previous year. The total assets of the company increase by 9.8% and stood at RO 48,046 million as compared to RO 43,746 million at the same period of previous year. The NAV stood at 300 Bzs as against NAV of 316 Bzs as of last year. We believe this is mainly due to low market value of company investment available for sale for the current period.

Corporate Governance

The Company believes that to succeed on a sustainable basis, it must maintain high standards of corporate governance towards its shareholders, employees, consumers and community. To this end, the Company has always and will remain focused on good corporate governance. Your company has adhered to all the regulations covering corporate governance in Oman and your Board is fully committed to ensure compliance of all the applicable rules and regulations.

Omanisation / Training

Your company attaches enormous importance to Human resources as a strategic

asset with specific attention to employ and nurture the local Omani talent. We continue to develop our staff to lay the foundation for our future growth with great amount of emphasis being done to develop local talent.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the Board, I express my sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tareq for his wise leadership and constant and generous support extended to the private sector. I would also like to thank our Management, staff, bankers, suppliers and our customers for their continuous trust placed upon your company.

Nasser Bin Mohammed Salim Al Harthi
Chairman

Audited consolidated statement of comprehensive Income For 1st quarter end 31 March '2022

	Group 2022 RO'000	Parent Company 2021 RO'000	Group 2021 RO'000	Parent Company 2021 RO'000
INCOME				
Revenue from sales of goods and services	8,997	7,465	10,025	8,464
Rental income	20	23	20	23
Cost of sales	(7,635)	(6,422)	(7,957)	(6,946)
Gross profit	1,383	1,066	2,088	1,541
Expenses				
Selling and distribution	1,307	1,087	1,152	941
General and administration	589	380	528	311
Directors' remuneration and meeting	41	31	37	32
	1,937	1,498	1,721	1,284
Profit / (loss) from operations	(554)	(432)	368	258
Dividend income (net)	196	196	172	172
Other income	36	25	34	20
Share of result of associates	176	0	55	0
Finance costs (net)	(378)	(253)	(291)	(167)
Profit / (loss) before taxation	(524)	(464)	338	283
Taxation	-	-	(2)	-
loss for the period	(524)	(464)	336	283
Other comprehensive income for the period :				
Potentially reclassified to the income statement:				
Movement in fair value reserve	(616)	(616)	(642)	(642)
Deferred tax Effect on movement in fair reserve	-	-	-	-
Other comprehensive income for the period	(616)	(616)	(642)	(642)
Total comprehensive loss for the period	(1,140)	(1,080)	(307)	(360)
Net loss attributable to:				
Shareholders of the Parent Company	(490)	(464)	335	283
Non-controlling interest	(34)	-	1	-
	(524)	(464)	336	283
Total comprehensive loss attributable to:				
Shareholders of the Parent Company	(1,106)	(1,080)	(308)	(360)
Non-controlling interest	(34)	-	-	-
	(1,140)	(1,080)	(307)	(360)
Basic earnings per share (RO)	(0.006)	(0.006)	0.004	0.003

Audited consolidated statement of financial position As of 31st March '2022

	Group 2022 RO'000	Parent Company 2022 RO'000	Group 2021 RO'000	Parent Company 2021 RO'000
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	13,716	7,387	14,579	7,819
Right of use assets	984	868	1,093	981
Intangible assets	80	31	99	42
Investments in subsidiaries	0	1,733	0	2,768
Investments in associates	3,080	2,812	2,846	2,812
Fair Value through other comprehensive income	13,826	13,826	11,533	11,533
Investment properties	2,090	2,090	2,000	2,000
Biological assets	4,684	4,681	3,808	3,808
Deferred tax asset	379	232	385	232
Total non-current assets	38,839	33,66	36,343	13,995
Current assets				
Inventories and biological assets	11,482	8,875	10,624	6,882
Accounts and other receivables	5,513	5,160	4,328	4,589
Bank balances and cash	638	349	361	280
Total current assets	17,633	14,384	15,313	11,751
Total assets	56,472	48,046	51,656	43,746
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity				
Share capital	8,085	8,085	8,085	8,085
Legal reserve	2,599	2,599	2,599	2,599
Voluntary reserve	3,712	3,712	3,712	3,712
Revaluation reserve	525	0	525	0
Fair value reserve	5,688	5,688	3,396	3,396
Retained earnings	3,269	4,159	7,238	7,773
Equity attributable to Shareholders of the Parent Company	23,878	24,242	25,555	25,565
Non-controlling interest	62	0	280	0
Total equity and non-controlling interest	23,940	24,242	25,835	25,565
LIABILITIES				
Non-current liabilities				
Non-current portion of term loans	1,424	674	350	350
Employees' end of service benefits	924	640	932	653
Non-current portion of lease liability	643	539	747	645
Deferred tax liability	13	-	15	-
Total non-current liabilities	3,004	1,853	2,044	1,649
Current liabilities				
Bank borrowings	16,798	11,383	12,952	6,379
Non-current portion of term loans	1,580	1,315	2,096	1,912
Accounts and other payables	10,748	8,880	8,324	7,856
Current portion of lease liability	397	373	406	386
Income Tax Payables	6	0	0	0
Total current liabilities	29,529	21,951	23,778	16,532
Total liabilities	32,532	23,804	25,821	18,181
Total equity and liabilities	56,472	48,046	51,656	43,746
Net assets per share (RO)	0.295	0.300	0.316	0.316

Note : The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any share- holder who request the company in either Arabic or English as requested within 7 days of receipt of the request .

MARKET WATCH

MSX30	4,154.72
Sensex	54,364.85

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

Indian Rs	200.33
Pakistani Rs	487.53
Bangladesh taka	225.06
Philippines peso	135.77
Sri Lankan Rs	934.19

*Rates as on MAY 10
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Fed to raise rates 'expeditiously' to cool economy

The US central bank has the right tools and will act quickly to cool the economy and bring down "unacceptably high" inflation, a senior Federal Reserve official said Tuesday.

After raising the benchmark lending rate by three-quarters of a percentage point in two steps since March, New York Fed President John Williams said he expects the Fed's policy committee "will move expeditiously in bringing the federal funds rate back to more normal levels this year."

Speaking at a conference in Eltville am Rhein, Germany, Williams said he is confident the rate hikes will "turn down the heat" on the economy and bring inflation down to around 2.5 percent next year, while maintaining a strong economy.

Omani banks recover from pandemic pressures: Fitch

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omani banks' credit fundamentals are recovering as pressures on the operating environment have eased and economic activity is gradually picking up amid higher oil prices, Fitch Ratings said on Tuesday.

In a new report on Oman's banking sector, Fitch Ratings said that Omani banks have been fairly resilient to the pandemic shock which caused a 3.2 per cent GDP contraction in 2020.

'Omani banks' performance metrics recovered substantially in 2021 and this is expected to continue in 2022, supported by higher interest rates. Capital metrics will remain reasonably sound, while pressures on Omani banks' funding and liquidity profiles have eased. This has been underpinned by the government support measures combined with the recent rebound in oil prices,' Fitch Ratings said.

Recently, another global credit ratings agency Moody's also revised up its outlook for the Omani banking system to 'stable' from 'negative' due to an improvement in the banks' operating environment.

'We have changed our out-



look for the Omani banking system to stable from negative to reflect a recovery in the challenging operating conditions facing the banks,' Moody's said in a report published on April 26.

Fitch Ratings upgraded the outlook on all Omani banks' operating environment factor scores to 'stable' from 'negative' in January to reflect improved operating conditions. The ratings agency, however, noted that Omani banks are highly exposed to the sovereign through lending to the government and government-related entities (GREs), holdings of Omani government securities, as well as high re-

liance on GRE deposits.

'Exposures to the sovereign also considers banks' exposures to public sector employees through their retail loan books,' Fitch Ratings added.

Commenting on Omani banks' asset quality, Fitch Ratings said asset quality will remain a key risk in 2022 with the run-off of payment holidays and a rising interest rate environment which could undermine borrowers' debt servicing capacities.

'Asset quality risks will remain in 2022 due to modest credit growth and the run off of payment holidays, but this should be manageable for the banks, in our

Asset quality risks will remain for Omani banks in 2022 due to modest credit growth and the run off of payment holidays, but this should be manageable for the banks, in our view

FITCH RATINGS

view,' the ratings agency said.

Pressure on asset quality will arise from Omani banks' exposure to vulnerable sectors, particularly real estate, contracting and hospitality, the ratings agency noted.

'Banks remain exposed to event risk due to high single-obligor and sector concentrations, which is largely unavoidable given the narrow nature of the domestic economy. However, we believe the (asset quality) impact on the banks' financial profiles will be contained and manageable at their current rating levels,' Fitch Ratings added.



CBO issues RO129mn treasury bills

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A tender of the government treasury bills (issue number 559) was issued this week by the Central Bank of Oman.

Total value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO129mn, for a maturity period of 91 days, from May 11, 2022 until August 10, 2022.

Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds.

The average accepted price reached RO99.685 for every RO100 bill, while the minimum accepted price arrived at RO99.650.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 1.2636 per cent and 1.2676 per cent, respectively.

The interest rate on the repo operations with the CBO is 1.5 per cent while the discount rate on the treasury bills discounting facility with the central bank is 2.0 per cent.

The Central Bank of Oman acts as the issue manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (repo).

Treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. The government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures.

MSX inks MoU with Iraq stock exchange

Muscat - The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on Tuesday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Iraq Stock Exchange (ISX) on drafting procedures of joint cooperation between the two exchanges.

The memorandum of understanding targets exchanging information and promoting best practices related to publishing and declaring information.

The MoU also aims to support the integrity and competence of the stock exchanges in both



countries. The MoU was signed by Haitham Salim al Salmi, chief executive officer of the Muscat Stock Exchange and Thaeir

Adnan Hashem, chairman of the governance board of the Iraq Stock Exchange.
ONA

Middle East travel and tourism revenues may hit \$246bn in 2022

Dubai, UAE - As tourism destinations in the Middle East are widening their appeal and extending their offerings to attract foreign direct investment (FDI), global ministers of tourism convened at the 2022 Middle East Tourism Investment Summit on the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) Global Stage on Tuesday to shine a spotlight on access to project finance in the post-COVID-19 era and discuss investment opportunities and challenges for destination tourism in the region.

Hosted jointly by ATM and the International Tourism & Investment Conference (ITIC), the summit began with a Ministerial Roundtable.

Shedding new light on the Middle East and the UAE as a financial hub for future worldwide tourism investment, Dr Ahmad Belhoual al Falasi, chairman of Emirates Tourism Council of UAE, said, "For the UAE hospitality accommodation sector, investment in rooms and keys remains a primary focus as evidenced by a 5 per cent growth in the number of rooms compared to 2019 levels, with a variation of service levels and accommodation type. However, while the



big-ticket FDI will continue to grow in terms of rooms, from the service side, we see a lot of venture capital deployed on technological solutions for tourism."

According to industry forecasts, Middle East's travel and tourism sector is expected to generate US\$246bn of revenues in 2022, which is only 8.9 per cent behind pre-pandemic levels. The total contribution of the travel and tourism industry to the GDP of Middle East countries is expected to reach around US\$486.1bn by 2028.

Governments across the region are attracting hefty investments in their tourism industry, with Bahrain attracting

US\$492mn of tourism capital investment in 2020, for example, and Saudi Arabia earmarking US\$1tn to its travel and tourism sector through to 2030.

The audience heard from Jordan's Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, Nayef al Fayed, who discussed the continued investment in the country's SME and start-up ecosystem to ensure that not only survived the pandemic but that it continued to thrive with women, youth and local communities empowered as a vital pillar of Jordan's tourism industry.

"ATM's strategy is to support the industry with a summit that acts as a platform for tourism

ministers, policymakers, industry leaders and investors to discuss topical issues, challenges and future trends in the sustainable development of tourism and travel throughout the region," said Danielle Curtis, exhibition director Middle East at Arabian Travel Market. Elsewhere on the agenda on second day of ATM, industry leaders took to the ATM Global Stage to discuss the evolution of the aviation sector while marketing and consumer consultancy firms explored how brands can more effectively connect with the Arabic travel audience.

ATM 2022 will conclude on Thursday at the Dubai World Trade Centre.

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MSX drops 0.47%; volumes rise

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange dropped 0.47 per cent on Tuesday to close at 4,154.72 points.

All sectoral indices closed in red territories led by Services index which lost 1.3 per cent for the day. Financial and Industrial indices dropped 0.38 per cent and 0.55 per cent, respectively. MSX Sharia index was down by 0.91 per cent at 472.63 points.



Total volumes rose by 43.1 per cent to 14.03mn shares against 9.8mn shares traded on Monday. Market turnover also increased by 28.4 per cent to RO2.57mn compared

with RO2mn recorded in the previous trading session.

The market breadth of the MSX remained highly negative with four advancing stocks to 22 decliners. As many as 16

traded stocks closed flat for the day.

The gainers for the day were A'Saffa Foods (6.32 per cent), Barka Desalination (2.86 per cent), Raysut Cement (2.38 per cent) and Oman Cement (0.39 per cent).

Top losers were Sembcorp Salalah (-9.1 per cent), Al Hasan Engineering (-9.1 per cent), Al Maha Ceramics (-3.41 per cent), Oman United Insurance (-2.78 per cent) and Al Madina Investment (-2.7 per cent).

Saudi fights to lead 'saturated' Middle East aviation market

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia – Saudi Arabia on Monday pitched aviation industry leaders on its plans to become a global travel hub, drawing scepticism from analysts who questioned how it could compete against regional heavyweights.

The conservative kingdom's aviation goals, part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's wide-ranging "Vision 2030" reforms, include more than tripling annual traffic to 330mn passengers by the end of the decade.

It also wants to draw US\$100bn in investments to the sector by 2030, establish a new national flag carrier, construct a new "mega airport" in Riyadh and move up to five million tonnes of cargo each year.

Officials outlined how they intend to hit those targets during a global aviation forum that began Monday in Riyadh. Organisers said 2,000 delegates are trying to chart the airline industry's post-pandemic recovery.

"Over the next 10 years the kingdom will emerge as the Middle East's leading aviation hub," Transport Minister Saleh Al-Jasser told the forum's opening session.

The strategy hinges on tapping the large domestic market of Saudi Arabia, whose population is around 35mn, he told AFP in an interview, citing what analysts described as a major advantage for Saudi carriers over regional rivals Emirates and Qatar Airways.



People attend the Future Aviation Forum in the Saudi capital Riyadh on Monday (AFP)

"We are very focused on building connectivity to Saudi Arabia, in helping the tourism industry to grow in Saudi Arabia and helping the Saudi people connect to the world... That's what we are focused on," he said. But steep competition raises questions about how feasible the Saudi plans are.

"They're fighting multiple headwinds on the aviation front," said Robert Mogielnicki with the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington.

"You have established regional players that have great

brand recognition and are already important parts of the economies of Qatar and Dubai."

In Saudi Arabia, by contrast, "the air transport sector is not as central to the economy so that urgency is not there, though the Saudis do have big ambitions for the sector. It's a new entity, so they're going to have to play catch-up."

'Not going to be easy'

The kingdom is currently served by flag carrier Saudia and its budget subsidiary flyadeal, both based in the coastal city of Jeddah, as well as other budget carriers including the Riyadh-based flynas.

Even without the kingdom's planned new airline, Saudi carriers are fighting for space not just with Emirates and Qatar Airways but also regional budget airlines like flydubai and Air Arabia.

"It is a rather saturated market," Henrik Hololei, the European Commission's Director-General for Mobility and Transport, told AFP. "It's clear that it's not going to be easy for any airline that wants to have a global reach to enter

that market." Multiple analysts highlighted the need for Saudi Arabia to improve its airports.

Last weekend the head of the company that operates the airport in Jeddah, gateway to the holy sites in Mecca and Medina, was fired after what state media described as "a crisis of overcrowding and flight delays".

Hololei said "the vision and very ambitious announcements" need to be complemented by details. "How they are going to play the cards, this remains to be seen." AFP

EU deal on Russia oil embargo possible this week: France

Paris, France – An EU accord on halting oil imports from Russia by the end of the year, the latest response to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, could be secured this week, France's Europe Minister said Tuesday.

The embargo, part of a sixth package of EU sanctions under discussion, is being resisted by some member states that rely on Russian oil to keep their economies running and are seeking guarantees of alternative sources.

"I think we can have an accord this week, we're working flat out on it," France's Clement Beaune told LCI television. "It's probably a matter of days."

"We have to move quickly, and I say with confidence that there will be a sixth package of European sanctions, they will be very strong and we will gradually get out of using Russia oil at first, but also Russian hydrocarbons in general," he said.

New discussions will be held between European leaders by telephone on Tuesday, involving French President Emmanuel Macron, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban, Beaune added.

Orban in particular is insisting on EU funding guarantees for building new pipelines and other infrastructure needed to



Clement Beaune

wean his country off Russian oil, and wants to be able to keep importing from Russia for several more years.

Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic have been offered permission to continue importing Russian oil until the end of 2024 in the sanctions talks that began last week.

Von der Leyen said Monday that there had been "progress" after talks with Orban in Budapest.

"There are two types of exemption possibilities: the delay for certain countries for which it is obviously difficult, because 100 per cent of their oil comes from Russia, and then guarantees on alternative sourcing. These are the two parameters that we're working on," Beaune said.

Unanimous approval by the 27 EU members is needed for the new sanctions, the sixth package since Moscow launched its assault on Ukraine on February 24.

AFP

Bitcoin falls below \$30,000 level

London, UK – Bitcoin slumped below US\$30,000 for the first time since July 2021 on Tuesday as cryptocurrencies track sinking markets with investors spooked by aggressive US monetary tightening and surging inflation.

The world's largest cryptocurrency by market value fell as low as US\$29,764 in Tuesday trade, before recovering above US\$30,000, extending a recent collapse in price as investors desert assets viewed as risky.

Bitcoin's value has more than halved since a November surge that sent the token to a record of nearly US\$69,000.

While crypto enthusiasts view bitcoin as a hedge against inflation, an influx of more traditional investors tend to view it as a

riskier asset.

They have been offloading bitcoin and other digital tokens along with other volatile assets like tech stocks as the US Federal Reserve moves to hike interest rates to tackle decades-high inflation.

"Bitcoin is breaking below some key technical levels as the never-ending selloff on Wall Street continues," said Edward Moya, senior market analyst at OANDA, a foreign exchange platform. "The institutional investor is paying close attention to bitcoin as many who got in last year are now losing money on their investment," he added.

While the token's "long-term fundamentals have not changed in months", concerns about

growth and a possible recession are creating "a very difficult environment for cryptos", Moya said.

"No one is looking to buy the crypto dip just yet and that leaves bitcoin vulnerable here."

Other cryptocurrencies are not faring better: the total market is valued at just over US\$1.5tn, compared with US\$3tn at its peak, according to data from the CoinGecko website, which tracks over 13,000 crypto assets.

The sector's woes are linked to investors' heightened caution.

The slump in crypto follows dives on US equities and other markets, with the tech-heavy Nasdaq sinking by more than four percent on Monday.

AFP

UN says 'imminent' Yemen oil spill would cost \$20bn

Amman, Jordan – The United Nations warned Monday that it would cost US\$20bn to clean up an oil spill in the event of the "imminent" break-up of an oil tanker abandoned off Yemen.

"Our recent visit to (the FSO Safer) with technical experts indicates that the vessel is imminently going to break up," the UN humanitarian coordinator for Yemen, David Gressly, said ahead of a conference, hosted by the UN and The Netherlands, to raise funds for an emergency operation to prevent an oil spill.

The 45-year-old FSO Safer, long used as a floating oil storage platform with 1.1mn barrels of crude on board, has been moored off the rebel-held Yemeni port of Hodeida since 2015, without being serviced.



This file handout satellite image shows a close-up view of the FSO Safer oil tanker on June 19, 2020 off the Yemeni port of Ras Isa (AFP)

"The impact of a spill will be catastrophic," Gressly continued at a briefing in Amman. "The effect on the environment would be tremendous... our estimate is that US\$20bn would be spent just to clean the oil spill."

The UN official had earlier announced on Twitter that the Netherlands would host on Wednesday a pledging conference for the international body's plan to avert the crisis.

Last month, the UN said it was seeking nearly US\$80mn for its operation. It warned of "a humanitarian and ecological catastrophe centred on a country already decimated by more than seven years of war". It said that the emergency part of a two-stage operation would see the toxic cargo pumped from the storage platform to a temporary replacement vessel at a cost of US\$79.6mn. Gressly estimated that a total of US\$144mn would be needed for the full operation, reiterating that US\$80mn was needed "to secure the oil safely in the initial phase".

Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed directly or indirectly in Yemen's seven-year war, while millions have been displaced in what the UN calls the world's biggest humanitarian crisis.

AFP

China-backed projects testament to Sri Lanka's mismanagement

Hambantota, Sri Lanka – An airport without planes, a revolving restaurant with no diners, a debt-laden seaport – Sri Lanka's economic crisis has been exacerbated by Chinese-funded projects that stand as neglected monuments to government extravagance.

The South Asian island nation borrowed heavily to plug years of budget shortfalls and trade deficits, but squandered huge sums on ill-considered infrastructure projects that have further drained public finances.

It is now in the grip of its worst financial crisis since independence from Britain in 1948, with months of blackouts and acute shortages of food and fuel plaguing its 22mn people.

After weeks of largely peaceful protests demanding the government resign over its economic mismanagement, things turned violent Monday after pro-government supporters clashed with demonstrators,

leaving five people dead and at least 225 wounded.

Many of the white-elephant projects that helped fuel the crisis now gather dust in Hambantota district, home of the powerful Rajapaksa clan, which used its political clout and billions in Chinese loans in a failed effort to turn the rural outpost into a major economic hub.

Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa – who commissioned many of the projects – announced his resignation Monday, the same day the anti-government protests turned violent. But his younger brother Gotabaya remains president.

The centrepiece of the infrastructure drive was a deep seaport on the world's busiest east-west shipping lane, which was meant to spur industrial activity. Instead, it has haemorrhaged money from the moment it began operations.

"We were very hopeful when the projects were announced,



This picture taken on May 5 shows the Lotus Tower, a floral-shaped skyscraper bankrolled by Chinese funds, in Colombo (AFP)

and this area did get better," Dinuka, a long-time resident of Hambantota, told AFP.

"But now it means nothing. That port is not ours and we are struggling to live."

The Hambantota port was unable to service the US\$1.4bn in Chinese loans rung up to finance its construction, losing US\$300mn in six years.

In 2017, a Chinese state-owned company was handed a 99-year lease for the seaport – a deal that sparked concerns

across the region that Beijing had secured a strategic foothold in the Indian Ocean.

Overlooking the port is another Chinese-backed extravagance: a US\$15.5mn conference centre that has been largely unused since it opened.

Nearby is the Rajapaksa Airport, built with a US\$200mn loan from China, which is so sparingly used that at one point it was unable to cover its electricity bill.

In the capital Colombo, there

is the Chinese-funded Port City project – an artificial 665-acre island set up with the aim of becoming a financial hub rivaling Dubai. But critics have already sounded off on the project becoming a "hidden debt trap".

Biggest bilateral lender

China is the government's biggest bilateral lender and owns at least 10 per cent of its US\$51bn external debt.

But analysts believe the true number is substantially higher if loans to state-owned firms and Sri Lanka's central bank are taken into account. The borrowing contributed to Sri Lanka's dire fiscal predicament, after years of taking loans to cover spiralling budget deficits and to finance the imported products needed to keep the island's economy ticking over. "Fiscal profligacy over many decades and weak governance... got us into trouble," Murtaza Jafferjee, chairman of

Sri Lanka's Advocata Institute think tank, told AFP. The economic woes weighed heavy after the coronavirus pandemic torpedoed vital revenue from tourism and remittances, leaving the import-dependent country unable to purchase essential goods from abroad. Unable to service its growing debt burden, and with credit rating downgrades drying up sources of fresh loans on the international money market, Sri Lanka's government last month announced a default on its foreign loan obligations.

It had sought to renegotiate its repayment schedule with China, but Beijing instead offered more bilateral loans to repay existing borrowings.

That proposal was scuttled by Sri Lanka's appeal for help to the International Monetary Fund – a move that has aroused consternation as Chinese lenders will now likely need to take a haircut on their loans.

"China has done its best to

help Sri Lanka not to default but sadly they went to the IMF and decided to default," Chinese ambassador Qi Zhenhong told reporters last month. For many Sri Lankans, the largely unused infrastructure projects have become potent symbols of the Rajapaksa clan's mismanagement.

"We are neck-deep in loans already," said Krishantha Kulatunga, owner of a small stationery store in Colombo.

Kulatunga's business sits near the entrance to the Lotus Tower, a floral-shaped skyscraper bankrolled by Chinese funds.

The tower's colourful glass facade dominates the capital's skyline but its interior – and a planned revolving restaurant with panoramic views of the city – has never been opened to the public. "What is the point of being proud of this tower if we are left begging for food?" asked Kulatunga.

AFP

Bank Muscat signs agreement with Lulu Hypermarket



Shabeer K A



Wafa Ibrahim al Ajmi

In line with its commitment to enhancing business connectivity and digitalisation for its corporate partners, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has signed an agreement with Lulu Muscat Hypermarket LLC to provide its state-of-the-art Corporate Online Banking solution.

Lulu Group International, a multinational conglomerate is one of the largest retail chains in Asia, operating a chain of hypermarkets and shopping malls. Bank Muscat continues to leverage its technology expertise to provide Lulu hypermarkets with instant and seamless digital solutions which are customised to

their requirements, thus boosting their digital experience.

The agreement was signed by Wafa Ibrahim al Ajmi, assistant general manager - Transaction and Government Banking, Bank Muscat and Shabeer K A. regional director, Oman, Lulu Muscat Hypermarkets. Bank Muscat Corporate Online Banking's enhanced 'multi company' relationship feature provides Lulu Muscat Hypermarkets with the benefit of accessing the comprehensive banking relationship of its group companies with Bank Muscat through the credentials of a single user.

This solution thus provides Lulu Muscat Hypermarket with complete control and access to



the accounts of its group companies.

The 'multi company' relationship setup in Corporate Online Banking benefits all large corporate groups with subsidiaries in managing transactions between the company accounts of the group.

Speaking on the occasion, Ajmi, said, "We are delighted to onboard Lulu Muscat Hypermarket on to our advanced Corporate Online Banking. Our Corporate Online Banking with

its 'multi company' relationship setup feature will benefit Lulu Muscat Hypermarket with complete visibility and control over transactions between group accounts accompanied with ease of operation.

Bank Muscat believes in leveraging the latest technology to bring in new and improved digital banking solutions to its customers. In an increasingly competitive and dynamic environment with rapid digital transformation impacting each industry,

corporates look towards a banking partner that can offer solutions which keep pace with the dynamic markets and are accessible globally."

Shabeer, said, "We are proud to partner with Bank Muscat to use the bank's dynamic digital payment solution. The corporate online banking solution seamlessly caters to all our payment requirements in a smooth and frictionless manner, and it helps to greatly improve our operational efficiencies. This is a testa-

ment of our constant efforts to incorporate digital transformation in our group to make our business operations further efficient."

Bank Muscat had announced earlier this year, the launch of its 'Integrated Transaction Banking Platform', as part of the bank's digital transformation plan, which offers a wide range of on-line capabilities including payments, consolidated dashboard of bank accounts across all banks, Direct Debit solution, Vir-

tual Accounts and Liquidity solutions.

The new digital platform comes from the bank's belief in the importance of achieving the highest level of services provided to its customers in a manner that meets their needs and keeps pace with market changes, while providing the highest level of security.

The bank's online Corporate Banking platform and the B2B Connect solution also facilitate salary payments for employees through a secure payment channel under the Wages Protection System (WPS) as mandated by the Central Bank of Oman and the Ministry of Manpower.

As the trusted banking partner in Oman, Bank Muscat is committed to supporting Corporates to make a mark in digitalisation to create a successful business environment.

Bank Muscat provides a complete range of products, services and technology-driven digital offerings catering to Government entities, Corporates and SMEs in the area of Payments, account services, Collections and Receivables, Liquidity solutions, Point of Sales (PoS) terminals and Payment Gateway.



Wizz Air to explore Saudi Arabian market

Wizz Air Holdings Plc, Europe's fastest growing and most sustainable airline, signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) together with the Ministry of Investment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, supported by the Saudi National Air Connectivity Programme (a Ministry of Tourism initiative to support the development of the Saudi Tourism Sector).

The purpose of the MoU is to explore airline market development opportunities in the kingdom.

Saudi Arabia has launched a strategic and ambitious vision to triple passenger traffic in the

kingdom by 2030 as part of the Vision 2030 programme. This will provide unprecedented opportunities for airlines and the aviation supply chain.

Wizz Air's innovative and sustainable ultra-low-cost-carrier model is proven to develop markets by making air travel affordable for more people than ever before.

The MoU reflects a shared vision between the parties on the potential Wizz Air could bring to the kingdom to stimulate new demand, thereby making a significant contribution to Saudi Arabia's planned growth.

The parties will work together

to enable potential investment and operating models to benefit and add to the Saudi Arabian aviation ecosystem, boosting its tourism industry and significantly increasing its connectivity.

Wizz Air, the fastest growing European low-cost airline and one of the most sustainable, operates a fleet of 154 Airbus A320 and A321 aircraft.

A team of dedicated aviation professionals delivers superior service and very low fares, making Wizz Air the preferred choice of 27.1mn passengers in the financial year F22 ending 31 March 2022.

Wizz Air is listed on the London Stock Exchange under the ticker WIZZ.

The company was recently named one of the world's top ten safest airlines by airlineratings.com, the world's only safety and product rating agency, and 2020 Airline of the Year by ATW, the most coveted honour an airline or individual can receive, recognising individuals and organisations that have distinguished themselves through outstanding performance, innovation, and superior service, and was rated the most sustainable airline in Europe by Sustainability.

Mercedes-Benz Oman to continue its Ramadan offers until May 31



Leave a trail of pure excellence and enjoy the benefits of the Ramadan package from Mercedes-Benz Oman. Until May 31, customers can drive away with one of the latest models and receive a five year/75,000km service package complete with four years Mobilo on-road assistance service, three years unlimited mileage warranty, registration for the first year all included, alongside a complimentary gift from the Mercedes-Benz Lifestyle Collection to welcome customers to their new vehicle.

Shaun Michael, chief execu-

tive officer at Mercedes-Benz Oman, said, "We continue to spread the spirits of giving with our customers by offering fantastic benefits on our most sought-after vehicles. Adding to the sense of style and luxury that comes with owning one of our iconic vehicles, we are delighted to be able to give our customers even more joy."

"Visit our showroom where our dedicated specialists will be on hand to help ensure customers drive away with the perfect car to match their lifestyle in every way and enjoy an unmatched driving experience long

after their purchase."

The exclusive offer extends across the range of new Mercedes-Benz and Mercedes-AMG Cars and SUVs stock range, with the exception of the Mercedes-AMG G-Class.

With an uncompromising commitment towards style and luxury, Mercedes-Benz Oman makes sure every journey is comfortable and peaceful.

To find out more about the Ramadan Package or to book a test drive across the entire Mercedes-Benz range, visit Mercedes-Benz showroom or call the expert sales team on 80077333.

Industry experts optimistic about future of international travel in Mideast

The opening session of the 29th edition of Arabian Travel Market (ATM) - the Middle East's largest travel and tourism showcase - took place live in Dubai, shining a spotlight on the future of international travel and tourism within the region and beyond.

As the post-pandemic recovery of the Middle East's travel and tourism sector continues apace, industry leaders took to the ATM Global Stage to explore the latest trends and global movements that are steering the sector forward. Flexibility, responsiveness, sustainability and innovation were all highlighted as catalysts for long-term success.

Moderated by Eleni Giokos, anchor and correspondent at CNN, the opening session's panellists included Issam Kazim, chief executive officer, Dubai

Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing; Scott Livermore, chief economist at Oxford Economics; Jochem-Jam Sleiffer, president - Middle East, Africa and Turkey at Hilton; Bilal Kabbani, industry head - Travel and Tourism at Google; and Andrew Brown, regional director - Europe, Middle East and Oceania at the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTTC).

Commenting on the ever-increasing importance of environmentally responsible travel and tourism, Kazim said, "A few years ago, we launched special awards to recognise the efforts that hotels in Dubai are making in advancing sustainability within the emirate's tourism industry. We have now broadened this with the continued support of our valued stakeholders and partners to ensure that everyone operating in the travel and



tourism space is working with sustainability at top of mind. We are also highlighting its importance to residents and visitors, as evident in the launch of the Dubai Can sustainability initiative."

"With the post-pandemic era set to create a highly competitive landscape, our successful tourism recovery strategy is still

evolving in keeping to the disruption taking place across global tourism. As we continue to embrace creativity and innovation to stay ahead of the curve, we will remain focused on creating alternative pathways to growth as we strive to achieve the goal of our visionary leadership to make Dubai the world's most sought-after destination and the

best place in the world to live and work in," Kazim added.

Kazim's fellow panellists cited examples such as Expo 2020 Dubai as proof of the emirate's success in following through on its travel and tourism-related commitments, noting that destinations across the Middle East are working hard to mirror this success.

Panellists also noted that domestic travel had rebounded at a faster pace than international travel in the Middle East. Regional trips accounted for 55 per cent of demand in 2019, according to Livermore, and this figure grew to more than 80 per cent during the segment's post-COVID peak. While Livermore predicted the proportion of regional trips accounted for by international travel would continue to recover in the future, he also pointed out that the importance of domestic travel was likely to persist.

In addition, speakers highlighted the role of mega-events, such as Expo 2020 Dubai and FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, in ensuring tourism in the Middle East continues to recover more rapidly than in other regions. Panellists also noted that, while issues related to the supply chain

and oil prices represent challenges for the sector, they remain cautiously optimistic due to high levels of pent-up demand in the wake of the pandemic.

Danielle Curtis, exhibition director ME for Arabian Travel Market, said, "Speakers during our opening session offered a selection of fascinating insights into the future of the Middle East's travel and tourism sector."

"Industry professionals are going to great lengths to meet customers' evolving requirements in the wake of the global pandemic, and it was interesting to learn about the steps already taken to ensure the long-term success of travel and tourism in our region."

"We look forward to hearing much more from travel and tourism experts from around the world during the next four days of ATM 2022," Curtis added.

Own a premium motoring experience with INFINITI SUVs



Continuing with the tradition of rewarding its valued customers, INFINITI Oman has announced special offers across its SUV range of INFINITI QX50, INFINITI QX55, and INFINITI QX80.

Customers who purchase INFINITI SUVs - QX50, QX55 and QX80 during the offer are eligible for free registration, assured gifts vouchers, periodic vehicle maintenance, manufacturer's warranty, AAA/ Road assistance card, digital promotion, INFINITI loyalty programme, reference programme.

The special offer will go on till May 19

The scheme is applicable for all the customers purchasing INFINITI vehicles for personal use only. Vehicles purchased with commercial registration will not be eligible for the scheme. Vehicles bought for taxi, driving school, ministries, fleet, and rent-a-car usage will not be eligible for this scheme. The scheme is applicable for retail billing only.

A senior spokesperson at INFINITI Oman said, "This is the perfect time to book one of the versatile INFINITI SUVs - QX50, QX55 and QX80. These incredible performers continue to be amongst the best-selling vehicles in Oman for obvious reasons. They are an excellent choice for anyone looking for powerful performance, safe drive, and comfortable interiors. The models are fitted with smart technologies that adapt to the needs of customers. The SUVs have multiple advanced features

to please even the most demanding of lifestyles, such as versatile interior with adaptable seating, cargo space, and the individualised entertainment system."

Free registration

All customers purchasing INFINITI QX50, QX55, and QX80 in the scheme period will be eligible for free first year vehicle registration.

Assured gifts vouchers

All customers purchasing INFINITI QX50, QX55, and QX80 in the scheme period will be eligible for Value Added Service (VAS) gift vouchers. For INFINITI QX50 and INFINITI QX55 it is RO200 and for INFINITI QX80 it is RO400. Voucher can be redeemed for vehicle service at SBA workshop, purchase of value-added service products at SBA workshop, purchase of parts/accessories at SBA workshop and purchase of service contracts from SBA workshop. VAS voucher will have to be utilised fully in one go and cannot be fragmented.

Any additional expenses on top of the voucher amount will be paid by the customer separately. VAS Voucher will have a limited validity period & will have to be consumer before October 31, 2022. VAS Voucher is transferable and will be in denomination of RO50. VAS Voucher can be redeemed only at SBA Workshop and the amount cannot be discounted in cash.

Periodic vehicle maintenance

Customers purchasing INFINITI QX50, QX55, and QX80 in the scheme period will get free Periodic Vehicle Maintenance of two years or 30,000km (whichever is earlier). This offer excludes battery and wear and tear components. This offer includes only the Service intervals of 10,000km.

Manufacturer's warranty

All INFINITI vehicles QX50, QX55, and QX80 purchased in the scheme period will have a 3 years / 100,000km manufacturer's warranty.

AAA/ road assistance card

Free AAA / Road Assistance card will be given on the purchase of INFINITI Saloon Cars & SUV vehicles only, for the First year only and as supported by AAA Oman and UAE.

Digital promotion

Two winners from all the social media users who will participate in the Ramadan campaign, Contest and other online challenges on Instagram (@sbainfinitioman) and Facebook (@sbainfinitioman) will get BOSE Ear Buds.

INFINITI loyalty programme

All INFINITI existing owners and their immediate family members [father, mother, son(s) and unmarried daughter(s)] will be eligible for the following additional

benefits on purchase of another INFINITI vehicle. Diamond members will get a loyalty Bonus on trade-in price of Infiniti vehicle of RO300 and platinum will get RO400. Special in-house finance rate for diamond members is 3.75 per cent and platinum is 3.50 per cent. Diamond members will get a special accessories package of window tinting and platinum members will get window tinting and paint protection.

Reference programme

INFINITI will generate references of people looking to buy a car. This reference will be generated from existing INFINITI customers. The same person cannot refer himself but can refer multiple names. If any of the referred persons buy an INFINITI car, then the person who referred him will get RO100 gift voucher. This gift voucher can be redeemed during vehicle service at SBA workshop, purchase of consumables from SBA counters, Purchase of parts and accessories from SBA counters. All such gift voucher winners will be declared on an ongoing basis. This gift voucher is non-transferable and cannot be redeemed for cash or exchanged for credit. The gift voucher will be valid for six months from the date of issue. The voucher needs to be redeemed fully all at once. Part redemption will not be allowed.

INFINITI QX50: Convincing performance
INFINITI QX50 provides the

highest level of versatility, efficiency, and performance in luxury mid-size crossovers. The VC-Turbo engine delivers the strong and convincing performance of a V6 and the fuel economy of a 4-cylinder engine, which allows users to harness the exhilarating performance of 268 hp and 380 nm at 4,400 rpm of torque. The appearance of the INFINITI QX50 highlights the influence of human artistry in the design process to emphasize the car's premium quality with intelligent packaging and deep character lines with INFINITI signature design cues.

The VC-Turbo engine is the world's first production-ready variable compression ratio engine, transforming on demand. A breakthrough in combustion engine design, the 2.0-litre VC-Turbo engine adjusts its compression ratio to optimize power and efficiency.

A multi-link system continuously raises or lowers the pistons' reach to transform the compression ratio. High compression ratios aid efficiency, while low ratios enable greater power and torque. The VC-Turbo offers any compression ratio between 8:1 (for performance) and 14:1 (for efficiency), maximizing driver control.

The engine delivers 268 hp (200 kW) and (380 Nm) and fuel economy of 14.1 km/l combined, front-wheel drive; 13.6 km/l combined, all-wheel drive). Front-wheel drive models offer a 35 per cent improvement in fuel efficiency over the previous V6 petrol QX50.

Alexander Malofeev to perform at ROHM

The Royal Opera House Muscat is delighted to announce the upcoming concert with the exciting virtuoso pianist, Alexander Malofeev, performing alongside the Tatarstan National Symphony Orchestra. The concert will be conducted by Alexander Sladkovsky, artistic director and chief conductor of the Tatarstan National Symphony Orchestra.

Enjoy a concert starring the one of the world's most extraordinary performers. The young artist, Malofeev, is an award-winning Russian pianist who has been playing the piano since he was five years old, tackling pieces by Rachmaninoff and Shostakovich by the age of seven. At the age of 13 won the biggest youth piano competition in Russia, catapulting him into national and international fame. Now 20 years old, Malofeev has performed throughout the world to huge critical acclaim.

The concert presents a stirring programme featuring Liszt, Rachmaninoff and Borodin. The National Symphony Orchestra of the Republic of Tatarstan has been celebrated worldwide for



Alexander Malofeev

its elegant and sophisticated sound and dynamic approach to programming.

The performance will take place at the House of Musical Arts. Enjoy an evening concert on Thursday May 12 at 7.30pm.

All visits to the opera house are conducted under the guidelines of the Supreme

Committee responsible for measures to tackle the development of COVID-19. Social distancing is maintained throughout the building and the wearing of facemasks is mandatory.

For more details, please download the app or check the ROHM website.

Symposium on Omani Efforts in Quranic Studies next week

As part of Manar Alizz events, Alizz Islamic Bank will hold a symposium entitled 'Omani Efforts in Quranic Studies' next Monday in Al-Shahba Hall, University of Nizwa under the patronage of H E Dr. Mohammad bin Saeed al Maamari, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs.

This symposium is organised in collaboration between Alizz Islamic Bank and the University of Nizwa with the aim of highlighting Omani significant contributions throughout history to the leading intellectual and scientific achievements, which had prestigious impacts on science, civilization and history that were highly appreciated by scientists, scholars and researchers.

Moreover, the symposium has a number of important objectives, including educating the younger generation about Omani achievements in the field of Quranic Studies, in the past and nowadays, highlighting

Omani talents that have a pioneering standing among scholars of the Islamic Nation and identifying past and present contributions of Omanis in fields of Quranic sciences, in addition to encouraging researchers to study this issue in detail.

The symposium will discuss a number of key themes covering various topics, notably the Omani achievements in the fields of interpretation of the holy Quran, Quranic readings (Qira'at), narration and knowledge, whether in the past or presently, I'jaz al-Qur'an, and in various Quranic sciences. These themes are explained by a number of knowledgeable researchers and scholars in these fields who have different contributions in this regard.

It should be noted that there are remarkable Omani contributions in different fields of Quranic studies, so it is a scientific and national duty to identify them and explain such contributions to researchers and scholars.

GPX Store revs up for ultimate motorsport retail experience

GP Extreme has finally got everyone's blood racing. With the GPX Store up and running in a digital format, this store is now available in their iconic Dubai Autodrome location and online to all motorsport enthusiasts.

This one of its kind store in the GCC, is a dream come true for serious racing fans looking for various collectable racing items, including ones signed by Lewis Hamilton, Michael Schumacher and more. Also, there is a state of the art race simulator, while racing enthusiasts can marvel over the memorabilia, art, gear, apparel, books, home interior and accessories of some of the best race car drivers of all times.

Shoppers now have the chance to fully experience the intricacies of the motorsports' world. They get a feel of what goes on in the pitlanes and behind the wheel by foraging into the original suits of former racing drivers and world champions like Schumacher, Hamilton and Ayrton Senna, while also being able



to purchase a T-shirt from Anyways, a keychain from Period Correct or a poster from the Automobilist. The racing car lovers will be in awe as they choose from the most coveted motorsports inspired brands collected and curated in one space.

The diverse collection of motorsports goods means that there is something for everyone. The interiors of the space have been designed to give everyone

an immersive experience.

Wannabe racers who do not want to be left out in the melee of discussions surrounding motor racing can have a first-hand experience of what it feels like to be decked out in the gear of some of their racing icons. The store offers protective gear for karters too, which means that you will find high-end helmets and junior suits for the aspiring race car drivers in your family.

Keep cool this summer with free vehicle air-conditioning check-up from Mitsubishi

Summer is already well underway, so General Automotive Company, the official distributor of Mitsubishi vehicles in Oman, has launched a free air-conditioning check-up campaign for Mitsubishi vehicle owners throughout the country. GAC will also be offering discounts on parts and labour for any work done as part of the campaign.

Commenting on the campaign, Ashraf Mustafa Oman, the National Service Manager of GAC said, "At GAC, we have always kept our customers at the heart of our campaigns, and as a result, we like to go the extra mile and offer them something of real value. As summer approaches, drivers certainly want their vehicle air conditioning to perform at its peak. This is why we are bringing back our free annual A/C check-up campaign. With the campaign, Mitsubishi owners can now have their vehicle's air conditioning systems professionally checked for free by factory-trained technicians, as well



as fixed at a heavily discounted price if necessary."

The complimentary check-up includes a complete diagnostic and general health check of your vehicle's A/C system. As needed, remedial measures will also be suggested to achieve optimum performance and maintain a comfortable temperature. Additionally, GAC is offering discounts of up to 45 per cent on parts, 20 per cent on labour for

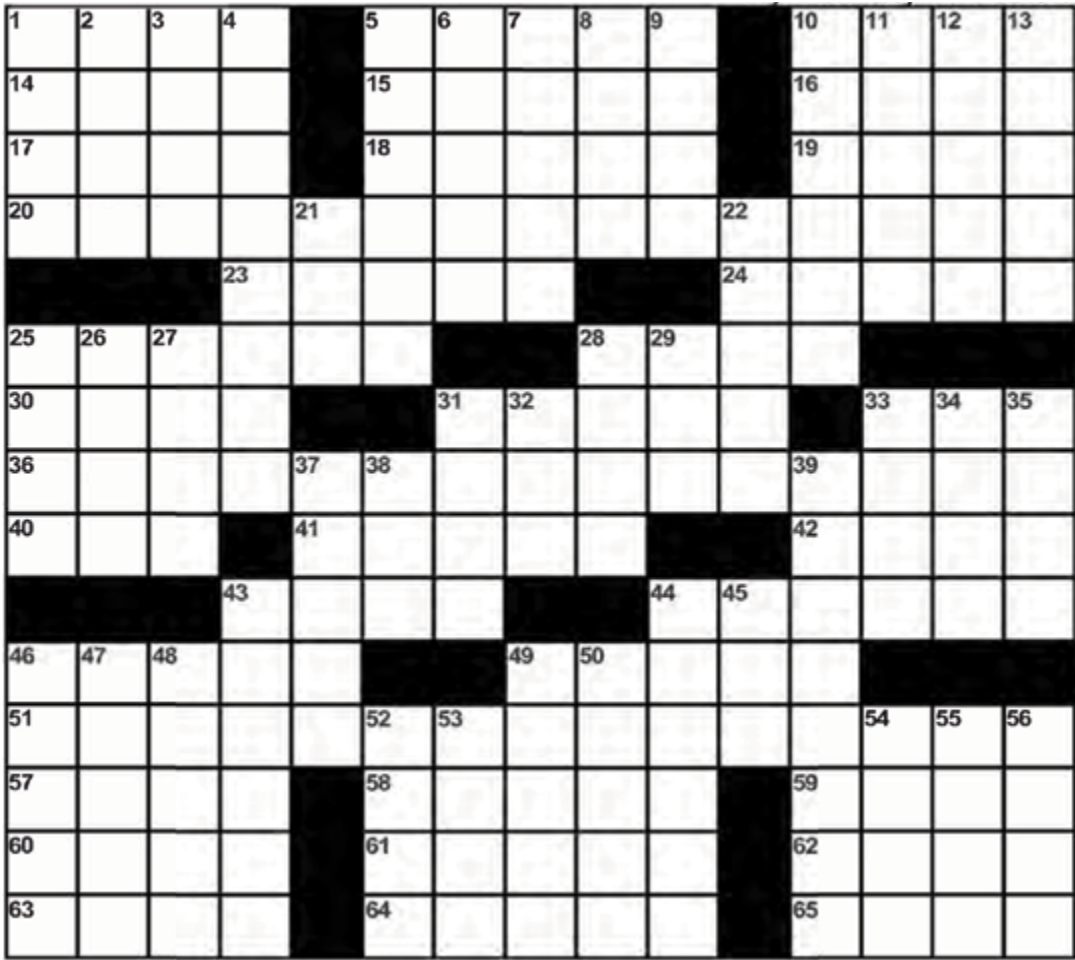
repair jobs identified during the free check-up and a complimentary car wash during the campaign. Mitsubishi owners are encouraged to get their vehicles checked and can pre-book the service by phone or by visiting their local Mitsubishi service centre.

"The benefits we are providing with this campaign demonstrate our commitment to customer excellence as well as

the total peace-of-mind ownership experience offered by our extensive service network throughout the sultanate," added Osman.

For more information on the promotion, visit your nearest Mitsubishi Service center in Athaibah, Barka, Sohar, Nizwa, Ibri, Jalan Bu Ali, Salalah and across Oman or follow 'MitsubishiMotorsOman' on Facebook.

DAILY CROSSWORD

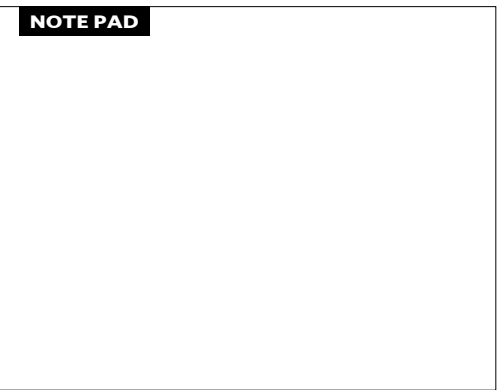


- ACROSS**

 - 1) One way to attend a party
 - 5) Tum blue, as skies
 - 10) The African Queen, famously
 - 14) What you want your engine to do
 - 15) Unable to hold water
 - 16) Actress Jessica
 - 17) Large part of a world map
 - 18) Met show
 - 19) Book page
 - 20) Destroy a track record, in a way
 - 23) Cast off from the body
 - 24) Like some retreats
 - 25) In _ (together)
 - 28) Singer Tori
 - 30) Bollywood drape
 - 31) Embroidered loop
 - 3 3) Thing to push for in a hotel?
 - 36) Thing given upon entering the military
 - 40) Howard who was Opie
 - 41) Seriously corpulent
 - 42) Smallest bit
 - 43) Become unhinged
 - 44) Film festival site
- 46) Swiftly, to Shakespeare
 - 49) Chlorinated waters
 - 51) Like Thomas Kinkade paintings
 - 57) The season to be jolly
 - 58) Quite angry
 - 59) He measured in cubits
 - 60) Bridge feat
 - 61) Picky worker?
 - 62) Was charitable
 - 63) _ en scene (stage setting)
 - 64) Squirrel away
 - 65) Apple attachment

DOWN

 - 1) Centers of lavish attention
 - 2) Keister
 - 3) Solo in 18-Across
 - 4) Thing for which to ask forgiveness
 - 5) Selected
 - 6) Runs easily
 - 7) Send to Congress
 - 8) Prefix for "space" or "dynamic"
 - 9) Meg of "You've Got Mail"
 - 10) Modeler's woods, sometimes
- 11) Dairy section purchases
 - 12) Towards the back of the boat
 - 13) Saltwater confection
 - 21) Cause of a power trip
 - 22) Garment worn by some Indian men
 - 25) Former world power
 - 26) Defense alliance based in Brussels
 - 27) Tehran's locale
 - 28) Stomach woe
 - 29) Extinct kin of the ostrich
 - 31) Ready for an operation
 - 32) Checkpoint requests
 - 33) Clickable image
 - 34) Adorable, as a puppy
 - 35) In-flight announcements, for short
 - 37) Transplant receiver
 - 38) Atty. grp.
 - 39) Some salon activities
 - 43) Plotter's plot
 - 44) Hold fast
 - 45) "By_ means!"
 - 46) Deep gulf
 - 47) St_ Girl (beer brand)
 - 48) Book full of maps
 - 49) Grand master's instrument?
- 50) Aquatic relative of a ferret
 - 52) Tums down, as lights
 - 53) Habeas corpus, e.g.
 - 54) Creature with a beard
 - 55) "_ you heard?"
 - 56) Not us



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
You may not know about it just yet, but someone's resentment is taking on a life of its own from behind the scenes, and you may well be at the heart of the situation. But this doesn't mean you caused it, or that you should feel guilty about it. You're in control of what you do, not what others do. So when and if something that's not quite fit for the public emerges, there's no reason for you to feel accountable.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
For quite a while now, you've been thinking about what to do about your relationship with a certain someone who tends to be a bit on the possessive side. Should you end it, slow it down, or jump right in? The fact that you're unsure is a statement in itself. You're feeling serious about everything and you want a return on your efforts, so you may not want to end it just yet, but keep a careful eye on that jealousy thing.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
If there's one thing you definitely don't appreciate, it's being manipulated. You can smell it a mile away and spot the signs with your eyes closed. So when a loved one, probably a family member or long-term friend you've shared intimate secrets with in the past, starts winding up, don't just sit there. You already know what they're up to. Give them your answer before they ask the question.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
Someone near and dear to your heart has been acting quite oddly. You're not sure what's up, but it doesn't feel like a good thing. To make matters even more intense and even more puzzling, someone you're not quite sure you trust will feel the need to tell you all about what they think is going on. Don't shoot the messenger, but don't take the message seriously yet either.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Your intellectual and verbal skills are always sharp to say the very least. But at the moment, you should probably paste a warning label on your forehead warning anyone foolish enough to challenge you to a debate to back out while they still can. Once you've issued your disclaimer, though, if they're not bright enough to step away from the situation, don't feel bad about it. You can only do so much.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
That secret you've been holding on to forever? The one you've been lugging around for what feels like most of your life? Someone has made it more difficult for you to keep that secret any longer. Besides, it's your secret and only your secret, which makes it perfectly fair game for you to tell anyone and everyone. So when the questions come about, don't feel bad about openly disclosing everything. Why hide what you're not ashamed of?

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
There's a mixed bag of heavenly influences on duty at the moment, and they're causing all kinds of emotions to arise. On the one hand, you're feeling especially close to an elder or authority figure, someone who's known for being cranky with just about everyone but you. On the other hand, you're not quite sure who to trust or if you can trust anyone at all. You know who your someone is. Find them and start talking.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Keeping things lighthearted and pleasant is your specialty, but it may not be such a piece of cake now. A family member who loves this kind of thing is deliberately stirring up trouble (and doing a fine job of it). Funny thing is as good as you are at keeping the peace, you're equally good at defending it. You won't stand for this, and you shouldn't. Let them know that you can only be pushed so far and this happens to be the limit.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
Being asked for a favour is nothing new to you. You're always available when a friend or coworker calls, whether it's a loan for the electric bill, a ride to work, or a shoulder to cry on. You pride yourself on being a good and loyal friend and hardworking compatriot, and there's no reason to ever expect that to change. You may need to think for a second before you respond to this latest plea for help, though. It's going to be a big one.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
Communication will be tricky for most people now, especially the secretive kind, but not quite as much for you. Still, news you're not relishing but are nonetheless expecting will be along shortly. If that's the case, you've not only begun to expect it but you've probably also prepared yourself to deal with it. You know you've got this.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
This may be tough astrological turf for some signs to travel, but you'll undoubtedly do just fine with it. You're no stranger to difficult terrain. In fact, you often secretly welcome the trek. Your partner or best bud may not be quite so enthusiastic about this challenge, but if anyone can talk someone into seeing the positive that might come from the negative, it's definitely you. Get busy.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
Everyone around you is in an absolutely foul mood. They're either angry, depressed, or depressed and angry, so you need to assemble some personal boundaries quickly. This doesn't mean you should shut them out entirely, but you'd better think twice before you offer to do anything you can to help. They'll undoubtedly take you up on it and try to make you feel guilty for holding anything back. Think of this as a game of chess.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. The Dutch-based Stellantis N.V., formed in 2021, is a 50:50 merger between two internationally recognised manufacturing conglomerates from which countries and in what field?

- A. Italy and France, automobiles
- B. UK and Germany, medicine
- C. Hungary and Nigeria, fashion
- D. USA and Russia, energy

02. What is a medical term referring to the presence of pathogenic organisms in the bloodstream, leading to blood poisoning?

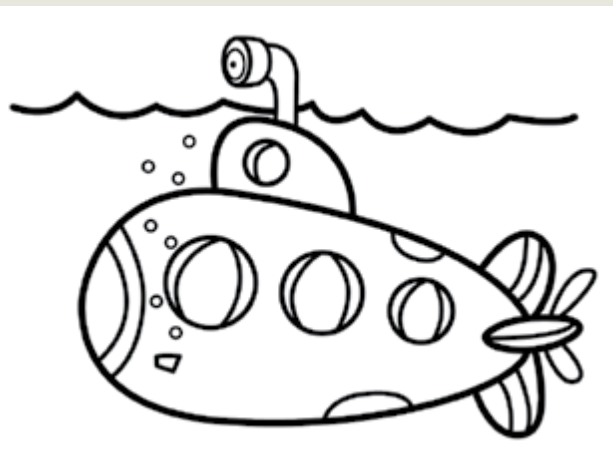
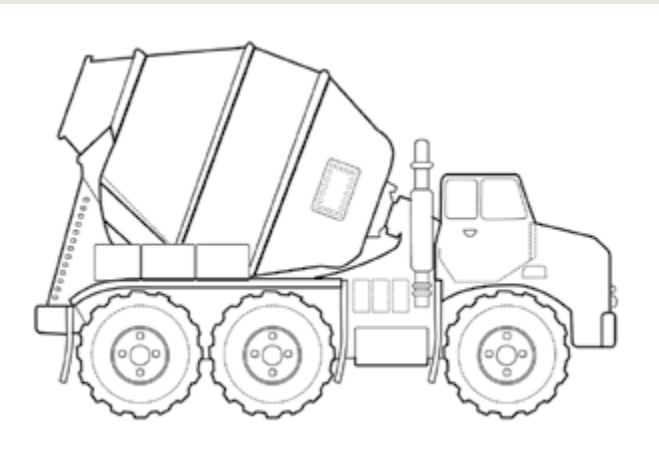
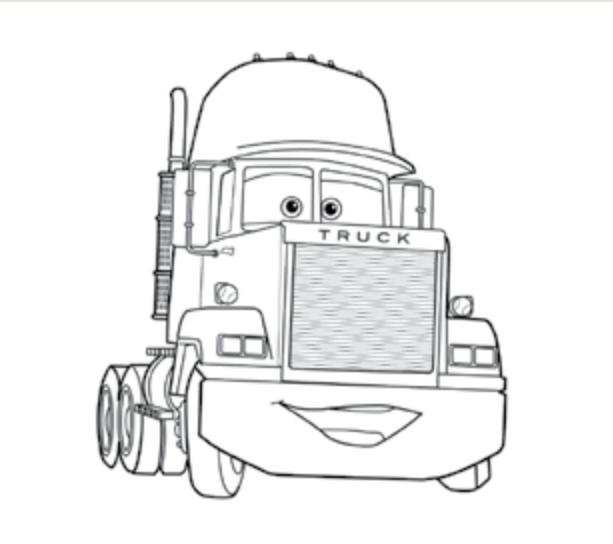
- A. Tetanus
- B. Septicemia
- C. Hypertension
- D. Bursitis

03. La Plata is the capital city of which province of Argentina?

- A. La Rioja
- B. Córdoba
- C. Buenos Aires
- D. Formosa

Answers: 1.A 2.B 3.C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

E	A	U	J
R	G	S	S
U	E	R	U
E	T	P	H

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.

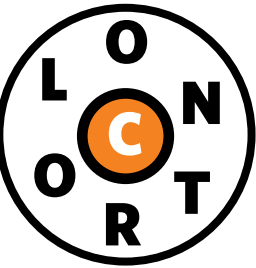
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Son of late Philippine dictator wins presidency

Ferdinand ‘Bongbong’ Marcos Jr cemented a landslide election victory, securing over 56% of the vote

Manila, Philippines - The son of late Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos cemented a landslide presidential election victory on Tuesday, after Filipinos bet a familiar but tainted dynasty could ease rampant poverty - while dismissing warnings the clan’s return will deepen corruption and weaken democracy.

With an initial count almost complete, Ferdinand ‘Bongbong’ Marcos Jr had secured over 56 percent of the vote and more than double the tally of his nearest rival, liberal Leni Robredo.

His now unassailable lead of 16mn-plus votes spells another astonishing reversal in the fortunes of the Marcos family, who have gone from the presidential palace to pariahs and back again in the space of a few decades.

The Marcos victory is a hammer blow to millions of Filipinos who hoped to reverse course after six years of increasingly authoritarian rule by President Rodrigo Duterte.

Far from repudiating Duterte’s excesses, voters elected his daughter Sara as vice president by a landslide in a parallel vote.

In 1986, Marcos Sr and kleptocratic first lady Imelda Marcos were chased into exile by the ‘People Power’ revolution.

Marcos Jr steadfastly refused to denounce his family’s brutal and corrupt excesses in a campaign marked by a systemic whitewashing of history.



Supporters of Ferdinand Marcos Jr celebrate outside his campaign headquarters in Mandaluyong City, Metro Manila, on Tuesday (AFP)

With memories of the regime fading with time and muddled by countless misleading Facebook posts, voters turned to Marcos to rekindle past glories.

“He will lift our country from the poverty we’re experiencing now,” said supporter and retired police officer Anthony Sola, who described himself as elated with the result. The 50-year-old dismissed allegations that the Marcoses stole as much as US\$10bn during their last period in power: “I don’t believe they stole money, because if they did, they should have been imprisoned already.”

Despite an Oxford education and jet-set lifestyle, Marcos was able to tap into both anti-elite anger and economic malaise. Some 43 per cent of Filipinos consider themselves poor, and 39 per cent more feel they are on the borderline, according to a March poll by the Social Weather Survey.

Delivering a late-night address from his campaign headquarters in Manila on Monday, a beaming Marcos thanked volunteers for months of ‘sacrifices and work’ but stopped short of claiming victory.

A fully certified tally is not expected before May 28. On the streets, hundreds of ecstatic supporters set off fireworks late into the night, waved the national flag and clambered onto parked cars to chant in victory. Marcos’ spokesman Vic Rodriguez told government television he believed ‘it is clear’ that ‘we have now a president-elect in the person of Ferdinand

Bongbong Marcos Jr’.

‘More death, more hunger’

Rights activists, Catholic leaders and political commentators all warned against returning the Marcos clan to power.

“This election could have been our biggest chance for radical change,” said Mae Paner, a 58-year-old political satirist who was part of the People Power movement. “There will be more death, there will be more debt, there will be more hunger. The Marcoses will steal.”

Bonifacio Ilagan, who endured two years of imprisonment and torture during Marcos Sr’s imposition of martial law, said the election exposed a deep malaise in Philippine society.

It had, he said, laid bare, ‘how deeply the trickery of historical fraudsters has seeped into the consciousness of Filipinos’.

Robredo, a lawyer and the current vice president, admitted ‘clear disappointment’ about the result but vowed to continue the fight against poor governance.

The 57-year-old had promised to clean up the dirty style of politics that has long plagued the feudal and corrupt democracy.

In the final weeks before the election, her campaign morphed into a catch-all pro-democracy movement that drew almost one

million people to a single protest in Manila.

Fearing a backlash from 15mn disgruntled voters - with many alleging irregularities in Monday’s poll - police urged restraint. “I am appealing to you to remain calm. Let us respect the result of the vote,” said acting Philippine police chief Lieutenant-General Vicente Danao.

The country’s Commission on Elections indicated that despite long queues and problems with some voting machines, the initial tabulation of votes had gone well. Police and protesters briefly clashed near the commission’s Manila office on Tuesday, but unrest was limited and crowds were small. For the liberal opposition, analyst Mark Thompson said there should be a period of soul searching and a broadening of its message beyond ‘good governance’.

“They need to make clear that they’re going to improve the lives of the average Filipino,” said Thompson, director of the Southeast Asia Research Centre at the City University of Hong Kong. For Marcos, the coming weeks and months will bring high expectations from poor supporters already disillusioned with a string of post-dictatorship governments, which many believe failed to materially improve their lives.

AFP

Iran rules out prisoner exchange with Sweden

Tehran, Iran - Iran’s judiciary dismissed on Tuesday the possibility of a prisoner swap that would see a former Iranian official on trial for war crimes in Stockholm released in exchange for a Swedish-Iranian academic on death row.

The two cases ‘have nothing to do with each other... as a result, there is no question of an exchange’, the spokesman for the judiciary, Zabiollah Khodayian, told a press conference in Tehran.

The remarks come as former prison official Hamid Noury, 61, is set to be sentenced in July in a trial in Sweden. He was arrested in November 2019 and faces charges including crimes against humanity and war crimes for his role in the killing of as many as 5,000 prisoners across Iran in 1988 during the Iran-Iraq war.

As his trial came to a close last week, Iranian media reported that Swedish-Iranian academic Ahmadreza Djalali would be executed by May 21, after he was sentenced to death in 2017 over espionage for Israel. He was found guilty of passing information about two Iranian nuclear scientists to Israel’s Mossad spy agency that led to their assassinations.

The judiciary spokesman said that Noury is ‘innocent and his trial is illegitimate’, while Djalali was ‘arrested two years prior’ to the former official. ‘A final verdict was issued’ against the academic, and the Iranian judiciary will act accordingly, Khodayian added.

AFP

Afghan women protest new edict to cover faces

Kabul, Afghanistan - About a dozen women protested in the Afghan capital on Tuesday against the Taliban’s new edict that females must fully cover their faces and bodies when in public.

Afghanistan’s supreme leader and Taliban chief Hibatullah Akhundzada issued a mandate over the weekend ordering women to cover up fully, ideally with the traditional all-covering burqa.

The diktat was the latest in a series of creeping restrictions in Afghanistan, where the Islamists have rolled back the marginal gains made by women after a US-led invasion toppled the first Taliban regime in 2001.

“Justice, justice!” chanted the protestors, many with uncovered faces, in central Kabul.

The demonstrators also chanted “Burqa is not our hijab!” - indicating their objection to trading the less restrictive hijab



Members of Afghanistan’s Powerful Women Movement, take part in a protest in Kabul on Tuesday (AFP)

headscarf for the totally concealing burqa.

After a short procession, the march was halted by Taliban fighters, who also obstructed journalists from reporting on the event.

Akhundzada’s decree, which also orders women to ‘stay at

home’ if they have no important work outside, has triggered international condemnation.

“We want to live as human beings, not as some animal held captive in a corner of a house,” protester Saira Sama Alimyar said at the rally.

Akhundzada also ordered

authorities to fire female government employees who do not follow the new dress code, and to suspend male workers if their wives and daughters fail to comply. In the 20 years between the Taliban’s two stints in power, women made some gains in education, the work-

place and public life but deeply conservative and patriarchal attitudes still prevailed.

In the countryside, many women continued to wear the burqa in those two decades.

But several religious scholars and activists say the attire has no basis in Islam and is rather a Taliban dress code designed to repress women.

After seizing power last year, the Taliban had promised a softer version of the harsh Islamist rule that characterised their first stint in power from 1996 to 2001, but many restrictions have already been imposed. Some Afghan women initially pushed back against the curbs, holding small protests where they demanded the right to education and work.

But the Taliban soon rounded up the ringleaders, holding them incommunicado while denying that they had been detained.

AFP

Warhol portrait of Marilyn Monroe fetches record \$195mn: Christie’s

New York, US - An iconic portrait of Marilyn Monroe by American pop art visionary Andy Warhol went under the hammer for US\$195mn on Monday at Christie’s, becoming the most expensive 20th century artwork ever sold at public auction.

Shot Sage Blue Marilyn, produced in 1964 two years after the death of the glamorous Hollywood star, sold for exactly US\$195.04mn, including fees, in just four minutes in a crowded room at Christie’s headquarters in Manhattan.

Dozens of Christie associates were in the room clutching their phones as they took orders from potential buyers. The auction house owned by French magnate Francois Pinault said in a brief press conference that the winning bid for the ‘Marilyn’ was made from within the room.

Prior to the sale, the portrait was estimated to go for about US\$200mn, according to Christie’s.

While falling just short of that threshold, it nevertheless beat



This file photo shows a woman taking a photo of Andy Warhol’s *Shot Sage Blue Marilyn* during Christie’s 20th and 21st Century Art press preview in New York City on April 29 (AFP)

the previous record for a 20th century work, Pablo Picasso’s *Women of Algiers*, which brought US\$179.4mn in 2015.

The all-time record for any work of art from any period sold at auction is held by Leonardo da Vinci’s *Salvator Mundi*, which sold in November, 2017 for

US\$450.3mn.

Warhol’s silk-screen work is part of a group of his portraits of Monroe that became known as the *Shot* series after a visitor to his Manhattan studio, known as ‘The Factory’, apparently fired a gun at them.

In a statement, Christie’s de-

scribed the 40-inch (100-centimeter) by 40-inch portrait as ‘one of the rarest and most transcendent images in existence’.

Alex Rotter, head of 20th and 21st century art at Christie’s, called the portrait ‘the most significant 20th century painting to come to auction in a generation’.

“Andy Warhol’s Marilyn is the absolute pinnacle of American Pop and the promise of the American Dream encapsulating optimism, fragility, celebrity and iconography all at once,” he said in a statement.

Warhol began creating silkscreens of Monroe following the actress’s death from a drug overdose aged just 36 in August 1962. The pop artist produced five portraits of Monroe, all equal in size with different coloured backgrounds, in 1964.

According to pop-art folklore, four of them gained notoriety after a female performance artist by the name of Dorothy Podber asked Warhol if she could shoot a stack of the portraits.

Warhol said yes, thinking she meant she would photograph the works. Instead, Podber took out a gun and fired a bullet through the forehead of Monroe’s image.

The story goes that the bullet pierced four of the five canvasses, with Warhol barring Podber from The Factory and later repairing the paintings - the *Shot*

series.

The *Shot Sage Blue Marilyn* portrait portrays her with a pink face, red lips, yellow hair and blue eye shadow set against a sage-blue backdrop.

It was based on a promotional photograph of her for the 1953 movie *Niagara*, directed by Henry Hathaway.

At an unveiling at Christie’s headquarters, Rotter said the portrait stood alongside Sandro Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus*, Da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* and Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger* as ‘categorically one of the greatest paintings of all time’.

Only 14 paintings have sold for more than US\$100mn at auction, according to an AFP tally, although others are expected to have changed hands for as much during private sales.

The auction record for a Warhol is the US\$104.5mn paid for *Silver Car Crash* (Double Disaster) in 2013.

In 1998, Sotheby’s sold the orange shot Marilyn for US\$17mn.

AFP

Elephants kill 60 this year in Zimbabwe

Harare, Zimbabwe - Sixty Zimbabweans have been killed by elephants so far this year, as a conservation success story has led to increased conflict with humans, the government spokesman said on Tuesday.

With 100,000 elephants, Zimbabwe has the world’s second-largest population after Botswana, and about one-quarter of the elephants in all of Africa. “In some areas, elephants are moving into homesteads, forcing community members to retaliate,” government spokesman Nick Mangwana said on Twitter.

“The issue of human and wildlife conflict has become quite emotive. This year alone 60 Zimbabweans have lost their lives to elephants and 50 injured,” he said.

AFP

South Korea's Yoon calls on North to trade nukes for economic aid

Seoul, South Korea - South Korea's new leader Yoon Suk-yeol on Tuesday called on the North to give up its nuclear weapons in exchange for massive economic aid, describing Pyongyang's missiles as a threat to regional and global security.

Yoon, 61, who started work in an underground bunker with a briefing on North Korea, takes office at a time of high tensions on the peninsula, with Pyongyang conducting a record 15 weapons tests since January, including two launches last week.

The former prosecutor, who won the election by a razor-thin margin in March, said in his inaugural speech that he would consider sending transformative levels of economic aid to the North - but only if Pyongyang first gives up its nuclear weapons. "If North Korea genuinely embarks on a process to complete denuclearisation, we are prepared to work with the international community to present an audacious plan that will vastly strengthen North Korea's economy and improve the quality of life for its people," he said.

Yoon's predecessor Moon Jae-in pursued a policy of en-



South Korea's President Yoon Suk-yeol (centre) and his wife, First Lady Kim Kun-hee listen to National Assembly Speaker Park Byeong-seug during 20th presidential inaugural reception at the National Assembly in Seoul on Tuesday (AFP)

gagement with Pyongyang, brokering summits between North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and then US president Donald Trump. But talks collapsed in 2019 and diplomacy has stalled since. "While North Korea's nuclear weapon programmes are a threat not only to our security and that of Northeast Asia, the door to dialogue will remain open

so that we can peacefully resolve this threat," Yoon added. But the offer of 'audacious' aid is a dud, analysts say: North Korea, which invests a vast chunk of its GDP into its weapons programmes, has long made it clear it will not make that trade. "Since 2009, North Korea has stated it will not give up its nukes for economic incentives,"

Park Won-gon, a professor at Ewha University, told AFP. "Yoon's comment will only trigger Pyongyang, who will see it as an attack." Kim does not want massive economic growth because achieving this would require opening up North Korea's information ecosystem, said Chad O'Carroll of Seoul-based special-

ist site NK News. "Ideological pollution would rapidly steep in, a key risk for Pyongyang's ruler... Yoon's denuclearisation plans won't go anywhere... because the 'carrot' is actually poisonous," he wrote on Twitter.

Unpopular move
During his inauguration speech, Yoon said South Korea was fac-

ing 'multiple crises', citing the COVID-19 pandemic, global supply chain issues, economic woes and new armed conflicts. "Such complex, multi-faceted crises are casting a long and dark shadow over us," Yoon said, adding that he was confident the country would emerge from its current difficulties. But Yoon is not likely to have an easy ride, taking office with some of the lowest approval ratings of any democratically elected South Korean president at 41 per cent, according to a Gallup poll.

The biggest reason for Yoon's unpopularity, the survey found, was his decision to move the presidential office from the decades-old Blue House to the former defence ministry in downtown Seoul.

The hasty, expensive move soured public sentiment, with critics claiming it was unnecessary and a security risk.

Yoon said the Blue House, on a site used by the Japanese colonial administration from 1910 to 1945, was a 'symbol of imperial power', claiming the relocation would ensure a more democratic presidency.

AFP

14 civilians killed in eastern DR Congo

Bunia, DR Congo - Fourteen civilians, including children, were killed in an attack on a displaced persons' camp in Ituri province in eastern DR Congo, a monitoring organisation and local civil group said on Tuesday.

The attack occurred on Monday in the Djugu area of Ituri, according to the Kivu Security Tracker (KST), a respected monitor of violence in the conflict-torn region. It added that it suspected militants from an ethnic armed group called CODECO to be behind the attack.

CODECO - the name for the Cooperative for the Development of the Congo - is a political-religious sect that claims to represent the interests of the Lendu ethnic group.

It is considered one of the deadliest militias operating in the east of the country, blamed for a number of ethnic massacres.

Jules Tsuba, president of an association of civil society groups in Djugu, said most of the victims in Monday's attack were children and stressed that the death toll was provisional. "It's shocking to see children chopped up by machetes," he told AFP. Photos seen by AFP showed children splayed on the ground, covered in blood.

Ituri and neighbouring North Kivu province have been governed by the security forces since May last year, in a bid to stem attacks. Civilian massacres have nonetheless continued.

State of siege
Termed a 'state of siege' in DR Congo, the military- and policed administrations of Ituri and North Kivu have come under criticism for their apparent ineffectiveness. The provinces are plagued by a growing number of attacks from various militias, including CODECO and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which the Islamic State group describes as its local affiliate. About 2,500 civilians were killed between May 2021 and April 2022, according to the KST.

AFP

Singapore bans film on Kashmir over portrayal of Muslims

Singapore - Singapore has banned a controversial Indian film over its 'provocative and one-sided portrayal' of Muslims in Kashmir that officials fear could provoke religious and ethnic tensions in the city-state.

Released in March and one of India's highest-grossing films this year, *The Kashmir Files* depicts in harrowing detail how several hundred thousand Hindus fled Muslim militants in Indian-administered Kashmir in 1989 and 1990.

The movie has been endorsed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and seized on by Hindu hardliners to stir up hatred against the country's Muslim mi-



This file photo shows a worker cleaning a display with poster of the movie *The Kashmir Files*, outside a cinema hall in New Delhi on April 7 (AFP)

nority. Critics say it tackles themes close to the political agenda of Modi's Hindu nationalist government, which has often been accused of marginalising and vilifying Muslims.

The media regulator in Singapore refused to classify the film, meaning it cannot be screened. The decision was due to the movie's 'provocative and one-sided portrayal of Muslims and the depictions of Hindus being persecuted', officials said in a statement late on Wednesday.

"These representations have the potential to cause enmity between different communities, and disrupt social cohesion and religious harmony in our multi-

racial and multi-religious society." The city-state's population of 5.5mn are mostly ethnic Chinese but it also has large communities of ethnic Malay Muslims and ethnic Indian Hindus.

The film's director, Vivek Agnihotri, lashed out at the decision, tweeting that Singapore was the 'most regressive censor in the world'.

The tightly-controlled country is sensitive to anything that could trigger ethnic and religious tensions.

It occasionally bans films and publications for fear of inflaming divisions, leading some to ridicule it as a nanny state.

The movie revolves around a

university student who learns about the death of his parents in the 1990s in Muslim-majority Kashmir, a disputed region split between India and Pakistan since 1947.

Three decades of insurgency in the region - with Pakistan's backing, according to New Delhi - and a heavy-handed response by the Indian military have killed tens of thousands of people, mostly Muslims.

Around 200,000 Kashmiri Hindus - known as Pandits - fled after the violence began in the late 1980s. Up to 219 may have been killed, according to official figures.

AFP

Northern Ireland Protocol unsustainable, says UK PM

London, UK - Post-Brexit trading arrangements in Northern Ireland are unviable and need urgent reform to unblock the province's power-sharing assembly, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Tuesday.



UK PM Boris Johnson (AFP)

Pro-UK unionists have vowed not to nominate ministers to the Northern Ireland Assembly in Belfast until the protocol governing trade is scrapped. That has raised the prospect of paralysis at the legislature, just days after Sinn Fein nationalists became the biggest party for the first time.

Johnson and his government have repeatedly risked confrontation with the EU by threatening to trigger a suspension clause in the protocol, which keeps Northern Ireland largely in the European single market.

But with fresh talks looming to iron out difficulties, Johnson told his Irish counterpart Micheal Martin in a call that the situation was now 'very serious'. He told Martin that the 1998 Good Friday Agreement that brought peace to Northern Ireland after 30 years of violence 'was being undermined', his office said.

Last week's elections 'further demonstrated that the protocol was not sustainable in its current form', Downing Street said.

London's position, at least verbally, backs the unionists, who claim that Irish Sea border checks put Northern Ireland's place in the wider UK at risk. Signed as part of the UK's EU divorce, it imposes sweeping checks on goods heading from Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) to Northern Ireland.

The compromise was introduced to avoid the return of hard border infrastructure between Northern Ireland and EU member Ireland to the south.

Keeping the border open was a key plank of the Good

Friday Agreement.

The UK government has accused the EU of inflexibility, claiming that implementing the deal it signed to the letter is causing 'economic and political disruption'.

European Commission vice-president Maros Sefcovic, who is spearheading talks, has urged London to dial down the rhetoric after previously warning it risked a trade war if it acts on its own to pull the protocol. Martin wrote on Twitter that he 'stressed the need to intensify EU and UK discussions, and to avoid any unilateral action'.

But *The Times* reported on Tuesday that Foreign Secretary Liz Truss could move to scrap large parts of the deal from British law by as early as next week.

The newspaper said officials had drawn up draft legislation to remove the need for checks on goods from Great Britain for use in the province.

If passed, Northern Irish companies could also ignore EU rules and regulations and strip the European Court of Justice of oversight powers on disputes, it added.

AFP

Ecuador prison riot leaves 44 dead

Santo Domingo de los Colorados, Ecuador - At least 44 inmates died on Monday in Ecuador's latest grisly prison riot, the public prosecutor said, as another 100 prisoners managed to escape.

Authorities said a fight broke out between the rival Los Lobos and R7 gangs inside the Bellavista prison in Santo Domingo de los Colorados, in the centre of Ecuador some 80km from Quito.

During the riot, dozens of inmates tried to escape.

Police chief Fausto Salinas told reporters that 108 were missing after another 112 escaped prisoners were recaptured.

The South American country's prison authority SNAI said it has activated security protocols to contain the 'disturbances to order'.

Six gang leaders were transferred from Bellavista to two maximum security prisons, the interior ministry said.

Interior Minister Patricio Carrillo had initially claimed that the authorities were in total control of the situation and that all escaped prisoners had been recaptured.

Inmates with facial injuries were taken by truck and ambulance to medical facilities while family members of those incarcerated gathered at the prison looking for information, AFP re-



This photo released by the Ecuadorean Interior Ministry shows an operation at the Bellavista prison after a riot, in Santo Domingo de los Colorados, Ecuador, on Monday (AFP)

porters at the scene said. **'Mutilated bodies'**

Prior to this one, around 350 inmates had been killed in five separate prison riots since February 2021. Just last month, at least 20 inmates died inside the El Turi prison in Cuenca, southern Ecuador.

President Guillermo Lasso insists the problem inside the facilities mirrors that outside, where drug gangs are vying for control of trafficking routes.

Those rivalries among inmates sometimes explode into violence, with some prisoners hacked to death or beheaded with machetes.

"The majority of victims, if not almost 100 per cent, were killed

with knives and not guns," said Carrillo. "Their mutilated bodies were left where they were."

The prisoners were killed in their cells and common rooms, after which inmates then used guns to try to escape the facility.

Authorities have said they will carry out a search for weapons and transfer gang leaders to a different prison in Guayas province. "This is the unfortunate result of gang violence," Lasso, who is on a state visit to Israel, wrote on Twitter.

He also expressed 'condolences to relatives' of the victims.

Even with greater investment in the prison system, the creation of a commission to pacify facilities and new policies such as the

holding of the most dangerous prisoners at a single penitentiary, have not reduced the bloody violence. Overcrowding is another problem, with 35,000 detainees in 65 prisons that only have a capacity for 30,000 inmates.

The 1,200-capacity Bellavista prison houses 1,700 inmates.

Ecuador has also seen a rise in street crime and drug trafficking which the government has tried to tackle by declaring a state of emergency in the three worst affected provinces: Guayas, Manabi and Esmeraldas.

The country seized a record 210 tons of drugs in 2021 and has already seized another 82 tons this year.

AFP

Shoot-on-sight orders issued in Sri Lanka

Troops have been ordered to shoot on sight anyone looting public property or causing harm to life

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lankan authorities issued shoot-on-sight orders on Tuesday to quell further unrest a day after the island was rocked by deadly violence and rioting.

With thousands of security forces enforcing a curfew, the defence ministry said troops 'have been ordered to shoot on sight anyone looting public property or causing harm to life'.

On Monday, government supporters attacked with sticks and clubs demonstrators in Colombo protesting peacefully for weeks over a dire economic crisis and demanding the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

Mobs then retaliated across the country late into the night, torching dozens of homes of ruling-party politicians and trying to storm the prime minister's official residence in the capital.

Police said on Tuesday that in total eight people died.

Protests continued on Tuesday despite the curfew.

A crowd attacked and set fire to a vehicle carrying Colombo's most senior policeman.

Officers fired warning shots and sent in reinforcements to



Anti-government demonstrators take part in a protest near the President's office in Colombo on Tuesday (AFP)

rescue Senior Deputy Inspector-General Deshabandu Tennakoon, who was rushed to hospital but later released after treatment.

In another sign of rapidly deteriorating security, vigilante groups blocked the main road to Colombo airport to check for any Rajapaksa loyalists trying to leave the island, witnesses said.

As well as those killed, more than 225 people were injured on Monday, which also saw the resignation of prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa.

His departure however failed to quell public anger, with his brother still president and wielding widespread powers and command over the security forces.

Mahinda had to be rescued in

a pre-dawn military operation after thousands of angry protesters stormed his official residence overnight and lobbed petrol bombs. Protester Chamal Polwattage said he expected demonstrations to swell again and vowed they would not leave 'until the president goes'.

"People are angry about the attacks launched against us yesterday... We have a lot of volunteers bringing food and water for us," the 25-year-old told AFP.

'Deeply troubled'

The Rajapaksa clan's hold on power has been shaken by months of blackouts and shortages of essential goods in Sri Lanka's worst economic crisis since independence in 1948.

The pandemic torpedoed vital tourism and forced the government to halt most imports to save foreign currency needed to pay its debts, on which it has now defaulted.

But after weeks of peaceful demonstrations, Monday's attacks on protesters by government supporters represented a turning point.

In the ensuing violence, police fired tear gas and water cannon to disperse crowds and declared a curfew across the entire South Asian nation until Wednesday.

Angry crowds set alight the homes of at least 41 pro-Rajapaksa politicians. Several Rajapaksa homes were torched, while a family museum in their ancestral village was trashed.

Outside Colombo, ruling-party lawmaker Amarakeerthi Athukorala shot two people - killing one of them - when surrounded by a crowd of protesters, police said. The MP later took his own life, officers said, but the ruling party said he had been murdered. The lawmaker's bodyguard was also killed.

Another ruling-party politician who was not named shot dead two protesters and wounded five others in the south, police added.

UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet said on Tuesday she was 'deeply troubled' by the violence committed both by supporters of the government and the subsequent 'mob violence' against ruling party members.

Bachelet in a statement called for an investigation and urged the government to 'engage in meaningful dialogue with all parts of society'.

Mahinda Rajapaksa said his resignation was intended to pave the way for a unity government, but it was unclear if the opposition would join any administration led by his brother.

The president has the power to appoint and fire ministers as well as judges, and enjoys immunity from prosecution.

AFP



Israeli machinery demolish a Palestinian house in the Arab east Jerusalem neighbourhood of Silwan on Tuesday (AFP)

Israel demolition leaves 35 homeless in Jerusalem

Jerusalem - Israeli authorities demolished a residential building in annexed east Jerusalem on Tuesday, leaving 35 people, the majority of them children, homeless.

The demolition of the three-storey building in the neighbourhood of Silwan was carried out because the owners lacked the required permits, the authorities said.

Israel regularly razes homes built by Palestinians in east Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank if they lack the relevant construction permits.

The catch, according to a UN study, is that such permits are 'virtually impossible' to obtain, and the result is a chronic housing shortage.

"Municipality personnel came at 9am, broke the doors, expelled us and didn't let us take any belongings," said Faris Rajabi, 35, who lived in the building.

Palestinian youths looked on in the presence of Israeli forces as heavy machinery was used to tear down the structure, an AFP photographer reported from the scene.

Rajabi said his family had gone to great lengths and paid over US\$100,000 in fines and fees in order to settle the issue in the courts.

The building included five apartments and housed 35 members of the Rajabi family, Faris Rajabi told AFP.

AFP

Ukraine's Odessa reels from strikes; German minister visits

Kyiv, Ukraine - The port city of Odessa reeled on Tuesday from Russian missile strikes as Germany's top diplomat became the highest-ranking official from Berlin to visit Ukraine since Moscow's invasion.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock's surprise visit to Bucha, a town outside Kyiv where Russian troops have been accused of war crimes, came amid mounting criticism of Berlin's slow response to the conflict.

Fresh fighting raged in the east and south of Ukraine, with officials saying over 1,000 Ukrainian fighters including hundreds of injured remain holed up in the besieged Azovstal plant in the devastated city of Mariupol.

The series of missile strikes in Odessa overnight destroyed buildings, set ablaze a shopping centre and killed one person, just hours after a visit by European Council President Charles Michel.

Michel had earlier warned that vital supplies of wheat and grain that were ready for export from Ukraine, one of the world's key producers, were stuck in



Members of Ukrainian Army's mobile evacuation unit treat a soldier wounded on the frontline before his transfer to a hospital by ambulance, on a road near Lysychansk, eastern Ukraine, on Tuesday (AFP)

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock's surprise visit was to Bucha, a town outside capital Kyiv where Russian troops have been accused of war crimes

Odessa because of the conflict. "This badly-needed food is stranded because of the Russian war and blockade of Black Sea ports causing dramatic conse-

quences for vulnerable countries. We need a global response," he added.

A string of Western officials have been visiting Ukraine in re-

cent weeks, but Germany has been notable by its absence due to tensions between Kyiv and Berlin over the level of German support.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in particular has come under fire for arms deliveries to Ukraine deemed insufficient and Germany's refusal to ditch its reliance on Russian energy imports.

AFP

Spain's spy chief sacked over phone hacking scam

Madrid, Spain - Spain's government on Tuesday sacked the country's spy chief as part of a widening scandal over the hacking of the mobile phones of the prime minister and Catalan separatist leaders.

The affair broke in April when Canadian cybersecurity watchdog Citizen Lab said the phones of over 60 people linked to the Catalan separatist movement had been tapped using Pegasus spyware after a failed independence bid in 2017.

Last week the government confirmed the phones of Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and Defence Minister Margarita Robles were also targeted.

Paz Esteban, the first woman to head Spain's CNI intelligence agency, will be replaced, said Robles, whose ministry oversees the agency, confirming media reports. 'There are flaws, mistakes' in the way the affair was handled by the CNI, she told reporters.

Esteban appeared before a parliamentary committee for questioning on Thursday over the phone hacking scandal which has dominated headlines for days.

She confirmed that 18 Catalan separatists, including Pere Aragonés, the head of Catalonia's regional government, had been spied on by the CNI but always with court approval, according to participants at the closed-door meeting. The affair has sparked a crisis between Sanchez's minority government and Catalan separatist party ERC.

AFP

Queen misses UK parliament opening for first time since 1963

London, UK - Head of state Queen Elizabeth II missed Tuesday's ceremonial opening of the UK parliament for the first time in nearly 60 years, handing the duty to her heir Prince Charles in a clear sign of the looming transition of power.

The 96-year-old monarch usually presides over the pomp-filled event and reads out her government's legislative programme from a gilded throne in the House of Lords.

But Buckingham Palace said late on Monday she would skip



Britain's Prince Charles reacts after reading the Queen's speech in the House of Lords Chamber, in London on Tuesday (AFP)

the annual showpiece on medical advice, making the decision 'reluctantly' as she continues to experience 'episodic mobility problems'. It is the latest in a string of cancelled public appearances caused by health problems and old age indicating her record-breaking 70-year reign is drawing to a close.

Charles, the Prince of Wales, was accompanied at the high-profile state engagement by his eldest son, Prince William, who is second-in-line to the throne.

William, the Duke of Cam-

bridge, arrived ahead of his father, wearing a morning suit and military medals as he was escorted through parliament.

Charles, wearing full military regalia, waved to crowds as he made his way by car to the Palace of Westminster with wife Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall. The national anthem, *God Save the Queen*, played as he arrived at parliament, before a royal trumpet fanfare struck up as he stepped out of the vehicle.

The royal procession entered the House of Lords behind the

imperial state crown - usually worn by the queen - which was carried into the chamber on a cushion before being placed on a small table. Charles delivered the Queen's Speech from the consort's throne, symbolically an inch shorter than the monarch's sovereign throne, and was flanked by his wife and son as he read out the agenda.

The queen has rarely been seen in public since spending an unscheduled night in hospital last October.

AFP

CLIMATE AND CROPS



The world needs a food system 'transformation' to tackle the effects of climate change, says US based World Food Prize awardee Cynthia Rosenzweig

Food is fundamental to the efforts to tackle climate change, according to a scientist who has spent decades tracing the interactions between global warming and what we eat. Cynthia Rosenzweig, head of the Climate Impacts Group at NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, was last week awarded the prestigious World Food Prize for her research. That includes stark warnings about the potential effect climate change will have on food.

Impact of climate change on food
“Climate change cannot be restrained without attention to greenhouse gas emissions from food systems,” Rosenzweig told AFP. “Our work, among others, shows that those food system emissions are approximately one third of total human emissions. We’re not going to be able to solve climate change unless these are taken into account.”
At the same time, food security for all is dependent on the changing climate, she points out. As we move into this crucial decade of action on climate change, food needs to be at the table.

High temperatures in general are detrimental to crops, because they speed them through their growing period, so they have less time to make the grain. So this is a very big downward pressure on yield. Then, we have extreme events affecting the critical growth stages, for example, a heatwave happening during pollination in maize. Those extreme events are already increasing in frequency, duration and intensity in many farming regions around the world.

Water, too, is absolutely critical for food production. Climate change is projected to change - and is already changing - the hydrological cycle in many agricultural areas, with increased drought as well as heavier downpours because the warmer air holds more water vapour, the researcher said.
“We can already see tremendous impacts of drought in the developed world. For example, in California since the 2000s. In the developing world, there isn’t as much breeding for heat and drought tolerance in farming, there isn’t as much work on pests. This increases tremendously the vulnerability of the world’s 500 million smallholder farmers.

Research project
About the Agricultural Model Intercomparison and Improvement Project (AgMIP), founded by Rosenzweig, she said, there used to be different modelling groups around the world, all working very diligently to develop different crop models. But people would be using different climate scenarios to test climate change impacts - and the results weren’t comparable.
So at the heart of AgMIP is improving the rigour of the projections by developing common protocols so that the results from agricultural models can be compared. “We do crop modelling, livestock modelling, pest modelling, and economic modelling, and we always bring in the latest climate scenarios,” she informed.
With the latest climate scenarios, AgMIP’s Global

Food system emissions are approximately one third of total human emissions. We cannot solve climate change unless this is taken into account

DR CYNTHIA ROSENZWEIG

Gridded Crop Modelling Team found that the emergence of impacts on some of the agricultural regions around the world is now projected to be felt earlier, to really start biting even in the 2030s. That’s really soon.
Some of the key areas with these earlier impacts are parts of the US Midwest, Western Africa and East Asia. In West Africa, crop yields are projected to fall by 20 to 40 per cent, and potentially more.

File photo of Dr Cynthia Rosenzweig of the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, in a field in India

A third of food produced is wasted
Increasing carbon storage can help to fight climate change. We need to increase efficiency for crop production and reduce food loss and waste - it’s a rough figure but around a third of all food produced is lost or wasted. If we don’t waste as much food, we don’t have to grow as much food - thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions from agricultural production.

In developed countries, there’s definitely the potential for dietary choices to make an impact, because animal-based emissions, especially from beef and dairy, are significant. But as we think about consumption, we have to start by saying that all solutions are context specific and they have to take into account equity issues.
“I interact with so many different groups in all different parts of the food system, from the production side, supply chain side, retail, packaging, everything. There is definitely a transformation going on in the food system,” she said, adding “Food is the fundamental climate impact sector and connects everyone on the planet to climate change. We need to transform the food system, so that it delivers food security for all.”



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THAI CUISINE

Summer's *special*

Thai food is considered a combination of both, Eastern and Western influences, creating a perfect balance of sweet, sour, bitter, salty and spicy flavours that all work in harmony. **With a generous use of herbs and spices, Thai food is not just colourful and aromatic but also very healthy.**



Thai Chicken Satay with Peanut Sauce

Ingredients
For the Chicken:
400g boneless chicken breasts - cut into strips
2tbsp soy sauce, ½tbsp fish sauce
2tbsp freshly squeezed lime juice
1tbsp honey, 1tbsp Sriracha sauce
2tsp ground ginger
2 cloves garlic - minced

For the peanut sauce:
1 cup low sodium chicken broth
5tbsp creamy peanut butter
1tbsp honey, 1tbsp soy sauce
2tsp fish sauce, 2tsp Sriracha sauce
1tsp ground ginger
2 cloves garlic - minced
1tbsp freshly squeezed lime juice
Chopped fresh cilantro - for garnish

Method
In a large mixing bowl, whisk together all of the marinade ingredients - soy sauce, fish sauce, lime juice, honey, Sriracha, ginger, and garlic. Add the chicken, toss to coat, then cover with plastic wrap and place in the refrigerator to marinate for 2 hours or overnight. Let stand at room temperature for 30 minutes before grilling. If using wooden skewers, soak the skewers in water for 30 minutes prior to grilling.
Meanwhile, prepare the peanut sauce - In a medium saucepan, combine the chicken broth, peanut butter, honey, soy sauce, fish sauce, Sriracha, ginger, and garlic. Bring to a simmer over medium heat, then let cook, stirring often, until the sauce is smooth and has thickened, about 6 minutes. Stir in the lime juice and set aside.
When ready to cook, preheat a grill to medium-high. Then thread the chicken onto skewers. Grill chicken until cooked through, about 2-3 minutes per side. Let rest for 2-3 minutes. Sprinkle with peanuts and cilantro, then serve warm with peanut sauce and lime wedges.



Thai Pineapple Fried Rice

Ingredients
2tbsp coconut oil - divided
2 eggs - beaten with a dash of salt
1½ cups chopped fresh pineapple
1 large red bell pepper - diced
¾ cup chopped green onions
2 cloves garlic - minced
½ cup chopped raw, unsalted cashews
2 cups cooked and chilled brown rice
1tbsp soy sauce, 1-2tsp chilli garlic sauce
1 small lime - halved, salt, to taste
½ cup chopped cilantro leaves - for garnish

Method
Heat a large wok over medium-high heat and place an empty serving bowl nearby. Once the pan is hot enough that a drop of water sizzles on contact, add 1tsp oil. Pour in the eggs and scramble - about 30 seconds to 1 minute. Transfer the eggs to the empty bowl.
Add 1tbsp oil to the pan and add the pineapple and red pepper. When the pineapple is caramelised on the edges, add the green onion and garlic. Cook for 30 seconds and transfer to the bowl of eggs.
Reduce the heat to medium and add the remaining 2tsp oil to the pan. Add the cashews and cook until fragrant. Add the rice to the pan and stir to combine. Cook until the rice is hot, stirring occasionally, about 3 minutes.
Add the contents of the bowl into the pan and stir to combine, breaking up the scrambled eggs with your spoon. Cook until the contents are warmed through, then remove the pan from heat. Add the tamari and chilli garlic sauce, to taste. Add juice of ½ lime and toss. Season to taste with salt and set aside.
Transfer the stir-fry to individual serving bowls and garnish each bowl with a lime wedge and a light sprinkle of cilantro. Serve hot.



Thai Mango Salad

Ingredients
1 large ripe mango - peeled, sliced thin
1 green onion - finely chopped
¼ cup sweet bell red pepper - chopped
1 cup fresh bean sprouts
Salt and pepper, to taste
2tbsp chopped fresh cilantro
3-4 cherry tomatoes - halved

For the dressing
2tbsp sweet chili sauce, ½ lime - juice
½tsp grated ginger, ½tsp minced garlic
½tsp fish sauce or soy sauce

Method
Mix together all dressing ingredients in a bowl. Add mango, bean sprouts, bell pepper, tomato, cilantro and green onion. Just before serving, add dressing and toss to combine. Add salt and pepper to taste. If mangoes are sour, sprinkle some sugar.

Thai Red Chicken Curry

Ingredients
2tbsp Thai red curry paste
250g boneless chicken - cut to small pieces
½ cup chopped red onion
¼ cup french beans - cut into small pieces
¼ cup diced button mushrooms
¼ cup cherry tomato - halved, ¼ cup diced bell peppers
¼ cup baby corn - cut into small pieces

Other Ingredients
4tbsp cooking oil, 2 cups coconut milk
1tsp fish sauce, 1tsp rice vinegar, 1tsp light soy sauce
1tsp light brown sugar, 1tsp brown sugar
Salt to taste, 2 - 3 kaffir lime leaves
1 stalk lemongrass - broken to bits
2 Thai birds eye chillies, ¼ cup fresh basil leaves

Method
For the curry, heat the oil in a wok or large saucepan over medium flame. Add chopped onion and saute for 1 - 2 minutes. Stir in the curry paste and cook for 3 - 5 minutes or till oil starts separating from the paste. Add chicken pieces and stir-fry till chicken pieces are nicely roasted and turn pale white in colour. Add 1-2tsp coconut milk if the curry paste is sticking to the wok or burning. Add the lemongrass, fish sauce, vinegar, soy sauce, sugar, and half the amount of coconut milk. Stir to combine and cook for 1 - 2 minutes. Then add the remaining coconut milk along with kaffir lime leaves, lemongrass, basil, red chilli, vegetables, and stir to combine. Taste and season with salt accordingly.
Add ½ cup chicken stock or water if the curry seems too thick. Bring slowly to the boil, then reduce the heat to low and simmer, uncovered, for 6-8 minutes or until chicken and vegetables are cooked. Stir the curry a few times while it cooks, to stop it sticking and to keep the chicken submerged. Serve hot.





Oman to host 44Cup decider in December

Muscat -Oman will host the final of the 2022 44Cup season, to be held from December 7 to 11. Oman Sail will play hosts to the last event of the five-stop international tour in Muscat. The tour started in Lanzarote in Spain in early February and will move to Cascais in Portugal, Marstrand in Sweden and Portoroz, Slovenia for the World Championship before heading for its grand finale in the Middle East.

Muscat will extend a warm welcome to the fleet of ten high-performance one-design RC44s, which will be based in and racing on the warm waters off Al Mouj Marina.

Muscat and Al Mouj Marina are well known to the 44Cup crews, having hosted the fleet

here in 2013, when it was won by Chris Bake's Team Aqua and in 2014 when the top honour went to Vladimir Proskikh's Team Nika.

"There is a passion for sailing in Oman and thanks to Oman Sail, a great development programme for youth sailing. As a professional racing circuit, the fact that the conditions are tricky is ideal for exciting racing. We had a lot of fun sailing the last time we went there," said Team Aqua's tactician Cameron Appleton.

Since 2009 Oman Sail has been attempting to rekindle the country's maritime eminence and to provide opportunities for the Omani youth to learn from the sport. Oman Sail has become

a globally recognised initiative in the process. Omani high-performance sailors are now competing in several leading racing circuits and Oman Sail hosts an

increasing number of key international events along their nation's splendid coastline. In 2021 they hosted, among others, the Asian Windsurfing Championships, the 2021 49er, 49er FX

and Nacra 17 Asian and World Championships, the ILCA Radial World Championship in Musanah and brought the sailing season to a close with the suc-

cessful hosting of the Youth Sailing World Championships.

Welcoming the 44Cup to Oman, CEO of Oman Sail Oman Sail Dr Khamis Al Jabri said: "The high-speed, high-performance

racing on show during the 44Cup is always a spectacular sight to behold. With some of the world's best professional sailors competing, the ideal winter sailing conditions will provide an excellent arena for the top prizes to be decided. We look forward to welcoming the teams to Oman and sharing our famed warm hospitality at the finale of this year's series."

Artemis Racing's tactician Andy Horton added: "It feels like an adventure to go to Oman for a regatta. The climate is perfect for winter racing, the culture and the people are welcoming. It's always exciting to go back."

To find out more about the 44Cup visit 44cup.org.

With some of the world's best professional sailors competing, the ideal winter sailing conditions will provide an excellent arena for the top prizes to be decided

DR KHAMIS AL JABRI



Oman women's team to participate in ACC T20 Championship

Muscat: Oman Cricket has announced the participation of the Women's National Team in the ACC Women's T20 Championship, scheduled to be held in Malaysia from June 16 to 30, 2022.

UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Nepal, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Myanmar and Bhutan will also compete in the 10-team tournament. The two finalists will qualify for the Women's T20 Asia Cup 2022, joining regional heavyweights India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and hosts Bangladesh in October.

The competition is aligned with and borne out of the Asian Cricket Council's vision for the development of Women's cricket in the region. It was originally set to be

The two finalists will qualify for the Women's T20 Asia Cup 2022

held in June 2020, but was postponed because of COVID-19 pandemic.

The Oman women's national team's previous tournament exposure at the international level came in the form of the GCC Women's T20 Championship Cup held at the Oman Cricket Academy in March where Oman finished second behind the United Arab Emirates with four wins in five games.



Oman women finished second in the GCC Women's T20 Championship Cup in March

Ex-England batsman Graham Thorpe 'seriously ill' in hospital

London, United Kingdom - Former England batsman and assistant coach Graham Thorpe is "seriously ill" in hospital, the Professional Cricketers' Association said on Tuesday.

Thorpe, 52, had accepted the job of Afghanistan head coach following his departure from the England set-up after a 4-0 defeat in the Ashes in Australia in December and January.

The PCA released a statement at the request of Thorpe's family, which read: "Graham Thorpe has recently fallen seriously ill and is currently in hospital receiving treatment.

"His prognosis is unclear at this stage and we ask for privacy



Graham Thorpe

for him and his family at this time. Our thoughts are with Graham and his family."

The Afghanistan Cricket Board confirmed Thorpe's appointment in March.

A stylish left-handed batsman, Thorpe played 100 Test matches for England, scoring 6,744 runs at an average of 44.66 and hitting 16 centuries. He also played 82 one-day internationals.

The former Surrey player coached in Australia at New South Wales, before joining the England and Wales Cricket Board as a batting coach.

Thorpe worked as assistant with the senior side under Trevor Bayliss and Chris Silverwood, stepping up to lead the team in the drawn Sydney Test in early January due to Silverwood's coronavirus diagnosis.

AFP

Cricket South Africa withdraws racism charges against coach Boucher, says no basis to sustain

Johannesburg, South Africa - Cricket South Africa announced on Tuesday that all charges against head coach Mark Boucher have been withdrawn, leading to the abandonment of a disciplinary hearing which was due to start on May 16.

The 45-year-old former Test wicketkeeper was facing charges of racism, laid by CSA, which could have resulted in his dismissal. The controlling body admitted in a statement that there was "no basis to sustain any of the disciplinary charges".

The allegations against Boucher followed Social Justice and Networking hearings last year into discrimination into cricket.



Mark Boucher

Boucher was accused by former teammate Paul Adams of leading a song with racially derogatory words during fines meetings after matches while they were playing.

Adams announced on Sunday that he was not prepared to testify at the hearing, stating his comments to the SJN ombudsman related to the overall culture of the team rather than any par-

ticular player. CSA noted in its statement that Boucher had apologised to Adams and the apology had been accepted.

It was also alleged that Boucher had sidelined his black assistant coach Enoch Nkwe, leading to Nkwe's resignation, but Nkwe was also unwilling to testify at the planned hearings.

A further charge was that Boucher had failed to deal effectively with a controversy over "taking the knee" in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement.

CSA said its lawyers had consulted with other potential witnesses and concluded that none of the charges were sustainable.

AFP

Pegula into Rome second round after Samsonova thriller

Rome, Italy - Madrid finalist Jessica Pegula enjoyed a winning start to her Italian Open campaign on Tuesday, squeezing past world number 25 Liudmila Samsonova 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 to advance to the second round.

A runner-up to Ons Jabeur in the Spanish capital on Saturday, Pegula withstood 38 winners from the big-hitting Samsonova to set up a last-32 showdown with in-form Ukrainian Anhelina

Kalinina.

The 13th-seeded Pegula, who played with a heavily-strapped left thigh against Samsonova, made the quarter-finals in Rome last season and has improved her 2022 win-loss tally to 18-9.

Meanwhile, former French Open champion and number 11 seed Jelena Ostapenko was sent packing by American qualifier Lauren Davis 6-2, 6-3 in just one

hour and 10 minutes.

Following a strong early-season stretch that saw her make the semi-finals in St. Petersburg and Doha, and clinch the title in Dubai, Ostapenko is currently on a five-match losing streak.

American world number 32 Amanda Anisimova recovered from a second-set bagel to overcome Czech qualifier Tereza Martinova 6-2, 0-6, 6-4.

Anisimova, a former Roland

Garros semi-finalist, will take on Olympic champion Belinda Bencic in the next round, looking to make the last-16 stage in Rome for the first time.

In the men's tournament, Grigor Dimitrov and Stefanos Tsitsipas will square off for the second time in seven days after the Bulgarian moved past American qualifier Brandon Nakashima 6-3, 6-4 in first round action on Tuesday.

It was Dimitrov's 10th Masters 1000 match-win of the season and he'll be searching for just a second victory over Tsitsipas in their sixth career meeting against one another.

British ninth seed Cameron Norrie saved 4/4 break points in his 6-4, 6-4 success over local wildcard Luca Nardi and will next play former US Open champion Marin Cilic.

AFP



Jessica Pegula will take on Anhelina Kalinina in the round of 32 (AFP)



MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

The megarich Indian Premier League has made young players millionaires and turned cricket into gold

New Delhi, India - The Indian Premier League has made millionaires out of young players, generated invaluable publicity for team owners and made the national cricket board one of the richest governing bodies in global sport.

The world's most valuable cricket tournament, now in its 15th iteration and boasting the likes of Virat Kohli, Pat Cummins and Jos Buttler, was a pioneer in Twenty20 league cricket.

Its success and popularity has spawned copycat competitions in other countries and generated a fortune for the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

The high-octane, big-hitting carnival provides a must-see product, driving broadcast subscriptions by the millions and pulling in huge advertising revenue.

Some businesses are willing to splash out nearly \$1 billion just to get a chance to field a team on the IPL's golden wicket.

When the tournament expanded to 10 teams this year from the original eight, the auction for the rights to own the new franchises drew international bidders including the Glazer family, who own Manchester United.

They were ultimately beaten out by Indian tycoon Sanjiv Goenka's RPSG conglomerate, who paid the BCCI \$930 million to form the Lucknow Super Giants.



The second new franchise, the Gujarat Titans, cost the global venture fund CVC Capital \$690 million.

The sums are eye-watering for teams that will only play two months a year, but Simon Chadwick, a sports economy profes-

sor at the Emlyon Business School in France, told AFP that it was worth the investment.

"The IPL is already a massive commercial opportunity, but given India's economic growth, expanding middle class and massive potential as a market for dig-

ital, it will potentially become even more lucrative," said Chadwick.

Broadcast rights are the BCCI's biggest money-spinner.

Star India, owned by Disney, paid \$2.55 billion for a five-year television and digital rights deal

that expires at the end of this season.

Analysts expect the next package, for 2023-2027, to balloon to as much as \$6.6 billion.

Reports say the league will also earn the BCCI around \$130 million in sponsorship this year

alone.

Title sponsor Tata, the Indian steel-to-broadcast conglomerate, is the biggest contributor with others including finance apps, an online education firm and a fantasy gaming site.

'Recession proof'

The BCCI earned \$533 million from the IPL in 2020, treasurer Arun Dharmal told Indian media, but its finances are cloaked in secrecy.

he said: "We have fared really well."

Business executive Neelima Burra has been involved in several IPL sponsorship deals with Cargill foods, sewing-machine maker Usha and Hewlett-Packard.

"It has been a great symbiotic relationship between the brands and the IPL as a franchise and both have really helped each other grow," she told AFP.

"What the IPL did was that it

Some businesses are willing to splash out nearly \$1 billion just to get a chance to field a team on the IPL's golden wicket

The last annual report on its website is for 2016-17, but reports say a subsequent filing put its net worth at \$2 billion.

IPL teams receive a share of the television rights and sponsorship money, and around 10 to 15 percent of ticket sales.

They can also generate their own revenue through lucrative shirt or other sponsorships.

"I have always said that 'cricket is recession proof'," Dhiraaj Malhotra, chief executive of the Delhi Capitals, told AFP.

Even last season, which saw the league suspended and later moved to the United Arab Emirates because of the pandemic,

made cricket more interesting, more interactive, more celebratory and more fun because of association with celebrities and cricketers. That is why I am a great fan of the IPL."

The teams spent nearly \$75 million in the February player auction, with Mumbai Indians retaining wicket-keeper-batsman Ishan Kishan for \$2 million and Punjab Kings paying England's Liam Livingstone \$1.52 million for his services.

By contrast, the average player contract in England's six-month-long County Championship is \$66,000.

AFP

GT V LSG

Rashid stars as Gujarat beat Lucknow to enter playoffs

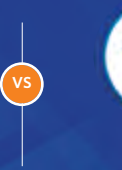


BRIEF SCORES:

Gujarat Titans 144 for 4 in 20 overs (Shubman Gill 63 (49) 7x4, David Miller 26 (24) 1x4, 1x6; Avesh Khan 2 for 26) beat Lucknow Super Giants 82 all out in 13.5 overs (Deepak Hooda 27 (26) 3x4; Rashid Khan 4 for 24, R Sai Kishore 2 for 7) by 62 runs



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Haaland goes to England

Premier League leaders Manchester City agree to sign star striker Erling Haaland from Dortmund

London, United Kingdom - Manchester City said Tuesday they had reached an agreement to sign Erling Haaland from Borussia Dortmund -- ending their hunt for a top-class centre-forward.

"Manchester City can confirm we have reached an agreement in principle with Borussia Dortmund for the transfer of striker Erling Haaland to the club on 1st July 2022," the Premier League champions said in a statement.

"The transfer remains subject to the club finalising terms with the player."

Haaland will move to the Etihad Stadium after City opted to trigger the forward's release clause, reportedly 75 million euros (£64 million, \$79 million).

The deal for the 21-year-old ends City's long search for a specialist striker to replace record goalscorer Sergio Aguero, who left last year.

The club tried but failed in a high-profile attempt to prise England captain Harry Kane away from Tottenham Hotspur.

Haaland, whose father Alf-Inge played for City from 2000 to 2003, has been sensational since joining Dortmund from RB Salzburg in January 2020, scoring 85 goals in 88 appearances for the German side.

Earlier Tuesday, City manager Pep Guardiola dropped a heavy hint that Haaland was on his way to Manchester.

"Everybody knows the situation," he said. "I shouldn't talk because I don't like to talk about the future or next season. Borussia Dortmund and Man City told me



Erling Haaland will move to the Etihad Stadium after City opted to trigger the forward's release clause, reportedly 75 million euros (AFP)

Erling Haaland, whose father Alf-Inge played for Manchester City from 2000 to 2003, has been sensational since joining Dortmund from RB Salzburg in January 2020, scoring 85 goals in 88 appearances for the German side

I'm not allowed to say anything until it's completely done."

City, who are the Premier League's top-scorers this season with 89 goals, have often played without a recognised striker this season. Riyad Mahrez is their top scorer with 24 goals in all competitions, ahead of Raheem Ster-

ling (16), Kevin De Bruyne (15) and Phil Foden (14).

City, who lead Liverpool by three points at the top of the Premier League table with just three games to go, are closing in on a fourth English league title in five years.

AFP

Erling Haaland: Goal machine and record breaker

Berlin, Germany - Erling Haaland, who is poised to become the most expensive player in Premier League history, has made a career out of breaking records.

Born in Leeds, the son of former Manchester City striker Alf-Inge Haaland had not even turned 20 when he became the first player to chalk up six goals in his first three Champions League games.

He hit a hat-trick on his European debut for Red Bull Salzburg in September 2019 against Genk, which he proved was no fluke by scoring another against Liverpool, then bagging two against Napoli.

His 29 goals in 27 games for Salzburg put him on the radar of Borussia Dortmund, who signed him for 20 million euros (\$21 million) in December 2019.

He became the first player to score a hat-trick in Germany's top flight on his debut as a replacement, needing just 23 minutes to bang in three and seal a 5-3 win at Augsburg.

"That's what you signed me for," Haaland told Dortmund

sports director Michael Zorc.

He is youngest player to chalk up 50 Bundesliga goals, reaching the milestone in just 50 matches - another record.

However, any UK sports journalists seeking in-depth answers have their work cut out.

He is the master of short replies, once quipping: "The day I do an interview over one minute will be the day I quit football".

In December 2019, Haaland bagged a jaw-dropping nine goals - three hat-tricks in one game - when Norway juniors hammered Honduras 12-0 at the Under-19 World Cup.

In his first six months with Dortmund - including the two-month enforced break as a result of the Covid pandemic - Haaland racked up 16 goals in 18 games.

In the 2020/21 campaign, he managed 41 goals in 41 games for Dortmund. He helped Dortmund reach the quarter-finals in the Champions League, scoring twice in both the home and away legs of the last 16 win over Sevilla.

AFP



The present group stage of Champions League will be replaced by one single league from the 2024/25 season

UEFA expand Champions League from 32 to 36 teams

Vienna, Austria - The European Champions League will see an increase of four teams to 36 and the present group stage replaced by one single league from the 2024/25 season, UEFA said on Tuesday.

The revamp of European football's premier club competition will see each team play eight league games - four home and four away - as opposed to six in the group stage.

The top eight sides in the league will qualify automatically for the knockout stage, while the teams finishing in ninth to 24th place will compete in a two-legged play-off to secure their path to the last 16 of the competition.

"We are convinced that the format chosen strikes the right balance and that it will improve the competitive balance and generate solid revenues that can be distributed to clubs, leagues and into grassroots football

across our continent," said UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin.

Ceferin and UEFA will be hoping the reforms - passed unanimously by their executive board - will kill off once and for all any thought of the rebel Super League making a reappearance.

Twelve of Europe's biggest clubs signed up to the proposed new competition last April but it collapsed within days following a fierce backlash from their own players and fans, as well as governments and football's governing bodies. Nine clubs distanced themselves from the project but Real Madrid, Barcelona and Juventus remain on board with the concept.

UEFA had stepped back after consulting with various parties - including supporters - from having 10 league matches and allocating two of the four new places to teams based on club coefficient.

The four places will go to the

club ranked third in the championship of the association in fifth position in the UEFA national association ranking.

Another will be awarded to a domestic champion by extending from four to five the number of clubs qualifying via the so-called 'Champions Path'.

The final two places will go to the associations with the best collective performance by their clubs in the previous season (total number of points obtained divided by the number of participating clubs).

Those two associations if it had been judged on this season based on the collective performance of their clubs would be England and the Netherlands. Similar format changes will also be applied to the UEFA Europa League (8 matches in the league stage) and UEFA Europa Conference League (6 matches in the league stage).

AFP

Lampard warns Everton cannot relax in relegation dogfight

London, United Kingdom - Everton manager Frank Lampard has warned his players to "expect the worst" in terms of results from their relegation rivals, insisting they cannot relax despite two crucial wins.

Victory over Leicester on Sunday made it 10 points from five matches and lifted the Toffees out of the drop zone into 16th place, one point ahead of both Burnley and Leeds with a match in hand.

Everton travel to already relegated Watford on Wednesday but Lampard has stressed they cannot underestimate their opponents or consider they have already done the hard work.

"The only message is we've to go now and finish the job, which is a tough job," the former Chelsea boss said on Tuesday.

"We have to expect the worst.



Frank Lampard celebrates Everton's victory against Leicester City (AFP)

Everyone else can win, but we can control ourselves so there is absolutely no way we can relax. That's the biggest message.

"To underestimate it because Watford are relegated would be

Sunday's victory at Leicester was Everton's first on the road in the Premier League since August but, with two more away games to come, Lampard wants to see more consistency.

"It's a step forward," he said. "Getting one result doesn't mean you go and get more. You have to understand why we got the result - the team was together in every moment, fought for every chance, and defended very tight.

"That's what gets you good results away from home and consistently doing that is the big challenge."

Everton are likely to be without centre-back Yerry Mina until the final-day trip to Arsenal after the Colombia international was forced off with a calf injury at Leicester.

AFP

Fiorentina strike early to beat Roma

Paris, France - Fiorentina scored twice in the first 11 minutes to beat Roma 2-0 on Monday and climb back into Serie A minor European places.

In a battle of out-of form sides, Nicolas Gonzalez converted a fifth minute penalty awarded after he was mowed down by Rick Karsdorp.

Six minutes later the Roma defence allowed Giacomo Bonaventura the time to bury a shot in the bottom corner.

Roma coach Jose Mourinho picked nine of the starting 11 who drew in Leicester on Thursday to reach the Europa League final but

the team stretched their winless league run to five games.

Fiorentina ended a run of four games without a victory and overtook Atalanta to climb into seventh, which this season will bring qualification for the Europa Conference League. Both are level on points with Roma who trail neighbours Lazio by three points.

The two Rome clubs occupy the two Europa League places.

Earlier on Sunday, Sandro Tonali fired AC Milan closer to the title with a brace in a 3-1 win at Verona which maintained their two-point lead at the top.

AFP



Giacomo Bonaventura celebrates after scoring against Roma on Monday