

Oman on track to record fastest growth in decade

IMF forecasts Oman's 2022 GDP growth at 5.6%, fastest since 2012

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The International Monetary Fund has significantly raised its forecast for Oman's economic growth this year. It now expects the sultanate's real GDP to

grow at the fastest pace since 2012. As per IMF's *World Economic Outlook* report released on Tuesday, Oman's real GDP is expected to grow by 5.6 per cent in 2022 from an estimated two per cent growth recorded in 2021. The fund expects the sultanate's economy to grow by 2.7 per cent in 2023. In contrast, IMF on Tuesday downgraded its growth forecast for the world economy for 2022 by 0.8 percentage points to 3.6 per cent due to the 'seismic' impact of the war in Ukraine. The expected boost for Oman's economic growth reflects the sultanate's

higher oil production in line with an OPEC+ agreement and a rebound in non-oil economic activities. Last week, the World Bank also projected Oman's real GDP to grow by more than five per cent in 2022 as the sultanate's economy is on a solid path to recovery amid the easing of pandemic pressures, higher hydrocarbon outputs, and wide-ranging government reforms. Additionally, IMF has projected Oman's average annual inflation to increase to 3.7 per cent in 2022 from 1.5 per cent in 2021. Inflation will decrease again to 2.2 per cent in 2023.

The fund stated that Middle Eastern countries are highly exposed to global food prices, particularly the price of wheat, which is expected to remain high throughout the year and into 2023 amid the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict. 'In the Middle East and North Africa, spillovers from tighter global financial conditions, reduced tourism, and secondary demand spillovers (for example, from Europe) will also hold back growth, especially for oil importers. For oil exporters, higher fossil fuel prices may provide some offsetting gains,' the IMF stated.



Royal Decree ratifies mutual visa waiver with Chile

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal Decree No 17/2022 on the ratification of an agreement between the governments of the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Chile on mutual waiver of visas for holders of diplomatic, special and service passports, signed in Cairo on March 22, 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

Sayyid Theyazin to open Oman's pavilion at 59th Venice Biennale

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, will preside over the opening ceremony of Oman's pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale on Thursday. This is the first time Oman is setting up a pavilion at the prestigious art event, set to take place from April 23 to November 27. The sultanate's participation aims to introduce Omani culture at the global level through its pavilion, which will also reflect efforts to achieve Oman Vision 2040 in the cultural field. Oman's inaugural pavilion at Biennale Arte 2022, curated by Omani curator and art historian Aisha Stoby, will present a group exhibition - titled 'Destined Imaginaries' - featuring new bodies of work by three generations of contemporary Omani artists -



H H Sayyid Theyazin al Said

Anwar Sonya, Hassan Meer, Budoor al Riyami, Radhika Khimji and the late artist Raiya Al Rawahi. The artists developed these works - an abstract timeless habitat of future relics with insights - during the extraordinary events of the past two years, and each has tackled the question, 'What would life look like without us?'

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*TERMS AND CONDITIONS APPLIED

Mechanic by choice: Omani woman breaks stereotypes

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Zainab Ali al Yarubi, who hails from Masirah, has come a long way since selling vehicle spare parts to becoming an ace auto mechanic.

Zainab's father, who is also an auto mechanic, was her biggest supporter when she showed interest in this work. She watched her father work in his workshop with passion and love repairing vehicles and fell in love with the profession early in her childhood.

"In 2006, I started selling spare parts in a shop attached to the vehicle repair shop," Zainab said.

Over time, while dealing with spare parts, engine lubricants and changing worn-out parts, she became skilled in repairing vehicles and mastered the knowledge needed in this physically and mentally demanding profession.

"I was afraid of consumers' reactions and was doubtful if they would accept me - a woman - working in this field. This profession requires muscle strength and time, in addition to handling heavy, sharp and dangerous tools. But with patience,



(ONA)

I was afraid of consumers' reactions and was doubtful if they would accept me - a woman - working in this field. This profession requires muscle strength and time, in addition to handling heavy, sharp and dangerous tools

ZAINAB ALI AL YARUBI

determination and the encouragement of people, I overcame

all the challenges and self-doubts," she said.

Zainab added, "I began the journey of becoming a mechanic by diagnosing faults, learning how to quickly disassemble and change spare parts, and by the virtue of experience I gained from selling spare parts. I was able to master a lot of vehicle repairing skills, especially identifying mechanical faults, under the supervision of my father.

"Many girls in Masirah come to our workshop now because they feel comfortable in working with a girl."

Spark plug change, oil change, engine overhaul etc come naturally to Zainab now.

Talking about her future plans, Zainab said, "I will continue this work and I hope to have a workshop of my own to repair women's vehicles. I would like to encourage this profession among women by training girls to be auto mechanics and finding job opportunities for them.

"I dream of having a workshop that will provide various services, including maintenance, mechanical repairs and all kinds of vehicle electrical works, in addition to a specialised shop for spares and a car wash."



(Supplied photo)

RO10mn commercial project starting in Barka in Q2 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Barka Real Estate Development Company and Tibiaan Properties Company announced the launch of an integrated commercial project - Massar - in the wilayat of Barka in South Batinah governorate on Wednesday.

H E Dr Khalfan al Shuaili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, a number of senior officials and business owners witnessed the launch.

Work will start on the project in the second quarter of 2022.

The project, located adjacent

The Massar project will enhance commercial activities in Barka and its surrounding wilayats and attract investors

ABDULLAH
AL LAWATI

to Barka commercial market, will include more than 230 shops.

Abdullah al Lawati, CEO of Barka Real Estate Development Company, said, "The project will

enhance commercial activities in Barka and its surrounding wilayats and attract investors."

On the occasion, Younis bin Khasib al Harrasi, CEO of Tibiaan Properties, said, "The project is the largest of its kind in Barka. It will add a new developmental landmark to the wilayat of Barka."

In addition to modern design of shops, the entrances and exits of the project are designed for convenience and are visitor-friendly.

"More than 750 parking spaces are available for a convenient shopping experience," Harrasi added.

Valor Hospitality announces inaugural hotel in Oman

Muscat - Valor Hospitality Middle East, a full-service hotel acquisition, development, management and asset management company, announced its first hotel in Muscat, adding to its portfolio in the Middle East.

The full-service hotel in Muscat is scheduled to open in the first quarter of 2024. When open, the hotel will feature 201 guest rooms, ballroom and conference facilities, leisure and fitness amenities and multiple bars and dining venues. 'Located in Qurm, the hotel will offer a great location and diverse room mix for both short and long stays, corporate and leisure travellers,' stated a press release.

"After our recent hotel opening in Dubai, it gives us great



(Supplied photo)

pleasure to expand our third-party hotel management services in the Middle East by partnering with Mustafa Sultan Enterprises for our first of, hopefully, many hotels in Oman," said Julien Bergue, co-founder and managing partner, Valor Hospitality Middle East. "We are working closely with the ownership on the full renovation plan and in identi-

fying a suitable brand fit for the fully revamped hotel."

Shabeer Mustafa Sultan, chairman of Mustafa Sultan Enterprises, said, "We are thrilled to partner with Valor Hospitality for operating an international branded hotel in Muscat and to provide the best possible guest experience. This collaboration points to a full-renovation and re-

branding investment that supports our mission to create long-term value for the tourism, real estate and leisure sectors across Oman. We are confident the hotel will add great value to the vision of Oman's leaders, particularly in the upscale hotel segment. We look forward to delivering an engaging and positive experience for all our guests."

200 free tickets for people with disabilities for Umrah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to support people with disabilities, Oman Air has provided 200 free tick-

ets to this category of individuals to perform Umrah this Ramadan.

A statement issued by the Ministry of Social Development said, 'The ministry appre-

ciates the efforts of Oman Air in providing 200 tickets for people with disabilities to perform Umrah in Ramadan. The initiative is in line with Oman Air's social responsibility.'

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	35	21
Doha	31	22
Kuwait City	30	22
Manama	32	23
Muscat	33	26
Riyadh	40	24



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MoSD launches programme highlighting family bonding

Our Correspondent

Muscat

The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), in cooperation with Mazoon e-channel, has launched a programme during Ramadan in efforts to strengthen family bonds.

Khalid Ahmed Ali Tabook, presenter of the programme and head of MoSD's Family Counselling and Guidance Department in Dhofar, informed that the programme - *Khairukum li'ahlili* - gets its title from the hadith of Prophet Muhammad which says, 'Khairukum khairukum li'ahlili wa ana khairukum li'ahliai.' (The best of you is the best of you towards his family and I am the best of you towards my family).

According to Tabook, the programme comprises eight episodes released on Mazoon E-channel on Sunday and Wednesday. "The programme is run in cooperation with Dr Ahmed bin Ali al Ma'aashani, head of the Centre for Psychological and Family Counseling in Dhofar."

The programme discusses various aspects of family bonding, including effective communication between family members and raising children with an understanding of family values. "The episodes focus on different topics such as managing family budget, obeying parents, and dealing with psychological stress," Tabook said.

Besides stressing on the significance of family bonding, *Khairukum li'ahlihi* spreads cultural awareness among parents to care for their children in accordance with the values of Islam and Omani traditions.

Tabook informed that one episode focuses on the importance of emotional intelligence of spouses. "It protects relationships between spouses from misunderstanding, jealousy and distrust."

About psychological happiness, he said, "It can be obtained easily and by yourself only. There are several keys to obtaining psychological happiness, such as seeking help from God to manage the affairs of your life, being satisfied with God's decree, being satisfied with your



One episode focuses on emotional intelligence of spouses which protects relationships from misunderstanding, jealousy and distrust

KHALID AHMED ALI TABOOK

work and your family, and feeling secure."

He added that a happy person must have good health "because if he suffers from any pain in his body, he will not be happy".

He added, "I believe a person is responsible for his or her own happiness. No other person is capable of giving you that happiness – only you yourself, by developing your skills and by following your religion."

Abu Huraira reported: A bedouin came to the Messenger of Allah and he said, "O Messenger of Allah, show me a deed by which I may enter Paradise." The Prophet said, "Worship Allah and never associate anything with Him, establish the prescribed prayers, give the obligatory charity, and fast in the month of Ramadan." The man said, "By Him in whose hand is my soul, I will never add anything to it, nor will I lessen anything from it." When the man turned his back, the Prophet said, "Whoever is pleased to see a man from the people of Paradise should look at him."

Amr ibn Murrah reported: A man came to the Messenger of Allah and he said, "O Messenger of Allah, what do you think if I testify there is no God but Allah and you are the Messenger of Allah, I perform the five prayers, I pay the obligatory alms, I fast the in month of Ramadan and stand for prayer in it. Among whom will I be?" The Prophet said, "Among the truthful and the martyrs."

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

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Eid shopping made easy for the needy

Our Correspondent

Muscat

At the end of Ramadan comes Eid al Fitr, a time to celebrate dressed in new clothes and accessories. While most markets are currently doing brisk business with shoppers buying new clothes, there are a few who can't afford the luxury.

Catering to such people, an exhibition offering a wide variety of clothes and accessories is being held at Sablat Muttrah.

The Kaswatul Eid (New clothes for Eid) exhibition was inaugurated by Ahmed bin Hilal al Busaidi, Wali of Muttrah, in the presence of several officials and dignitaries, on April 17.

The exhibition has been organised jointly by Muttrah Charity Team and Al Rahma Association for Motherhood and Childhood Care.

Kaswatul Eid is offering a variety of new clothes, bags, shoes and perfumes for all



members of the family.

'The charitable event targets orphans, those registered in the social security cate-

gory and with the Al Rahma Association, besides needy families of the wilayat of Muttrah,' a press release stated.

Assad al Khanjari, CEO of Muttrah Charity Team, said, "We are providing clothes and other items needed to celebrate Eid al Fitr for children and adults. Our target is mainly women, young boys and girls, with everything free for the registered people."

The exhibition was arranged in the organisers' belief in the importance of promoting a culture of social solidarity among members of society. 'The exhibition will alleviate the financial burden on needy families by covering some of the requirements and needs of Eid clothing,' the organisers stated.

The exhibition is open from 10am to 4pm and from 8pm to 12am and ends on Thursday.

'The exhibition is held in a family atmosphere observing all precautionary measures issued by the Supreme Committee tasked with dealing with COVID-19 pandemic.'

QUICK
IFTAR DISH

For a healthy and quickly prepared iftar, try this bowl of colourful and nutritious salad



Eggplant Salad

Ingredients

- 150g grilled eggplant - diced
- 1/4 red bell pepper - chopped
- 1/4 green bell pepper - chopped
- 1 small onion - chopped
- 2tbsp olive oil, 1tsp lemon juice
- 1/4tsp salt
- 1/4tsp finely chopped mint
- 1tbsp pine nuts – for garnish

Method

In a bowl, put together the eggplant with the red and green bell peppers. Add the chopped mint and onion, then toss to mix. Finally, drizzle olive oil and sprinkle salt.

MARKET WATCH

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Pakistani Rs	482.39
Bangladeshi taka	224.05
Philippines peso	136.14
Sri Lankan Rs	857.45

*Rates as on April 20
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

IMF asks Sri Lanka to restructure debt before bailout

The International Monetary Fund said on Wednesday that it has asked cash-strapped Sri Lanka to "restructure" its huge foreign debt before a bailout programme could be finalised as anti-government protests escalated across the island.

Sri Lanka opened talks with the IMF in Washington this week after announcing its first ever default on external borrowings. The South Asia country is in the grip of its worst economic crisis since independence in 1948 and has been rocked by a wave of protests over food and fuel shortages.

"When the IMF determines that a country's debt is not sustainable, the country needs to take steps to restore debt sustainability prior to IMF lending," the Fund's country director Masahiro Nozaki said in a statement.

"Approval of an IMF-supported program for Sri Lanka would require adequate assurances that debt sustainability will be restored."

PDO builds sustainability with GE's energy management system

Our Correspondent
Muscat

GE Digital on Wednesday announced that Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has purchased its Advanced Energy Management System (AEMS).

The AEMS software is designed to enable PDO to plan, control, and optimise renewable power generation to help keep its oil production plants operating reliably and efficiently, GE Digital said in a press statement.

PDO delivers the majority of Oman's crude oil production and natural gas supply.

The company runs its own electric network – a microgrid – to serve their business. A microgrid is a local controllable grid which can run autonomously from the main grid. By using a microgrid, PDO can be more resilient, potentially lower costs, and run more efficiently. Conversely, when connected to Oman's main grid, PDO can supply power back to the country.

PDO strives to operate in an environmentally responsible and sustainable fashion.

To be a more sustainable



business, PDO has launched a Lean program to streamline operations, cut waste, eradicate inefficiency, and avoid duplication of activities.

"Our goal is to meet our electricity needs and support a stable grid.

To do that, we needed an effective system management that allows us to be proactive," said Zahir al Busaidi, infrastructure power systems department manager at PDO.

"The addition of GE Digital's

software will support the efficient management of our microgrid to keep our business operating and assist in the preparation for challenges and opportunities with renewables in the future," he added.

GE Digital's AEMS is designed to integrate with electric utility functions, such as plant and field management, asset and maintenance management, IT internal services, security services, substation automation systems, HVDC line control, power plant

control systems, and other EMS interchanges.

"The global economic landscape will change rapidly in the next ten years and it is critical to incorporate renewable energy sources into all grids," said Jim Walsh, general manager of GE Digital's grid software business.

He added, "Industrial companies like Petroleum Development Oman are utilizing contemporary digital tools to deliver a reliable, more sustainable microgrid to support their core operations."

Oman sells 1mn barrels crude via DME auction

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The sultanate's Ministry of Energy and Minerals sold a cargo of 1mn barrels of Oman crude via the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) auctions platform. The barrel cargo of

June-loading Oman crude was awarded at a premium of US\$3.69 per barrel over the June official selling price of Oman crude.

The DME Auctions platform saw 17 participants with 31 active bids placed during the two-minute period.

A total volume of 43.6mn barrels was auctioned, generating US\$21.69mn in premiums, the DME statement said.

The official selling price of Oman crude is calculated on a volume-weighted average of daily DME Oman crude marker prices over the month.

DME Auctions aims to provide commodity market participants with the flexibility to buy and sell physical commodities via an electronic auction system.

This offers customers the advantage of a transparent platform to trade commodities for immediate delivery.



Acquisition of RSA Middle East will be positive for NLGIC ratings: AM Best

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Global credit rating agency AM Best has placed the financial strength rating of 'B++' and the long-term issuer credit rating of 'bbb+' of National Life and General Insurance Co (NLGIC) under review with positive implications.

This rating action follows the announcement on April 4 that NLGIC will acquire 100 per cent shareholding in Royal & Sun Alliance Insurance Middle East Limited (RSA Middle East), AM Best said in a statement.

RSA Middle East is a joint venture formed by RSA Insurance Group, with majority shareholding, and regional shareholders in the Middle East. It has operations in Bahrain, the UAE, Oman and Saudi Arabia.

NLGIC is expected to execute the transaction for the 100-per cent acquisition of RSA Middle East in two parts. In first part, it will acquire 50 per cent shareholding in RSA Middle East from Sun Alliance Insurance Overseas Ltd, a fully-owned entity of RSA Insurance Group. In second part

of the transaction, NLGIC will exchange the remaining shares of RSA Middle East, owned by reputable Saudi shareholders, for new shares to be issued by NLGIC.

As a result of the acquisition, RSA Middle East will become a wholly-owned subsidiary of NLGIC.

This transaction, which is subject to regulatory approval, would make the Saudi shareholders collectively the second-largest shareholders of NLGIC after Ominvest, AM Best said.

The rating action reflects the positive impact AM Best expects the transaction to have on NLGIC's business profile. 'Particularly, the agreement is expected to help NLGIC reach new markets, expand its product offering and strengthen its position in the Middle East region,' AM Best said.

'The ratings will remain under review until the transaction is formally completed, which is expected to happen by the third quarter of 2022, and AM Best can assess the definitive impact on NLGIC's credit fundamentals,' the ratings agency added.

IMF downgrades eurozone growth forecast for 2022 on Ukraine war

Paris, France – The war in Ukraine will weigh heavily upon economic growth in the eurozone, the IMF said Tuesday, as the conflict wreaks havoc on energy prices and the manufacturing sector.

The International Monetary Fund revised down its eurozone growth forecast for 2022 to 2.8 per cent from 3.9 per cent in its January estimate, with the region's biggest economy, Germany, taking a heavy hit.

"The main channel through which the war in Ukraine and sanctions on Russia affect the euro area economy is rising global energy prices and energy security," the IMF said in its World Economic Outlook report.

The war has hurt some countries like Italy and Germany more than other European nations because they had "relatively large manufacturing sectors and greater dependence on energy imports from Russia", the IMF said.

Germany's economy is now expected to grow by 2.1 per cent this year, down from the previous forecast of 3.8 per cent. Italy will also drop, with growth of 2.3 per cent compared to an earlier forecast of 3.8 per cent.

After Moscow's invasion in February, the West, including eurozone countries, imposed sanctions on Russia's financial system, aviation sector and other major parts of the economy.

Nearly two months later, prices are rising. Oil remains above US\$100 a barrel after reaching historic highs in March, while the price of gas, wheat, aluminium, nickel and other raw materials have soared.

As a result, consumer price



Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas poses for a photo outside the IMF headquarters in Washington, DC on Tuesday (AFP)

inflation in the eurozone has surged to 7.5 per cent, an all-time high.

Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas, the IMF's chief economist, said the

As a result, "we would have a fairly significant downward revision of the economic forecasts for the euro zone."

If domestic consumption and

the fact that inflation is concentrated in certain sectors... it is not necessary to start tightening monetary policy very quickly."

The drag from the war in Ukraine comes as the eurozone economy was set to fully recover from the pandemic in 2020.

The IMF had predicted last October that eurozone growth would be 4.3 per cent in 2022 before lowering the forecast in January due to a global supply chain crisis and the emergence of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

The IMF's latest report also lowered the eurozone's growth outlook for 2023 to 2.3 per cent, down from 2.5 per cent previously.

But it slightly increased its forecast for Germany to 2.7 per cent next year. Italy's growth, however, will slow further to 1.7 per cent.

AFP

The International Monetary Fund revised down its eurozone growth forecast for 2022 to 2.8 per cent from 3.9 per cent in its January estimate, with the region's biggest economy, Germany, is now expected to grow by 2.1 per cent this year

forecast calls for a slowdown but no recession in the eurozone.

The main risk to the outlook is an escalation of sanctions, in particular an embargo on Russian gas, which would cause a "quite severe" slowdown over the short term in countries like Germany that depend most on those imports, Gourinchas told AFP in an interview in Washington.

confidence decline, that could also slow growth, which would put the European Central Bank in a "tricky situation."

The ECB last month slashed its growth forecast as well, and warned inflation will soar in the eurozone area, but it has yet to follow the US Federal Reserve in raising interest rates to tame prices. Gourinchas said, "For now, given the slowdown and

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بؤوال
BANKING AND CAPITAL MARKET
2022

Bank Muscat Najahi holds meets in S Batinah, Dhofar



Bank Muscat continues to strengthen its partnership with micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) through a number of initiatives by Retail Enterprises (Najahi) as the bank progresses further on its customer-centric vision. Regular interactions, communications and customer meetings are an integral part of the bank's quest to serve its customers better, every day. As part of this strategy, Najahi recently hosted two iftars for its customers in the governorates of South Batinah and

Dhofar. Both the events were attended by a large number of Najahi customers and senior officials from the bank. Earlier, the bank organised similar iftar events for its customers in Dhakliyah and North Batinah on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadhan as well as to get feedback and suggestions from them regarding the bank's products and services for the sector. During these events, bank officials are also able to update customers about plans for the future as the bank seeks to

further support the MSME sector, especially micro and small enterprises in their path to becoming bigger players in the Sultanate's economy. Since its inception in 2014, Najahi has been well recognised for the banking services and financial facilities provided, as it has enabled customers to develop and expand their projects, which is in line with the development goals of the Sultanate which aims to contribute to economic diversification, support Omani youth and increase GDP.

Over the years, Najahi has been growing from strength to strength in its role of supporting the MSME sector. Today, the beneficiaries of Najahi's collateral-free financing include businesses operating in retail trading, services, manufacturing and processing, construction, hospitality, travel and tourism, mining and agricultural sectors. It must be noted that Bank Muscat has been continuously supporting the MSME sector through its different initiatives and programmes that view these

businesses as a primary pillar of Oman's plans for economic diversification in alignment with the landmark Oman 2040 Vision. Its landmark Najahi financing products and services continue to promote self-employment among Omani youth, which will strengthen the National Economy in the coming years. For more information about Najahi, please visit the nearest branch or visit <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/najahi/Pages/default.aspx>.

Get assured gold coins at Malabar Gold & Diamonds

Malabar Gold & Diamonds, one among the largest jewellery retailers globally with a strong retail network of 280 outlets spread across the globe has announced the much-awaited festive season offer, 'Gold Promise' giving customers a chance to get assured gold coins on their Gold & Diamond Jewellery purchases. This offer will be valid across all stores of Malabar Gold & Diamonds from April 21 to May3 . Malabar Gold & Diamonds has also unveiled the Festive Jewellery collection, featuring the most eye-catching and unique trends in gold, diamond and precious gem jewellery, bound to captivate jewellery lovers at the best price. The 'Festive Jewellery' collection presents an array of exclusive and stylish designs that are sure to entice jewellery enthusiasts of all age groups and ethnicities. These include Era - Uncut Diamond Jewellery, Precia



- Gem Jewellery, Divine - Indian Heritage Jewellery and Ethnix - Handcrafted Designer Jewellery. Further, the brand has also launched trendy and unique designs within the 'Bella' and 'Elegance'. Through the 'Gold Promise' by Malabar Gold & Diamonds, customers can get a free 1 gm gold coin on purchase of Diamond and precious gem jewellery worth RO500 and 1/2 gm gold coin on purchase of Diamond and precious gem Jewellery worth RO300. All offers are valid until May 3, 2022.

A'Safwah promotes healthy lifestyle with fresh juices

A'Safwah, the market leader in the production and distribution of dairy and beverages in the country, is set to meet the demands of the local market with its wide range of thirst-quenching fresh juices. Delivering both taste and nourishment, A'Safwah's fresh juices have gained increasing popularity, especially with the onset of summer and the holy month of Ramadan. While A'Safwah has been at the forefront of advocating the benefits of adopting a healthy lifestyle, there has also been a shift in consumer preference as they have become more conscious about health and wellness. With many consumers wanting to swap carbonated, nutritionally deficient, and sugary beverages with those that offer more wholesome goodness, A'Safwah's range of fresh juices has become the go-to choice of refreshment. A'Safwah has been expanding its fresh juice portfolio to cater to the preferences of its varied cus-



tomers. Currently, it has all the popular single fruit flavours like apple, guava, lemon, mango, orange, and pineapple and also offers a number of delicious blends like berry mix, kiwi lemon, mixed fruit, and orange carrot. While all its fresh juices are free of artificial colours or flavours, its apple and orange juices also have no added sugar. A'Safwah has set a new benchmark in taste and elevated the nutritional profile of fresh juices. Committed to offering unique flavours to its consumers, A'Safwah also introduced a Tamarind flavour to its line of fresh juices which has been very well-received in the market. Of-

fering a distinct sweet and sour taste, the juice is rich in vitamin C, B-6, calcium, magnesium, iron, and zinc, in addition to fibre, that not only helps improve the digestive system but also flushes out toxins. A'Safwah's fresh tamarind juice has, therefore, been preferred by many during iftar. Made for a variety of occasions, whether an iftar with the family or a quick rejuvenating drink after a long day outdoors, A'Safwah's fresh juices come in generous 1.5 L bottles. Its fresh juices are competitively priced and are readily available in all leading supermarkets and neighbourhood supermarkets.



Hongqi launches Ramadan offer

After the successful inauguration of the brand in Oman, MHD ACERE's latest automotive brand addition, Hongqi, is now launching its first promotional offer. The offer entitled 'The joy of giving' is inspired by the spirit of the holy month that encourages generosity and doing good. 'Befitting benefits' await customers who purchase one of the four luxury models offered by Hongqi in Oman. The offer includes a seven-year warranty for unlimited kilometers, seven years of roadside assistance. The service package is for two year/ 65,000km. In addition, each customer will receive a free car registration for the first year, one year of free insurance coverage for Oman and UAE, and a brand new Apple iPhone 13. This offer is valid from April 10 to June 9, 2022.

The Ramadan offer applies when buying any of the four exquisite Hongqi sedans such as the H5 and H9, or SUVs like the HS5 and HS7. The H5 is an extraordinary compact executive car, with exquisite and advanced appearance, perfect configuration and powerful performance. The exterior and interior in this car collaborate to provide the ultimate luxury experience, featuring a stylish silhouette adorned with 'Wing of Hongqi' greeting light, and the panoramic sunroof which offers an inspiration from nature into your private space. This model offers thrilling performance with acceleration from 0 to 100km/h in 9.7 seconds only, enabled by the brilliant 196 HP and 320 Nm maximum torque producing 1.8 L Turbo engine. Another stunning sedan model from Hongqi is the H9. This astonishing vehicle combines powerful driving force, powerful start, and perfect handling. The H9 model boasts a new design concept called 'oriental artistic conception'. It combines different design elements and details, creating an impressive traditional atmosphere. This beautifully contrasts with the high-tech features such as the full LCD (liquid crystal display) instrument clusters and large

centre console screen lending futuristic sense along with the 12-inch head-up display (HUD) and video-streaming rearview mirror, seats with heating and massage, wireless charging, and many more. In the SUV category, Hongqi HS5 tries to define a sense of luxury that corresponds with aesthetic interests of consumers. This AWD runs on a 2.0 L Turbocharged direct injection petrol engine, perfectly balanced power, fuel consumption and emissions and exerting a maximum of 340 Nm of torque. Along with its dynamic exterior, the Hongqi HS5 greets the driver with the unique Red Flag wings like an eagle spreading its wings. The anterior is extremely comfortable with all means of luxury including premium leather and great dashboard details. The other SUV model, HS7 brings the exclusive off-road mode for the fun of conquest, constant breakthroughs with professional off-road performance powered by the TCS all-wheel power control technology exclusively customized by Bosch. It is equipped with the new generation of 8-speed AMT for comfortable driving experience and excellent fuel economy. The anterior of the HS7 comes with a BOSE 5.1 surround audio system, and double 10.1-inch HD touch displays fitted on seats covered with world-class Nappa leather, which harmonizes with the solid wood decoration, a flagship luxury space is presented to you. Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE - the exclusive distributors of Hongqi vehicles in Oman, said, "We are excited to witness the growing interest in Hongqi as a luxury brand in the region. Hongqi vehicles deliver optimum class and high performance at an incredibly reasonable price. At MHD ACERE, we make sure that our customers get the best experience and after sale service, when they choose Hongqi". For further details on Hongqi's Ramadan offer and different Hongqi models, visit the Hongqi showroom in Azaiba.

Attractive offer available on crossover Changan CS75 Plus

Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment LLC (AGAE), part of Bahwan International Group, has announced an attractive Ramadan offer on crossover Changan CS75 Plus which impresses with premium design, comfortable automotive interior, and highly intelligent configuration. Customers buying CS75 Plus Crossover (2.0 L Turbo Engine, 224 hp, 8 speed AT) are eligible for many benefits as part of the exclusive Ramadan promotion 'Driving Forward This Ramadan'. Ramadan offer 2022 includes: ►Free service (3 years/55,000 km whichever is earlier) PMS ►First year free insurance ►First year free registration ►Free fuel card worth RO50 ►Exclusive Ramadan gift as Apple Watch 7 Series 41mm ►Manufacturer's warranty 6 years/250,000km whichever is earlier The above Ramadan offer is valid for all retail customers pur-

chasing Changan CS75 Plus till May 20, 2022. A spokesperson for AGAE, said, "Changan CS75 Plus has been impressing car enthusiasts for its promising quality of innovation, aesthetics, functionality and stability. The model makes driving feel like winning with its stunning design, premium interior and intelligent features. The CS75 Plus is loaded with smart and innovative features that aim to elevate the confidence and sophistication in every drive. In CS75 Plus Radar based safety features and Automatic parking is one of the unique features in Luxury variant. This Ramadan offer is guaranteed to make the buying experience special and affordable for customers." **Free service package** Customers purchasing Changan CS75 Plus can avail Periodic Maintenance Service of three years/55,000km and includes only 10,000km Service Intervals.



Free assured fuel card Customers of Changan CS75 will get a free fuel card worth RO50 upon purchase. **Exclusive gift** Customers buying Changan CS75 are eligible for Apple Watch Series 7. **Free insurance** Free first year insurance (Oman and UAE) on purchase of

Changan CS75; for private registration only. **Free registration (1st year only)** Free first year registration on purchase of Changan CS75. **Manufacturer's Warranty** Customers of Changan CS75 can enjoy manufacturer's warranty for 6 years/250,000km whichever is earlier.

Compact crossover Changan CS75 Plus With its premium design, comfortable automotive interior, and highly intelligent configuration, the compact crossover Changan CS75 Plus which comes in luxury and sport variants offers a host of special features. The Changan CS75 Plus 2WD features a more sloped roofline and more power. Under the hood, it has a 2.0-litre turbocharged 4-cylinder engine,

mated to an 8-speed automatic transmission with a power of 224 hp and torque of 360 Nm. With a wheelbase of 2710 mm, and it measures 4700 mm in length, 1865 mm in width and 1710 mm in height. Standard features in the CS75 Plus include power windows, central locking, cruise control, dual-zone auto A/C, 8 speakers, multifunctional steering wheel, USB+AUX ports, 12-inch screen, Bluetooth, 360 camera, leather ventilated seats, sunroof, fog lamps, parking sensors LED headlamps, panoramic roof, keyless entry and start, and 19-inch wheels. Safety features includes dual front, side and curtain airbags, ABS, and hill assist. Its Blue Core Powertrain Technology, based on the principles of power, clean and quiet, provides owners a highly efficient and energy saving performance. **Futuristic design** CS75 Plus features a more

streamlined body with flowing lines and geometric patterns, creating the overall appearance of a vehicle from the future. **Advanced safety and technology** To instill the confidence and sophistication in every drive, CS75 Plus offers a range of intelligent driving technologies and advanced safety features. **Elevated extravagance** To create a premium drive experience, CS75 Plus seamlessly integrates luxurious interior with high-tech convenience features, coupled with ample space. **Changan CS75 Plus 2.0 T B AT Luxury** Changan CS75 Plus 2.0 T B AT Luxury includes the features of CS75 Plus 2.0 T 8 AT Sport features.

IKEA to open its Oman flagship store in June

Swedish home furnishings giant IKEA, has announced the opening of its first store in Oman in June 2022. Spanning over 25,000sqm, the two-level flagship store is set to launch in Lulu Group's Oman Avenues Mall.

Bringing customers affordability and a comfortable shopping experience, the new IKEA will be located in the centre of the city making it more accessible for many people. It will feature inspirational room setups and creative solutions for visitors with over 9000 articles across living room, bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, and other home furnishing accessories. Leveraging digital innovation, Oman's first IKEA store will also be available virtually, making it easier for shoppers to browse and buy the latest products.

The new IKEA store will be home to some of the most innovative

customer experience solutions, including wall projectors to facilitate planning and product selection. Throughout the main showroom, digital signage and in-store technology will help customers find the right furnishings, visualise room setups and schedule deliveries in simple, easy steps. Oman's first IKEA will also comprise a 394-seat restaurant, directly connected to the shopping centre for easy access and convenience.

As one of the world's largest food providers, IKEA is taking the next step towards making healthy and sustainable food more affordable and accessible to the many people. The retailer hopes to inspire better food choices at its Oman store, with a food and beverage range that includes IKEA's popular plant-based meatballs, ASC-certified salmon, and UTZ-certified coffee. Featuring self-service kiosks, the IKEA restaurant extends into the mall for more seating options for customers. Customers can shop from the Swedish Food Market for their favourite Scandinavian ingredients and enjoy fresh pastries, cookies and more at the IKEA Bistro.

Vinod Jayan, managing director - IKEA UAE, Egypt, Qatar and Oman, said, "Al-Futtaim IKEA's first store in the Sultanate of Oman reflects our commitment to making sustainable living affordable and accessible, while creating a better everyday life for the many people. As part of the



Al-Futtaim Group, we live by the same ethos of enriching the lives and aspirations of our customers at every turn and we aim to do this for our customers across Oman. We are now closer to our Omani customers and are confident that the experience and home furnishing ideas we provide at IKEA will inspire our customers to refresh their homes."

Designed to have a positive impact on the environment and promote sustainable living, IKEA's first Oman store will contribute to the sultanate's Green Agenda with innovative solutions that help reduce waste, save energy, and conserve natural resources. It will also comprise electronically commutated motors that run alternating current power supply to provide 30 per cent more efficiency than conventional air conditioning,

with condensation to be used for the mall's landscaping. Moreover, the store will be powered by LED bulbs created to reduce consumption by 70-80 per cent.

The new IKEA store in Oman will also provide its customers with the Click and Collect service to enjoy a convenient and contactless shopping experience.

The 'Click & Collect' works in three simple steps. First, customers need to choose their preferred time and place for delivery. Secondly, they receive an email and an SMS once the order is ready and finally, they can have the order picked up from the store on the same or next day, without getting out of the car.

Customers can access the 'Click & Collect' service through the IKEA website and mobile app. This service is available for all online paid orders.

Blessed Ramadan with Muzn Ramadan offer

Extending the financing opportunities available to its customers, Muzn, National Bank of Oman's (NBO) pioneering Islamic banking window, has made owning and driving your dream car more affordable and enjoyable this Ramadan. With an increased tenor of up to 10 years and special Ramadan rates starting from 4.45 per cent, customers (Omani nationals and residents) can now avail new and second hand car financing, from Muzn at very low monthly installments. The offer comes with a 25 per cent discount on V-KOOL products to help customers protect their paintwork and reduce temperatures within the vehicle, making driving a pleasurable experience.

The special Ramadan rates are also applicable on Muzn Consumer goods financing allowing customers to refurnish their homes at low installments and avail a special discounts on VKOOL home products.

Salima al Marzouqi, chief Islamic banking officer, said, "Muzn's extended tenor offers



customers more options to spread the payments on their new car from the previous seven years to ten under the concept of Murabaha. This helps to make a large purchase more affordable by reducing the monthly installment while providing peace of mind. Our innovative Islamic banking products are services are designed to support customers in planning and managing their financial lives while maintaining their lifestyle with Sharia'a firmly at the core of every service we offer."

Oman's first Islamic Window,

Muzn offers a growing range of fully Sharia'a-compliant banking options including current and savings accounts, privilege banking, as well as a dedicated Kids Wakala account. Muzn also provides a Sharia'a-compliant Corporate Banking solution which covers trade, capital and treasury products, as well as project finance. Each service matches the values of account-holders and is personalised to offer a range of value-added benefits including special offers at a variety of merchants and airport lounge access for privilege customers.

Indian artist Kavitha makes special Tanjore mural to mark Muscat Yog Mahotsav

To mark the launch of 'Muscat Yog Mahotsav 2022 - 75 Days, 75 Events' being organised by the Indian Embassy in association with yoga organisation in the sultanate, noted Oman based artist Dr Kavitha Ramakrishna created a 24-carat gold special Tanjore artwork on surya namaskar (sun salutation) which is a vibrant technique within the yogic repertoire.

The special artwork was unveiled by H E Amit Narang Ambassador of India to Oman during the launch of Muscat Yog Mahotsav at the Indian Embassy premises. In the run-up to the 18th International Day of Yoga, Indian Embassy is organising the unique Muscat Yog Mahotsav - a festival of peace, health and wellbeing.

The Muscat Yog Mahotsav will feature over 75 curated yoga events across Oman for 75 days till June 21, 2022 as part of larger celebration of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav.

Dr Kavitha Ramakrishna said, "It was an honour to create this



24-carat gold Tanjore artwork on surya namaskar, combining a sequence of 12 elegantly linked asanas. For the Tanjore piece I depicted the different postures of surya namaskar which is considered the king of asanas. Known for their classiness, rich colours, gold embellishments and attention to detail, Tanjore paintings are a class apart. I consider surya namaskar too as a therapeutic practice where yoga mat becomes the canvas. The intention is to stay present with the breath while doing the Tanjore painting

as well as the yoga practice. It has been fulfilling to bring both art forms together for this art work."

She added, "I would like to thank H E Amit Narang, the Ambassador of India and Divya Narang for unveiling the work as part of Muscat Yog Mahotsav which is an incredible idea conceptualised by the Indian Embassy. I thank them for the opportunity to be part of this festival which celebrates yoga. From an ancient spiritual practice to a modern way of staying

fit, the powerful ancient Indian practice of yoga has indeed crossed many boundaries and such festivals will promote the concept of yoga further."

Dr Kavitha has been determinedly promoting India's cultural export yoga as a practice of wellbeing and spirituality. Leading a personal initiative, she has been working relentlessly to popularise and restore the ancient practice of yoga and surya namaskar.

For the last many years Dr Kavitha has been working relentlessly to promote yoga, art and culture and has authored a yoga book *Tamoghna*. Kavitha's extensively researched book *Tamoghna* which touches upon the history of yogic philosophy, essence of yoga practice and deals specifically with vast benefits of surya namaskar has received glowing response. For her expertise in yoga and community work Dr Kavitha was awarded honorary doctorate from the Yoga University of the Americas in Florida.

Indian expatriate from Muscat becomes finalist in Mrs. International

Neelam Singh from Muscat has been announced as one of the finalists in the prestigious Mrs. International beauty pageant conducted by Jeo King & Queen. The Pageant is hosted in Thailand this year and the grand finale will be held on May 15.

Neelam is a nutritionist, wellness consultant, and a mother. She is also a life therapy coach who helps people to live their best lives by breaking the chains of stress, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. She is a professional nutritionist and has been working as a wellness consultant, clinic manager in Muscat for more than ten years. Neelam has been recognised by many organisations for her work. She has keen interest in hand made and ethnic textile clothing and artefacts. Neelam plans to uplift and promote the local artisans community of Oman and India to international platforms.

Jeo King & Queen is one of the major organisations that hosts famous beauty pageants. The Jeo King & Queen Mrs. India International Beauty Pageant is at the top of its list.



Neelam Singh

These pageants provide women and men with beauty and smart minds with the opportunity to get well-deserved acclaim. It is a noteworthy attempt in bringing individuals from all cultures and communities together to celebrate femininity. Eminent people from around the globe gather to assess their potential and talents. The organisers of Jeo King & Queen Mrs. India International assesses the competitors based on four major criteria: Personality, talent, confidence, and intelligence.

Neelam will make herself available for the contest from May 3 and hopes to make it to the finals, which will be held at Phi Phi islands, Thailand.

Dhofar Automotive includes Fiat 500 DolceVita and Alfa Romeo Stelvio in its Ramadan offers

Dhofar Automotive, the official distributor of Jeep, Dodge, Chrysler, RAM, Fiat and Alfa Romeo vehicles in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced that particular models under renowned Italian brands Fiat and Alfa Romeo will be included in the recently launched Ramadan offers.

The offers include incredible benefits that comprises huge cash gifts and up to five years/120,000km free service on select models, five-year warranty, five-year roadside assistance, free registration and several value additions as well.

As part of the offer period, which began this month and continues until May 30, the Italian brand, Fiat 500 DolceVita model will be available with a monthly instalment starting from RO99 in addition to a warranty of five years/120,000km, free registration for the first year, and five-year roadside assistance.

The Alfa Romeo Stelvio is also available with attractive prices starting from RO25,980 in addition to five years/120,000km warranty and maintenance, free registration for the first year and five years roadside assistance.

Commenting on these incredible



new offers, Hatem El-Nagar, general manager at Dhofar Automotive, said, "The vintage Italian brands Fiat and Alfa Romeo have been distinguished for decades by the superior quality of their designs and the level of craftsmanship that they employ without compromising the performance levels within their respective classes and the advanced technology that meets the aspirations of sports driving enthusiasts, giving them a real passion for driving. Dhofar Automotive presents these attractive offers on the two highly sought-after models from Fiat and Alfa Romeo. With the Alfa Romeo's

sporting characteristics that satisfy the needs of our valued customers who are fans of sophistication, luxury and a sporty performance that is synonymous with the brand for decades, and the city's most popular Fiat model that is unmistakably Italian in its approach to driving with its capabilities for daily use, the offers from Dhofar Automotive on these cars are too good to miss. The offers also come with a generous package of after-sales service that are on par with international standards, providing owners with peace of mind and the pleasure of driving their beautiful Italian cars."

Fiat

The Fiat 500 DolceVita model is one of the most prominent Italian vintage car brands that represents the values of Italian elegance and lifestyle, design, art, aesthetics of everyday life, taste, imagination and enjoyment. These are the characteristics of the vintage Italian persona and are aimed at customers who look for exclusivity and elegance in their cars. The interior of the 500 DolceVita is inspired by a marine theme with its wood dashboard and contrasting beauty line. The car is powered by a 100-hp 1.4-liter four-cylinder engine with a DualLogic transmission, and is

truly a unique model with exceptional features that is designed specifically for the city.

Alfa Romeo

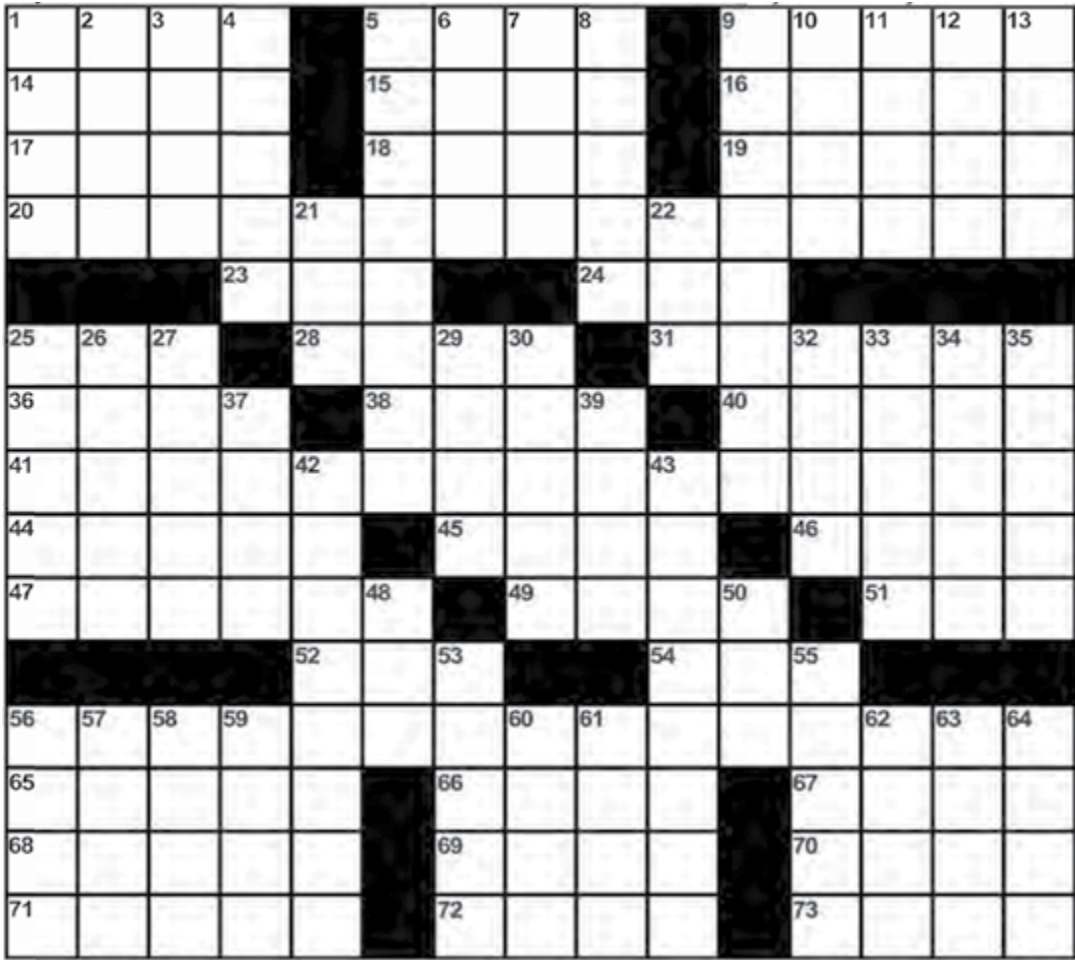
Stelvio is the brand's first SUV with a powerful and distinctive design that grabs attention wherever it is, this is evident in the Stelvio Quadrifoglio which includes design features that create a sportier look, as well as special technical features for the car.

The vehicle is equipped with an exclusive aluminium 2.9 V6 Bi-Turbo petrol engine that delivers power of 510hp, generates a torque of 600 Nm and accelerates from 0 to 100km/h in just 3.8 seconds, with a best-in-class top speed of 283km/h. And it has already set a new world record for its class on the iconic Nürburgring at 7 minutes and 51.7 seconds.

"Taking advantage of this offer is a great opportunity for car enthusiasts, as it is now possible to own a Fiat or Alfa Romeo with easy and affordable instalments plus up to 5 years of free services, along with other valuable benefits and guaranteed cash gifts." He added.

The offers from Dhofar Automotive are only valid on select models.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) _ sapiens
5) Applaud
9) Asparagus unit
14) Homecoming guest, briefly
15) Make over
16) Prefix for "sonic" or "violet"
17) Part of a Monopoly set
18) Bun warmer
19) Maple bar or apple fritter
20) President who was the son of a president
23) Break bread
24) Ages and ages
25) What a pilot might announce, briefly
28) Classroom assistant
31) Rub the wrong way
36) Drop, to an editor
38) Congers
40) Police car's alarm
41) President on the
44) Like a vampire's face, stereotypically
45) Sky box?
46) Dietary, in ads

47) Supplies with better weapons
49) Dress in India
51) Affirmative action?
52) When dark comes o'er the land
54) Museum exhibit
56) President associated with peanuts
65) Dickens' Heep
66) Eight, on a sundial
67) Jason's mythical ship
68) Chop finely
69) Occasional needle point?
70) Barristers' accoutrements
71) Walkways
72) Dispatch, as a dragon
73) Misplace

DOWN

1) Muslim pilgrimage
2) Varied assortment
3) Scads
4) Signs of things to come
5) Raker of chips
6) Jeans name
7) Yemeni port
8) Explorer_ de Leon
9) Ethiopian's neighbor

10) Fail to tread lightly
11) Volcano in Sicily
12) Calla lily family
13) Things to exterminate, to many
21) Sine_ non
22) Hither companion
25) Painter Degas
26) Far from long-winded
27) Hello or goodbye
29) Dealer's handful
30) Clothing designer Perry
32) Place for dead presidents?
33) Coach
34) Slow, musically
35) Broke off
37) "Be it_ so humble ..."
39) Words before "date" or "trap"
42) Entangles, as in a net
43) Truthfulness
48) Observe
50) Nest egg feature
53) Church parts
55) It's a drag in fishing circles
56) Checkers maneuver
57) Opera highlight
58) After-dinner

confection
59) A head
60) 100 dinars
61) "Mona_"

62) Small band
63) Baker's dozen?
64) Gift on "The Bachelor"

NOTE PAD

SELMAPERDADS
ATEAMAMAINFOP
PHILIPPINESGPA
AGOUTIOTHER
SUBROSAPLEASE
CRUISECRAVEN
AGRABRACEIMF
LEKSTRIPEDSOL
PSIQUIETETUI
NEUTERSAVANT
GUAVASLEGENDS
UNFEDSHAMAN
SPACOTEDIVOIRE
TISAWAREEUROS
ONORERANSTEEP

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

It's not just your loved ones who are pleased with what you've been able to manage lately. It's also the higher-ups. They've been watching to see if you're truly ready for a bump up the career ladder. You're worthy of both their attention and affection, and you've proven it. So why not let loose and do just a bit of celebrating? You've been toying the line for a while. Isn't it about time you were nice to you for a change?

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Someone you've had your eye on recently will be more than happy to keep you up late tonight. All you have to do is be sure to make yourself available. That might mean you'll be tired at work tomorrow, but you've probably heard of power naps. And you're probably familiar with the concept of resting up, having some coffee, and then heading out to continue astounding the masses. Your mission now is to keep up that reputation. Ready?

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

Okay, so you might be taken by surprise. Love doesn't run on a schedule, does it? Especially not this kind of thing. You're at the beginning of a period of meeting new and fascinating individuals. When one of them appeals to more than just your intellect, who's to say how it will end up? Only you and your soon-to-be significant other, and you'll do what you can to make sure the two of you walk off into the sunset together.

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Something is going on behind the scenes, and you've been privy to it for some time now. This doesn't mean you have free licence to let everyone know about it, especially anyone you're sure isn't already involved. It might be tough to keep quiet, but you need to do it, and you'll be proud of yourself if you do. Besides, it's an honor to be told a secret. Don't make the teller feel foolish.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

A relationship you've recently begun is more than ready for that extra step. So if you're thinking of taking a giant leap toward intimacy, don't hesitate. You can do it now, and it will work out well. If this just so happens to be someone who's been hurt in the past, however, you might want to cool your heels a while. There's no reason to share anyone's affections. You're loving and compassionate, and they're lucky to have you.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Something very unexpected and exciting could be coming your way today. This might mean a new romance in the offing, a new job opportunity landing in your lap, or maybe just some wonderful news you've been waiting for. No matter what it is, it will bring a lot of fun into your life. Any scheduling hassles it causes won't be a big deal. Any inconvenience will be worth it. Your only task right now is to open up your mind and get ready.

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

If you find yourself staring across the office at someone you've known for a long, long time, and you know it's not the way a friend looks at a friend, things might be changing. After all, haven't you been thinking about this for a while? If the answer is yes, then by all means explore the possibilities. Just be sure you can still be friends if it doesn't work out.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Ready to let go and let the cosmos handle things between family members? Well, it's about time, especially because there's only so much you can do to solve this problem. Once you've exhausted those efforts, it's up to them to take the ball and run with it. If they do, so much the better. After all, you can't live someone else's life for them.

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You never run short on charm, and you've never been known to be at a loss for words. At the moment, those talents will come in extremely handy, even more so than usual, especially since the rest of the world won't be quite so amply endowed. Go ahead and let each and every charming, enticing syllable slip persuasively from your lips. Just don't use this gift for anything selfish. That's the kind of karma you don't need.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

The heavens have decided to give you your turn at being not just charming but also extremely persuasive. Of course, that's something you're more than acquainted with, so you're no stranger to this power. At the moment, you'll be even better at it, however, so staying calm and keeping to the rules of etiquette won't be tough. Just be fair. It's what you do best, and what others expect of you.

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Ready for that long-cherished dream to become a reality? Sure you are, and bet you're thrilled. Some changes, definitely positive, are brewing on the job front. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to get out of the way and let that new energy happen. That might sound easy, but you know how you get when things start to spin out of control. This time around, assist it.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Are you ready to dig in your heels and defend what you believe in? It's probably the case that you're quite eager to do it! If you're up against someone who isn't as well armed as you, verbally speaking, try not to hit too hard and too far below the belt, especially if a simple talking-to will do the trick. Why hurt someone irreparably when a bit of honey is all that's necessary?



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. In terms of astronomy what is an NEO?

A. An asteroid on a collision course with another body
B. A space probe
C. Any small body in the Solar System whose orbit brings it into proximity with Earth
D. A newly discovered space object

02. According to The Mamas and the Papas, which day cannot be trusted?

A. Monday
B. Tuesday
C. Wednesday
D. Thursday

03. What usually powers the spray action of paint spray cans in the 21st century?

A. Butane
B. Hydrocarbons
C. Unsaturated compounds of hydrogen, fluorine and carbon (hydrofluoroolefins)
D. Hydrogen

Answers: 1.C 2.A 3.C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

I	C	E	I
S	D	C	T
O	T	N	E
I	M	I	A

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

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

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

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

Iran Guards ‘to remain’ under US terror list

Washington, US - US President Joe Biden seems increasingly determined to keep the ‘terrorist’ designation on Iran’s Revolutionary Guards, which Tehran is demanding be removed before it returns to a deal on curbing its nuclear programme.

“Each side is just hoping that the other would blink first,” Ali Vaez, an Iran expert from the International Crisis Group, a conflict-prevention think tank, told AFP. Negotiations opened a year ago in Vienna to revive the landmark 2015 agreement that was supposed to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Under the presidency of Donald Trump, the United States walked out of the agreement in 2018 and reinstated economic sanctions against Tehran, which in response, shrugged off restrictions imposed on its nuclear activities.

Biden wants Iran to return to the agreement, provided that Iran resumes those commitments. Despite early hopes, the talks are deadlocked and the emissaries have not been in the Austrian capital since March 11.

However, a draft compromise is still on the table, after resolution of most of the thorniest issues. The fate of the Guards is the final obstacle blocking the talks: the Islamic Republic is demanding the re-



US President Joe Biden salutes while stepping off Air Force One upon arrival at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland on Tuesday (AFP)

moval of its elite ideological force from the US blacklist of ‘foreign terrorist organisations’.

Change of direction
The Iranians argue that it was only added to the list by Trump to increase pressure on them

after the US exit from the 2015 agreement, also known by its acronym, the JCPOA. But the Americans have shot back that the subject is in no way related to the nuclear issue. “If Iran wants sanctions lifting that goes beyond the JCPOA,

they’ll need to address concerns of ours that go beyond the JCPOA,” State Department spokesman Ned Price said this week. He added that Iran should negotiate in ‘good faith’ and reciprocity. The United States

has said it does not negotiate in public and had avoided making any clear statement on the fate of the Revolutionary Guards’ status. But Price’s comments appeared to confirm that the Biden administration was hardening its

position against removing the designation after a split between its diplomatic fringe, allied with part of the military, and the political wing of the White House. The former had favored some kind of gesture toward the Guards on the grounds that dropping the group from the blacklist would have few real-world consequences, while the latter feared criticism from Republicans before the November midterm elections. Questioned at the beginning of April, Secretary of State Antony Blinken gave a first indication of a toughening stance by saying that the Revolutionary Guards were indeed, in his eyes, a ‘terrorist organisation’. “I’m not overly optimistic at the prospects of actually getting an agreement to conclusion,” he told NBC News. Influential Washington Post columnist David Ignatius then reported that Biden was preparing to rule out the organisation’s removal from the blacklist.

the Guards while keeping their overseas branch, the Quds Force, on the blacklist. But privately, US officials are suggesting that even such a compromise as that may no longer be on the table. Vaez recognises that any gesture toward Iran on such a sensitive issue ‘would be used by the opponents and critics to crucify the Biden administration’ by denouncing its weakness in the face of such a sworn enemy of the United States. Making matters worse, the Revolutionary Guards back other US foes - such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, or the Yemeni Houthis rebels, or even some Iraqi militias - and have been blamed for numerous attacks against US soldiers or interests in the Middle East. Several elected officials within the president’s own Democratic camp are also opposed to their removal from the blacklist. “And that is the political cost that I think the president is reluctant to pay,” said Vaez, who, however, warns that a failure to reach a deal will also exact a high political cost. “The Republicans are bound to accuse him of allowing Iran to become a virtual nuclear weapons state under his watch now,” predicted the expert. AFP



Israeli forces fire tear gas at Palestinian protesters in the village of Burqa in the north of the occupied West Bank on Tuesday (AFP)

Blinken urges Palestinians, Israel to ‘end the cycle of violence’

Washington, US - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged Israeli and Palestinian leaders on Tuesday to ‘end the cycle of violence’ after a sharp escalation in tensions between the two sides in recent days.

In separate calls with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas and Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, Blinken stressed ‘the importance of Israelis and Palestinians working to end the cycle of violence in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza by exercising restraint and refraining from actions that escalate tensions’, the State Department said.

He also urged both sides to exercise ‘restraint’ and refrain ‘from actions that escalate tensions’ including at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound, Islam’s third-holiest site, but known to Jews as the Temple Mount - Judaism’s holiest place - in Jerusalem’s Israeli-annexed Old City.

In his call with Lapid, Blinken reiterated the US government’s ‘steadfast commitment’ to Israel’s security and condemned recent rocket attacks from Gaza.

In his call with Abbas, Blinken affirmed the US commitment to improving Palestinians’ quality of life.

But with both leaders, Blinken urged for a two-state solution.

The State Department announced on Tuesday evening

that Yael Lempert, assistant secretary for near eastern affairs, would travel to Jordan, Israel, the West Bank and Egypt for talks aimed at ‘reducing tensions’ in the region. Her trip will last from Tuesday until April 26.

Antony Blinken urged both sides to exercise restraint and refrain from actions that escalate tensions

Israel carried out its first air strike on the Gaza Strip in months early on Tuesday, in response to a rocket fired from the Palestinian enclave after a week-end of violence around the Jerusalem holy site.

The strikes come after weeks of mounting violence, with a total of 23 Palestinians and Arab-Israe

lis killed, including assailants who targeted Israelis in four deadly attacks. The violence, coinciding with the Jewish Passover festival as well as the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, has sparked fears of a repeat of last year’s events, when similar circumstances sparked an 11-day war that levelled parts of Gaza.

AFP

UK court issues order to extradite Assange to US

London, UK - A UK court on Wednesday issued a formal order to extradite WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to the United States to face trial over the publication of secret files relating to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

The decision now rests with interior minister Priti Patel, although Assange may still appeal within 14 days of any decision to approve the extradition.

The ruling on Wednesday by a magistrate in central London brings the long-running legal saga in the UK courts closer to a conclusion.

But Assange’s lawyers have vowed to make representations to Patel and potentially launch further appeals on other points in the case.

“No appeal to the High Court



Former leader of Britain’s opposition Labour party Jeremy Corbyn addresses supporters of Julian Assange outside Westminster Magistrates court in London on Wednesday (AFP)

has yet been filed by him in respect of the other important issues he raised previously,” his lawyers Birnberg Peirce Solicitors said in a statement last month. “That separate process of ap-

peal has, of course, yet to be initiated.” Assange was last month denied permission to appeal to the UK Supreme Court against moves to extradite him to the US, where he could face a lifetime in

prison. Washington wants to put him on trial in connection with the publication of 500,000 secret military files relating to the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

UK Tory MPs hold Johnson’s fate in their hands

London, UK - Boris Johnson has survived the initial fallout from becoming the first British prime minister to be fined for breaking the law, but his long-term position remains precarious, analysts said on Wednesday.

The embattled UK leader offered a ‘full apology’ on Tuesday after being penalised for breaching COVID lockdown laws by attending a brief celebration of his birthday in 2020, but defied calls to resign. However, the so-called ‘partygate’ scandal shows little sign of abating.

Johnson faces further possible fines as police continue their probe into numerous rules-breaching events in Downing Street, while his ruling Conservatives look set to be punished in local elections next month.

And once police have concluded their investigation, a senior civil servant’s detailed report on the scandal will be published in full, which seems likely to increase the political pressure.

Once-mutinuous Conservative MPs have in recent weeks rallied around their leader as the war in Ukraine and the growing cost-of-living crisis diverted attention away from the furore.

But commentators are ques-



Britain’s PM Boris Johnson reacts after apologising to MPs for the ‘partygate’ fine in the House of Commons, in London, on Tuesday (AFP)

tioning whether Johnson, 57, can maintain that support if he is repeatedly fined, his party fares poorly in the May 5 nationwide polls and further details of parties emerge.

“A lot more fines and a lot more headlines might change the view of more voters and that in turn might change the mind of Conservative MPs if they do very badly in the elections,” Anand Menon, a politics professor at King’s College London, told AFP. “He’s clearly willing and able to brazen some things out in a way other, earlier prime ministers probably weren’t... I don’t think he’s superhuman, though.”

As a possible sign of things to come, Justice Minister David Wolfson resigned from the gov-

ernment on Wednesday, citing ‘the scale, context and nature’ of the rule breaches.

‘His fate’

Johnson’s position was hanging by a thread earlier this year following a stream of controversies since last summer that culminated in ‘partygate’ and an increasingly rebellious mood among his MPs.

Several Conservative lawmakers publicly withdrew their support for his leadership, with more reportedly writing letters of no-confidence in him to the party’s 1922 Committee.

If the grouping of back-benchers receives at least 54 such letters from Johnson’s 360 MPs, it would spark a confidence

vote and his possible removal as leader.

“Boris Johnson will remain PM so long as he... retains the confidence of the Conservative group of MPs,” Robert Hazell, of University College London’s Constitution Unit, explained. “It is they who will decide his fate.”

Johnson is expected to face lawmakers when they return from their Easter break next week to explain why he repeatedly insisted in the House of Commons that no lockdown rules had been broken.

Knowingly misleading parliament is a breach of government ministers’ code of conduct, which states they should resign as a result. Hannah White, of the Institute for Government think-tank, told the BBC that Johnson’s refusal to do so ‘puts us in a very difficult situation’. “If it is now henceforth precedent that if you break the law as a minister, you don’t automatically have to resign, that’s... quite a difficult precedent to have been set,” she said.

‘Anger’

White noted that Johnson was hoping voters’ anger over ‘partygate’ had dissipated.

But Britons across the country made huge sacrifices during the pandemic, including not being able to attend loved one’s funerals. Opinion polls suggest that many remain furious at the behaviour in Downing Street.

A snap survey on Tuesday by YouGov found 57 per cent of respondents thought Johnson should resign after having been fined. “They are able to see that Boris Johnson has done a good job on Ukraine but that anger about ‘partygate’ has continued throughout the entire time,” James Johnson, a Conservative pollster, told BBC radio.

“I think we’re going to see this really light that anger up all over again,” he said. It would be ‘de-luded’ to think the Tories could avoid fallout from the scandal at the ballot box, he added on Twitter. London Metropolitan Police, which is conducting the ‘partygate’ probe, said on Tuesday over 50 fines had been issued so far. The initial March 29 announcement had referred to just 20. Johnson’s wife Carrie and finance minister Rishi Sunak have also been fined, and the British leader attended several more of the events under investigation. AFP

Shanghai cautiously eases lockdown as death toll rises

Shanghai, China - Shanghai further eased its gruelling, weeks-long COVID-19 lockdown on Wednesday despite a mounting official death toll and tens of thousands of daily cases.

China's largest city is ambling towards reopening as businesses and residents grow increasingly desperate over closures and food shortages.

Faced with the country's worst virus outbreak in two years, Shanghai has confined most of its 25mn people to their homes since last month, doubling down on the Communist Party's unrelenting zero-COVID approach.

But the surge, driven by the fast-spreading Omicron variant, has thwarted official efforts to avert a pandemic rebound, with more than 400,000 infections reported since March.

City authorities confirmed seven COVID-19 deaths and more than 18,000 mostly asymptomatic new cases on Wednesday, while also announcing 4mn more people had been released from the strictest version of lockdown.

Some factories have resumed operations and a total of 12mn residents previously barred from leaving their homes have in the past few days been given permission to venture outdoors.

Many are, however, still restricted to their residential compounds under an easing of the rules announced last Monday.

While Shanghai's outbreak remains small compared with parts of the world getting used to living with the virus, it has rattled



A health worker wearing personal protective equipment talks to the residents who are waiting to board a bus along a street during a COVID-19 lockdown in the Jing'an district in Shanghai on Tuesday (AFP)

City authorities confirmed seven COVID-19 deaths and more than 18,000 mostly asymptomatic new cases on Wednesday, while also announcing 4mn more people had been released from strict lockdown

China's inflexible virus response, and prompted rare glimpses of discontent usually wiped away by the 'Great Firewall' of censorship. On social media, Shanghai residents have vented about the tight movement restrictions, multiple rounds of mass testing and lack of access to food and non-COVID medical care.

Beijing insists its unrelenting COVID approach has averted fatalities and the public health crises seen in many other parts of the world.

Shanghai has confirmed just 17 official fatalities in its current outbreak, though some have questioned that tally, pointing to the low vaccination rate among

China's vast elderly population.

The seven deaths reported on Wednesday were, like all those previously confirmed, among patients with underlying conditions such as lung cancer and diabetes. City officials said five of the seven people were over the age of 70. The shuttering of economic engine room Shanghai and lockdowns elsewhere have taken a heavy toll on the world's second-biggest economy, clogging supply chains and forcing businesses to halt production.

Hoping to rebuild some steam, authorities have called for a 'white list' of key industries and companies that can continue

production, with more than 600 firms identified for early work resumption in Shanghai.

US electric car giant Tesla 'officially resumed production' on Tuesday, state media reported, after suspending work at its 'gigafactory' in the city for more than 20 days.

Businesses in other Chinese regions affected by COVID lockdowns in recent weeks have also gradually resumed operations amid production and logistics backlogs, including northeastern Jilin province which announced on Tuesday that its top 500 companies were back at work.

AFP

Solomons signed China security pact 'with our eyes wide open': PM

Sydney, Australia - Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare was defiant on Wednesday about his decision to sign a controversial security pact with China in the face of lobbying from the United States and Australia.

Sogavare said it was an 'honour and privilege' to tell parliament the deal had been signed by officials in Honiara and Beijing 'a few days ago'.

The deal, announced on Tuesday by Beijing, has faced sharp criticism from the United States and Australia, which fear the pact could lead to China gaining a military foothold in the South Pacific.

Sogavare said his government had signed the deal 'with our eyes wide open' but declined to tell the opposition leader when the signed version would be made public.

A draft of the deal sent shockwaves across the region when it was leaked last month, particularly measures that would allow Chinese naval deployments to the Pacific nation, less than 2,000km from Australia.

The broad wording of the draft prompted a flurry of diplomatic overtures from Washington and Canberra to prevent it from being signed - including a last-ditch visit from Australia's Pacific minister - but they were ultimately unsuccessful.

The Solomon Islands and China have been moving closer in recent years, with Sogavare's government severing ties with Taiwan in September

2019, just days before its Pacific neighbour Kiribati followed suit in recognising Beijing.

'Little Cuba'

News of the deal's signing upended Australia's closely fought federal election campaign on Wednesday as Prime Minister Scott Morrison faced a barrage of questions about his handling of the Solomon Islands.

He said he would visit the Pacific nation 'at the first opportunity' but rejected criticism that he or Foreign Minister Marise Payne should have travelled to the Solomons to personally lobby against the deal.

Morrison added that Australia had to respect decisions made by regional neighbours and said he had 'spent countless hours in meetings with Pacific Island leaders'.

But Morrison's deputy, Barnaby Joyce, struck a different tone, telling reporters the deal would enable China to set up a military base in the Solomon Islands.

"We don't want a 'little Cuba' off our coast," he said.

Sogavare has previously said there was 'no intention whatsoever... to ask China to build a military base in the Solomon Islands'.

The deal was signed just days before senior US National Security Council official Kurt Campbell is due to arrive in the Pacific nation for high-level talks.

AFP

Four dead in Polish coal mine accident

Warsaw, Poland - Four people were killed and seven more are missing following a gas explosion at a coal mine in southern Poland on Wednesday, officials said.

"One of the miners injured by the methane explosion at the Pniowek mine has died in hospital," the company in charge of the mine, JSW, said on Twitter.

"That is the fourth victim of today's mining disaster."

Polish deputy prime minister Jacek Sasin tweeted that rescuers were still looking for seven other people. Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki expressed his condolences and will travel to the area.

The company said earlier that

21 people had been injured and also spoke of two explosions.

It said a first blast occurred shortly after midnight at a depth of 1,000 metres. There were 42 miners in the area where the explosion happened and many of them suffered burns. A second explosion occurred while rescue workers were assisting the victims of the first blast. Poland, which still relies on coal for the majority of its power, has seen several other mining accidents in recent years. Last year, two men were killed and two others injured when an underground wall collapsed at the southern Myslowice-Wesola mine.

AFP

Rohingya migrants flee Malaysia detention, six dead

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - Hundreds of Rohingya migrants from Myanmar escaped a detention centre in Malaysia on Wednesday after a riot broke out, with six killed on a highway as they fled, authorities said.

Many Rohingya arrive in Malaysia by boat after enduring harrowing, months-long sea journeys. Those who are caught are often sent to detention centres, which rights groups say are typically overcrowded and filthy.

A total of 528 people from the Muslim minority group fled a centre in northern Kedah state at 4:30am (2030 GMT Tuesday), said Khairul Dzamee Daud, the country's immigration chief.

Many were recaptured



Rohingya refugees, who had escaped from Malaysian Immigration's temporary Sungai Bakap depot, detained on the side of a highway in Penang on Wednesday (AFP)

quickly, but 176 were still at large as of Wednesday afternoon, according to police.

After the riot erupted, the

migrants broke through a door and barriers at the centre, and 23 guards who were on duty were unable to bring the situa-

tion under control.

Six of the detainees - two adult men, two adult women, one girl and one boy - were

killed as they attempted to cross a highway after escaping, police said.

The cause of the riot and break-out are under investigation, police said.

Police, officers from other agencies and members of the public are hunting for the missing detainees.

Relatively affluent, Muslim-majority Malaysia is a key destination for Rohingya fleeing persecution in their predominantly Buddhist homeland or refugee camps in Bangladesh.

More than 100,000 Rohingya live on the margins of society in the country, working illegally in construction and other low-paid jobs.

AFP

Dung power: Rural India draw on new energy cash cow

Indore, India - India is tapping a new energy source that promises to help clean up smog-choked cities and is already providing a vital revenue stream for poor Indian farmers: truckloads of bovine manure.

Cows are venerated as sacred creatures by the country's Hindu majority. They also have pride of place in India's rural communities, where they are still regularly used as draught animals.

Rural households have long burned sun-dried cattle droppings to heat stoves, a practice that continues despite government efforts to phase it out with subsidised gas cylinders.

Villages on the outskirts of the central Indian city of Indore are now being handsomely rewarded for handing over their mounds of bovine waste in a pilot project to help meet the city's power needs.

"We have a very good quality dung, and we keep the dung clean to ensure it fetches the best price," farmer Suresh Sisodia told AFP.

The 46-year-old has sold nearly a dozen truckloads of fresh manure at the equivalent of US\$235 per shipment - more than the monthly income of the average Indian farming household. Sisodia's farm has 50 head of cattle and, in the past, occasionally offset costs by selling manure for fertiliser. Now, he is hopeful for a more reliable revenue stream.

'Dung money'

"The farmers pick it up once every six or 12 months and there are seasons when they don't - but the plant could give us a steady income," he said, adding that his farm generates enough manure to fill a truck every three



Farmer Suresh Sisodia works at his dairy farm in Mayakhedi village on the outskirts of Indore (AFP)

weeks.

His family are one of the many beneficiaries of 'Gobardhan' - literally 'dung money' in Hindi -

since the inauguration of a nearby biomass plant by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in February. Sisodia's cattle droppings

are carted to the plant, where they are mixed with household waste to produce flammable methane gas and an organic residue that can be used as fertiliser. Eventually, the plant is slated to work through 500 tonnes of waste, including at least 25 tonnes of bovine faeces, each day - enough to power the city's public transit system, with plenty left over.

"One half will run Indore buses and the other half will be sold to industrial clients," plant boss Nitesh Kumar Tripathi told AFP. The Gobardhan pilot programme has faced its share of logistical hurdles, with decrepit rural roads making it hard for the plant's dung-carrying trucks to reach farms.

Farmers have also been sceptical of what appears to be a get-rich-quick scheme and required careful 'assurances of quick and

regular' payments before signing on, said Ankit Choudhary, who scouts villages for potential suppliers. The Indian government, however, has high hopes for the initiative, with Modi pledging waste-to-gas plants in 75 other locations since the Indore facility began operations.

Cultivating alternative energy sources is an urgent priority in India, which burns coal to meet nearly three-quarters of the energy needs of its 1.4bn citizens.

Its cities regularly rank among the most smog-choked urban centres in the world as a result. Air pollution is blamed for more than a million deaths in India annually, according to a study published in The Lancet medical journal.

Sacred strays

The project is also guaranteed to appeal to Hindu nationalist

groups - Modi's most important political constituency and vocal advocates of cow protection.

Under their watch, 'cow vigilantes' have run Muslim-owned abattoirs out of business and lynched people accused of involvement in cattle slaughter.

But bovine-centric religious policies have led to unintended consequences, with stray cows now a common sight in villages and even on busy roads in big cities.

Government acolytes such as Malini Laxmansingh Gaur, a former Indore mayor and member of Modi's party, hope that scaling up the biogas project will incentivise farmers to keep their cows even when they are too old to give milk or help till fields.

"This extra income will both clean villages and help tackle the strays," she told AFP.

AFP

Russia closes in on besieged Mariupol

Kyiv said it had agreed with Russia to open a safe route for civilians to flee the city

Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine - After nearly two months under siege, the southern city of Mariupol could fall into Russian hands within 'hours', a Ukrainian official said, as the two sides agreed on Wednesday to a humanitarian corridor to allow civilians to flee the devastated port city.

As fighting raged in the country's east and south, the president of the European Council Charles Michel arrived in Kyiv, in the latest sign of strengthening ties between Ukraine and the EU.

"In Kyiv today. In the heart of a free and democratic Europe," he wrote on social media.

Michel's visit comes as the West continues to pour weapons into Ukraine amid a renewed Russian push into the eastern Donbas region where a new offensive launched this week has led to an uptick in fighting.

Hours ahead of Michel's arrival, the Pentagon said that Ukraine had recently received fighter planes and spare parts to bolster its air force, following repeated calls from Kyiv for heavier weapons.

The Pentagon declined to specify the number of aircraft and their origin.

The announcement came as the battle for Mariupol appeared to be nearing a crucial peak, after months of devastating fighting that has seen untold numbers of civilians trapped and killed.

Control of Mariupol and the separatist-controlled Donbas region in the east would allow

Moscow to create a southern corridor to the Crimean peninsula that it annexed in 2014, depriving Ukraine of much of its coastline.

In the latest ultimatum issued in its battle to capture Mariupol, Moscow made another call for the city's defenders to surrender on Wednesday by 2pm Moscow time (1100 GMT) and announced the opening of a humanitarian corridor for any Ukrainian troops who agreed to lay down their arms.

As the deadline approached, a commander in the besieged Azovstal steel plant issued a desperate plea for help, saying his marines were 'maybe facing our

The Pentagon said that Ukraine has received fighter planes and spare parts to bolster its air force, following Kyiv's request



A kitten stands in front of a house damaged by shelling in the village of Mala Tomachka, south of Zaporizhzhia, on Tuesday (AFP)

An adviser to the mayor of Mariupol described a 'horrible situation' in the encircled complex and reported that up to 2,000 people - mostly women and children - are without 'normal' supplies of drinking water, food and fresh air.

During an interview broadcast on CNN on Tuesday, Pavlo Kyrylenko - who oversees the Donetsk region's military admin-

istration - insisted Mariupol remained contested.

"The Ukrainian flag is flying over the city," he said.

"There are certain districts where street fighting is continuing. I can't say the Russians are controlling them."

Offering some respite, Kyiv said early on Wednesday it had agreed with Russian forces to open a safe route for civilians to

flee the devastated city.

"We have managed to get a preliminary agreement on a humanitarian corridor for women, children and elderly persons," Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk wrote on Telegram.

Elsewhere on the frontlines, Ukraine's defence ministry reported its troops had beaten back a Russian attack in the city of Izium, south of the partly

blockaded second city of Kharkiv in the east.

Kyiv also claimed enemy losses in a Ukrainian counter-attack near the town of Marinka in Donetsk.

The governor of the eastern Lugansk region, Sergiy Gaiday, said Ukrainian forces were holding their ground in the face of heavy fighting.

Russian forces, meanwhile, on

Wednesday said its forces had launched 73 airstrikes across Ukraine, hitting dozens of locations where troops were concentrated. In eastern Ukraine's Kramatorsk, a large city in the Donetsk region, residents were already braced for the worst.

"It's going to be a mess," said Alexander, 53. "There's nothing good to expect."

AFP



Palestinian leave the al-Aqsa mosque compound through Damascus Gate after taking part in the prayers, on Friday (AFP)

Israel's Bennet takes steps to stem violence

Jerusalem - Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett on Wednesday barred far-right lawmaker Itamar Ben Gvir from entering Muslim areas of Jerusalem's Old City and holding a rally, in a bid to stem further violence.

Tensions in Israeli-occupied east Jerusalem have spiked in recent weeks, amid nearly a month of deadly violence in Israel and the occupied West Bank, with the Jewish Passover festival coinciding with the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.

The ban is intended to prevent further violence in the Old City, including in the Al-Aqsa mosque, where clashes between Palestinian demonstrators and Israeli forces left more than 170 injured on Friday and Sunday. Ben Gvir had announced he would take part in a rally on Wednesday evening, saying he would march through the Damascus Gate, the main entrance to the Muslim quarter of Jerusalem's Old City.

Bennett accepted the recommendation of security chiefs to prevent Ben Gvir from entering the Damascus Gate. "I have no intention of allowing petty poli-

tics to endanger human lives," Bennett said in a statement.

"I will not allow a political provocation by Ben Gvir to endanger IDF (Israeli army) soldiers and Israeli police officers, and render their already heavy task even heavier."

Israeli police had earlier banned the rally from taking place on the proposed route.

Ben Gvir is a controversial member of the opposition, whose supporters occasionally chant 'Death to the Arabs'.

Right-winger Bennett, a key figure in Israel's settlement movement, leads a fragile coalition government.

Earlier this month, Bennett's coalition lost its one-seat majority of 61 in the 120-seat Knesset, Israel's parliament, after a member left in a dispute over the use of leavened bread products in hospitals during Passover.

Then on Sunday, the Raam party, drawn from the country's Arab-Israeli minority and with four members of the Knesset, suspended its support for the coalition.

AFP

China plane crash report does not identify cause

Beijing, China - China's preliminary investigation into the country's deadliest plane crash in about 30 years did not identify a cause, according to a report released on Wednesday.

In March, a China Eastern plane was flying between Kunming and Guangzhou when it nosedived into a mountainside, disintegrating on impact and claiming the lives of all 132 people on board.

Two flight recorders, or 'black boxes', were recovered and are being analysed in the United States in the hopes of unlocking the mystery behind the jet's rapid descent.

A brief of the report released by the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) on Wednesday gave no further details on the possible reasons behind the crash.

The update came as 30 days passed since the incident - the



This file photo shows rescuers standing in a silent tribute for victims in Tengxian county on March 27 (AFP)

deadline by which China is required to submit an early report to the International Civil Aviation Organization.

Investigations found the flight and cabin crews' qualifications 'meet requirements', and the same was said of main-

tenance staff, the CAAC said in a statement.

"The airworthiness certificate of the aircraft in the accident was

valid," the statement said.

There was no report of fault before the flight, nor was there cargo declared as dangerous goods on the plane, said the CAAC, noting no abnormalities in navigation and monitoring equipment.

The plane was equipped with two flight recorders: a cockpit voice recorder and a flight data tracker in the rear passenger cabin.

The devices 'were severely damaged due to the impact, and data restoration and analysis work is still in progress', said the authorities.

China Eastern previously said that the crashed plane's captain and two co-pilots were not under suspicion.

The aircraft went down near Wuzhou in southern China after losing contact with air traffic control.

AFP

Riots over Quran burning test Swedish tolerance

Stockholm, Sweden - Riots across Sweden sparked by a notorious anti-immigrant provocateur threatening to tour the country burning Quran has challenged the country's limits to free speech.

Police clashed with groups of mostly masked young men in several towns and cities after the anti-Islam Danish-Swedish politician Rasmus Paludan announced his Quran burning 'tour' for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Swedish police insisted they had to grant permits for Paludan's incendiary events because of the country's liberal freedom of speech laws.

But several Muslim countries



An Iranian woman lifts a Quran as she takes part in a student rally in front of the embassy of Sweden in Tehran, on Monday (AFP)

have reacted angrily, with Iraq's foreign ministry warning the affair could have 'serious repercussions' on 'relations between

Sweden and Muslims in general'. Despite the outcry, justice minister Morgan Johansson stressed the importance of pro-

tecting the country's freedoms.

"We are living in a democracy with far-reaching freedoms of speech and the press and we should be very proud of that," he said. But he admitted that those freedoms were being used by a 'Danish extremist' to foster 'hate, division and violence', which he deplored.

At least 40 people were hurt - 26 of them police officers - and as many arrested after days of rioting over the Easter weekend in Norrkoping, Linkoping, Landskrona, Orebro, Malmo and the capital Stockholm.

A school was also set alight with 20 police vehicles either damaged or destroyed.

But with Paludan announcing

more events, many local officials are having misgivings.

"Under these circumstances, the police should not grant permits for more public gatherings," Anna Thorn, city manager of Norrkoping, told a press conference on Tuesday.

Freedom of speech has historically enjoyed strong protection in Sweden.

While police can deny permits for gatherings that would constitute 'incitement of against an ethnic group', the bar is usually high. Much of the rioters' fury was directed at police, with national police chief Anders Thornberg even saying they 'tried to kill police officers'.

AFP

WORLD'S TALLEST FAMILY

Tall Trapps

MINNESOTA FAMILY REACHES NEW HEIGHTS WITH GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS. AS THE WORLD'S TALLEST FAMILY, THE AVERAGE HEIGHT OF EACH MEMBER IS 203.29 CM

The Trapp family from Duluth, Minnesota, has achieved the Guinness World Records title for 'Tallest family'. The five member family is an average of 203.29 cm (6 ft 8.03 in) tall and they seem to be drawing attention everywhere they go merely because of their towering presence.

"I love saying I'm the shortest person in the world's tallest family at 191.2 cm!" joked Kristine Trapp, the mother of three adult children. The others add that they are easy to find in any group of people. 'Just look up,' they say.

Scott Trapp and his wife Kristine say that height runs in the family, but their kids are much taller than the extended family. However, the extended family appreciates the Trapp family's height. "They think it is useful for household projects. They don't ever need a ladder," says Scott.

The Trapp family leans on each other during the ups and downs of their extraordinary height. "It's so nice to have someone else to look up to and someone to understand what you are going through being tall," Molly (daughter) shared.

Each family member experiences unique situations due to their height. The popular response amongst them is that they frequently hit their heads on doorways, ceiling fans, and overhead lighting.

The family unanimously agrees with another difficulty - finding clothing, especially pants, and shoes. Nonetheless, Adam (son), the tallest of the family, says his daily routine is like the average person. "I still put my pants on one leg at a time like most people. They are just really long pants."

The children - Savanna, Molly and Adam - excelled in sports growing up. Their height and hard work ethic propelled them to success. Savanna was recruited by UCLA to play Division I basketball, Molly played volleyball in college, and Adam was a star basketball player in high school.

They three children had the advantage of being able to easily block shots in their respective sports.

Savanna, Molly, and Adam, now adults, excel in life as a result of their experiences.

Savanna adds that the family hopes that their new Guinness World Records title "empowers others who are unique or feel different. There is joy and freedom in embracing who you are. Rock what you got. There is nobody else like you and that is fantastic."

TALL ORDER

(from left to right)

Kristine Trapp, mother: 191.20cm
Molly Steede, daughter: 197.26cm
Scott Trapp, father: 202.70cm
Savanna Trapp, daughter: 203.60cm
Adam Trapp, son: 221.71cm



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WELLNESS

EXERCISE PROMOTES

MENTAL HEALTH

People who exercise regularly experience an enormous sense of well-being, feel more energetic during the day, sleep better at night, and have sharper memory

A recent study in the United Kingdom found that people who squeeze their exercise routines into one or two sessions during the weekend experience almost as many health benefits as those who work out more often. So don't find excuses of being busy at work/school to avoid your workout – it not just keeps you fit but also promotes mental wellbeing. Most people feel that when you're tired, depressed, or stressed, working out might make you feel worse. But the truth is that physical activity is a powerful energiser. Studies show that regular exercise can dramatically reduce fatigue and increase your energy levels.

Benefits of exercise
Exercise is not just about aerobic capacity and muscle size. Sure, exercise can improve your physical health and your physique, trim your waistline, and even add years to your life. But that's not what motivates most people to stay active. Recent research shows that people who exercise regularly tend to do so because it gives them an enormous sense of well-being. They feel more energetic throughout the day, sleep better at night, have sharper memories, and feel more relaxed and positive about themselves and their lives.

Tackling depression
Regular exercise can have a profoundly positive impact on depression, anxiety, and ADHD. It also relieves stress, improves memory, helps you sleep better, and boosts your overall mood. And you don't have to be a fitness fanatic to reap the benefits. Research indicates that modest amounts of exercise can make a real difference. No matter your age or fitness level, you can learn to use exercise as a powerful tool to deal with mental health problems, improve your energy and outlook, and get more out of life. Studies show that exercise can treat mild to moderate depression as effectively as antidepressant medication, but without the side-effects. A recent study done by the Harvard T H Chan School of Public Health found that running for 15 minutes a day or walking for an hour reduces the risk of major depression by 26%. In addition to relieving depression symptoms, research also shows that maintaining an exercise schedule can prevent one from relapsing. Exercise is a powerful depression fighter for several reasons. Most importantly, it promotes all kinds of changes in the brain, including neural growth, reduced inflammation, and new activity patterns that promote feelings of calm and well-being.

Exercise and anxiety
Exercise is a natural and effective anti-anxiety treatment. It relieves tension and stress, boosts physical and mental energy, and enhances well-being through the release of endorphins. Anything that gets you moving can help, but

you'll get a bigger benefit if you pay attention instead of zoning out. Try to notice the sensation of your feet hitting the ground, for example, or the rhythm of your breathing, or the feeling of the wind on your skin. By adding this mindfulness element - really focusing on your body and how it feels as you exercise - you'll not only improve your physical condition faster, but you may also be able to interrupt the flow of constant worries running through your head.

Exercise and stress
Ever noticed how your body feels when you're under stress? Your muscles may be tense, especially in your face, neck, and shoulders, leaving you with back or neck pain, or painful headaches. You may feel a tightness in your chest, a pounding pulse, or muscle cramps. You may also experience problems such as insomnia, heartburn, stomachache, diarrhoea, or frequent urination. The worry and discomfort of all these physical symptoms can in turn lead to even more stress, creating a vicious cycle between your mind and body. Exercising is an effective way to break this cycle. As well as releasing endorphins in the brain, physical activity helps to relax the muscles and relieve tension in the body.

Exercise and ADHD
Exercising regularly is one of the easiest and most effective ways to reduce the symptoms of ADHD and improve concentration, motivation, memory, and mood. Physical activity immediately boosts the brain's dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin levels - all of which affect focus and attention.

Exercise and PTSD and trauma
Evidence suggests that by really focusing on your body and how it feels as you exercise, you can actually help your nervous system become 'unstuck' and begin to move out of the immobilisation stress response that characterises PTSD or trauma. Instead of allowing your mind to wander, pay close attention to the physical sensations in your joints and muscles, even your insides as your body moves. Outdoor activities like hiking, sailing, mountain biking, rock climbing, whitewater rafting, and skiing (downhill and cross-country) have also been shown to reduce the symptoms of PTSD.



OTHER BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

Even if you're not suffering from a mental health problem, regular physical activity can still offer a welcome boost to your mood, outlook, and mental well-being. Exercise can help provide:

Sharper memory and thinking
The same endorphins that make you feel better also help you concentrate and feel mentally sharp for tasks at hand. Exercise also stimulates the growth of new brain cells and helps prevent age-related decline.

Higher self-esteem
Regular activity is an investment in your mind, body, and soul. When it becomes habit, it can foster your sense of self-worth and make you feel strong and powerful. You'll feel better about your appearance and, by meeting even small exercise goals, you'll feel a sense of achievement.

Better sleep
Even short bursts of exercise in the morning or afternoon can help regulate your sleep patterns. If you prefer to exercise at night, relaxing exercises such as yoga or gentle stretching can help promote sleep.

More energy
Increasing your heart rate several times a week will give you more get-up-and-go. Start off with just a few minutes of exercise per day, and increase your workout as you begin to feel more energised.

Stronger resilience
When faced with mental or emotional challenges in life, exercise can help you build resilience and cope in a healthy way, instead of resorting to alcohol, drugs, or other negative behaviours that ultimately only make your symptoms worse. Regular exercise can also help boost your immune system.

Embarrassing, disappointing, humiliating!

Manchester United are ‘six years’ behind Liverpool, says interim manager Ralf Rangnick after suffering a 4-0 thrashing at Anfield

Liverpool, United Kingdom - Manchester United interim manager Ralf Rangnick said the Red Devils are “six years” behind Liverpool after being blown away in a 4-0 defeat at Anfield on Tuesday.

Jurgen Klopp’s men won 5-0 at Old Trafford in October and expectations of a similar rout were well-founded as Liverpool exposed the massive gulf between the sides with Mohamed Salah scoring twice and Luis Diaz and Sadio Mane also finding the target.

Liverpool move two points ahead of Manchester City at the top of the table, but still need the English champions to slip up in their remaining seven league games of the season to win the title.

Rangnick will step aside at the end of the season, with Ajax manager Erik ten Hag reportedly set to take over.

And the German said the impact Klopp has made on transforming Liverpool’s fortunes is the example for United to follow.

“It is embarrassing, it is disappointing, maybe even humiliating,” said Rangnick.

“We have to accept they are six years ahead of us now. When Jurgen Klopp came they changed at the club and lifted not just the team but the club and city to a new level.

“That is what needs to happen with us in the next transfer windows.”

In contrast to the fine margins separating Liverpool and City, a 22-point gap now lies between the league leaders and United in sixth with only Tottenham and Arsenal’s own failings keeping the Red Devils in the race to qualify for next season’s Champions League.

Rangnick’s attempt to plug the holes in the United defence was a recall for Phil Jones, making just his second Premier League appearance since January 2020, as part of a back five.

But it took just five minutes for the visitors to be cut open.

Mane’s through ball picked out Salah in acres of space and he found Diaz to apply a simple finish from close range.

“They always try to give us the ball in a one-against-one situations, so it makes our life much easier,” said Salah.



Mohamed Salah celebrates after scoring Liverpool's fourth goal against Manchester United in their Premier League match at Anfield in Liverpool on Tuesday (AFP)

Support for Ronaldo

Two minutes later the fierce rivalry between English football’s two most successful clubs was set aside in a show of support for Cristiano Ronaldo.

The Portuguese superstar was missing for United after revealing on Monday that his newborn

baby son had died.

Supporters on all sides of Anfield stood for a minute’s applause, while the Liverpool fans sang their own anthem “You’ll never walk alone”.

“That was my moment of the game,” said Klopp. “So many things are much more important

in life than football, we feel for Cristiano and his family.”

On the field, the one-way traffic continued. A second Liverpool goal seemed inevitable and when it arrived, it was of the highest quality.

Joel Matip fizzed the ball into Mane’s feet and the Senegalese

lofted a first-time pass over the top for Salah.

The Egyptian had not scored for Liverpool from open play since February, but showed no signs of a lack of confidence as he cushioned the ball into his path and slotted low past David de Gea.

Half-time offered United some respite but Mane coolly steered home the third from Diaz’s cross before Salah took his tally for the season to 30 when he lifted the ball over De Gea from Diogo Jota’s pass five minutes from time.

AFP

Inter see off Milan to reach Italian Cup final

Milan, Italy - Lautaro Martinez scored twice as Inter Milan beat city rivals AC Milan 3-0 on Tuesday to reach the Italian Cup final, where they will face either Juventus or Fiorentina.

The semi-final second leg was closer than the scoreline suggested, but Inter ultimately were comfortable winners on aggregate after a goalless draw in the first fixture.

Simone Inzaghi’s men will take on the winners of Wednesday’s other semi-final, which Juventus lead 1-0 after the first leg, at the Stadio Olimpico on May 11.

“I am happy because we are playing another final, we work to



Inter Milan’s Lautaro Martinez (R) and teammates are jubilant as they acknowledge the crowd after beating AC Milan on Tuesday (AFP)

bring Inter to the top and tonight we proved it again,” said Mar-

tinez.

AC Milan remain without a

major trophy since winning the 2011 Serie A title, but the Scudetto is still up for grabs this season. Stefano Pioli’s men lead Inter by two points in the table, although the reigning champions have a game in hand.

Inter Milan made a dream start on Tuesday as they struck inside the first four minutes.

Matteo Darmian’s dinked cross found its way to Martinez, and the Argentinian slammed a volley into the top corner to score his 18th goal of the season in all competitions.

Inter doubled their advantage against the run of play, as Joaquin Correa played a lovely

through ball into the path of Martinez, who coolly chipped the ball over advancing goalkeeper Mike Maignan.

Milan thought they had given themselves hope in the 66th minute through Ismael Bennacer’s excellent long-range drive. But the goal was disallowed by VAR due to Kalulu standing in front of Handanovic in an offside position.

Inter secured their place in the final with eight minutes remaining on the counter-attack, as Marcelo Brozovic crossed for substitute Robin Gosens to score.

AFP

Pele hospitalised again for colon cancer treatment

Sao Paulo, Brazil - Brazilian football great Pele has been hospitalised in Sao Paulo since Monday as part of his treatment for colon cancer, the medical centre that treats him said.

The clinical condition of Edson Arantes do Nascimento is “good and stable, and he should be discharged from hospital in the next few days,” the Albert Einstein Hospital said Tuesday.

Considered by many the greatest footballer of all time, Pele is the only player in history to win three World Cups (1958, 1962 and 1970).

Known in Brazil as “O Rei,” or



Pele

“The King,” the 81-year-old must go to the hospital at least once a month to undergo check-ups and continue chemotherapy against the colon tumor that was detected last September, according to his family.

AFP

Freiburg brush aside Hamburg to reach their first German Cup final

Hamburg, Germany - Freiburg cruised into the first German Cup final in the club’s history with a 3-1 victory at second-tier Hamburg in Tuesday’s semi-final, with all their goals coming in the first half.

Bundesliga side Freiburg dominated Hamburg, who have spent the last four seasons in the second division, with Nils Petersen, Nicolas Hoefler and Vincenzo Grifo scoring in the opening 35 minutes.

Hamburg managed a consolation goal with two minutes left when Robert Glatzel headed in.

“It’s indescribable - we’ve written history, Freiburg has never managed this before,” said Hoefler.

“We can still achieve a lot, I couldn’t care less who we play in the final, we just want to win it.”

There will be a new German Cup winner when the final is held at Berlin’s Olympic Stadium on May 21.



Freiburg’s Nils Petersen (2nd L) is congratulated by team-mates after scoring against Hamburg on Tuesday

Neither Freiburg, nor Union Berlin and RB Leipzig who meet in Wednesday’s other semi-final, have previously lifted the trophy.

Hamburg were the only club in the semi-finals to have already won the cup, with the last of their three victories coming during the fallen giants’ glory days of the 1980s.

Hosts Hamburg were behind on just 11 minutes when Hoefler swung in a cross which Petersen

met to score.

Hoefler then smashed in a shot which deflected off Hamburg captain Sebastian Schonlau six minutes later.

Hamburg rallied, with forwards Bakery Jatta and Glatzel going close.

But Freiburg grabbed their third when Grifo converted a penalty after a foul on Germany defender Nico Schlotterbeck.

To compound Hamburg’s misery, midfielder Anssi Suho-

nen had a goal disallowed for offside. The game’s tempo dropped after the break as Freiburg’s defence contained Hamburg, apart from a great chance for Suhonen who dribbled through the defence before Hoefler blocked his shot.

Glatzel scored a deserved late consolation for Hamburg when he headed home. But it was not even a brief interruption for the celebrating visiting fans.

AFP

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IPL 2022



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BRIEF SCORES:

Punjab Kings 115 all out in 20 overs (Mayank Agarwal 24 (15) 4x4, Jitesh Sharma 32 (23) 5x4; Axar Patel 2 for 10, Lalit Yadav 2 for 11) lost to Delhi Capitals 119 for 1 in 10.3 overs (Prithvi Shaw 41 (20) 7x4, 1x6, David Warner 60 (30) 10x4, 1x6) by 9 wickets.

TODAY'S MATCH (6PM)



MUMBAI INDIANS

VS



CHENNAI SUPER KINGS

Overcooked Kohli risks 'fried brain' if not rested: Former India coach Shastri

New Delhi, India - Out-of-sorts Virat Kohli could be lost to cricket with a "fried brain" if he is not given a break soon, said former India coach Ravi Shastri after the batsman's latest IPL failure.

Kohli's extended lean patch in the Indian Premier League continued when the Royal Challengers Bangalore star was out first ball against Lucknow Super Giants on Tuesday to take his aggregate to 119 runs from seven matches.

Bangalore rode skipper Faf du Plessis's 96 to win the match and jump to second in the 10-team table of the tournament.

"Virat Kohli is overcooked. If anyone needs a break, it's him," Shastri told Star Sports on Tuesday. "Whether it's two months or a month and a half, whether it's after (the) England (tour in July) or before England - he needs a break because he has got six to seven years of cricket left in him and you don't want to lose that with a fried brain."



Virat Kohli was out first ball against Lucknow Super Giants on Tuesday

Kohli, 33, has stepped down as captain India in both white-and red-ball cricket and stood aside as skipper at Bangalore in the past seven months.

He has failed to score a cen-

ture in his last 100 matches in all formats.

The former India captain had last year warned about players getting "cooked" mentally because of relentless cricket in bio-

secure bubbles during the coronavirus pandemic.

Former England skipper Kevin Pietersen also backed Kohli to take a break and reset his personal and professional life.

"The guy has had so much to deal with, from marriage to baby to media scrutiny and all on his personal life. He is the biggest star on show," Pietersen said.

"Virat Kohli needs to say: 'Cricket boots, for six months, I will see you later.' Turn off social media, go and get re-energised."

"When the stadiums are full again, you guarantee him a spot in that side for the next 12, 24 or 36 months. Tell him: 'You're our guy. We know you'll deliver for us.'"

Nicknamed King Kohli, the batsman has played 101 Tests, 260 one-day internationals and 97 Twenty20 matches for India since 2008, during which time he has amassed 23,650 runs across the three formats including 70 centuries.

Kohli is still searching for a first IPL title with Bangalore, a team he captained from 2013 to 2021.

AFP

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