

H M issues Royal Decree

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal Decree No 38/2023 on Wednesday appointing a Permanent Representative to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

Article 1 appoints Omar Said al Kathiri, Oman's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Spain, as a Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to UNWTO.

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



Cost of living in Muscat lowest in Middle East

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat is the least expensive city in the Middle East, according to Mercer's latest Cost of Living City Ranking for international employees.

Ranked 130th, Muscat is the only city in the region to drop in the ranking, that too by 11 places, while all other cities gained in ranks, except for Kuwait City which didn't see any change in its ranking.

This year's ranking by Mercer, an American consulting firm, includes 227 cities across five continents and measures the comparative cost of more than 200 items in each location, including housing, transportation, food, clothing, household goods, and entertainment.

Tel Aviv remains the costliest city in the Middle East for international employees, ranked 8th on the global ranking.

The next two most expensive cities of the region are Dubai (18) and Abu Dhabi (43), both of which have seen fairly significant jumps in their rankings since last year, meaning their residents have to adapt to the increasing cost of living.



The other most costly cities of the region are Riyadh (85th, up by 18 places), Manama (98th, up by 19 places), Jeddah (101), Amman (101), Doha (126th), and Kuwait City (131).

One of the key drivers behind the changes in 2023 rankings is the surge in rental costs. Notably, after Singapore (2nd), which has seen an average 50% hike in rents, Dubai is the second city in the survey where the rental cost has had a significant impact on

the ranking. Rents in Dubai have increased by 25% on an average. Hong Kong once again topped the Cost of Living City Ranking. It is followed by Singapore, which jumped six positions up from the last year's, pushing Zurich to spot number three.

The least expensive locations in the ranking include Havana, which dropped 83 spots, due in part to strong currency devaluations mid last-year; and two cities in Pakistan - Karachi (226)

and Islamabad (227).

This year, only two out of 10 of the most expensive cities for international assignees to live in are located in Asia, compared to four last year. However, these cities - Hong Kong and Singapore - topped the list.

The global top ten include five European cities - four of them in Switzerland, and the fifth one (Copenhagen) in Denmark. Other most expensive cities in Europe include London, Vienna,

Amsterdam, Prague (up 27 spots in the global ranking since last year) and Helsinki.

Explaining the emerging challenges and opportunities, Vladimir Vrzhovski, Financial Services and Technology Industries Lead at Mercer Middle East, said, "Despite the benefits of a growing economy, the survey shows that key factors that have shaped the world's economy in 2022 will continue to exert an influence into 2023."



Dr Liane Saunders OBE

UK appoints new envoy to Oman

Muscat - The British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) announced on Wednesday that Dr Liane Saunders OBE has been appointed King Charles III's Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman.

Dr Liane will succeed William Murray, who has retired from the diplomatic service, and will take up her appointment this month.

Dr Liane, born in Cardiff, United Kingdom, held several positions prior to her appointment as ambassador to the sultanate, including staff counsellor and strategy director and strategic programmes coordinator at FCDO; acting deputy national security advisor and director, Foreign and Defence Policy, and Afghanistan/Pakistan Coordinator at Cabinet Office.

She also served as additional director of Middle East and North Africa Directorate (MENAD); head of Counter Proliferation Department; head of Consular Crisis Group and Strategic Challenges Lead at Comprehensive Spending Review Team.

First EU Gulf envoy takes office to boost ties

Our Correspondent
Muscat

For the first time, the European Union has appointed a special representative for the Gulf region, who took charge on June 1.

Luigi Di Maio will serve a 21-month tenure in the region, developing a stronger, comprehensive and more strategic partnership for EU with the countries in the Gulf region.

The EU special representa-

tives (EUSRs) promote the EU policies and interests in specific regions and countries and play an active role in consolidation of peace, stability and the rule of law.

While the EU already had nine special representatives for different regions and issues, Di Maio's appointment reflects Brussels' desire to establish an active political presence in the Gulf.

The ten EUSRs support the work of the High Representative



Luigi Di Maio

of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell.

On Di Maio's appointment, EU stated that the EUSR seeks the best ways to contribute to the stability and security of the region by engaging and supporting dialogue and long-term solutions with individual Gulf partners and relevant regional organisations.

'He (Maio) equally supports and cooperates with the Council and the European Commission to help ensure the consistency of the

EU's external action in the region, and contributes to increasing the visibility and understanding of the role of the EU.'

Di Maio served as Italy's foreign minister from 2019 to 2022. He also held the positions of deputy prime minister, minister of economic development and trade, minister of labour and social policies, vice president of the Chamber of Deputies and a member of the EU Affairs Committee in Italy's 17th legislature.

More than RO26mn released for housing in Sharqiyah: MHUP

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Council of Ministers approved RO26.4mn for a housing assistance programme to be implemented in North and South Sharqiyah last week.

According to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP), a total of 403 families will benefit from the approved housing aid allocated for the region so as to reduce application backlog and expedite the implementation of housing schemes for eligible families.

Part of the allocated funds, as explained by an MHUP official, will be provided to 255 families affected by adverse weather conditions in the wilayat of Sur, South Sharqiyah. These families will be relocated to safe areas and compensated financially, along with a residential plot to construct a new house with necessary infrastructure and public services.

The remaining portion of the allocated amount will be used for the construction of 148 housing units in remote villages across North and South Sharqiyah. This includes 11 units in Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, 19 units in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, and 54 units in Sur.

Nineteen more units will be constructed in Wadi Bani Khalid and 45 units in Quriyat.

The ministry is currently constructing 111 housing units at a cost exceeding RO4.6mn. They will be handed over to beneficiaries before the end of the current year, the ministry official confirmed.

Out of these 111 units, 49 are in Hail al Kafof and 24 in Hail al Qish in Dima Wa Taa'in, North Sharqiyah, 26 units in Sarj village in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, South Sharqiyah, and 12 in Wadi al Sail in



The programme has been planned to allow beneficiaries to remain engaged in their traditional occupations and help them stay in their close social network

AN OFFICIAL

Mahout, Al Wusta governorate.

According to the official, the ministry received 67,570 applications, out of which 24,913 met the required conditions.

"The programme has been planned to allow beneficiaries to remain engaged in their traditional occupations, and help them stay in their close social network, without having any need for relocation for want of housing," the official explained.

Providing an overview of the previous housing projects, the official stated that 287 housing units were delivered to beneficiaries between 2020 and 2022, with a total invested amount exceeding RO10.1mn.

This includes 256 units in al Mazyuna, Dhofar, 20 units in Adam, Dakhiliyah, eight units along with a mosque and a public council in Quriyat, Muscat.

Biparjoy may intensify into category 3 cyclone: Met

Muscat - The tropical storm Biparjoy in the Arabian Sea turned into a category 1 cyclone on Wednesday with the possibility of it further intensifying in a couple of days.

The storm is likely to turn into a category 2 cyclone on Thursday and category 3 by Friday, the Directorate General of Meteorology said on Wednesday.

The Met office said that the latest satellite images show that Biparjoy is located 1,140km away from the coasts of the sultanate.

The wind speed around the eye of the cyclone is estimated between 65 to 82 knots and it is likely to intensify to category 3 cyclone on Friday, with no direct impact on Oman weather in the next three days.

'The expected movement is to the north of the Arabian Sea with chances of high cloud advection over South Sharqiyah and Al Wusta governorates.'

The cyclone it is likely to move north to northwest by Saturday.

Met stated that maximum wave height may reach 4m to 6m along South Sharqiyah and al Wusta governorates.

KHERSON IN TORRENT OF WATER

Thousands of people were rendered homeless in Ukraine's Kherson region due to flooding after the collapse of Kakhovka dam. During the ongoing evacuation, a local resident sets afloat his boat onto the water, in Kherson on Wednesday. An attack on this major Russian-held dam unleashed a torrent of water, inundating two dozen villages and sparking fears of a humanitarian disaster (AFP)

See also Page 07





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Experts urge caution as citizens drown in wadis

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Following recent incidents of drowning that claimed the lives of two citizens, authorities and experts are urging caution when venturing out into wadis and the sea.

The Civil Defence and Ambulances Authority (CDAA) emphasised the importance of adhering to safety measures and avoiding hazards during summer outings to wadis, particularly for families and youth seeking adventurous experiences.

In response to a distress call on Saturday, Muscat's CDAA rescue team swiftly acted upon the drowning incident of a 24-year-old citizen in Wadi al Ar-beien, Quriyat.

Sadly, the individual could not be saved. The rescue team recovered his body later.

In a similar incident in early May, CDAA reported another citizen missing for three days. They eventually found his body in a wadi in Dima Wa al Taien, North Sharqiyah.

According to CDAA's latest statistics, water rescue teams handled 521 calls related to drowning accidents in 2021. In light of these incidents, CDAA urged people to maintain caution and warned against swimming in undesignated areas.

Experts stress the importance of adhering to safety measures while swimming.

Said Ali al Shayadi, a free div-



Everyone should start small and select swimming areas that match one's fitness level, while also staying mindful of weather conditions

SAID ALI AL SHAYADI

ing instructor, explains that unfortunate incidents occur when individuals, particularly youth, neglect safety measures. He reminded that the purpose of swimming should be to enjoy the outdoors, rather than competing

with others.

"Everyone should start small and select swimming areas that match one's fitness level, while also staying mindful of weather conditions."

Adventurer Khalid Said al An-

qoudi underscored the need for adhering to guidelines during adventure trips and wadi swimming. This includes wearing life jackets and choosing well-known tourism companies that provide necessary equipment. "I urge youth to adhere to safety measures while swimming."

CDAA reminded individuals to ensure physical fitness and good health before engaging in such activities to mitigate risks. The call for caution and preparedness serves as a crucial reminder to prioritise safety.



Forum explores opportunities, challenges for startups in Oman

Our correspondent
Muscat

The Omani French Friendship Association, in collaboration with Omantel, organised a forum at the Omantel headquarters to address the opportunities and challenges faced by start-ups in the country and beyond.

The event brought together over 100 attendees, including students, and those representing startups, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), to discuss ways of overcoming adversities and navigating the entrepreneurial landscape.

Raouti Chehah, co-founder and CEO of Tansley, and an angel investor, shed light on the transformative nature of SMEs.

"There is a saying that nothing is lost and nothing is created; everything is transformed. This holds true for present-day Omani SMEs and for the pioneers of the past who transformed their products and services."

The forum encouraged new entrepreneurs to explore crowd funding, angel investors, and building trust, rather than solely relying on direct funding from organisations.

One of the challenges faced by SMEs is the lack of a proper digital platform for exposure.

Ahmed al Ghadani, CEO of Byanat, a technology solutions provider, highlighted the importance of online exposure for SMEs in today's age, stating, "some customers lack the basic

online exposure, which is essential for any SMEs these days".

Services provided in Oman, particularly through apps, are known for their speed and cost-effectiveness.

Sharing his experience during the event, Azzan al Kindi, CEO of Rihah, a data processing company, said, "When we solved a problem in Oman, we received orders from Angola. Soon after, we received a tender from the US, competing against giants like Infosys and Wipro. However, due to our cost-effectiveness and faster delivery time, we secured the project."

His company got the project but it faced challenges with the legal processes, which took around three months to navigate.



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. 21 /2023

Companies specialized in the field and registered with Tender Board, may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender Number	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/20/022 2023/MM/HQ-24	Consultancy Services for Design of Wadi Al Lahlo	75	28/06/2023	20/07/2023	First
PRE/22/145 2022/MM/QS-74 (Re-tender)	Stray Dogs Control Project (Re-Tender)	40	15/06/2023	22/06/2023	Specialist
PRE/23/107 2023/MM/QS-39	Construction of Proposed Solutions to resolve Water Stagnation at Bousher (37)	25	28/06/2023	20/07/2023	Forth
PRE/23/108 2023/MM/QS-40	Construction of Proposed Solutions to resolve Water Stagnation at Al Ansab	25	28/06/2023	20/07/2023	Forth
PRE/23/116 2023/MM/QS-41	Supply of Polymerization devices and accessories	25	28/06/2023	20/07/2023	Specialist
PRE/23/120 2023/MM/QS-42	Roads Maintenance Works in Muscat Governorate	25	28/06/2023	20/07/2023	First

1- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.

2- Clarification and Support:

• For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) .

• For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+96824402200).

• For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+96824402200/24402330).

Nama says water services in N Sharqiyah costing RO143mn

Muscat - Nama Water Services Company has said that the total cost of managing the water services in the governorate of North Sharqiyah is more than RO143mn.

The cost quoted by Nama includes existing projects and projects under construction, and the annual cost of water tanker contracts.

Nama's development projects in this governorate are of all sizes - small, medium and large.

According to Qais Saud al Zakwani, CEO of Nama Water Services Company, all together 26,035 subscribers benefit from the company's water network in the governorate.

The governorate has 2,064km of water network, 75 water collection reservoirs and 14 main pumping stations, Zakwani told ONA.



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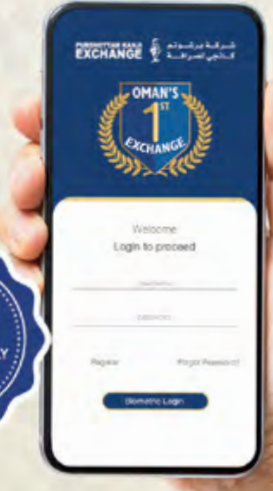
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FOREX RATES

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Indian	214.33
Pakistan	744.77
Bangladesh	280.31
Philippines	145.32
Sri Lanka	758.11

*Rates as on June 07
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

China's exports fall 7.5% in May

China's exports fell in May for the first time since February, state media reported Wednesday, breaking a two-month growth streak as a post-Covid rebound in the world's second-largest economy faded. Overseas shipments sank 7.5% on-year last month, a sharp drop from an increase of 8.5% in April, according to figures published by the official Xinhua news agency.

Meanwhile, imports fell 4.5% in May, according to Xinhua. Forecasts in a survey by Bloomberg showed economists expected exports to drop 1.8% and imports to shrink 8.0%.

Rising global inflation, the threat of recession elsewhere and geopolitical tensions with the United States have weakened demand for Chinese products.

China's exports grew in March and April, snapping a run of five straight declines, when production was disrupted by sweeping lockdowns and delays at ports when authorities enforced their strict zero-Covid policy. But that recovery has lost steam, with the economy weighed down by a debt-laden property sector, limp consumer confidence and a global economic slowdown.

GCC countries keep shadow economy in check: Report

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The GCC countries boast a remarkably small shadow economy, with informal businesses accounting for just 18% of total GDP of the region, which is significantly below the global average, according to a new report.

It is estimated that the shadow activity accounts for 15% of GDP in Saudi Arabia, 17% in Bahrain, 22% in Kuwait, and 24% in the UAE and Oman. This is significantly below the global average of approximately 28% and closely aligns with OECD countries, which stand at around 15%, according to the global management consulting firm Arthur D. Little.

'Building on this strong position, integrating shadow businesses into the formal economy remains a top priority across the GCC,' the report noted.

Arthur D. Little Wednesday released an exclusive viewpoint report titled 'Delivering Inclusive Growth'. The report outlines recent initiatives and presents innovative strategies designed to further diminish the shadow economy and bolster SMEs by enhancing economic and financial inclusion.

According to the report, the GCC is spearheading the battle against the shadow economy in the Middle East and North Africa region by implementing effective



Muscat Daily

policies and ideas that incentivise shadow businesses to participate in the formal economy. Measures include improving tax enforcement, promoting the formalisation of small businesses,

In the UAE alone, SMEs employed more than 86% of the private sector labour force as of mid-2020 and accounted for over 60% of GDP. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia aims for SMEs to

It is estimated that shadow economic activity accounts for 15% of GDP in Saudi Arabia, 17% in Bahrain, 22% in Kuwait, and 24% in the UAE and Oman

advancing digitalisation, fostering transparency, and boosting financial inclusion through the provision of financial services and greater access to credit.

contribute 35% by 2030, and Bahrain set a target of 50% to be achieved by the same year.

Stephane Ulcakar, principal at Arthur D. Little Middle East, said,

of the entire region," he added.

GCC accelerating inclusive growth

To ensure a robust enabling SME ecosystem, Arthur D. Little advised that the governments must lead with an orchestrated and coordinated approach and offer solutions that harmonise design, technology, and data. Moreover, such an ecosystem requires that various ministries and government entities establish shared objectives to circumvent siloed approaches.

'Key enablers of this ecosystem include a strong legal framework, straightforward and transparent taxation, artificial intelligence and digital solutions, access to finance, investment, market access, lucid and effective labor laws, comprehensive infrastructure, and education and awareness,' the report noted.

It said that the GCC countries are forging a path toward achieving what has eluded virtually every government in the last century: state-driven economic transformation with a citizen-centric approach.

'But there is more to do; the region's leaders recognise the need for a thriving and sustainable SME sector to guarantee growth and resilience for the entire economy, and they have positioned this need at the heart of their policies,' the report added.

ONEIC wins RO4.3mn government contract in Salalah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman National Engineering & Investment Company (ONEIC) has secured a RO4.269mn worth of contract for the operation and maintenance of a government property in Salalah.

In a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange, ONEIC revealed that a government entity has awarded the company a contract on June 5, 2023 for one of its prestigious properties located in Salalah.

The contract is valued at RO4,269,578 and spans over a period of four years. According to ONEIC, the commencement of this new project is set for July 1, 2023.

The principal activities of ONEIC include operation and maintenance of power generation stations, desalination plants, hospital equipment, air conditioning plants, sewage treatment plants, contracts for meter reading and the billing of electricity and water and their subsequent collection, supply and installation of power generating equipment, construction of power supply lines and other related projects.

Nabil

NATIONAL BISCUIT INDUSTRIES LTD. SAOG

DIRECTORS REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I have great pleasure in welcoming you to the fortieth Annual General Meeting of your Company.

Revenue and Profits

The company recorded a Net Revenue of RO 11,742,543 in the financial year 2022-23 (9 Months) compared to RO 11,832,010 in the financial year 2021-22 (12 Months).

The Management focuses to maintain the market leadership position in Oman, expand export markets with the endeavor of improving margins, efficiencies as advised by the board.

The Company has expanded its product portfolio across all its brands with a view to increase the visibility and presence across GCC markets. The cost of raw material and packing material has also been stabilized which is positive sign for the future of the company, both the above factors will contribute to increase the footprints across the brand and geography.

Thus, the company has achieved a net profit of RO 192,810 for the financial year 2022-23 (9 Months) as compared to RO 234,027 in the financial year 2021-22 (12 Months).

Dividend

The Board of Directors proposes a cash dividend of 25% on the paid up share capital of RO 1,000,000 amounting to RO 250,000/-. There are no other appropriations.

Compliance with CMA

Your Company has been constantly monitoring and upgrading its internal control procedures and systems in compliance with local laws and regulations. As a part of this process, the internal controls, procedure manuals and guidelines as recommended by the Capital Market Authority, have been implemented from 2003 onwards. The Board through a process of internal audits, audit committees' regular involvement in the review process, ensures that the internal controls and procedures adopted by your company are effective.

Corporate Governance

Your company confirms its compliance with the code of corporate governance for Public Listed Companies issued in July 2015, as updated in December 2016 and a separate note on Corporate Governance forms a part of this report.

Future Outlook

Company is continuously adding new products in the market and a few of them are well established across all regions and the feedback is encouraging. The relentless development of new products is going to be continuous effort which will help the company to grow substantially.

Company is exploring, evaluating and implementing the best solutions to reduce the cost by leveraging the technology and automation in all possible areas of manufacturing operations.

Company is also expanding the distribution in GCC by appointing new distributors to strengthen our presence in general trade channel.

Acknowledgement

The Board expresses its gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq, May Allah protect him and guide him for the benefit of Oman and its people.

Board sincerely thank and appreciate all the Ministries and Government Departments for their continued support to your Company.

Board also likes to convey sincere thanks to the shareholders of National Biscuit Industries Limited SAOG for the confidence they have reposed in the company and it's Board.

Finally, the Board thanks the Management and Staff members for their support in the financial year 2022-23 (9 Months) and looking forward to continued progress for your company.

NOOH BIN MOHAMMED AL- ZIDJALY
CHAIRMAN

Statement of financial position

	31 March 2023 RO	30 June 2022 RO
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	6,607,914	5,868,942
Intangible assets	137,665	128,571
Right-of-use assets	267,269	284,202
Total non-current assets	7,012,848	6,281,715
Current assets		
Wakala deposits	—	755,260
Inventories	2,537,542	2,682,705
Trade and other receivables	4,271,532	3,452,662
Bank balances and cash	408,960	229,448
Total current assets	7,218,034	7,120,075
Total assets	14,230,882	13,401,790
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Share capital	1,000,000	1,000,000
Legal reserve	333,333	333,333
Retained earnings	6,184,073	6,241,263
Total equity	7,517,406	7,574,596
Liabilities		
Non-current liabilities		
Non-current portion of lease liabilities	300,602	314,636
Employees' end of service benefits	443,090	417,771
Deferred tax liability	88,948	45,909
Total non-current liabilities	832,640	778,316
Current liabilities		
Current portion of lease liabilities	18,564	10,670
Trade and other payables	5,617,456	4,895,691
Bank borrowings	230,283	86,919
Taxation	14,533	55,598
Total current liabilities	5,880,836	5,048,878
Total liabilities	6,713,476	5,827,194
Total equity and liabilities	14,230,882	13,401,790
Net assets per share	7.517	7.575

Statement of comprehensive income

	31 March 2023 RO (9 months)	30 June 2022 RO (12 months)
INCOME		
Revenue from contracts with customers	11,742,543	11,832,010
Cost of sales	(10,385,876)	(10,330,300)
Gross profit	1,356,667	1,501,710
Other income	49,017	130,648
	1,405,684	1,632,358
EXPENSES		
General and administration	537,472	673,708
Selling and distribution	587,678	649,620
Finance charges	40,393	34,569
	1,165,543	1,357,897
Profit before taxation	240,141	274,461
Taxation	(47,331)	(40,434)
Net profit and total comprehensive income for the period / year	192,810	234,027
Basic earnings per share	0.193	0.234

Omantel invests in byanat for data analytics solutions

Muscat - Omantel has invested in byanat's Seed Funding Round to expand the provision of data analytics solutions through a software-as-a-service (SaaS) analytics platform for telecommunications operators and service providers.

The funding round featured participation from 500 Global in collaboration with Sanabil Investments, an investment fund owned by the Public Investments Fund (PIF) of Saudi Arabia, and Al Jabr MENA, a startup development and innovation firm. This funding is set to expedite byanat's technology and product development and enable entry into the Saudi market.

byanat is one of the tech companies that was incubated at Omantel Innovation Labs. The company aims to enhance infrastructure in the telecom, energy, and utilities sectors. Their SaaS analytics platform assists businesses in effectively scaling and maintaining connected infrastructure, by unifying communication management, device management, and data analytics.

Talal al Mamari, CEO of Omantel, said, "This historic investment partnership is an eloquent endorsement of the trust global investors have in Omani startups. It also reflects Omantel's far-sighted vision towards innovation and technology. Omantel's investment in byanat is driven by our confidence in its potential to revolutionise the technology industry, not just in Oman but worldwide."

"As we continue to focus on enhancing and growing our innovative services and infrastructure, we also place a high priority on empowering startups through

Talal al Mamari

management, and data analytics.

various programs offered by Omantel Innovation Labs."

Omantel Innovation Labs, Oman's innovation and entrepreneurship centre, fosters Omani tech startups and cultivates a thriving ecosystem. Their investment in byanat reaffirms their dedication to nurturing ground-breaking startups and re-inforcing Oman's status as a regional leader in technology and innovation.

Ahmed al Ghadani, CEO of byanat, said, "With this milestone investment, our focus at byanat is firmly set on the future. We are committed to scaling our operations, expanding our product offerings, and reaching new markets, ensuring that we remain at the forefront of our industry."

As digital infrastructure becomes more complex, the demand for advanced data analytics solutions grows. With Omantel's support, byanat's innovative platform is poised to tackle these challenges and deliver value.

US energy agency revises up oil price forecast for this year

Washington, US - The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) significantly revised up the price of Brent crude late Tuesday, citing OPEC+ production cuts.

In its Short-Term Energy Outlook (STEO) released late Tuesday, the EIA revised up the price of Brent crude this year to \$79.54 per barrel and the American benchmark, West Texas Intermediate (WTI), to US\$74.61 per barrel. In the report last month, these figures were

\$78.65 and \$73.62, respectively.

For the next year, the agency expects the price of Brent crude to average \$83.51 per barrel and WTI to average \$78.51 per barrel.

The EIA attributed the price increases to lower global oil production as a result of OPEC+ and Saudi Arabia's announced supply curbs on Sunday.

On June 4, OPEC+ members agreed to extend crude oil production cuts through the end of 2024.

OECD slightly raises world growth forecast to 2.7%

Paris, France - The OECD slightly raised its growth outlook for the world economy on Wednesday as inflation eases and China has dropped Covid restrictions, but it warned the recovery faces a "long road".

The Paris-based organisation forecast an economic expansion of 2.7%, up from 2.6% in its previous report in March, with upgrades for the United States, China and the eurozone.

But it is still under the 3.3% growth recorded in 2022.

"The global economy is turning a corner but faces a long road ahead to attain strong and sustainable growth," OECD chief economist Clare Lombardelli wrote in the OECD's Economic Outlook.

"The recovery will be weak by past standards," Lombardelli wrote.

The growth forecast for 2024 remains unchanged at 2.9%, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development said.

'Signs of stress'

A drop in energy prices, the untangling of supply chain bottlenecks and China's sooner-than-expected reopening are contributing to the recovery, the OECD said.

Among its 38 members - an eclectic group ranging from the United States to Germany, Mexico, Japan and New Zealand - inflation is expected to slow to 6.6% this year, after soaring to 9.4% in 2022.

But core inflation, which strips out volatile energy and food prices, is higher than previously expected, according to the OECD.

The international organisation said this may force central banks, which have already raised interest rates in efforts to tame consumer prices, to further hike borrowing costs.

"Central banks need to maintain restrictive monetary policies until there are clear signs that



OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann presents the organisation's updated global economic outlook, in Paris, on Wednesday (AFP)

underlying inflationary pressures are abating," Lombardelli said.

James Pomeroy, an economist at HSBC bank, said: "The period we are going through is slow growth but that's what policy makers want to see because we are trying to rein in some of the inflationary pressures."

At a press conference, Lombardelli said central banks faced a "delicate balance".

"Obviously they shouldn't tighten too much to the point that it would have a greater impact on growth than it is necessary," said the OECD's new chief economist, who took her post last month.

The OECD warned that higher interest rates around the world are "increasingly being felt", notably in property and financial markets.

"Signs of stress have started to appear in some financial market segments as investors reassess risks, and credit conditions are tightening," the

report said.

The banking sector was rocked in March by the collapse of US regional lender SVB, whose demise was partly blamed on high rates bringing down the value of its bond portfolio.

The crisis reverberated across the Atlantic, with the Swiss government forcing Swiss banking giant UBS to take over troubled rival Credit Suisse.

"Should further financial market stress arise, central banks should deploy financial policy instruments to enhance liquidity and minimise contagion risks," Lombardelli wrote.

Debt danger

The OECD also warned that almost all countries have budget deficits and higher debt levels than before the pandemic as they propped up their economies to withstand the shocks of Covid restrictions and Russia's war in Ukraine.

"As the recovery takes hold,

fiscal support should be scaled back and better targeted," Lombardelli said.

As energy prices, which soared following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, fall further, government should withdraw schemes aimed at supporting consumers, the OECD said.

The OECD raised its 2023 growth forecasts for the United States, the world's biggest economy, to 1.6% and China, the second biggest, to 5.4% - both an increase of 0.1 percentage points.

The eurozone also got a slight 0.1-point bump to 0.9%.

Britain was upgraded out of recession territory, with growth now forecast at 0.3% instead of a contraction.

The OECD, however, sharply lowered the outlook for Germany, with zero growth now expected for Europe's economy while Japan's GDP will grow 1.3%, a slight downgrade.

AFP

US trade gap widens in April

Washington, US - The US trade deficit grew in April on a pullback in exports, bringing the gap to its widest since October 2022, according to government data released on Wednesday.

Although the country's imports have been boosted by resilient consumer spending, analysts expect this trend to weaken as well going forward, while tighter lending conditions weigh on investments.

The anticipation is that trade could bring negative growth to gross domestic product in the second quarter of the year.

In April, the overall trade deficit was \$74.6bn, expanding slightly less than expected by \$14bn, according to Commerce Department data.

Exports fell by \$9.2bn to \$249bn in the month, while imports edged up by \$4.8 billion to \$323.6 billion.

"Net foreign trade often is sidelined in discussions of headline GDP growth, but it has been a huge swing factor since Covid," said Pantheon Macroeconomics economists Ian Shepherdson and Kieran Clancy in a recent report. They added that weakening in foreign trade will likely be "ac-



Cargo ships are docked at the Port Newark Container Terminal in Newark, New Jersey, on July 21, 2022 (AFP)

companied by a further drag from the inventory component, and a steep drop in investment in business equipment, making an outright drop in headline GDP more likely."

The slide in exports came on the back of a decrease in value of goods shipments, such as crude oil and fuel oil, along with some consumer goods.

Imports of goods picked up with support from auto vehicles

and parts, as well as some industrial supplies and materials.

But imports are likely to weaken in the months ahead, according to economist Matthew Martin of Oxford Economics in a recent note, citing "a mix of declining consumer strength and a wave of destocking by businesses."

The US goods deficit with China stood at \$24.2bn in April. AFP

World Bank lifts Russia growth forecast on resilient energy exports

Washington, US - The World Bank has significantly improved its outlook for the Russian economy this year due to stronger-than-expected revenues from energy exports to countries including India and China.

The Russian economy is now forecast to contract only slightly in 2023, the bank said in a semi-annual report on the global economy published Tuesday, marking a sharp change from its previous prediction of a more pronounced economic contraction.

The European Union, the United States and others levied heavy economic sanctions on Russia following its invasion of Ukraine in February last year,

leading to a significant cut in Russian oil and gas exports to those countries.

But overall, Russian oil export volumes "have not changed materially," with Russia successfully offsetting this lost revenue by ramping up exports to other countries including India and China, the World Bank said.

Russia's economy is now expected to contract by just 0.2 percentage points this year, according to the updated forecast. This is 3.1 percentage points higher than the bank's previous estimate in January.

The World Bank's revision follows a similar alteration to Russia's short-term growth fore-

cast by the International Monetary Fund in April.

In its report, World Bank also revised upward its prediction for the world economy, and now expects global growth this year to be 2.1%.

The upgrade in the forecast is due to "substantial upgrades to projections for China and, to a lesser extent, Russia," the bank said.

"Nonetheless, for 2023 as a whole, global activity is projected to slow, with a pronounced deceleration in advanced economies and a sizable pickup in China," the bank said.

AFP

JOB VACANCIES



Oman Electricity Transmission Company SAOG (OETC) has a vital role in the Oman Electricity Sector, as it owns and operates the main transmission network as well as transmission network in Dhofar through which electricity is transmitted from the generating stations to the distribution load centers in all governorates of the Sultanate. The main electricity transmission network operates at high voltage of 132kV and above. Also, OETC has the responsibility of balancing generation and demand at all times of the day as part of its responsibilities for the economic dispatch of power in the Sultanate, and are currently looking for motivated Omani candidates for the following position

Job Title	Job Code
Technical Advisor – Asset	IRC17333
Protection Advisor – Asset	IRC17332

Interested candidates may apply for this post through Vacancies(www.omangrid.com) by not later than 17th June 2023.

Please attach the following when applying:

- CV
- University Degree
- Transcript

Note: Incomplete applications will be excluded and only shortlisted will be contacted



Oman Electricity Transmission Company S.A.O.C.
MUSCAT-Mawaleh
Way No.2153, Bulding No.4230, Square No.321
Tel: 24283000
Website: www.omangrid.com



وظائف شاغرة

إن للشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء ش.م.ع دوراً حيوياً في قطاع الكهرباء بالسلطنة، حيث أنها تمتلك وتشغل شبكة النقل الرئيسية وكذلك شبكة النقل في محافظة ظفار. حيث تقوم الشركة بنقل الأحمال الكهربائية من محطات الإنتاج إلى مراكز توزيع الأحمال في جميع محافظات السلطنة، وتعمل شبكة نقل الكهرباء الرئيسية بجهد عالٍ ١٣٢ كيلو فولت فيما فوق. كما أن الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء مسؤولة عن تحقيق التوازن بين إنتاج الكهرباء والطلب عليها في جميع الأوقات كجزء من مسؤوليتها عن لتحقيق التوزيع الاقتصادي في السلطنة، وتبحث حالياً عن المرشحين العمانيين المتحمسين للوظيفة التالية:

رمز الوظيفة	الوظائف
IRC17333	خبير تقني – الأصول
IRC17332	خبير حماية – الأصول

على من لديه الرغبة في التقدم إلى الوظيفة أعلاه، يرجى زيارة موقع الشركة Vacancies www.omangrid.com في موعد أقصاه 17 يونيو 2023م.

يرجى إرفاق الإتي عند تقديم الطلب:

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Al Mouj Muscat gets Oman's first BREEAM certification

Al Mouj Muscat has achieved Oman's first ever BREEAM sustainability status, earning the internationally recognised certification for Golf Beach Residences, a collection of luxury family homes at the oceanfront lifestyle destination.

BREEAM is the world's most established international sustainability certification organisation which since 1990 has rated more than half a million buildings worldwide. It uses 10 different measurement categories such as management, innovation, energy, water, waste and pollution to rate a building's environmental performance and give it a score, a press release said.

Al Mouj Muscat is the first organisation to achieve this highly demanding and prestigious certification in the sultanate, once more establishing Al Mouj Muscat as a community that continues to define design excellence.

Golf Beach Residences are 51 spectacular oceanfront mansions and beachside villas situated in private gated neighbourhoods within Al Mouj Muscat's Shatti and Golf Dis-



tricts. Whilst there are four different designs of the five and six-bedroom family homes, all are built to exemplary standards using the highest quality materials and with features that demonstrate a clear focus on long-term energy efficiency,

health and well-being. Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat said, "We are overjoyed to have achieved BREEAM certification with a Very Good score which demonstrates our commitment to sustainability and to

achieving the goals set out in Oman Vision 2040. Sustainability sits at our core and Golf Beach Residences is only part of the extraordinary gains being made at Al Mouj where our residents' living environments are helping the wider environment through

lower energy consumption and CO2 emissions."

He further said, "The health and well-being of our residents is also a priority, so while living in exemplary homes, they also benefit from an exceptional outdoor environment."

Ahlibank shines at Banking Summit 2023

Revered for upholding the highest values of excellence, Ahlibank has been recently honoured with three prestigious accolades at the Oman Banking and Finance Awards, held during the eighth edition of the New Age Banking Summit 2023.

Ahlibank's CEO, Said Abdullah al Hatmi, was recognised as the 'CEO of the Year' while the bank itself received the 'Excellence in Corporate Banking' and 'Excellence in Digital Transformation' accolades. The twin awards further attest to Al Hatmi's keen emphasis on delivering superior performance in all aspects of the bank's operation.

With an illustrious career that spans over two decades, Al Hatmi has played an integral role in Ahlibank, holding several senior management positions over the course of the years. Under his transformative leadership, Ahlibank experienced remarkable growth, expanded its cus-



Said Abdullah al Hatmi

tomor base, and fortified its network of physical and digital branches.

Commenting on the awards, Hatmi said, "I am truly humbled to have received this coveted title, the credit of which goes to the unwavering commitment that the team at Ahlibank has consistently demonstrated. The excellence awards are a testament to the holistic approach that Ahlibank has taken towards growth as well as its inherent dedication to support both businesses and individuals realise their aspirations."



Al Madina Takaful introduces work-life balance initiative

Al Madina Takaful has announced the implementation of an experimental initiative starting from June 1, 2023, to support its women employees who are facing the challenges of balancing work obligations with their personal responsibilities, particularly when it comes to their families and children.

As part of the new trial-based adjustment to working hours, specific categories of women

employees will be eligible for flexible working arrangements. The initiative specifically targets women who are currently breastfeeding, pregnant women in their last months of pregnancy, and mothers with children under the age of six, a press release said.

Speaking about the new initiative, Usama al Barwani, CEO of Al Madina Takaful said, "As we strive to achieve a harmo-

nious balance between work obligations and personal responsibilities, while also supporting our employees' families and children, we will be implementing a trial-based adjustment to working hours."

This move demonstrates the company's commitment to nurturing a positive and inclusive work environment that considers the unique needs of its women workforce.

Audi Oman announces exclusive offers

Audi Oman, represented by Premium Motors, has announced an exclusive 'peace of mind with unlimited mileage' offer on high-performance Audi flagship models.

The offer extends an array of benefits to customers, including comprehensive seven-year roadside assistance, five-years' servicing or up to 105,000km, and a five-year unlimited mileage warranty, a press release said.

The offer includes first-year registration and insurance. To enhance the offer even



further, customers may receive up to an additional RO1,000 when trading in any German-manufactured vehicle.

Additionally, customers working in government entities are entitled to special price privileges upon submitting a

valid proof.

Customers can enjoy a transparency package, which is also part of the promotion, comprising free window tinting, and interior and exterior cleaning.

For those interested in the

service offer, a free AC check is available, which requires prior booking and includes a vehicle health check (VHC) along with Audi Service Cam. Moreover, it entails free labour for AC filter replacement and complimentary AC sanitisation.

MoE holds meeting on 'national roles'

In cooperation with the Ministry of Education, the State Financial and Administrative Control Authority, organised an awareness meeting titled 'National Roles and Institutional Partnership in Protecting Public Funds and Promoting Integrity', in the presence of the Director-General of the Directorate-General of Supervision of Service Units, the Director of the Department of Supervision of the Education Sector in the Authority, and members of the examination team at the Ministry of Education.

The meeting targeted employees of the Ministry's General



Diwan, and the Educational Directorates in the governorate, a

press release said. It began with a visual presentation introducing

the State Financial and Administrative Control Authority, its organisational structure, tasks, specialisations, and its partnership with society.

This was followed by the first paper titled 'National Roles of the State Financial and Administrative Control Authority' presented by Abdullah al Saidi, director of the Legal Studies Department. The paper included two main topics - 'Introduction of the Authority and its work' and 'Promoting Integrity and Anti-Corruption', which dealt with the United Nations Organization Agreement.

Alizz Islamic Bank announces 3rd 'Ruwad Alizz' programme



Alizz Islamic Bank announced the enrollment of the third batch in the renowned Ruwad Alizz programme aimed at cultivating middle-level leadership.

In partnership with Harvard Manage Mentor, the esteemed e-learning platform affiliated with Harvard University, the programme offers a compre-

hensive training experience. It aims to empower and develop 60 employees annually, divided into two batches of 30 individuals each. The program entails six

consecutive months of dedicated study, with the first and second batches having already produced 56 successful graduates, a press release said.

The third batch comprises 34 employees from Alizz Islamic Bank as well as other esteemed government institutions. The selection process involved eval-

uating individuals' job performance followed by a practical test in the form of a case study, assessing their crisis management skills, ability to overcome chal-

lenges, and decision-making acumen, all of which contribute to maintaining the company's productivity and employees' well-being.

IN BRIEF

2 dead, 5 injured in US school graduation shooting

Washington, US - Two people were killed and five injured on Tuesday during a shooting near a high school graduation in the US state of Virginia, police said, the latest in an epidemic of mass shootings plaguing the country.

The shooting took place around 5pm (2100 GMT) outside a theater in the state capital of Richmond, where students from a local high school were celebrating their graduation, Richmond interim police chief Rick Edwards told reporters.

The deceased included an 18-year-old graduate and a 36-year-old man, he added. A nineteen-year-old suspect fled the scene, but was soon arrested and is to be charged with second-degree murder, Edwards said.

Attacks by suspected militants in Burkina Faso kill 21 people

Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso - Twenty-one people, most of them members of the security forces, have been killed in Burkina Faso in attacks by suspected militants, security sources said on Wednesday.

Fourteen members of the VDP volunteer militia and four soldiers died on Monday in Sawenga in central-eastern Burkina, while five were wounded, a source said. Another security source confirmed the toll, saying that the clash occurred during an operation to secure the area, and that 'more than 50 terrorists were neutralised' in an airborne counter-attack.

Separately, a police source said a policeman and two civilians were killed on Monday night in an attack on a police border post at Yendere, on the southwestern frontier with Ivory Coast.

Rwanda unveils major military shakeup

Kigali, Rwanda - Rwandan President Paul Kagame has embarked on a major shakeup of the country's military, with a round of dismissals announced on Wednesday following the appointment of a new defence minister, army chief and head of internal security.

The Rwanda Defence Force said in a statement that two senior commanders had been sacked, along with 14 officers, and more than 200 people in other ranks.

No reason has been given for the changes.

On Tuesday, Kagame had announced the appointment of Juvenal Marizamunda as defence minister, replacing Albert Murasira who had served in the post since 2018. The 58-year-old Marizamunda was previously the head of Rwanda's correctional services.

AFP

Thousands flee flooded homes after destruction of frontline Ukraine dam

Kherson, Ukraine - Thousands were fleeing their homes on Wednesday after the destruction of a frontline Russian-held dam flooded dozens of villages and parts of a nearby city in Ukraine, sparking fears of a humanitarian disaster.

Downstream from the breached Kakhovka dam, Ukrainian police and troops in Kherson city were bringing people out from inundated areas in inflatable boats, most clutching only a few documents and pets.

Moscow and Ukraine have traded blame for the dam being ripped open early on Tuesday, which unleashed a gush of water on the Dniro River and forced hasty departures.

One woman, Nataliya Korzh, 68, had swum part of the way to escape from her house. She emerged from a rescue boat barefoot, her legs covered with scratches, her hands trembling from cold.

"All my rooms are underwater. My fridge is floating, the freezer, everything. We're used to shooting, but a natural disaster is a real nightmare. I wasn't



Ukrainian servicemen help local residents during an evacuation from a flooded area in Kherson on Wednesday, following damages sustained at Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant dam (AFP)

expecting that," she told AFP.

She had only managed to bring a few belongings and medicines with her and feared for her two dogs and cat, which she was unable to save.

"To get to the room where the dogs were, I would have had to dive. I don't know what's happened to them."

Central streets of Kherson were waist-deep in water and ground-floors of buildings underwater. A spokesman for Ukraine's emergency services, Oleksandr Khorunzhyi, said on television that 'more than 1,450 people have been evacuated' and 'currently there is no information about the dead or injured'.

Water levels in Kherson have risen by five metres (16 feet), he said.

Amid the rescue operation, frequent shelling could be heard in the city, which was occupied by Russian forces for nine months in 2022.

A policeman, Sergiy, 38, was using a radio to coordinate the

Opposition wins majority in Kuwait's parliament election

Kuwait City, Kuwait - Opposition lawmakers won a majority in Kuwait's parliament with only one woman elected, results showed on Wednesday, after the Gulf state's seventh general election in just over a decade.

The opposition figures include Islamists and independent politicians not tied to the ruling family who are pushing for a raft of reforms.

The vote on Tuesday came after Kuwait's constitutional court in March annulled the results of last year's election - in which the opposition made significant gains - and reinstated the previous parliament elected in 2020.

Opposition lawmakers won 29 of the legislature's 50 seats, according to results published by the official Kuwait News Agency. Only one woman was elected - opposition candidate Janan Busheiri.

The make-up of the new parliament is very similar to the one elected last year and later annulled, with all but 12 of its 50 members retaining their seats.

This has sparked concerns that the legislature may once again find itself locked in disputes with the cabinet, further



Kuwaiti candidate and former parliament speaker Marzouq al-Ghanim celebrates with his supporters in Kuwait city, early on Wednesday (AFP)

deepening a political crisis that has delayed reforms and hampered growth.

Longtime speaker Marzouq al-Ghanim and Ahmed al-Saadoun, who replaced him last year, both return to parliament. Saadoun is expected to run again for the post of speaker.

"We are celebrating today the (victory of the) reformist approach," opposition lawmaker Adel Al-Damkhi told reporters after the results were announced. "The election results are an indication of the awareness of the Kuwaiti people."

Turnout reached 50 per cent one hour before polls closed, according to the Kuwait Trans-

parency Society, an NGO. Last year's election saw turnout of 63 per cent.

Since Kuwait adopted a parliamentary system in 1962, the legislature has been dissolved around a dozen times.

While lawmakers are elected, Kuwait's cabinet ministers are installed by the ruling Al-Sabah family, which maintains a strong grip over political life.

Continual standoffs between the branches of government have prevented lawmakers from passing economic reforms, while repeated budget deficits and low foreign investment have added to an air of gloom.

AFP



People work amongst debris in Jeremie, Haiti, after an earthquake hit western Haiti on Tuesday (AFP)

Four dead, several dozen injured in Haiti earthquake

Port-Au-Prince, Haiti - An earthquake shook parts of western Haiti on Tuesday, killing at least four people and injuring three dozen others, authorities said, with more victims feared trapped under the rubble.

The magnitude 4.9 quake occurred just after 5am (0900 GMT) around 5.5 miles (9km) off the coast of the isolated Grand'Anse department, some 185 miles west of Port-au-Prince, according to the US Geological Survey.

The Haitian Red Cross said emergency workers were looking for people who may still be

trapped under the ruins.

"Efforts continue to find survivors," the group said.

The majority of victims lived in the poor neighborhood of Sainte Helene, in the town of Jeremie, where an AFP photographer saw a number of cracked houses.

Three of the dead 'are members of the same family and were killed when their house collapsed', Christine Monquele, head of Civil Protection in Grand'Anse, told AFP.

"I don't know what to do," said Katiana Pierre, a 19-year-old who lost her husband and little sister in the quake.

At least 36 people were reported injured.

"We were able to administer first aid to the victims," said Soitmil Lorreus, head of emergency services at the Saint-Antoine public hospital. Some patients were airlifted to the capital, and Lorreus said the hospital expected to receive more patients from the countryside.

One man, speaking from his hospital bed in a video shared by local news outlet JCOM Haiti, recalled how his neighbours and wife helped him save his two children.

AFP

Francoise Gilot, the woman who dumped Picasso, dies aged 101

Paris, France - France's Francoise Gilot, who died on Tuesday aged 101, survived what she called the 'hell' of being Spanish artist Pablo Picasso's mistress and muse to become a renowned artist in her own right.

The Picasso Museum in Paris confirmed her death to AFP, after the *New York Times* reported Gilot had passed away following recent heart and lung ailments.

While two of the other women in Picasso's life died by suicide, and two others had mental breakdowns, Gilot stood up to the giant of modern art, and was the only woman to leave him of her own accord.

"Pablo was the greatest love of my life, but you had to take steps to protect yourself. I did, I left before I was destroyed," she

confided in Janet Hawley's 2021 book *Artists and Conversation*.

"The others didn't, they clung on to the mighty Minotaur and paid a heavy price," she said, referring to Picasso's first wife, dancer Olga Khokhlova, who lapsed into depression after he left her; his former teen lover, Marie-Therese Walter, who hanged herself; his second wife Jacqueline Roque, who shot herself; and his best-known muse, artist Dora Maar, who had a nervous breakdown.

The painter of *Guernica* was, she said, 'astonishingly creative, a magician, so intelligent and seductive... But he was also very cruel, sadistic and merciless to others, as well as to himself.'

Bowl of cherries

Gilot was 21 and a budding

painter when she first met Picasso, who was 40 years her senior and married to Russian dancer Khokhlova, in occupied France during World War II. At the time of the meeting he was also the lover of French photographer, painter and poet Maar.

The meeting took place in a Paris restaurant in the spring of 1943 when he brought a bowl of cherries to her table and an invitation to visit his studio.

Lovers for 10 years, they never married but had two children, a son, Claude, born in 1947, and a daughter, Paloma, in 1949.

He often painted her, portraying her as the radiant and haughty *Woman-Flower* in 1946. In *Femme assise* (1949), which sold for £8.5mn (US\$9.6mn) at auction in London in 2012, he depicted her while heavily pregnant



French painter Francoise Gilot poses in Paris, on April 6, 2004

with Paloma.

In 1948, photographer Robert Capa captured the couple on a beach, with Picasso playing in the sand with his son, dutifully carrying a shade over Gilot's head.

When she decided to walk out

on him in 1953 and resume painting he took it badly.

He told her she was headed 'straight for the desert'. From then on his entourage snubbed her and her work.

"In France things had got rather difficult for me... leaving Picasso was seen as a big crime and I was no longer welcome," she was quoted as saying by Sotheby's in 2021.

The diminutive and slender brunette became a US citizen and did not go to his funeral in 1973.

Tyrannical

Born on November 26, 1921, at Neuilly-sur-Seine to the west of Paris to a well-to-do family, she followed in her mother's footsteps starting out as a water-colour artist, before moving on to

drawing and painting.

Her parents wanted her to become a lawyer, but she abandoned her studies at the age of 19. By 21 she was already one of the most respected artists of the emerging School of Paris, which grouped French and emigre artists in the capital during the first half of the 20th century.

As she developed, she increasingly produced minimalist, colourful works and over her career signed at least 1,600 canvasses and 3,600 works on paper. In her 1964 book *Life with Picasso* she portrayed him as a tyrant. Picasso failed in a legal bid to get the book banned, and retaliated by refusing to see her and their children.

She also wrote a book in 1991 on Picasso's complicated love-hate relationship with the other

giant of modern art, Matisse, with whom she was friends.

The two other men in her life were painter Luc Simon, with whom she had a daughter Aurelia, and American virologist Jonas Salk, inventor of the first polio vaccine, whom she married in 1970 and lived with in California until his death in 1995.

Gilot spent the last years of her life in New York, where she continued painting into her nineties.

In 2021 her painting *Paloma a la Guitare*, a 1965 portrait of her daughter, sold for US\$1.3mn at Sotheby's in London.

Her work graced the walls of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, as well as the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

AFP

'WORLD'S TOUGHEST'

Millions of Chinese students sit gruelling college entrance exams

Beijing, China - Millions of Chinese students sat for notoriously tough college entrance exams on Wednesday, the first since the country lifted zero-COVID rules that forced classes online for months on end.

China's education ministry says nearly 13mn students, a record, are registered to take the 'gaokao' exams - billed by state media as the 'world's toughest' - this year.

In Beijing, anxious parents gathered around exam halls as their children knuckled down, many wearing red for good luck.

Zhang Jing, a mother in her forties, compared herself to Bai Suzhen, a character in Chinese folklore who is locked in a tower until her son passes an important test.

"My son is quite relaxed, I think I am more nervous than him," Zhang, wearing a red qipao, a traditional Chinese dress, told AFP.

"I have been accompanying my son and instructing his study from the first grade of elementary school to the first year of high school," she explained.

"As long as he's at home studying, I'm there by his side."

'I struggled'

Testing high school students on their Chinese, English, mathematics and other science or humanities subjects of their choice, the exams are critical to landing coveted spots at China's top universities.

In the Chinese capital, parents and volunteers held up



Students arrive for the first day of the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE), in Jinan, in eastern Shandong province on Wednesday (AFP)

I've been waking up at 4am every day, except on Sundays, to study for the past four years

JESSE RAO

signs saying 'go for it, youngsters!' as students posed for photos with banners assuring them that 'victory is secured'.

"Of course I hope that he can get a good score, but I don't want to put any pressure on him. I want him to be relaxed," mother Fang Hong told AFP.

The exams are notorious for testing the ability to compose

essays in response to oblique prompts.

One sample question published on Wednesday by the *People's Daily* newspaper asked readers to consider two aphorisms by President Xi Jinping, adding that they would be marked in part on whether they write from the 'correct angle'.

"I've been waking up at 4am every day, except on Sundays, to study for the past four years," Jesse Rao, a 17-year-old high school senior in Shenzhen, told AFP.

"I've done everything I can, but I still feel a bit nervous."

Adding to the stress, this year's exam-takers have spent the bulk of their high school years under pandemic restrictions, which ended abruptly in

December.

"I struggled to follow online lessons last year," Katherina Wang, a high school student from Shanghai who has been through two snap lockdowns in the past two years, told AFP.

The high stakes have led to elaborate attempts at cheating. Several provinces this year have installed facial-recognition scanners to ensure that candidates do not hire proxies to take the test on their behalf, the state-run *Global Times* reported.

'I will try again'

Exams can last up to four days, lasting between an hour and 150 minutes per subject.

The maximum score is 750, with over 600 required for a place at top-tier universities,

which for years served as a ticket to personal and professional success in China.

Very few students make the cut. Last year, only three per cent of exam-takers in Guangdong, China's most populous province, scored over 600.

For students with more modest ambitions, scores still play a critical role in securing spots in universities and what subjects can be taken.

For those that do not get the results they need, there is always next year. In 2021, 17 per cent of students nationwide re-took the gaokao.

"If I don't get the results I want, I will try again," Benjamin Zhu, a high school senior from Guangzhou, told AFP.

AFP



Liang Shi going through exam papers ahead of the exam in Chengdu, in China's southwestern Sichuan province (AFP)

'Gaokao holdout', 56, taking the test for the 27th time

Beijing, China - Among the millions of fresh-faced high schoolers sitting China's dreaded 'gaokao' college entrance exam on Wednesday, Liang Shi sticks out like a sore thumb - a grey-haired, self-made millionaire stubbornly taking the test for the 27th time. Liang, 56, is no fool. He worked his way up from a menial job on a factory floor to establishing his own successful construction materials business.

But one dream has always eluded him: getting a high enough score on the notoriously gruelling gaokao to study at the top-tier Sichuan University.

To compete with the nearly 13mn high school seniors taking the exam this year, Liang said he has been living 'the life of an ascetic monk' for the past few months, rising just after dawn to furiously study textbooks for 12 hours a day. "It's an uncomfortable thought that I didn't manage to get a college education," Liang told AFP.

"I really want to go to university and become an intellectual." Over the past four decades, the Sichuan native has taken the gaokao 26 times but has consistently failed to get the required result to send him to his chosen university.

"They call me 'the gaokao holdout,'" he said, proudly owning a mocking nickname given to him by local media.

For students, a good gaokao result can decide one's life trajectory, with a degree from an elite university conferring respect, status and better job opportunities.

Liang took the exam for the first time in 1983, when he was only 16.

He kept trying to boost his score for the next decade - until he had to give up in 1992, as the test at that time was restricted to single people aged under 25. As soon as those limits were lifted in 2001, Liang's desire for a prestigious college education was rekindled.

AFP

North Pole: Norway rescues Russian

Oslo, Norway - Norway rescued a Russian in need of emergency medical assistance on board a scientific vessel stuck in ice near the North Pole in a spectacular helicopter operation, its rescue services said on Wednesday.

The evacuation took place on Tuesday evening from the Russian ship *Severn Polyus* (North Pole), located at the 86th parallel north, above Norway's Svalbard archipelago some 240 nautical miles (around 444km, 276 miles) from the North Pole.

At the request of Russian authorities, Norway dispatched a Super Puma helicopter from Longyearbyen, the main town on Svalbard some 500 nautical miles away, to evacuate a Russian whose condition was considered too serious to be treated on board.

"It's the extreme limit of what the helicopter can do in terms of range, a spokesman for Norway's Bodo rescue centre, Rune Danielsen, told AFP.

"The slightest detail counts when going that far: weight, wind conditions, etc," he said. The operation was carried out in line with Norwegian-Russian bilateral accords on Arctic search and rescues.

AFP

Trump foe Chris Christie launches 2024 presidential run

Washington, US - Republican former New Jersey governor Chris Christie jumped into the 2024 race for the White House on Tuesday, positioning himself as a political knife-fighter and the only candidate willing to take on frontrunner Donald Trump.

Christie, who filed his paperwork with the Federal Election Commission before an evening announcement in Manchester, New Hampshire, presents a novel challenge as the only Republican contender so far willing

to land genuinely damaging blows on the former president.

The 60-year-old Newark native came sixth in New Hampshire seven years ago and eventually endorsed Trump, serving as a key advisor before the pair fell out over the tycoon's refusal to accept his 2020 election defeat.

At his announcement in New Hampshire on Tuesday evening, Christie depicted Trump as self-obsessed and dishonest.

The former US president,



Chris Christie (AFP)

Christie said 'always finds someone else and something else to blame for whatever goes wrong, but finds every reason to take credit for anything that goes right'.

And Christie argued last month that the de facto Republican leader was 'afraid' of debating serious opponents.

Trump has indicated that he may skip at least one of the first two Republican primary debates, expressing a reluctance to share the limelight with lower-polling

rivals. "If he really cares about the country - and I have deep questions about that - but if he really cares about the country, then he's going to get up there, and he shouldn't be afraid," Christie told conservative radio host Hugh Hewitt.

Christie has assailed Trump on all manner of issues, highlighting the escalating criminal probes targeting the embattled billionaire, trashing his false claims of election fraud and dubbing him 'Putin's puppet' over his

isolationist stance on Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

John Ellis, a former head of the Fox News Election Night Decision Desk, told AFP that while a bigger field benefits Trump, Christie's candidacy could put the top-polling candidate on the back foot. "Because he will attack Trump relentlessly, Christie's campaign will get a ton of coverage in the mainstream press, which may help him do well in New Hampshire," said Ellis.

AFP

UK PM in Washington to meet Biden and talk tech, Ukraine

Washington, US - Prime Minister Rishi Sunak flew in to Washington late on Tuesday lobbying for Britain to take a lead role in regulating artificial intelligence, after a dire warning of the technology's existential dangers.

Sunak will meet President Joe Biden on Thursday for a White House summit, pledging unstinting support for Ukraine after Russia was accused of blowing up a major dam to thwart an apparent counter-offensive.

Any intentional attack on the Kakhovka dam would represent 'the largest attack on civilian infrastructure in Ukraine since the start of the war, and just would demonstrate the new lows that we would have seen from Russian aggression', Sunak told reporters aboard his plane from London.

But while the United States and Britain are inching closer on giving Ukraine air support, and on a robust approach to China, Sunak faces a harder sell with

Biden about the UK's post-Brexit relevance elsewhere.

The need for a coordinated response on AI was underlined by Downing Street task force advisor Matt Clifford, who warned the chances of the fast-learning systems wiping out humanity within two years were 'not zero'.

Interviewed on TalkTV, he said the world needed 'to regulate them on a global scale, because it's not enough I think to regulate them nationally'.

Sunak wants a future global AI regulator to be based in London, according to sources, arguing Britain has the requisite expertise and size of tech sector.

But it is pushing uphill as the United States talks directly to the European Union about AI regulation, to build on a pledge by G7 leaders including Sunak in Japan last month.

And Sunak, who meets US business leaders before Thursday's summit, has given up on securing a post-Brexit trade deal



British PM Rishi Sunak holds a huddle with political journalists onboard a government plane as he heads to Washington, D.C. on Tuesday (AFP)

with the Biden administration any time soon.

'Battlefield advantage'

En route to Washington, the prime minister announced cumulative US investment of more than £14bn (US\$17bn) into Britain - although some of that has already been deployed.

Underlining the US-UK mili-

tary alliance at the heart of NATO, Sunak said their economic relationship should also be deployed to defend Western democracy.

"By combining our vast economic resources and expertise, we will grow our economies, create jobs and keep our people safe long into the future," said the prime minister, a wealthy former banker who studied in the United

States and retains a property in California.

"Just as interoperability between our militaries has given us a battlefield advantage over our adversaries, greater economic interoperability will give us a crucial edge in the decades ahead."

Sunak is pushing for US relief to UK carmakers, via greater access to critical minerals used in electric batteries, after Biden's Inflation Reduction Act offered vast subsidies to US companies.

On the NATO front, Sunak has been talking up Defence Secretary Ben Wallace as the Western alliance seeks a new secretary-general at a summit in Lithuania next month. "I have absolutely zero doubt that the war in Ukraine will be a prime issue of discussion" in Thursday's summit, US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said.

"And the Brits have been right there - literally at the fore in terms of helping Ukraine," he added.

"I have no doubt that they'll talk about ways in which we can work together going forward."

'To score better'

On Wednesday, Sunak will lay a wreath at Arlington National Cemetery outside Washington before heading to Capitol Hill for talks with leaders in Congress.

He will then watch the Washington Nationals play the Arizona Diamondbacks for the second annual 'UK-US Friendship Day', marking 238 years of diplomatic relations.

But Sunak, a keen cricketer, has ducked the opportunity to throw the ceremonial first pitch at the baseball game - sparing his blushes if the throw goes astray in front of tens of thousands.

After transatlantic disputes over trade and Northern Ireland, Sunak hopes to score better with Biden than his controversial predecessors Boris Johnson and Liz Truss.

AFP

INDIA

Coromandal Express back on track after deadly crash

The train departed Shalimar station on a 25-hour journey to Chennai

Kolkata, West Bengal - One of the train services involved in a triple collision in India's deadliest railway disaster for decades resumed journeys on Wednesday, as officials revised the death toll up to 288.

"The Coromandal Express is back on track," railway spokesman Aditya Kumar Chaudhary said, with a train departing Shalimar station near Kolkata on Wednesday afternoon on a 25-hour journey south to Chennai.

The train, which was full, chugged out of the station five minutes behind the scheduled time as scores of people looked on.

The service was one of three trains involved in the crash near Balasore in the eastern state of Odisha on Friday.

As usual, long and winding queues formed for the train's unreserved section.

"Four friends who were travelling on the ill-fated train went missing after the accident on Friday," said Samaresh Mondal, 30, a migrant worker in the line.

"I am ready to accept my destiny. I am forced to go to Chennai to earn bread for me and my family."

Pradeep Jena, Odisha's top civil servant, said late on Tuesday that the official death toll had risen to 288.

At least 1,175 people were in-



A passenger aboard the Chennai bound Coromandel Express gestures as the train departs from Shalimar station near Kolkata on Wednesday (AFP)

jured, with many of them in critical condition and still being treated in hospital.

Jena said the revised toll came after deaths were tallied from both hospitals and mortuaries and noted that 83 bodies remain unidentified.

Medical centres were overwhelmed by the number of casualties and there are fears the death toll could rise further.

'No alternative'

The Coromandal Express was diverted onto a loop line before it slammed into a stationary goods train. The collision flipped the carriages of the Coromandal Express onto another track.

The derailed compartments were then struck by the rear carriages of another train, the Howrah Superfast Express from India's tech hub Bengaluru,

which was passing in the opposite direction.

While trains began operating late on Sunday past the crash site, Wednesday's journey is the first service of the Coromandal Express to resume the route.

"We are very much worried after Friday's devastating accident," said Pinki Bhuniya, 36, travelling with her husband and daughter.

"We have no alternative but to travel in trains because air tickets are too expensive for us."

Ashwini Vaishnaw, India's railway minister, has said the crash happened due to the 'change that occurred during electronic interlocking', a technical term for a complex signal system designed to stop trains colliding.

AFP



S Jaishankar signs at the conclusion of 1st India-Namibia Joint Commission of Cooperation, in Windhoek on Tuesday (ANI)

Project Cheetah a new symbol of India-Namibia friendship: EAM

Windhoek, Namibia - Upon conclusion of his Namibia visit, External Affairs Minister (EAM) S Jaishankar highlighted that Project Cheetah has emerged as a 'new symbol of friendship between India and Namibia'.

Jaishankar noted that shared political struggles of many decades, the challenge of preparing for a more contemporary world, the promise of technology, the excitement of common training and shared experiences are among the things that bind India and Namibia together in many ways. "There is so much today that binds India and Namibia together and in many ways, perhaps an agile, fast-moving animal that is equally comfortable in both societies is an appropriate symbol of what awaits us in the future," Jaishankar said after ending his Namibia visit.

He also said: "The relocation of Namibian Cheetas to the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh obviously stirred a lot of interest in India. But equally, as I discovered going to Namibia, it has been very much in the public discourse of that country as well."

Jaishankar added that the mainstay of every relationship is the people to people contact. "There is a deep interest in Indian arts and culture, a sense that the two countries are today moving forward to develop and nurture our traditions and heritage."

"Trade and investments have grown steadily, trade levels now approaching almost US\$300mn. And where investments are concerned, the pres-

ence of 22 Indian companies dealing with diamonds, who today impart training and skills to Namibians as part of their business model, is something that India has reasons to be proud of," the EAM said.

Jaishankar also held conversations on the International Year of Millets, which according to him were 'so personally driven by Prime Minister Modi'."

Namibia too has not just a tradition of consuming millet, but actually imports Bajara from

An agile, fast-moving animal, equally comfortable in both societies, is an appropriate symbol of what awaits us in future

S JAISHANKAR

Gangster shot inside Lucknow court, succumbs to his injuries

Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh - Police on Wednesday confirmed that gangster Sanjeev Jeeva, who was shot at inside Lucknow's civil court while being brought for a hearing, succumbed to his injuries.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Lucknow, Rahul Raj said: "Sanjeev Jeeva was shot at today and succumbed to his injuries. Two of our constables also sustained injuries but are out of danger. They are currently under treatment. I've



Bloodstains are spotted inside the Lucknow civil court where gangster Sanjeev Jeeva was shot dead, on Wednesday (ANI)

been told that the assailant has been arrested." Meanwhile, lawyers staged a protest outside Lucknow civil court in the wake of the firing incident. "A child was also injured in the incident and was admitted to a trauma centre," said Agarwal.

"A criminal, identified as Sanjeev Jeeva, was shot today. Two police officials, who were escorting him to the court, also sustained injuries. A child was also injured in the incident and was admitted to a trauma cen-

tre," Upendra Kumar Agarwal, joint commissioner of police, Law and Order, Lucknow, said.

The gangster was accused in the murder of BJP leader Brahm Dutt and was being brought to court for a hearing.

"DCP West and DCP Central reached the court premises after receiving word of the incident," said Assistant Commissioner of Police Sunil Kumar Mishra.

Further details are awaited.

ANI

Top Fatah official warns of its 'decline' in West Bank

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories - A senior Palestinian official warned on Wednesday of the ruling Fatah party's declining popularity in the occupied West Bank because of its failure to deliver on promises.

"Fatah adopted peaceful means, and made promises to the public, but it has not been able to deliver on them."

"This is an essential part of what has led to a decline in its popularity," he said. At 72, Aloul is one of the most senior figures in the Palestinian movement and is often mentioned as a possible successor

to 87-year-old Abbas.

But Aloul also appeared on Wednesday to rule himself out as a successor to Abbas, saying: "We will look for someone from the younger generation."

Aloul rose through the ranks of the Palestinian guerrilla movement in Lebanon in the 1970s and returned to the West Bank in 1995.

His comments were a rare acknowledgement by a senior Abbas ally of waning fortunes for the party which has dominated the West Bank since Israel and the Palestinians signed the Oslo peace accords in 1993.

Elections slated for 2021 were scrapped, with Abbas citing Israel's refusal to allow voting in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, which Palestinians claim as their capital.

Opinion polling at the time indicated that Hamas, might beat Fatah in an election.

AFP

Blinken attends GCC ministerial meeting in Jeddah

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met Gulf Arab officials in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday at a time of rapidly shifting alliances following the oil-rich kingdom's rapprochement with Iran.

Blinken attended a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) ministerial meeting in the capital Riyadh that kicked off shortly after he met with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan.

The two countries' 'resolved to continue to work together to counter terrorism, to support efforts to bring about a lasting peace in Yemen, and to promote stability, security, de-escalation, and integration in the region', the US State Department said.

"The two sides pledged to continue their strong cooperation to end the fighting in Sudan," it added in a statement.

The meetings came a day after Blinken flew into Jeddah and held talks with Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler Mohammed bin Salman, in which he raised human rights issues.

Relations between Washing-



Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman meets with Antony Blinken in Jeddah on Tuesday (AFP)

ton and Riyadh, decades-old allies, have been strained in recent times mainly over human rights and oil, after US pleas for help in bringing down skyrocketing prices last year were dismissed.

The three-day visit is Blinken's first since the kingdom restored diplomatic ties with Iran, which the West considers a pariah over its contested nuclear activities and involvement in regional conflicts.

On Tuesday, the day Blinken arrived, Iran reopened its em-

bassy in Riyadh after a seven-year closure, with Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Alireza Bigdeli hailing a 'new era' in ties. On the same day, Prince Mohammed hosted Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, the head of a fellow oil power who has long sparred with Washington.

Last month, in a major shift, Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad attended an Arab League summit in Jeddah, his first since Syria's membership was suspended at the start of its 12-year civil war.

Washington criticised the decision to invite Assad.

'Open, candid discussion'

Wednesday's meeting at the GCC headquarters in Riyadh was attended by Qatar's prime minister among other top Gulf officials. On the agenda were key regional issues, including conflicts in Yemen, Sudan, Syria and the Palestinian territories, Qatar's foreign ministry spokesperson Majid al-Ansari said on Tuesday.

"The meeting undoubtedly constitutes an opportunity to draw a common position here in the region in relation to the United States of America and to define the form of the American positive influence in the region through partnership with the GCC," he said.

Blinken's visit is aimed at boosting ties with longtime ally Saudi Arabia, which has begun forging closer relations with Washington's rivals.

The visit will also focus on the joint battle against the Islamic State group and the Arab world's relations with Israel.

Blinken had 'an open, candid discussion' with the 37-year-old Prince Mohammed in Jeddah, a US official said on condition of anonymity.

The meeting, which lasted about 100 minutes, touched on topics including Saudi Arabia's support for US evacuations from Sudan, the need for political dialogue in Yemen and the potential for the normalisation of relations with Israel.

AFP

AUSSIES ENJOY HEAD START

Kangaroos take charge against India in WTC final

London, United Kingdom - Travis Head Travis Head's dashing century put Australia in a strong position against India on Wednesday's opening day of the World Test Championship final at the Oval.

Head came in with Australia struggling at 76-3 after India captain Rohit Sharma had won the toss in overcast conditions and on a green-tinged pitch that favoured a four-man pace attack.

But left-hander Head put the pressure back on the bowlers from the start of his innings, with 24 of his initial 27 runs coming in boundaries.

As the sun burst through the clouds, conditions for batting eased and Head cashed in against some wayward deliveries from an attack without Ravichandran Ashwin after India decided against selecting the off-spinner,



Australia's Travis Head plays a shot en route to his century on the first day of the World Test Championship final against India on Wednesday

the world's top-ranked Test bowler. By the time India tested Head with the short ball, he was well set and a pulled single off Mohammed Shami took the 29-year-old to a sixth Test hundred in just 106 balls, including 13 fours

and a ramped six against the paceman.

Australia were 233-3, with Head having added an unbroken 157 for the fourth wicket with star batsman Steve Smith, happy to play second fiddle on 53 not out.

India captain Rohit Sharma elected to bowl under overcast skies and on a green-tinged pitch that promised to assist a four-man pace attack. It was not long before a bowling unit missing injured fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah

justified Rohit's decision, with Mohammed Siraj removing Usman Khawaja for a 10-ball duck with an excellent wobble-seam delivery.

Australia, to the raucous delight of a mostly pro-India crowd,

were then 2-1 in the fourth over.

But David Warner, who had managed just one century in his previous 32 Test innings, counter-attacked.

The 36-year-old struck first-change Umesh Yadav for three fours in successive balls, with a forcing shot through cover-point followed by an uppercut over the slips and a delicate late cut.

Even better was a cover-driven four off Shardul Thakur that sped across the outfield.

Medium-pace Thakur had his revenge when he dismissed the opener for 43, although credit for the wicket belonged to wicket-keeper Srikanth Bharat, who took a fine diving catch down the legside after Warner had gloved an attempted pull shot.

Marnus Labuschagne, the world's top-ranked Test batsman, fell for his lunch score of 26 when bowled between bat and pad by a Mohammed Shami inswinger. Head, one of three left-handers in Australia's top five, put the pressure back on an attack without Ravichandran Ashwin after India decided against selecting the off-spinner, ranked number one in Test cricket.

Sri Lanka win series

Hambantota, Sri Lanka - Easy half-centuries from Sri Lanka openers Dimuth Karunaratne and Pathum Nissanka made short work of Afghanistan on Wednesday in a nine-wicket drubbing that clinched a 2-1 ODI series win for the hosts.

Sri Lanka strode to 120 with 34 overs to spare in Hambantota, striding past the 117 set by the tourists after a fast-bowling attack led by Dushmantha Chameera that demolished the hapless Afghan top order.

Nissanka did not waste time when the chase began, racing to his seventh ODI half-century in 32 balls with eight fours and two sixes. He left on 51 after being trapped leg before wicket by Gulbadin Naib to end an 84-run stand for the opening wicket.

Fellow opener Karunaratne, featuring in his first ODI series in more than two years, made 56 not out to ensure that Sri Lanka reached the target without another wicket falling.

Fast-bowling spearhead Chameera established Sri Lanka's dominance early with two fiery spells at the crease that left the tourists unable to post a decent partnership.

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Oman Cricket inks sports-centric health insurance deal for national team

MUSCAT: In a first for any sports associations in the Sultanate of Oman, a sports-centric health insurance policy has been inked between Oman Cricket (OC) and a leading insurance company.

The long-term policy arrangement will ensure that the national team cricketers currently in South Africa, en route to play the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Qualifier in Zimbabwe (June 18-July 9), will be covered for any injuries or health issues.

Confirming the three-year deal between OC and Dhofar Insurance Company, Alkesh Joshi's, OC treasurer, said: "This

is the first time that an exclusive sports-centric health policy has been introduced in the Sultanate of Oman. This is one-of-its-kind health insurance policy for its national team players. We are happy to have taken the pioneering step.

"This policy ensures that the national team players do not have worry, God forbid, in case of any injury happening as they will be provided the best health-care and flown to any part of the world for the best of the treatment. From air travel to getting the treatment from the best experts, they would be taken care by Oman Cricket."

Joshi said: "The policy has



Alkesh Joshi

provided a great relief for the players, who can now focus on what they do the best: performance on the field."

"We have the biggest mission ahead for Oman Cricket as our players attempt to make history by qualifying to the ICC

We have the biggest mission ahead for Oman Cricket as our players attempt to make history by qualifying to the ICC Cricket World Cup. The Zimbabwe Qualifier is the ultimate test for our players

ALKESH JOSHI



Cricket World Cup. The Zimbabwe Qualifier is the ultimate test for our players, and we wanted them to go into the tournament in the best shape and mindset," added Joshi.

A former domestic cricketer himself, Joshi said: "We have never had so much talent in one

squad in recent times. Be it Bilal Khan, the highest wicket-taker during ICC World Cricket League Division 2, or skipper Zeeshan Maqsood, who was named the ICC Associate Player of the Year or Jatinder Singh, one of the most flamboyant strikers.

"We have a balanced squad with the selection made on pure merit and horses for courses policy. I am sure, we will be no pushovers in Zimbabwe," Joshi added.

Oman are among the ten teams who will vie for the two available Cricket World Cup slots to be played in India later this year.

Divided into two groups, Duleep Mendis-coached Oman are clubbed with World Cup winner Sri Lanka, Ireland, Scotland and the UAE in Group B. Group A comprises hosts Zimbabwe, two-time winners West Indies, Nepal, Netherlands and United States.

Incentives doubled for Zimbabwe Qualifier

With the stakes high in Zimbabwe, Joshi said that "OC has doubled the players bonuses for the Cricket World Cup Qualifier."

He added: "After the team finished second in Division 2, we increased their monthly contracts significantly and the incentives have been doubled. The idea is that players shouldn't worry anything other than their display on the field. We have declared incentives and have also chalked out a plan to reward them on each match performances."

THE REAL DEAL

English teenager Bellingham to join Real Madrid from Dortmund

Berlin, Germany - English teenager Jude Bellingham will move from Borussia Dortmund to Real Madrid for a fee in excess of 100 million euros (\$107 million), the German side announced on Wednesday.

Dortmund confirmed the two teams had reached a "mutual agreement" over the transfer of the 19-year-old in the summer.

The publicly listed club said it would receive a fee of 103 million euros in addition to a variable amount "up to a maximum total amount of around 30 percent" of the fixed transfer fee, depending on team and player bonuses.

One of the most promising talents in world football, Bellingham joined Dortmund from Birmingham City in 2020 for a fee of 25 million euros.

He has played 132 games for the club, scoring 24 goals and winning the 2021 German Cup.

Bellingham was named Bun-



Jude Bellingham

desliga player of the season after the 2022-23 campaign, when he helped Dortmund to within an inch of their first Bundesliga title in over a decade.

Dortmund finished second, behind Bayern Munich, on goal difference after dropping points on the final matchday against Mainz, a match which the injured Bellingham watched from the bench.

Dortmund said it would receive a fee of 103 million euros in addition to a variable amount "up to a maximum total amount of around 30 percent" of the fixed transfer fee, depending on team and player bonuses

Making his debut for England at just 17, Bellingham played a starring role in the Three Lions' 2022 World Cup campaign.

Bellingham started each of England's five matches in Qatar, scoring once and assisting another as his side made it through to the quarter finals, where they lost against eventual runners up France.

AFP



N'Golo Kante

Kante joins Benzema at Saudi's Al Ittihad

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - World Cup-winning French midfielder N'Golo Kante has signed a three-year deal with Saudi Arabia's Al-Ittihad, a club source told AFP on Wednesday, a day after Real Madrid striker Karim Benzema also joined the team.

Kante, 32, underwent a full medical before the contract was signed, the source said on condition of anonymity, not being authorised to make the information public. The departing Chelsea player, who lifted the 2018 World Cup in Russia, has a history of injuries and missed six months of this season with a hamstring problem.

The club source did not di-

vulge the size of the deal, which comes as the oil-rich Gulf monarchy buys up a swathe of players for its domestic Saudi Pro League.

On Tuesday Benzema, the 35-year-old French Ballon d'Or-winner, was confirmed as a major signing for Jeddah-based Al-Ittihad, also on a three-year contract. The latest signings come after Portuguese superstar Cristiano Ronaldo joined Saudi Arabia's Al-Nassr in January in a deal said to be worth more than 400 million euros.

Benzema, Kante and Argentine great Lionel Messi are on a list of 10 targets who have been contacted by Saudi officials.

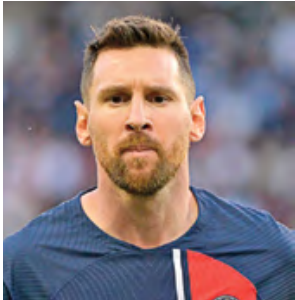
AFP

Messi set to snub Saudi mega deal and move to Inter Miami - reports

Paris, France - Argentine superstar Lionel Messi is joining American side Inter Miami, co-owned by David Beckham, various media outlets suggested on Wednesday.

The MLS side had declined to speculate over a move for the World Cup winner last week, with a mega buck switch to Saudi Arabia appearing the most likely destination for the 35-year-old.

Without quoting any sources, the BBC, the Independent and Marca amongst others named Miami as Messi's new club following the



Lionel Messi

end of his two-year contract this month with French Ligue 1 champions Paris Saint-Germain.

He has not announced which club side he will play for

next, but previous reports and a source close to the negotiations suggested he could join Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema and World Cup-winning French midfielder N'Golo Kante on a lucrative contract to play in Saudi Arabia.

Messi, with Benzema and Kante, was on a list of 10 targets who have been contacted by Saudi officials, a source close to the negotiations told AFP this week.

But if Wednesday's reports prove accurate it is Florida and not Jeddah that will be Messi's new destination.

Di Maria quits Juventus after one season

Paris, France - Argentina winger Angel Di Maria has quit Juventus after one season, becoming a free agent amid claims he could be targeted by a club in Saudi Arabia.

The 35-year-old World Cup winner touched down in Turin after seven seasons for Paris Saint-Germain, going on to score eight goals in 40 games for Juve in a trophy-less season.

"I leave with the peace of mind of having given all to help the club to continue winning titles, but it was not possible," Di Maria said on Instagram. "I leave with the bitter taste of not having achieved that, but also with the happiness of taking with me many friends from a fantastic



Angel Di Maria

dressing room."

Saudi Arabia has drawn up a list of more than 10 players who have won either the Champions League or the World Cup that it wants to lure to its league, a source close to the negotiations has told AFP.

The list includes Di Maria as well as the likes of Real Madrid and Croatia midfielder Luka Modric, Tottenham goalkeeper Hugo Lloris and his France teammate N'Golo Kante. All are at the tailend of their careers.

Karim Benzema signed Tuesday with Al-Ittihad, joining his former Real Madrid teammate Cristiano Ronaldo in the Gulf kingdom.

AFP

PGA Tour, LIV Golf merge to end golf’s ‘civil war’

Miami, United States - The PGA Tour has announced a shock merger with the Saudi-backed LIV Golf circuit, rocking the golfing world with a bombshell deal aimed at ending the sport’s two-year civil war.

In a stunning agreement that took the sport completely by surprise, the US-based PGA Tour and Europe’s DP World Tour said they had signed an agreement with LIV’s Saudi backers that will lead to the formation of “a new collectively owned, for-profit entity.”

“After two years of disruption and distraction, this is a historic day for the game we all know and love,” said PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan on Tuesday.

LIV Golf was launched in October 2021 and lured top PGA Tour talent with record \$25 million purses and money guarantees, bankrolled by Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund (PIF). Critics said LIV was conceived by the kingdom as a “sportswashing” exercise designed to improve Saudi Arabia’s

Tuesday’s deal ends all litigation between the feuding parties, although many other details of the landmark agreement remain to be disclosed

international image.

The PGA Tour responded by banning LIV players while the DP World Tour has handed out heavy fines to its players.

The rift had led to a series of lawsuits and caused acrimony between players such as major winners Phil Mickelson and Brooks Koepka, who signed lucrative deals with LIV, and those such as Rory McIlroy and Tiger Woods, who remained loyal to the PGA Tour.

Tuesday’s deal ends all litigation between the feuding parties, although many other details of the landmark agreement remain

to be disclosed.

The merger was given swift backing by six-time major winner Mickelson, the most prominent of the defectors to LIV.

“Awesome day today,” tweeted Mickelson.

But PGA Tour players were caught cold by the announcement, before later accusing Monahan of “hypocrisy” for joining forces with LIV after spending much of the past year urging players to resist the riches on offer. US media reported that Monahan was confronted by furious players at a meeting in Toronto ahead of this week’s Canadian Open. “I recognize that people are going to call me a hypocrite,” Monahan later told a conference call, but added that “circumstances do change.”

The name of the new merged entity and the precise structure of the tours has yet to be announced, but the PGA Tour said that the parties had agreed to “establish a fair and objective process for any players who desire to re-apply for membership with the PGA Tour or the DP

World Tour following the completion of the 2023 season”.

The Board of Directors of the new commercial entity will have the Saudi PIF governor Ya-sir Al-Rumayyan as chairman and Monahan as chief executive.

There was noticeably no mention of LIV chief executive Greg Norman in the statements. Norman’s combative approach to the conflict had seen him recently snubbed by Augusta National, which did not offer him an invite to April’s Masters tournament.

HIGH-VOLTAGE



Novak Djokovic



Carlos Alcaraz

Carlos Alcaraz books Novak Djokovic showdown in French Open semis

Paris, France - Carlos Alcaraz will play Novak Djokovic in a blockbuster French Open semi-final after the Spanish world number one beat Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-2, 6-1, 7-6 (7/5) on Tuesday.

The 20-year-old Alcaraz becomes the youngest French Open men’s semi-finalist since Djokovic in 2007 after defeating former Roland Garros runner-up Tsitsipas for the fifth time in as many attempts.

Djokovic, chasing a third French Open crown and record 23rd men’s Grand Slam singles title, recovered from dropping his first set of the tournament to defeat 11th seed Karen Khachanov 4-6, 7-6 (7/0), 6-2, 6-4.

The 36-year-old Serb is in his 12th Roland Garros semi-final - his 45th at the majors - and faces Alcaraz for a place in

That’s the match that a lot of people want to see. It’s definitely the biggest challenge for me so far in the tournament. If you want to be the best, you have to beat the best

NOVAK DJOKOVIC

the final after the world number one thrashed 2021 runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas in straight sets.

“That’s the match that a lot of people want to see. It’s definitely the biggest challenge for me so far in the tournament,” said Djokovic, who lost his only meeting with Alcaraz in Madrid last year.

“If you want to be the best, you have to beat the best. He’s definitely a guy to beat here. I’m looking forward to that.”

Djokovic fell behind for the first time this fortnight against Khachanov but dominated the second-set tie-break and then broke to begin the third set after a favourable bounce off the net.

Djokovic hit 19 winners and just one unforced error in the third set, conceding a solitary point on his serve before breaking the Russian again for good measure.

He briefly let slip a 4-2 lead in the fourth set but immediately broke back and se-

cured a ninth win in 10 tries against Khachanov with an ace on match point.

Alcaraz once more showed why he is the favourite with a convincing victory over Greek fifth seed Tsitsipas in the night session, easily navigating his stiffest challenge to date. The 20-year-old Spaniard has won all five meetings with Tsitsipas and becomes the youngest Roland Garros semi-finalist since Djokovic in 2007.

Tsitsipas started with a confident hold but Alcaraz soon grabbed control with two breaks to bag the opening set.

Alcaraz’s mix of delicate drop shots and blistering groundstrokes were too much for an overmatched Tsitsipas, who tamely surrendered the second set with a double fault.

AFF



Stefanos Tsitsipas

Tsitsipas to cut out ‘naps and melatonin’ after French Open exit

Paris, France - Stefanos Tsitsipas pledged Tuesday to cut out “naps and melatonin” after admitting virtually sleepwalking into a French Open defeat by Carlos Alcaraz.

The world number five from Greece slumped to a 6-2, 6-1, 7-6 (7/5) loss against top seed Alcaraz in a disappointing quarter-final.

“One thing that I’m going to try to avoid in the future is have melatonin pills and naps before matches because it clearly doesn’t seem to be working,” said Tsitsipas of his pre-match routine.

Melatonin in tablet form is often taken to treat sleep disorders.

Tsitsipas, the runner-up to Novak Djokovic in Paris in 2021, only woke up to the task at hand in the eighth game of the third set on Tuesday.

He saved two match points and then another in the 10th game as he pulled back from 2-5 down to 5-5 before Alcaraz eased through the tiebreak.

It was the 20-year-old Spaniard’s fifth win in as many meetings with Tsitsipas.

“The schedule has been a little bit difficult the last few

days. I had some late-night sessions. Not super late, but late enough for me to kind of have my sleep schedule ruined,” added Tsitsipas.

He recalled a 6-1, 6-2 loss to Djokovic at the Paris Masters in 2019 when the match played out in the same way after he had had tried to catch up on sleep.

“I feel like melatonin really

It wasn’t really that much fun out there in the first two sets. I felt completely off

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS

likes 1 and 2,” he said, referring to the set outcomes.

“It wasn’t really that much fun out there in the first two sets. I felt completely off, kind of like sleeping in a way. I just wish it never happens again. It sucks.”

Despite his defeat, Tsitsipas hailed US Open champion Alcaraz, who will face 22-time major winner Djokovic.

AFF

Haddad Maia first Brazilian woman since 1968 in Grand Slam semi-final

Paris, France - Beatriz Haddad Maia became the first Brazilian woman to reach a Grand Slam semi-final since 1968 on Wednesday when she came back from a set down to defeat Ons Jabeur at the French Open.

World number 14 Haddad Maia came through 3-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-1 and will face Iga Swiatek for a place in the final.

The defending champion and top seed defeated Coco Gauff 6-4, 6-2 on Wednesday in a re-

match of last year’s final.

World number one Swiatek improved her record at Roland to 26-2 after beating the 19-year-old Gauff for the seventh time in as many matches.

The 27-year-old left-hander Haddad Maia follows in the footsteps of seven-time major winner Maria Bueno who was the last Brazilian woman in the semi-finals of a major at the US Open 55 years ago.

Bueno, who passed away in

2018, made the last four in Paris in 1966 before the advent of the Open era. “Ons is not easy to play against, you have to be patient but I believed in my body and tried to keep my rhythm,” said Haddad Maia.

Jabeur, the runner-up at Wimbledon and the US Open in 2022, was playing in her first quarter-final at Roland Garros.

The Tunisian hit 15 winners as she claimed an opening set which featured five breaks of serve in



Beatriz Haddad Maia celebrates her victory over Ons Jabeur (AFP)

nine games.

Haddad Maia had never got past the second round of a Grand Slam before this French Open.

She had saved a match point in the third round against Ekaterina Alexandrova and then defeated Sara Sorribes Tormo in a three-hour 51-minute marathon, the third longest women’s match ever played at the tournament.

She summoned all that fighting spirit in the second set against Jabeur, holding her nerve on a

fourth set point.

Haddad Maia then swept into a 3-0 lead in the decider, saved four break points to stretch to a 5-1 advantage and took the match after two and a half hours when Jabeur hit long. “I had a day off after my fourth round match. My amazing team worked hard on my body,” said the Brazilian.

“We work hard all year to be in these moments so I remembered this when we were in the middle of the second set.”

Weekend



14

SIDE BY SIDE

Korean meals are all about an array of sides that go with steamed shortgrain rice



15

IN TOWN

Italian National Day and book release by Rangrez artists - 'Navyathanchal'



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ENTERTAINMENT

A peek into tinsel town in Hollywood and Bollywood



K-POP CONCERT

B.I.G WEEKEND

POPULAR KOREAN BOY BAND B.I.G (BOYS IN GROOVE) ARE SET TO PERFORM AT MADINAT AL IRFAN THEATRE (OCEC), ON FRIDAY (JUNE 9) AS PART OF THEIR CURRENT REGIONAL TOUR

Hubert Vaz

C lad in oversized trousers and shirts, and adorned with ear-piercings and lippgloss the Korean 'B.I.G boys' are all set to take the Gen Z in Muscat by storm as they unleash their Kpop hysteria at the Madinat al Irfan Theatre, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Friday (June 9) evening.

If you are one of those hooked onto K-pop - the latest music craze that not only offers young music lovers the world over a fresh, alien genre - and if you appreciate the smooth, ivory complexions of the boy band members synonymous with their smooth renditions, you cannot possibly miss encountering their magic in Oman, which is part of their regional tour. The band reportedly heads out to Kuwait for another concert on June 12.

Members of this popular Korean boy

band - B.I.G (Boys In Groove) - include J-Hoon, lead dancer and lead vocalist, Gunmin, leader, main dancer and vocalist, Heedo, main rapper, and Jinseok, main vocalist and the youngest. Two of the initial band members, Benji - main vocalist, and Minpyo - main rapper, are not part of the group now.

B.I.G had been formed in year 2014 in Seoul, South Korea, under GH Entertainment. They debuted on July 9, 2014, with their first digital single 'Hello' which became an instant hit because of its high praising lyrics in good regard of South Korea. Subsequently, other singles like 'Are You Ready?' soon built up their popularity.

In 2014, B.I.G were appointed ambassadors of the 2014 'Love Life while Walking Overnight' campaign and the 2014 Lifeline campaign. In 2016, the group became ambassadors for the National Unification Advisory Council and were subsequently appointed ambassadors for the Korea Youth Association.

With a dedicated fanbase in the Middle East and a growing presence in Japan, B.I.G has delighted audiences in various countries, including a special performance for the Prince of Saudi Arabia. Despite the challenges posed by the global pandemic, B.I.G remains committed to its fans, eager to continue sharing their love for music.

The Muscat concert is also expected to consolidate their popularity in the Arab world since a large number of K-pop fans exist in Oman, too.

This concert has been jointly organised by the Korean Embassy and the Korea-Arab Society which aims to promote cultural and people-to-people exchanges while upholding mutual cultural ties and heritage between Korea and 22 Arab countries.

The highlights include performances by talented musicians from Arab countries, including Mustafa Waad, from Iraq, and Anas Marzi, from Morocco. The two-hour concert is slated to begin at 8 pm.



J-Hoon
Lead dancer and lead vocalist



Gunmin
Leader, dancer and vocalist

ARABIC K-POP

The Muscat concert will incorporate a blend of Korean and Arabic titles including popular songs such as 'La Bezzaf' and 'LM3ALLEM'.

B.I.G. had released their seventh single - Illusion - in both, Korean and Arabic, making them the first K-pop group to release a song in Arabic. This was released before a mini-concert in Abu Dhabi, as part of the 'Korea Festival 2019'. The band had also released a coronavirus-inspired song in Arabic, titled 'Corona Song' aimed to empower and encourage those struggling during the pandemic.



Jinseok
Main vocalist



Heedo
Main rapper

cook-up

KOREAN CUISINE



Side by side

Korean cuisine is largely based on rice, vegetables, seafood and meats, beef being the most prized. Traditional Korean meals are significant for the number of side dishes that accompany short-grain steamed rice



Kimchi Stew

Ingredients
61tbsp oil
1 onion - thinly sliced
3 cloves garlic - sliced
250g beef - thinly sliced
400g kimchi - with juices, chopped
1tsp salt
2tsp sugar
1tbsp Korean chilli flakes
1tbsp gochujang (Korean red pepper paste)
3 cups chicken stock
250g firm tofu - cut into ½cm thick slices)
1tsp sesame oil
1 scallion – chopped

Method
In a large pot, heat the oil over medium high heat. Add the onion, garlic, and beef, and cook for about 5 minutes, until the beef is lightly browned and the onions start to soften.
Add the kimchi and fry for 2 minutes. Then add the salt, sugar, chili flakes, gochujang, and broth. Stir until combined. Bring to a simmer, cover, and cook for 10 minutes. Uncover and lay the tofu over the top. Replace the cover and simmer for another 10 minutes. Uncover for the last time and stir in the sesame oil. Garnish with the chopped scallion and serve with steamed rice.



Mango Bingsu

Ingredients
For mango puree
1 ripe large mango
¼ red chilli pepper [optional]
2 mint leaves

For Korean Bingsu
400ml (1¾ cups) water
2tbsp condensed milk
Black sesame seeds - for garnish
2 cups ice shavings/crushed ice
Mango/vanilla ice-cream – (optional, to serve)

Method
To make the mango puree, place half of the mango in a food processor along with the chilli, if using, and mint. Blend until smooth. Set aside. Chop the remainder of the mango into cubes, which will be used for garnishing when serving the dessert.
Now, layer the dessert: Add a layer of ice shavings in a dessert bowl, then drizzle with condensed milk and mango puree. Repeat, then garnish with mango pieces, mint, chopped chilli and black sesame seeds. Top with a scoop of ice-cream – optional.

Beef Bulgogi Bowls

Ingredients
600g beef tenderloin
½ pear
½ small onion
4 cloves garlic
1 inch piece ginger
2½tbsp soy sauce
2tbsp brown sugar
1 /8tsp black pepper
1tbsp sesame oil
2 scallions - chopped
½ carrot - sliced thin
6tbsp oil
5 cups steamed medium grain rice (to serve)
½ cup Kimchi (to serve)
3 cloves garlic - thinly sliced
3 Shishito peppers - thinly sliced
2tbsp Ssamjang paste
1tbsp toasted sesame seeds

Method
Slice the beef and transfer to a mixing bowl or deep plate. Next, prepare the marinade by adding the pear, onion, 4 cloves garlic, ginger, soy sauce, brown sugar, black pepper, and sesame oil to a food processor or blender. Blend until you have a smooth purée. Pour the marinade over the beef, topping the whole mixture with half of your chopped scallions and all of the sliced carrot. Stir thoroughly and let marinade for at least an hour, preferably overnight.
When the beef is done marinating, heat a cast iron skillet over high heat. The beef will cook in about 3 batches. Use 2tbsp of oil per batch. When the cast iron skillet is searing hot, lay pieces of beef in one layer to cover the pan. Let fry until crisped and caramelised, then flip and let fry again. The whole process takes 1-2 minutes per batch. Transfer to a plate.
When all the bulgogi is cooked, assemble the bowls. Add a generous heap of rice to each bowl. Top with the bulgogi, kimchi, garlic, Shishito peppers, and your reserved chopped scallions. Serve with additional kimchi on the side and ssamjang paste to taste. You can also sprinkle toasted sesame seeds over the top, if using.



Bibimbab

Ingredients
1 cucumber - cut into thin strips
¼ cup gochujang (Korean hot pepper paste)
1 bunch fresh spinach – chopped fine
1tbsp soy sauce
2tsp olive oil - divided
2 carrots, cut into thin strips
1 clove garlic - minced
1 pinch red pepper flakes
400g beef steak - sliced
4 large eggs
4 cups cooked white rice
4tsp toasted sesame oil - divided
1tsp sesame seeds
2tsp gochujang – divided

Method
Stir together cucumber pieces and gochujang paste in a

bowl - set aside.
Bring about 2 cups water to a boil in a large nonstick skillet and stir in spinach - cook until bright green and wilted. Drain spinach and squeeze out as much moisture as possible - set spinach aside in a bowl and stir in soy sauce.
Now, heat 1tsp olive oil in a large nonstick skillet, cook and stir carrots until softened, stir in garlic, and cook just until fragrant. Add cucumber mixture, sprinkle with red pepper flakes. Set carrot mixture aside in a bowl.
Brown beef in a clean nonstick skillet over medium heat, about 5 minutes per side - set aside. Heat remaining 1tsp olive oil in another nonstick skillet over medium-low heat. Fry eggs, sunny side up - set aside.
Divide cooked rice into 4 large serving bowls, top with spinach mixture, a few pieces of beef, and cucumber mixture. Place 1 egg atop each serving. Drizzle each bowl with 1tsp sesame oil, a sprinkle of sesame seeds, and a small amount of gochujang paste, if desired.

take a break

IN TOWN

FESTA DELLA REPUBBLICA



The Embassy of Italy hosted a reception to celebrate Italian National Day and Republic Day



(Photos: VK Shafeer)

Book release - 'Navyathanchal'



Rangrez, the artists' group of Indian Social Club, released a book titled 'Navyathanchal' - an artistic presentation on saris - under the auspices of H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India



(Photos: VK Shafeer)

BOGGLER

O	E	P	D
N	I	Y	G
G	S	I	N
A	Y	L	I

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

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

Weird but True...or False?

Can you spot the difference between a fun fact and a made-up tidbit? Take this 'Weird But True...or False' quiz to find out, based on facts from National Geographic Kids magazine.

NASCAR race-car drivers can lose up to 20 pounds of sweat in a single race - True or False?

False: NASCAR race-car drivers can lose up to 10 pounds of sweat in just one race. High temperatures outside, heavy uniforms, and heat from the cars they drive are all factors in how much a racer sweats.

Interesting facts



Desert animals are tough - they have to be in order to survive in this extreme habitat. Discover some interesting facts about desert animals.

Black-tailed jackrabbits can reach speeds of up to:

- a. 60 miles an hour
- b. 40 miles an hour
- c. 10 miles an hour
- d. 20 miles an hour

Answer: The black-tailed jackrabbit, also known as the American desert hare, can reach speeds of up to 40 miles an hour. Their powerful hind legs can propel them more than 10 feet forward. That plus a zigzag jumping style helps them escape predators like coyotes.

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

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

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Listen to your gut instinct today, because it will be telling you to avoid something that you usually do fairly often. And be prepared for other people to be confused about your sudden hesitation. But no matter what the stakes are, don't let anyone push you into doing anything that doesn't feel right today, especially if it involves any legal documents.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Your restlessness is fading away, and suddenly your regular routine doesn't feel so regular, any more! Instead of feeling dull, it feels comfortable, and most importantly, stress-free. This is a good time to finish up minor errands, pay bills, and hunker down for a quiet night in. Save the exploration for a day when you really need a new experience to get your blood pumping.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

The nonstop activity all around you will keep you extremely entertained today, especially since you are loaded with all the high energy you need to make the most of it! You should follow your urge to leap into the center of the action, because today you can sway the entire crowd and make a real difference.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

It's very wise for you to stay close to home right now, or, at the very least, remain in a place where you feel you can totally be yourself. Take off that mask you occasionally put on for the rest of the world's benefit. It should be easy. By this point in your life you should be through with trying to put on a show for anyone. Who do you really need to impress, anyway?



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Interesting and positive energy will be circling all around you today, and these good vibes will put you in a good frame of mind to deal with some surprising news from a friend. If your reaction is negative, resist the urge to sound the alarm right away. Respect the choices your friend is making, and wait a while to see how things proceed before you voice your concerns.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

A fog of drama has settled on your life today, and whether or not your actions are the cause is irrelevant. The problem is that this haziness could be making trivial issues look like real problems, and making real problems look like simple things that will just work themselves out. Flip your perspective around today, and make your seemingly trivial tasks your first priority.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Your ambition has been useful to you, but your whole life's happiness doesn't rely on what you do with your career. Balance is important in every aspect of your life, and you need to start paying more attention to fun and friendships. It's time to step off the career ladder for a while. Stop working so hard to move yourself upward.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Change is more than good for you right now. It's absolutely necessary! You've been tossing more than a few bright and fresh new ideas back and forth in your head, and today is a great time to pick one out and start moving forward on it! It doesn't matter whether it's a new career, a fun trip, a new health regimen, or just a new haircut,



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You're smart enough to know that decisions about who gets ahead in life are not always based on fairness. But that shouldn't stop you from seeking justice and equality, today. No matter how bizarre or uncomfortable a situation might be, you should try to be the voice of mutual respect. It's more rewarding to think that all people should be treated equally than it is to be cynical.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

It might feel like one of the authority figures in your life is being especially bossy today, but did you ever stop to think that maybe they are pushing you to do better because they believe in you? They aren't giving you a hard time just to show you that they can. They really do want you to be all you can be. So watch yourself and be careful how you react to what they say.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You should be bold to the point of obnoxiousness today. No one is going to mind. In fact, certain people have been waiting for you to speak up and show a bit of your true self. You have been hiding a very bright light deep inside of you, and you need to let it shine now. Why let yourself get all hung up on personal issues and worry?

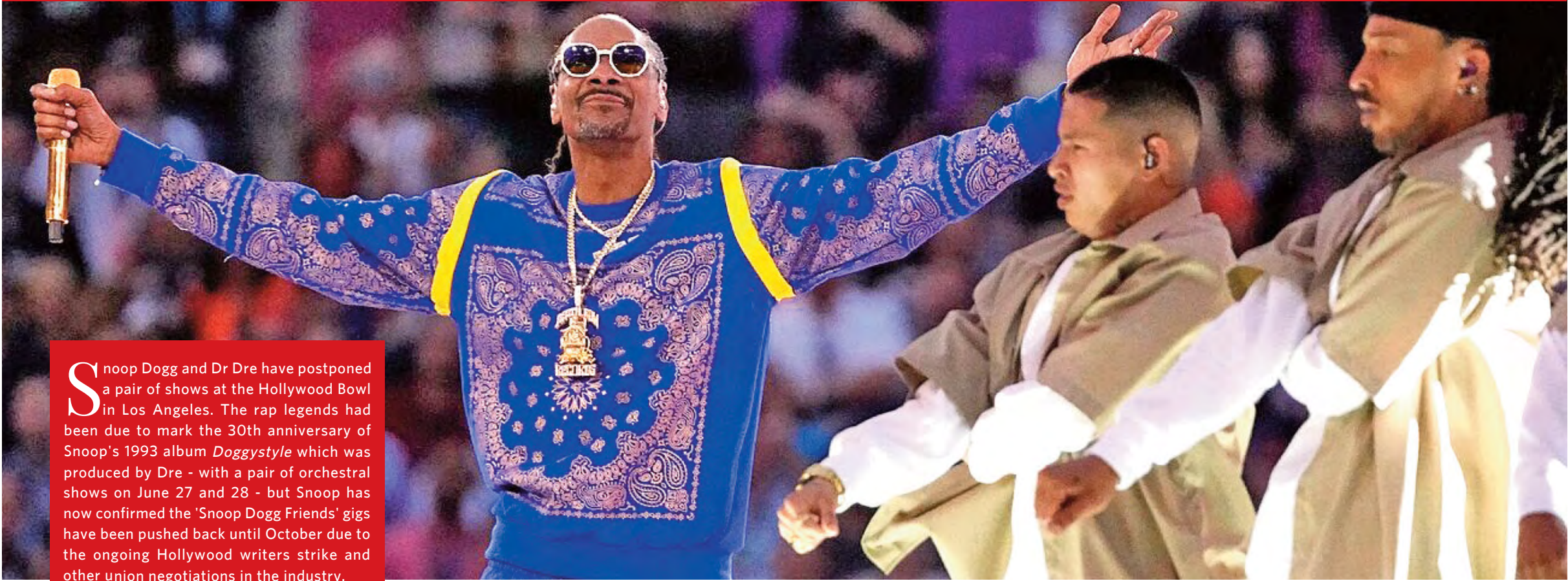


PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Are you following the path of least resistance with a friend and just doing whatever they want to do to avoid making them mad? That's no way to have a healthy relationship. Starting today, stand up for your own desires and pick the path that leads to your own healthy self-esteem. Sure, it will require you to push back at times.

entertainment

SNOOP DOGG POSTPONES A PAIR OF SHOWS IN LA



Snoop Dogg and Dr Dre have postponed a pair of shows at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles. The rap legends had been due to mark the 30th anniversary of Snoop's 1993 album *Doggystyle* which was produced by Dre - with a pair of orchestral shows on June 27 and 28 - but Snoop has now confirmed the 'Snoop Dogg Friends' gigs have been pushed back until October due to the ongoing Hollywood writers strike and other union negotiations in the industry.

JENNA ORTEGA RECALLS WEIRD FAN ENCOUNTER ON PLANE



Jenna Ortega has had some 'weird' experiences because of *Wednesday*. The 20-year-old actress stars in the title role of the hit Netflix series - which serves as a spin-off to *The Addam Family* franchise - and explained that the show had much wider reach than she thought it would but has endured some strange encounters when travelling, including a recent one which saw a flight attendant change her hair to match that of her famous character.

"I got off one yesterday, and at the end, the flight attendant took her hair down out of the bun and it was in two braids and she took her bangs down and she said, 'You made me do this,'" she said.



ANIMATED SPIDER-MAN BACK WITH 'ARTHOUSE' SEQUEL TO OSCAR WINNER

Nearly five years after the animated *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* won an Oscar with its innovative, biracial take on the beloved webslinger, a wildly ambitious sequel aims to further blur the boundaries between superhero films and arthouse cinema.

Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse, out Friday in the United States, picks up the story of half-Black, half-Latino Miles Morales, again using an eye-popping blend of decades-old 2D comic book drawing techniques with the latest computer-generated visual effects.

This time, the action takes place across several parallel universes and the movie employed three directors and more than 1,000 artists. Seen here, US rapper Offset and his family arrive for the world premiere of the film at the Regency Village Theatre in Los Angeles, California.



BRIAN COX HASN'T FOUND TIME FOR 'SUCCESSION' FINALE

Veteran Scottish actor Brian Cox on Sunday praised striking Hollywood writers as entertainment's 'prime forces' and revealed he has yet to watch the gripping finale of *Succession*. Cox, who has grumbled about the early demise of his tyrannical character Logan Roy in the HBO drama's last series, told BBC television he preferred not to go back over past projects. The fictional media tycoon's children were 'hateful' and Roy was justified in refusing to hand power, he said.

PUTTING THE K IN HIP-HOP: JAY PARK

K-pop idol. Used tyre salesman. Hip-hop mogul. The course of true success has never run smoothly, but Korean-American entertainer Jay Park has had an unusually bumpy ride to stardom.

The 36-year-old is now one of South Korea's most recognisable entertainers: he's founded two of the country's largest hip-hop labels, released a string of hits, has his own soju liquor brand and was the first Asian-American to sign with Jay-Z's Roc Nation.



AL PACINO TO BE A FATHER AT 83

Actor Al Pacino will soon be a father for the fourth time - at age 83, US media said Wednesday.

His partner, 29-year-old Noor Alfalah, is eight months pregnant, according to the showbiz and gossip news site TMZ.

Pacino - known for such films as *The Godfather* (1972), *Scarface* (1983) and *Scent of a Woman* (1992), for which he won an Oscar - has three grown children from previous relationships.



COMING SOON

THE FLASH

Ezra Miller stars as Barry Allen, AKA The Flash, who pushes the limits of his super-powers in the DC Super Hero's first-ever standalone feature film.

Genre: Action

Starring: Michael Shannon, Ezra Miller, Sasha Calle, Ron Livingston

Language: English



HOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW THE BOOGEYMAN Genre: Horror, thriller Starring: Sophie Thatcher, Chris Messina, Vivien Lyra Blair, David Dastmalchian

Even in its original short story form, appearing in his first collection *Night Shift* in 1978, Stephen King's *The Boogeyman* retains a remarkably clever narrative scaffolding. In that version, the tale simply follows a disturbed man telling a therapist about the monster that

killed all three of his children, then caps things off with a twist ending which cements our understanding that the monster is not just real, but still quite present.

The film's script, by Mark Heyman and A Quiet Place writers Scott Beck and Bryan Woods, however, uses the original King tale as a catalyst for

Lurking danger



the larger story of the title creature, and the family it's haunting. In this case, that family is the Harpers, led by therapist and recent widower Will (Chris Messina), who meets the disturbed patient from the original story (David Dastmalchian giving his scene-stealing best) early in the film and sets off on a darker, larger journey. Since losing his wife to a car accident, Will has been struggling to be a present father to his two daughters, teenage Sadie (Sophie Thatcher) and the much younger Sawyer (Vivien Lyra Blair), who's troubled by visions of monsters in her closet and

under her bed.

Of course, the central hook of *The Boogeyman* is that the creature Sawyer sees lurking in her room is not only real but very dangerous, having already destroyed one family and, through Will's new patient, transferred to the Harper home. What follows is a battle for the lives and souls of a broken family, as the Harpers must fight their own inner darkness, all while grappling with the idea that something inhuman, ancient and relentless is ready to eat them alive. Get thrilled!

Rating ★★☆☆☆



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