

Oman set to gain from G20 meet

The sultanate's participation will boost investment, facilitate trade

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman on Wednesday underlined the importance of its participation in the G20 meetings in India, scripting its first involvement in this global platform.

The G20 meetings promote dialogue among the world's top 20 economies and the guest members to drive global economic growth.

Addressing the media, Pankaj Khimji, advisor at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) and head of Oman's secretariat for the G20 meetings, emphasised the significance of the sultanate's presence in those meetings.

He highlighted that the G20, since its inception, had been following the practice of inviting select countries as participating guests to ensure geographical inclusivity.

India extended a special invitation to Oman for the 18th session of the G20 meetings in



It serves as a platform to showcase Oman's efforts in fostering ties with the international community

PANKAJ KHIJMI

2023, providing a crucial opportunity for the sultanate to participate in this intergovernmental forum of the world's most influential economies.

Khimji said that Oman's involvement in these meetings is

vital for knowledge enrichment through the exchange of expertise and experiences with participating nations.

"It also serves as a platform to showcase Oman's efforts in fostering partnerships with the international community, while addressing common issues such as trade, investment, and facilitating international trade."

The G20 summit this year is according special attention to small and medium enterprises so as to support them through financing facilities and creation of unified platforms.

Additionally, it is seeking cooperation in resolving global crises and achieving stability.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS PLAYERS READY TO SHINE



Oman's Special Olympics players and coaches are ready to show their talent at the Special Olympics World Games to be held in Berlin from June 17, said Mohammed Salem al Rashdi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Special Olympics Oman, and head of the delegation (ONA)

Oman welcomes US decision to rejoin Unesco

Muscat - The Sultanate of Oman has welcomed the decision of the United States of America to resume its membership in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) from July this year.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, Oman expressed appreciation for the United States' move, noting that it reaffirms the country's commitment to international cooperation in the fields of education,

science and culture.

The decision also reflects the United States' support for Unesco in its mission to promote peace, sustainable development, world cultural heritage, dialogue among nations and the exchange of global knowledge and expertise, the statement said.

"This is a strong act of confidence, in Unesco and in multilateralism. Not only in the centrality of the organisation's mandate - culture, education, science, infor-

mation - but also in the way this mandate is being implemented today," Unesco Director-General Audrey Azoulay said on June 12.

The return of the United States was made possible by the agreement reached by US Congress in December last year authorising financial contributions to Unesco. The US had suspended its contributions in 2011 due to domestic legislation, before notifying Unesco of its decision to legally withdraw on

October 12, 2017.

In a letter to the Director-General, the US State Department welcomed the way in which Unesco had addressed in recent years emerging challenges, modernised its management, and reduced political tensions.

Elected as the head of Unesco in November 2017, Audrey led the mediations that made it possible to reduce political tensions in various parts of the world.

► NEWS BRIEF

PARTICIPANTS OF FOOD SAFETY MEET THANK HM

Muscat - Participants of the 6th International Conference on Food Safety and Quality, held in Muscat from June 12 to 14, expressed their heartfelt appreciation for His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

They conveyed their gratitude for the warm reception and gracious hospitality extended by Oman, which significantly contributed to the conference's success.

The participants commended the sultanate's remarkable advancements across various sectors, particularly emphasising its dedication to food security as a fundamental element of its future vision.

'13% increase in blood donations reflects growing awareness'

Our Correspondent Muscat

Blood donation in Oman has increased 13% this year, highlighting the growing awareness of its importance. The upward trend continues from last year, which saw a 21% year-on-year rise in donations. This positive news was announced during the commemoration of World Blood Donor Day on Wednesday.

Dr Zainab al Arimi, Director of Blood Bank Services, lauded the 'invaluable role' played by blood donors and the collaborative efforts of various authorities. She attributed the rise in blood donations to the community's heightened awareness of its significance, amplified by the media's dissemination of this humanitarian message.

Statistics from the Blood Donation Services Department re-



veal that the majority (97%) of the collected blood was through voluntary contributions, with 77% of donors being Omani nationals. Additionally, 49% of the donors were first-time contributors. In 2022, the blood bank amassed 39,712 units of blood

and 2,381 units of blood components.

During the last year, Dr Zainab informed, 364 blood donation campaigns contributed up to 43% of the total donations, while the remaining 57% came from donations at the Central

Blood Bank building in Bausher.

This year, the total number of blood donors reached 18,118, including 9,639 donors at the blood bank and 8,479 donors participating in donation campaigns. The number of donation campaigns reached 161.

The Ministry of Health strongly encourages community members to contribute to the provision of safe blood units for healthcare institutions.

The ministry also urges donors to continue their commitment throughout the year to meet the growing need resulting from the expansion of health services in Oman.

The ministry's call serves as a reminder of the ongoing importance of blood donation in sustaining and supporting healthcare services across the nation.

See also Page 02

Xi calls for Palestine to be 'full member' of UN

Beijing, China - Chinese President Xi Jinping reiterated to Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas on Wednesday his call for a state of Palestine to become a 'full member' of the United Nations, state media reported.

Xi expressed Beijing's position during a summit with Arab countries in Saudi Arabia in December, although the latest call comes as the Asian powerhouse works to strengthen its role as mediator in the Middle East.

Xi met Abbas during the December trip and pledged to 'work for an early, just and durable solution to the Palestinian issue'.

Beijing has since positioned itself as a mediator in the Middle East, brokering the restoration in March of ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia - rivals in a region where the US has for decades been the main powerbroker.

"China supports Palestine in becoming a full member State of the United Nations," Xi said dur-



Mahmud Abbas and Xi Jinping

ing a meeting with Abbas in Beijing, according to Chinese state broadcaster CCTV.

"The fundamental way out of the Palestinian issue lies in the establishment of an independent Palestinian State," he said.

Abbas will be in the Chinese capital until Friday, his fifth official visit to the world's second-largest economy. Xi told Abbas that China was "ready to strengthen coordination and cooperation with the Palestinian side". AFP

04



Postpaid mobile and Internet subscriptions surge in Oman

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Oman's royal brothers ride to world endurance event

GCC rallies around UAE for COP28 to drive pragmatic progress

Abu Dhabi, UAE - The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations reaffirmed their full support to the United Arab Emirates' hosting of COP28 this year.

The council laid emphasis on the importance of this conference for tackling climate change.

The GCC's statement on COP28 came following an extraordinary ministerial meeting attended virtually on Monday.

The meeting, called at the request of the UAE, was chaired by H E Salim bin Nasser al Auli, Minister of Energy and Minerals and Chairman of the National Committee for Climate Change in Oman.

The meeting had the participation of Dr Sultan bin Ahmed al Jaber, UAE Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology and COP28 President-Designate; Shamma al Mazrui, UAE Minister of Community Development and the first-ever COP28 Youth Climate Champion; and Razan al Mubarak, the UN Climate Change High-Level Champion.

The council supported the



H E Salim al Auli

team's call for coordination, cooperation and joint action for the success of the summit.

They urged all countries and relevant international organisa-

tions to actively participate in the conference.

The bloc stressed that the action plan should take into account the negative social and economic impacts on a country, especially those developing countries, which are most vulnerable to such effects.

The GCC nations stressed that COP28 will have to achieve ambitious and balanced negotiated results with focus on the implementation of the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

During the meeting, the efforts of the GCC countries in combating climate change were

highlighted. They include measures, plans, and programmes to ensure environmental, economic, and social sustainability in the region through the circular carbon economy approach, which is a closed loop system involving 4Rs: Reduce, reuse, recycle, and remove.

The GCC countries emphasised the need for COP28 UAE to achieve tangible progress on the Global Goal on Adaptation in the context of the Paris Agreement temperature goal, and the Mitigation Work Programme (MWP).

The council asserted that it must explore all means to ad-

dress greenhouse gas emissions, regardless of their sources or sectors, by using all technologies and sectors, including renewable energy sources and clean hydrocarbons, and support implementation in accordance with the principles and provisions of the Paris Agreement.

The Paris Agreement principles include operationalising the loss and damage fund and its funding arrangements, and the fulfillment of the pledge to provide US\$100bn annually by developed countries to support developing countries, starting from 2020.



H E Sheikh Khalifa Ali al Harthi (left), Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, shakes hands with Pavel Yablonsky, Deputy Foreign Minister of Poland

Oman, Poland sign pact on mutual exemption of visas

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Poland signed an agreement on mutual visa exemption for diplomatic, special and service passports, in Poland's capital Warsaw on Tuesday.

H E Sheikh Khalifa Ali al Harthi, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, chaired the Omani side, while Pavel Yablonsky, Deputy Foreign Minister chaired the Polish side.

Munthir Mahfoudh al Manthri, Head of the Europe Department at the Foreign Ministry, also attended the meeting.

The meeting discussed bilateral relations and means of promoting them in various areas. The two sides explored means of boosting economic and investment cooperation between Oman and Poland.

The meeting also exchanged views on a set of regional and international issues.

H E Harthi separately had a meeting with Zbigniew Rau,

Foreign Minister of Poland, during which the two sides discussed various aspects of their bilateral relations.

He also met Kamila Król, Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology; and Pawel Kurtasz, Chairman of the Management Board of the Polish Investment and Trade Agency.

H E Sayyid Badr receives credentials of Polish envoy

H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, received on Wednesday a copy of the credentials of Robert Rostek, appointed-ambassador of Poland to the sultanate.

H E Sayyid Badr welcomed the ambassador, wishing him success in carrying out his duties. He also wished further progress and growth of the bilateral relations that Oman and Poland enjoy.

The meeting was attended by Dr Khalid Said al Jaradi, Head of the Protocols Department of Oman, besides a number of other officials.

ONA

Oman kickstarts three-city roadshow in Saudi Arabia

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) on Wednesday kickstarted a three-city roadshow in Saudi Arabia as part of its efforts to showcase the beauty of Oman.

Marwan bin Abdul Hakim al Ghassani, Director of Promotion at the Directorate General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar governorate, said that the road show - which started in Riyadh - is heading to Dammam for a similar show on Thursday, followed by Jeddah on Friday.

Around 15 Omani companies and 150 companies from Saudi Arabia, representing travel agencies and tour operators, are participating in the event.

The primary goal of this roadshow is to promote Oman, renowned for its diverse and picturesque landscape, as well as its unique tourist and historical sites.

The focus is also on Oman's khareef season, which offers a pleasant weather condition in the otherwise hot and arid region of the Middle East

Khareef season in Oman's



Around 15 Omani companies and 150 companies from Saudi Arabia, representing travel agencies and tour operators, are participating in the event

mountainous Dhofar region runs from June 21 to September 21 that attracts a huge lot of tourists from various parts of the region.

Additionally, Ghassani said,

the roadshow aims to promote the summer destinations such as Jabal Akhdar and Jabal Shams, characterised by moderate weather and abundant natural

wonders for adventure tourism.

According to the ministry, Oman's tourism sector experienced a significant growth during the last winter, with the number of tourists increasing by 177% in January.

The sultanate hosted 295,279 tourists in January this year, compared to 106,598 in January last year.

These figures, released by the National Centre for Statistics and

Information (NCSI), also reveal a substantial increase in the number of guests staying in 3-5 star hotels, reaching 523,494 during the first quarter of 2023 - a growth of 25.8% compared to the same period last year.

Revenues of 3-5 star hotels witnessed a remarkable increase of 49.9% to reach RO73.3mn, while hotel occupancy recorded a growth of 54.5% on an year-on-year basis.

Omani diplomats donate blood on World Blood Donor Day

Muscat - The Omani embassies across the world and the Foreign Ministry in Muscat marked the World Blood Donor Day on Wednesday with many officials and their family members taking initiative to 'share life'.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has assigned the theme 'Give blood, give plasma, share life, share often' for this year's donor day campaign.

Oman's move comes as a humanitarian initiative, which reflects a deep understanding that goes beyond the usual roles of



diplomatic missions and embassies abroad.

Omani diplomats, their fami-

lies and employees at the sultanate's embassies visited hospitals in the countries of

accreditation to donate blood.

Foreign Ministry staff in Muscat also donated blood supervised by a specialised team from Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.

This humanitarian initiative is part of the Foreign Ministry's strategy to support the health sector and raise awareness of the importance of blood donation as a humanitarian activity to help meet the increasing demand for blood in hospitals and medical centres around the world.

The blood donation initiative also encourages the ministry's employees to maximise the value of humanisation, selflessness, social responsibility, partnership and the expansion of humanitarian charitable work.

The initiative received good response from the Foreign Ministry's employees and from the Omani diplomatic missions abroad, and reflected their awareness and the benevolent culture of the Omani society, and their sincere belief in the importance of this humanitarian work.



SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH



ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/ Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
2238/2023/MOH/DGHSBR-1	Provision of Cleaning and Pest Control Services to Hafeet Health Center and Al_Rodha Health Center at Directorate General of health Services Al-Buraimi Governorate	26/ June / 2023	Before 10 am on Thursdays 27/ July /2023	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set

- Tenders should be submitted on line on: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accept or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone:24402200, Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	39	29
Doha	44	31
Kuwait City	41	29
Manama	39	31
Muscat	36	30
Riyadh	43	28

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	3.52am
Sunrise	5.20am
Duhr	12.12pm
Asr	3.30pm
Maghrib	7.00pm
Isha	8.22pm

Fahud hits 49°C; heatwave to continue: Met

Our Correspondent Muscat

Large parts of Oman are under the onslaught of a heatwave with daytime temperatures touching a high of 49°C in Fahud on Tuesday.

According to the Met Department's weather bulletin for Thursday, the mercury is expected to hit a high of 48°C again in places like Adam and Haima, and 47°C in Rustaq.

'The rise in maximum temperatures continues and may exceed mid-40s during the next three days over desert and open areas,' the Met Department said.

On Tuesday, the noon-time temperatures soared to 48.7°C in Hamrat ad Daru, followed by Sunaynah (48.6°C), Ibri (48°C) and Zamaim (47.7°C).

Maqshin, Haima and Saham recorded temperatures in the range of 47°C.

The Met Department has urged people to avoid going to the sea and practising marine activities from June 15 to 16 due to the high sea waves on the coasts of Oman caused by cyclone Biparjoy.

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Wheat yield boom boosts Oman's food security

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Farmers in the Najd region of Thumrait in Dhofar governorate have registered an impressive production of nearly 5,940 tonnes of wheat during the 2022-23 season, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources (MAFWR) reported.

The high output is a direct result of the ministry's initiatives to encourage farmers to adopt innovative cultivation methods.

The ministry has been taking several steps to increase food production in the country following the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 to make the sultanate food sufficient.

Eng Said Muslim al Kathiri, Di-

rector of the ministry's Thumrait wing, informed that the cultivated area for this year was approximately 2,100 hectares across 81 farms.

Kathiri attributed the increase in production to the ministry's dedicated efforts and programmes that include expansion of the cultivation area, implementation of agricultural mechanisation, modern irrigation systems, as well as use of high-quality seed varieties.

The ministry is also conducting regular campaigns to combat



The ministry continues its work to further expand the cultivation area for wheat, raising the expectation of the farmers for the next season

ENG SAID AL KATHIRI

agricultural pests and diseases, besides protecting crops from birds. It has even intensified awareness campaigns to educate farmers on the importance of timely engagement in agricultural activities.

To support farmers, the min-

istry provides wheat varieties known for their quality and productivity, including Wadi Quriyat 226, 227, 308, and 110.

"The ministry continues its work to further expand the cultivation area for wheat, with the expectation of farmers achieving excellent production during the next season," Kathiri further added.

On May 31, the Council of Ministers approved a plan to allocate RO5mn to be utilised till 2027 for aiding wheat production in the country.

Additionally, usufruct lands in several governorates of Oman will be assigned for wheat cultivation so as to bolster food security and stabilise strategic stocks of essential commodities.

Awareness programme launched in Dhahirah to combat drug abuse

Our correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH), in cooperation with the National Committee for Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances, on Wednesday launched an awareness programme in Dhahirah governorate on the harms of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

The three-day programme brings together government employees, charity workers, sportspersons, and health workers from three wilayats - Ibri, Yanqul and Dhank.

"The programme includes several axes reviewing the current situation of drug abuse issues and the national efforts in combating these influences; as



well as the therapeutic services available in the rehabilitation of addicts in order to help them return to normal life and engage in a healthy society," said Dr Laila Ali al Kalbaniya, head of the department of health education and community health initiatives in Dhahirah.

According to Dr Laila, the programme aims to enhance awareness to reduce the phenomenon of drug and psychotropic sub-

stance abuse and raise awareness of the social and psychological effects resulting from it.

She highlighted the role of the family in preventing and addressing this phenomenon and the importance of following up children at an early age to protect them from getting addicted to drugs and psychotropic substances. "The joint efforts of the relevant institutions will help raise awareness," she added.

MHT signs pact to revitalise Khabourah Castle, promote cultural heritage

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) on Wednesday entered into an agreement with Al Hosoon Heritage Trading company for the running of the Khabourah Castle, a prominent monument in North Batinah governorate.

Located just under 2km from the main centre of Sohar in the wilayat of Khaboura, the castle features a central courtyard and the main entrance on the northern side.

The sultanate has recently started engaging private sector entities for the management of various historical sites and monuments to foster investments and employment.



It seeks to empower the private sector, specifically small and medium-sized enterprises and productive families, while creating marketing channels for artisans, the ministry stated.

This initiative is the fallout of a thorough study on how to improve the tourism sector and related industries. Implementation

of value-added projects was found to be appropriate in engaging the local community and revitalise cultural heritage sites, all in line with the Oman Vision 2040 and the tenth Five Year Plan (2021-25).

MHT's commitment lies in developing and offering diverse tourist destinations across

Oman, elevating historical monuments as prominent tourist attractions. 'This endeavour aims to showcase the richness of Omani civilisation, the authenticity of its cultural heritage, and the unique Omani culture,' it stated. Forts and castles in Oman hold great appeal for tourists due to their significance in the history.

ROP NEWS

1 dead, another hurt in N Batinah accident

Muscat - One person died and another was injured when a heavy construction equipment they were operating overturned in North Batinah on Wednesday.

The rescue teams of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Department responded to a construction equipment accident in the wilayat of Suwaig. One person died, while another sustained moderate injuries.

Travellers urged to follow customs regulations

Muscat - The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has urged all travellers to follow customs regulations while entering or leaving Oman.

While entering or leaving the border points of Oman, a traveller must declare to ROP Customs if he or she is travelling with currencies (cash) exceeding RO6,000 or its equivalent, besides others.

Muscat Municipality takes action to curb summer snake infestation

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Municipality has started taking various measures to control the spread of snakes during the summer months in the governorate.

The municipality aims to address the issue of snakes seeking refuge in homes, parks, and farms in search of food, water, and humid environment due to the rising temperatures.

As part of the ongoing snake control efforts, Muscat Municipality is using repellents and traps.

The municipality is actively engaged in these campaigns, ensuring constant monitoring and control, the civic body stated.

To support this endeavour, Muscat Municipality has invited everyone to contact the toll-free number 1111 on noticing any snake or for general queries on this issue. 'The municipality values the participation and cooperation of the community in ensuring a snake-free environ-



Muscat Municipality calls upon all to contact the toll-free number 1111 on noticing any snake or for general queries on this issue

ment.'

Last year, the Health Affairs Department of Muscat Municipality provided comprehensive training to 20 of its employees in snake control. With this training, the municipality now possesses a dedicated team of qualified people capable of effectively handling emergency situations

related to snake reports.

The personnel of the department have received extensive knowledge about the various types of snakes commonly found in the sultanate, their habitats, behaviour, and methods to differentiate between venomous and non-venomous species. 'This knowledge equips them with the necessary skills to assess and respond appropriately to snake-related incidents.'

Additionally, Muscat Municipality has prioritised educating its personnel on following health and environmental guidelines when dealing with snake control.

'This ensures that the management of snakes aligns with best practices to safeguard both human health and the environment,' the municipality explained.

By implementing these measures and spreading awareness, Muscat Municipality aims to mitigate the risks associated with snakes, creating a safer and more secure environment for residents and visitors alike.

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MARKET WATCH

MSX304,687.06

Sensex63,228.51

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

Indian	213.03
Pakistan	736.95
Bangladesh	283.95
Philippines	145.21
Sri Lanka	831.31

*Rates as on June 14

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

UAE-listed firms' capital reaches AED702bn

The UAE's Securities and Commodities Authority (SCA) has revealed that the total capital of public joint-stock companies (PJSCs) registered with the SCA reached AED702bn in the end of 2022. Of this, AED393bn capital was for government companies and AED309bn was for non-governmental companies. The services sector accounted for the largest share of the total capital of registered PJSCs, with AED209.8bn. This was followed by the investment and financial services sector (AED165.9bn), energy (AED129.5bn), banks (AED77.7bn), real estate (AED33.4bn), and transportation (AED32.4bn). The industrial sector had a smaller share of the total capital of registered PJSCs, with AED24.5bn. Communications, insurance, and consumer goods each had a share of AED15.6bn, AED7.9bn, and AED4.9 bn, respectively. Abu Dhabi had the largest share of the total capital of registered PJSCs, with AED521bn. Dubai followed with AED89bn.

Postpaid mobile and internet subscriptions surge in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's telecom operators have recorded a sharp increase in monthly bill-paying phone subscribers and internet customers, thanks to people migrating from prepaid to postpaid plans and increased demand for data usage.

The total postpaid mobile phone subscriber base in Oman surged by nearly 24% to 1.716mn as of April 2023 compared to 1.386mn subscribers in April last year.

This means that service providers have added more than 330,000 new postpaid customers over the last one year, according to the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority's (TRA) data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

On the other hand, the prepaid mobile subscriber base in the sultanate also increased by 9.3% to 5.193mn as of April 2023 from 4.750mn in April 2022, an increase of 443,000 subscribers over the year, according to the TRA figures.

Overall, total mobile phone subscriptions (prepaid and postpaid) in Oman grew by 12.6% to 6.909mn as of April this year compared to 6.136mn a year ago.

Telecom operators recorded a 9.4% rise in the number of subscribers at 3.975mn, while



mobile resellers witnessed a 9% increase in their subscriber base at 1.218mn.

In line with these trends, the sultanate's largest telecom operator, Omantel, posted robust growth in the number of total mobile subscribers. The company's total domestic subscriber base as of March 2023 (including mobile and fixed businesses) rose to 3.251mn (excluding mobile resellers) from 3.170mn a year ago.

Omantel's domestic revenues in the first quarter of 2023 rose more than 22% to RO163.1mn compared to RO133.3mn for the corresponding period in 2022.

'Revenue growth was mainly achieved in mobile postpaid and fixed broadband revenues. Core retail revenues increased during

the (first quarter) period, contributed mainly by growth in postpaid mobile revenue (10.8%) and fixed broadband revenue (5.2%).' Omantel said in its first quarter financial report.

According to Fitch Ratings, Omantel made good progress in 2022 in transitioning prepaid customers onto postpaid contracts, where average revenues per year are higher.

Ooredoo Oman's mobile postpaid customer base grew by 18.6% to 750,975 customers at the end of the first quarter of 2023, compared to 633,288 customers a year ago. The company's mobile prepaid customer base also increased to 2,121,628 at the end of the first quarter this year compared to 2,026,179

customers a year ago.

However, Ooredoo's fixed service customer base decreased by 4.7% to 157,952 customers as of the end of the first quarter of 2023 compared to 165,676 customers at the end of the first quarter of 2022.

According to the company's quarterly financial report, Ooredoo's revenue for the first three months of 2023 increased by 1.9% to RO65.9mn compared with RO64.7mn in 2022.

'The increase is driven by growth in mobile postpaid, higher handset sales, and higher revenue from ICT solutions,' Ooredoo said in its report.

Internet services

Total active mobile broadband subscriptions in Oman rose by

Total postpaid mobile phone subscriber base in Oman surged by 24% to 1.716mn as of April 2023 compared to 1.386mn in April last year. This means that service providers added more than 330,000 new postpaid customers over the last one year

12.6% to 5.781mn in April this year compared with 5.132mn a year ago.

The number of fixed-line internet connections also grew by 3.6% to 539,329 subscribers as of April 2023, against 520,842 subscribers in April 2022.

The demand for high-speed data usage has substantially increased in Oman after the pandemic and is consistently growing each year.

According to the TRA statistics, the total international internet bandwidth capacity in Oman sharply expanded by 65% to 2,502,935 Mbps as of April this year, compared with 1,521,000 Mbps a year ago.

Moody's upgrade OETC ratings

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Global credit rating agency Moody's recently upgraded Oman Electricity Transmission Company's (OETC) rating from Ba3 to Ba2 with a positive outlook.

Moody's positive outlook on OETC reflects the company's positive financial performance and position in the market. The rating agency views OETC as a government-related issuer whose Ba2 corporate family rating reflects the high level of dependence and support from the government of Oman.

'Credit ratings are an important indicator of the company's financial health and stability. This rating upgrade reflects Moody's view of OETC's consistent track record of prudent financial management,' OETC said in a press statement on Wednesday.

OETC added that the rating upgrade raises the stakeholders' confidence and improves the company's reputation at the global and regional levels, leading to secured funding plans and higher profitability.

Major investments make Middle East gaming powerhouse

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Middle East countries are rapidly advancing to shape the future of gaming and esports, with unprecedented government investments, according to a new report.

Over \$3bn was invested in the industry by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) in 2022, as part of a much larger \$38bn commitment by PIF to be used by its company Savvy Games Group (SGG). Multiple acquisitions in gaming (Embracer Group, Scopely) and esports (ESL, FACEIT, VSP0) have already been executed. Additionally, Abu Dhabi Gaming has created a dedicated gaming and esports hub with strong incentives.

The latest gaming report from Boston Consulting Group (BCG) highlights that more than 60% of the population in the Middle East are gaming enthusiasts, resulting in one of the highest shares of gaming mobile app downloads (50% compared to the global average of 40%).

This explains why the region has demonstrated a long-term commitment to the gaming sector, with Saudi Arabia recently announcing its gaming and esports strategy, and the UAE creating two gaming centers to attract global companies.

Dr Alexander Schudey, Managing Director and Partner at BCG, said, "The Middle East is a key player in the global gaming industry, with an impressive penetration rate and a strong commitment from governments to invest in the sector. The region's focus on gaming and the establishment of dedicated gaming hubs makes it an attractive des-



Dr Alexander Schudey

ination for global gaming companies."

A strong indication of Middle East populations towards gaming is strong growth of game streaming at 24.5% CAGR, which is on path to reach approximately 200mn users in 2025, according to Boston Consulting Group's latest report. The region's growth is three times faster compared to China, the current leader, at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 24.5% versus 7.6%.

Pavel Kasperovich, Principal at BCG, commented, "The significant government commitment, such as Saudi Arabia's \$38bn investment in gaming companies and Abu Dhabi's attractive incentives for gaming businesses, highlights the region's dedication to fostering a thriving gaming industry."

As the Middle East continues to emerge as a gaming powerhouse, the region's commitment to innovation, investment, and audience engagement will play a significant role in shaping the future of the global gaming industry, the BCG report added.

Dubai's Emaar unveils \$20bn waterfront project

Dubai, UAE - Dubai's Emaar Properties celebrated the launch of The Oasis by Emaar, its \$20bn worth of latest waterfront luxury lifestyle destination, with a gala event held on Tuesday at the Armani Hotel in Burj Khalifa, Downtown Dubai.

The exclusive VIP event was attended by Emaar Properties customers and top Properties agents. The evening's highlight was the presence of the event's guest of honour, international superstar Shahrukh Khan, who welcomed the ceremony's guests and expressed his admiration for the new launch that joins the portfolio of renowned Emaar destinations.

Emaar Properties' newest lifestyle destination, The Oasis by Emaar, is one of the largest and most prestigious developments in Dubai, covering a total land area of more than 9.4mn square meters. With a total development value of \$20bn, the development boasts exceptional architectural design by the world's most famous architects, with interiors created by prominent international designers. Adhering to Emaar's commitment to delivering exceptional quality, The Oasis offers over 7,000 residential units focusing on large mansions and villas with spacious



plots, providing residents with stunning views of water canals, lakes, and parks.

Aiming to provide a prestigious and upscale living experience in Dubai's real estate landscape, the development is designed to create a resort-style lifestyle, with 25% of the land dedicated to lakes, water canals, parks, jogging tracks, green spaces, and various luxury amenities. This emphasis on recreational spaces allows residents to enjoy a high-quality living environment and engage in

an active and healthy lifestyle.

The Oasis by Emaar is situated in a prime location within Dubai, surrounded by high-end developments. It offers proximity to four international golf courses, allowing residents to indulge in their passion for golf. The development is conveniently located just a 20-minute-drive from downtown Dubai, providing easy access to the city's vibrant attractions.

The Oasis by Emaar will also feature an expansive 1.5mn square feet retail area, hosting a

wide array of lifestyle brands and offering residents access to superior shopping options. Moreover, there will be a variety of food and beverage outlets, ensuring a diverse culinary scene to cater to different preferences.

Commenting on the new development, the founder of Emaar, Mohamed Alabbar, said, "In each of its destinations, Emaar strives to meet the needs of our discriminating clientele. Our primary objective is to design one-of-a-kind destinations

that complement our clients' opulent way of life while providing unmatched comfort and luxury. Our most recent integrated project, The Oasis by Emaar, is poised to complement the urban landscape of Dubai and redefine the future of luxurious living amidst nature and water, blending harmonious architecture and exceptional amenities."

Emaar Properties is a global property developer and provider of premium lifestyles, with a significant presence in the Middle East, North Africa and Asia.

UK economy stages modest rebound in April

London, UK - The UK economy returned to modest growth in April on strong consumer spending, official data showed Wednesday, stoking hopes it will avoid recession despite high inflation and rising interest rates.

Gross domestic product increased by 0.2% in April following a fall of 0.3% in March, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement.

Activity was boosted by consumer expenditure on shopping and hospitality, while the reading was in line with market expectations.

"GDP bounced back after a weak March," said ONS director of economic statistics Darren Morgan.

"Bars and pubs had a comparatively strong April, while car sales rebounded and education

partially recovered from the effect of the previous month's strikes."

The British economy was 0.3% larger than its pre-pandemic level.

Finance minister Jeremy Hunt welcomed the upbeat data but cautioned over the outlook.

"We are growing the economy," Hunt said in response.

"But high growth needs low

inflation," he added.

UK annual inflation slowed to a 13-month low in April, but remains elevated at 8.7% as soaring food prices offset weaker energy costs. Official data for May is due next week.

The Bank of England last month lifted its key interest rate to 4.5%, its 12th increase in a row, and is widely expected to hike again next week in a bid to

tame stubbornly high consumer prices.

"Persistent inflation and higher interest rates continue to constrain the UK economy, yet April marked a welcome return to growth," said Jack Sirett, partner at global financial services firm Ebury.

"The likelihood of recession continues to fade," he added.

AFP

Peak in oil demand 'in sight' before end of decade: IEA

Paris, France – Global oil demand could peak before the end of this decade as the energy crisis has accelerated the transition to cleaner technologies, the International Energy Agency said Wednesday.

The Paris-based agency, which advises developed nations, forecast in its Oil 2023 medium-term market report that annual demand growth would slow sharply over the next five years.

"The shift to a clean energy economy is picking up pace, with a peak in global oil demand in sight before the end of this decade as electric vehicles, energy efficiency and other technologies advance," IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol said in a statement.

"Oil producers need to pay careful attention to the gathering pace of change and calibrate their investment decisions to ensure an orderly transition," Birol said. Energy prices soared last year after Russia, a major exporter of fossil fuels, invaded Ukraine and cut deliveries of natural gas to Europe.

Western powers imposed bans and price caps on Russian oil exports in efforts to drain a major source of cash for Moscow's war effort.

Oil and gas prices have fallen in the past several months.

World demand for oil will rise by 6% between 2022 and 2028 to reach 105.7mn barrels per day due to the needs of the petrochemical and aviation sectors, the IEA said.



But annual growth will slow significantly, from 2.4mn bpd day this year to just 400,000 bpd in 2028.

"Growth in the world's demand for oil is set to slow almost

demand peaking and stabilising after 2035.

But the energy crisis is "hastening the shift towards cleaner energy technologies", the organisation said.

tion for Economic Co-operation and Development, whose members range from Australia to European countries, Japan, Mexico and the United States.

"Nevertheless, burgeoning

world's second biggest economy, will slow "markedly from 2024 onwards" following a post-Covid rebound this year.

Oil investments rise

"Global oil markets are still slowly recalibrating after three turbulent years in which they were upended first by the Covid-19 pandemic and then by Russia's invasion of Ukraine," the agency said.

"Global oil markets could tighten significantly in the coming months," it added, noting production cuts by the OPEC+ alliance of major producers led by Saudi Arabia and Russia.

"However, the multifaceted strains on markets look set to ease in the following years."

While demand is set to slow, global investments in oil and gas exploration, extraction and production are "on course to reach their highest levels since 2015" with a 15% annual rise to \$528bn in 2023.

Earlier on Wednesday, British oil giant Shell said it would keep its oil production steady into 2030, angering environmental activists who saw the announcement as a "climate-wrecking U-turn".

Another British oil major, BP, announced in February that it expected to boost its profits between now and 2030 by investing more in both renewable energy and hydrocarbons, slowing the pace of its transition.

AFP



Oil producers need to pay careful attention to the gathering pace of change and calibrate their investment decisions to ensure an orderly transition

FATIH BIROL

to a halt in the coming years," the IEA said.

China demand to slow

In its 2022 World Energy Outlook, the IEA had forecast world

The use of oil for the transport sector should decline after 2026 as more and more electric vehicles hit the road, it said.

The need for oil will decline from 2024 in the 38 nations that are part of the Organisa-

petrochemical demand and strong consumption growth in emerging economies will more than offset a contraction in advanced economies," the IEA said.

Demand growth in China, the



Erdogan hints at rate hike after election victory

Istanbul, Turkey – Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan signalled Wednesday that he would let his new economic team hike interest rates to combat inflation and stabilise the lira, reversing an era of unconventional policies.

Erdogan, who secured re-election last month, has appointed market-friendly economist Mehmet Simsek as finance minister and former Wall Street executive Hafize Gaye Erkan as central bank governor.

The choices were cheered by the markets, which blame Erdogan's push to lower interest rates at all costs for Turkey's accumulating economic problems.

Turkey had "no choice but to return to rational ground", Simsek said soon after taking office.

Erdogan said that he "accepted" the changes proposed by his new appointments – although he still disagreed with their views.

"Of course, we agreed (for Simsek) to take the steps he will



Turkish President
Recep Tayyip Erdogan

take quickly and easily, together with the central bank," Erdogan said in comments released by his office.

But the Turkish leader, who once called high rates "the mother and father of all evil", added that people should not assume that he had made a "serious change" in views.

"I have the same (opinion) there," he said of high interest rates.

The central bank is scheduled to hold its next policy-setting

meeting on June 22.

Turkey's annual inflation rate dropped below 40% in May for the first time in 16 months, after touching 85% last year.

Erdogan's comments suggest that the powerful Turkish leader has given his new team time to show that their more conventional economic policies work.

He had spent that past two years promoting a "new economic model" that makes ultra-low interest rates a priority.

Erdogan argues that faster economic growth that usually accompanies low rates reduces unemployment and naturally brings down the cost of living.

His approach has forced Turkey's central bank to burn through \$25bn supporting the lira against sharp falls this year.

The lira began to lose value after Erdogan's election, suggesting that his new government was unwinding its artificial support measures.

AFP

Vodafone, Hutchison announce merger of UK mobile operations

London, UK – Mobile phone giant Vodafone has agreed to merge British operations with Three UK, owned by Hong Kong-based CK Hutchison, to accelerate rollout of faster 5G connectivity, the pair announced Wednesday.

Expansion of 5G across the UK has been hampered by Britain's ban on Chinese giant Huawei, a major supplier of equipment for mobile telephone networks.

Vodafone and CK Hutchison said in a joint statement that a new combined group is seen having a value of £16.5bn (\$21bn) following the deal's completion due by next year.

"The merger is great for customers, great for the country and great for competition," said Vodafone chief executive Margherita Della Valle, who recently cut 11,000 jobs at the group.

"It's transformative as it will



This combination of file pictures created on Wednesday shows the logo of CK Hutchison (CKHH) and a Vodafone logo (AFP)

create a best-in-class – indeed best in Europe – 5G network, offering customers a superior experience," she added.

The merger will lead to network investment of £11bn over ten years, the statement said.

Canning Fok, group co-managing director of CK Hutchison, said the tie-up "will have the scale needed to deliver a best-in-class 5G network for the UK, transforming mobile services" for customers.

"This will unlock significant value for CK Hutchison and its



Shell to maintain oil output levels until 2030

London, UK – Shell plans to maintain oil production levels until 2030, the British energy giant said Wednesday, triggering an outcry from green campaigners who also slammed a big payout for shareholders.

Shell previously flagged a crude output reduction of between one and two percent per year as part of its carbon neutrality plan unveiled in 2021 and based on 2019 output.

The group said Wednesday that it had already cut average daily liquids production to 1.5mn barrels per day by the end of 2022 – thanks to asset sales.

"Our target of a reduction in oil production by 2030 has not changed. We've just met it eight years early," a Shell spokesman said, adding that in 2021 the company stressed the target would be "achieved by divestments and natural decline" of oil fields. Shell said it cut output 21% from 2019, equivalent to a two-percent annual reduction until 2030.

Major oil and gas firms are seeking to pivot toward cleaner energy and away from fossil fuels, but stand accused of "greenwashing", or marketing

operations as climate-friendly.

Shell rival BP in February said it expected to boost profits by 2030 by investing more in both renewable energy and hydrocarbons, slowing the pace of its own transition.

Shell's net profit gushed to a company-record \$42.3bn last year as the invasion of Ukraine by key energy producer Russia sent oil and gas prices soaring.

Shell also revealed it would pay out at least \$5bn in share buybacks in the second half of this year following bumper profits.

The group will additionally cut capital spending to between \$22-25bn for 2024 and 2025, and slash annual operating costs by \$2-3bn by the mid-decade.

"Performance, discipline, and simplification will be our guiding principles as we allocate capital to enhance shareholder distributions, while enabling the energy transition," said chief executive Wael Sawan.

Shell insisted that its overall goal to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050 remains intact, despite fierce criticism from environmental pressure groups.

AFP

EU says Google abused dominant positions in online ads

Brussels, Belgium – The European Commission accused Google on Wednesday of abusing its dominance of the online ad market and recommended the US company sell part of its ad services to ensure fair competition.

The EU executive invited Google to now respond to this preliminary finding, made after a two-year antitrust probe, before a definitive finding was made.

If the commission maintains its view after that, it could levy a fine of up to 10% of Google's annual global revenues.

The charges add pressure on Google over its dominance of the

ad tech industry as it comes just months after US authorities sued the company for the same issue.

Google's vice president for global ads, Dan Taylor, said in a statement that the company disagrees with the commission's announcement and "will respond accordingly".

He stressed Google was committed to "creating value" for advertisers in a "highly competitive" market and said "the commission's investigation focuses on a narrow aspect of our advertising business".

Google is a subsidiary of US tech giant Alphabet, which reported worldwide revenues of



\$76bn in the last three months of 2022. Google's advertising income forms the core part of that.

Commission Vice President Margrethe Vestager, who spearheads the EU's antitrust activities, said: "We are concerned that Google may have illegally distorted competition in the on-

line advertising industry, also known as adtech."

She said the commission had not yet made a final conclusion in the case, and was awaiting Google's response.

"It is quite rare that we ask for a divestiture, and we have not asked for it yet," Vestager said.

'Dominant' in ad market

The commission's preliminary view, though, was that divestiture was the only appropriate remedy, given that Google is "dominant in the buy-side, dominant in the sell-side" of the online ad market.

"It's a reflection of how pervasive Google is in this value chain that we think that a divestiture is the only way to solve this," Vestager said.

Specifically, the commission noted that Google not only provides digital tools to place online ads in the form of webpage banners, video, audio, images

and text, but also acts as an intermediary for advertisers and publishers to get ads on computer and mobile screens.

For that, it has an ad exchange to match buyers and sellers, called AdX, as well as an ad server called DoubleClick, and tools to buy ads called Google Ads and DV 360.

In a statement, the European Commission said it "preliminarily finds that, since at least 2014, Google abused its dominant positions" by favouring AdX in ad buys via DoubleClick, Google Ads and DV 360.

That, it said, may have been

"intentional conducts aimed at giving AdX a competitive advantage" that sidelined rival ad exchanges and allowed Google to charge higher fees in its adtech supply chain.

The commission's preliminary finding announced on Wednesday tracks closely with an antitrust suit lodged against Google by the US government in January.

In that case, the US Department of Justice (DOJ) accused Google of running an unlawful monopoly that "corrupted legitimate competition in the ad tech industry".

AFP

OOC approves 5 sports in Arab Games in Algeria

The Board of Directors of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), at its regular meeting headed by Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, OOC Chairman, approved, in light of the procedures that took place in the Arab Sports Games in Algeria, five sports - football, athletics, weightlifting, sailing, and Paralympic athletics.

The meeting also dealt with a number of issues of importance for the coming period, as the Board of Directors approved the international participations that fall under the umbrella of OOC for the current year 2023, the first of which is participation in the 15th Arab Sports Games hosted by Algeria during the period from July 5 to 15, a press release said.

This is followed by the 2nd World Beach Games, which will be held on the island of Bali, Indonesia, from August 5 to 12, and the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, which will be held from September 23 to October 8, as well as the 6th Asian



Indoor Games, which will be hosted by the Thai capital, Bangkok, from September 17 until November 26. The last event is the 1st GCC youth sports tournament, to be held in the United Arab Emirates in December.

The Board, in coordination with sports federations and

committees, to prepare and equip these participations, as it had previously defined technical standards for external participations, circulated and formed a specialised technical team in this regard, and the team coordinated with sports federations and committees to determine the level of participation for

each round, competition, teams and players for individual games in light of technical levels, credits and allocations for each of them.

The Board also reviewed the minutes of the recent meetings of the Board of Directors and the Executive Office, and instructed the executive management to

take the necessary measures regarding some of the notes received from some members and to approve them. The OOC financial position until the end of May was reviewed, and the auditor's report of the OOC financial statements for the first quarter of the current year was reviewed.



Dubai Airshow to unveil Advanced Aerial Mobility

This is expected to be a pivotal year for the advanced aerial mobility (AAM) market, as disruptive methods of aerial transportation are fast becoming the future of aviation.

With the global market expected to be valued at US\$16.81bn in 2025, and reach US\$110.02bn in 2035, registering a CAGR of 21.7%, the rapid growth is seeing an influx of new inventive air freight and passenger transport solutions, along with new regulations, resources and infrastructure, a press release said.

Set to transform the future of travel for people and cargo, the pace of innovation and advancements in future aerial mobility solutions are making it one of the fastest growing markets in aerospace.

As a leader in AAM and urban air mobility (UAM) innovation and infrastructure expansion, Dubai is paving the way for the growth of the international industry, and Dubai Airshow has confirmed that AAM will be an integral part of the upcoming edition, taking place from November 13-17 at Dubai World Central (DWC), Dubai Airshow Site.

The prominence aligns with this year's theme 'The Future of

the Aerospace Industry', and will see the launch of a new pavilion dedicated to AAM, where regional and global players can discover the future flight technologies that are set to have a major influence over the way we travel.

Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, had earlier announced that air taxis will begin flying in Dubai within three years. He also approved plans to develop vertiports as part of the emirate's future air mobility infrastructure network to ease the mobility of individuals across urban areas in a safe, smooth and sustainable manner, with terminal design concepts now being worked on.

Meanwhile, the UAE General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) and the Mohammed bin Rashid Aerospace Hub (MBRAH) at Dubai South announced an agreement to establish the world's first AAM integrator world centre in Dubai, with the world's first ever vertiport certification process now underway as part of the project.

These developments are helping to facilitate the growth of the international industry, reaffirming Dubai's global status.

OAB recognised by MoSD for inclusive policies

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has received recognition from the Ministry of Social Development for fostering an inclusive and diverse workplace environment, particularly in integrating staff members with disabilities.

This achievement reflects OAB's human resources policies, which prioritise inclusivity and forward-thinking practices. The bank was commended at 'Be with Us for Them' event, which aligns with the Ministry's efforts to do more for people



with disabilities, a press release said.

Essam al Busaidi, head of HR at Oman Arab Bank, said, "We harmonise our human resources policies by seamlessly integrating employees with disabilities at our workplace. This weaves a thread of inclusivity and diversity, ultimately creating a vibrant workplace where barriers crumble and extraordinary talents flourish."

The efforts of the bank go hand in hand with a wider vision

for the country to guarantee the rights of people with disabilities. Oman is a signatory member of the UN's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CPRD), an international human rights treaty adopted in 2006 ensuring people with all types of disabilities enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as actively supporting the Sustainable Development Goals - both of which are reflected in the aims of Oman's Vision 2040.

Bank Nizwa leverages digital transformation to empower staff

Bank Nizwa, Oman's leading Islamic bank, has demonstrated its commitment to the development of its talented staff by introducing a new Learning Management System (LMS) powered by Disprz.

This state-of-the-art platform, with over 100,000 courses, is the latest initiative in the bank's ongoing efforts to provide its employees with comprehensive learning opportunities. By investing in the growth and enhancement of its workforce, Bank Nizwa aims to nurture a culture of continuous learning and professional development, ensuring that its staff remains at the forefront of the ever-evolving banking industry, a press release said.

The introduction of the LMS is an important milestone in the bank's journey towards empowering its employees with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in their roles. Equipped with advanced digital tools, LMS offers a seamless and convenient way for Bank Nizwa's staff to upgrade their capabilities and stay ahead in their careers.

"We are thrilled to introduce our new Learning Management System. This platform represents a significant investment in our employees' professional growth, aligning with Bank Nizwa's culture of continuous learning and excellence. By leveraging state-of-the-art digital tools and partnering with Disprz, we are equipping our talented staff with the resources



they need to excel in their roles and deliver exceptional services to our customers," said Haifa al Lawati, assistant general manager of Human Resources at Bank Nizwa.

"We believe that investing in employees' skills and knowledge is a key driver of success and we are confident that the new LMS will empower our workforce to reach new heights. Bank Nizwa remains dedicated to maintain its position as a leader in the industry and this advanced learning platform is another step forward in our digital transformation journey. We are excited about the possibilities it holds and the positive impact it will have on our employees' careers and our overall organisational growth," she added.

The platform features a vast library of self-paced as well as instructor-led courses, videos and interactive content, enabling Bank Nizwa employees to develop new skills and expand their knowledge in various fields.

Shama Perfumes opens flagship store in Muscat

Shama Perfumes, a heritage fragrance brand from India with over five decades of experience, announced the launch of its first-ever GCC region boutique store in Muscat. The new boutique will serve as a sanctuary where the art of perfumery pays homage to the nation's heritage.

With an unwavering commitment to crafting extraordinary fragrances that captivate the senses and transcend boundaries, Shama Perfumes extends a warm invitation to discerning connoisseurs, inviting them on an extraordinary journey of olfactory excellence that surpasses all others, a press release said.

Nestled in Galleria Mall Opera, Royal Opera House, Muscat, Shama Perfume's exquisite store stands as a testament to the brand's profound connection to Oman's majestic tradi-



tions, rich cultural heritage, and loyal clientele. The launch of Shama Perfumes' flagship store in Muscat marks a significant milestone for the brand as they

continue to expand their presence across the GCC and share their passion for oud and perfumes with a wider audience. Shama is also proud to house its

accessible mainline collection, inviting all to become fragrance connoisseurs.

Upon stepping into the store, guests are encapsulated in a

symphony of captivating fragrances emanating from Shama Perfumery's exquisite offerings. From alluring agarwood sticks to potent oudh concoctions, the Muscat boutique immerses all in a refined and sensorial experience. The boutique seamlessly blends Omani and Indian design influences resulting in a harmonious blend of Rajasthani arches, rich textures, and intricate architectural details that echo Muscat's captivating landscape.

At the heart of the store lies a mesmerising 20-ft scent library, with customised displays of an exquisite collection with an apothecary-like experience and an opulent VIP room. Every detail, from fabrics and decorative lights to repurposed antique decanters, elevates the rich craftsmanship, creating a story-filled space at Shama Perfumes.

Kuwaiti adventurer begins 50-day cross-continental tour

Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al Babbain Company (AABC), the exclusive authorised dealer of Nissan vehicles in Kuwait, has supported Khaled al Mutairi on his 50-day cross-continental tour in his Nissan Safari which began on June 7.

Fittingly themed 'Exploring the World with Nissan', the journey will span thousands of kilometres, encompassing diverse terrains and cultures in over 10 countries, a press release said.

Al Mutairi began his awe-inspiring adventure from Kuwait



and will traverse through Baghdad, Istanbul, Bulgaria, Greece,

Serbia, Hungary, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and

France, before returning via Germany, Austria, Serbia, Turkey, Iraq, and back to Kuwait. This extraordinary expedition will stand as a testament to the ruggedness and durability of Nissan vehicles, showcasing their capabilities in a variety of on-road and off-road conditions.

For Khaled, exploring the world has always been a passion, and his quest to drive through uncharted territories will fuel his ambition even further.

Throughout this tour, Mutairi

will be sharing his unique experiences and valuable insights with his followers, creating an enriching tapestry of adventures. From exploring historical landmarks in Istanbul to enjoying picturesque drives through the French countryside and beyond, his journey promises an endless exploration of the unexpected.

He is hopeful that this journey will open a window for him into humanity's rich diversity and provide him with countless learning opportunities that will broaden his horizons.

Erdogan dampens hopes of Sweden joining NATO in July

Istanbul, Turkey - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday rebuffed growing international pressure on Ankara to ratify Sweden's NATO membership bid before the Western defence alliance meets in July.

Western officials had hoped Erdogan would soften his position on the diplomatically charged issue after he secured a hard-fought re-election last month.

But Erdogan signalled no major shift in comments that were released by his office while Turkish and Swedish officials held last-minute negotiations in Ankara.

"Sweden has expectations. It doesn't mean that we will comply with them," Erdogan was quoted as saying.

"In order for us to meet these expectations, first of all, Sweden must do its part."

Sweden and its Nordic neighbour Finland ended decades of military non-alignment and applied to join the US-led defence bloc in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Turkey and fellow NATO member Hungary ratified Finland's membership this year.

But both countries' parliaments have yet to approve Sweden's entry.

Unanimous backing is needed for new countries to secure the guarantees afforded by the world's most powerful defence alliance.

'Let's get that done'

US President Joe Biden pressed Erdogan about Sweden during a call he placed a day after the Turkish leader extended his two-decade rule until 2028.

Ankara hopes to win US congressional approval of a major defence package that could substantially modernise Turkey's ageing fleet of fighter jets.

Biden directly linked the F-16 fighters' sale with the Swedish bid for the first time.

Erdogan 'still wants to work on something on the F-16s. I told him we wanted a deal with Sweden, so let's get that done', Biden told reporters after the call.

And NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg personally discussed the bid with Erdogan in Istanbul earlier this month ahead of an alliance summit in Lithuania in July.

Erdogan noted that Stoltenberg's visit coincided with a protest held in Stockholm by Kurdish supporters of a group recognised as a terrorist organisation by Ankara.

Turkey is pushing Sweden to ban and crack down on such rallies.

"There are rights given to (Sweden's) law enforcement under the constitution. Use those rights. If you don't deal with it, we cannot (say yes) at the summit in Vilnius," Erdogan said.

Sweden has already taken a series of measures aimed at appeasing Turkey's concerns. It has agreed to extradite a self-proclaimed supporter of the Kurdish militants who was convicted in Sweden of drug trafficking.

It has also toughened up its anti-terrorism laws.

Turkey 'was able to raise some concerns that it had. Finland and Sweden have both addressed those concerns and, in our judgment, addressed them appropriately and effectively', US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said this week.

"And that's what we're looking to see take place over the coming weeks."

AFP



Recep Tayyip Erdogan (AFP)

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AFP

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AFP

Deadly Russian missile strikes hit southern, eastern Ukraine

Kyiv, Ukraine - Deadly Russian missile strikes hit southern and eastern Ukraine on Wednesday as the Western-backed country's air defences fought back against Moscow's intensified attacks.

Russia fired four Kalibr missiles on the southern port city of Odesa from a warship in the Black Sea, Ukraine's air force said, with air defences shooting down three of them.

One of the missiles hit a food warehouse, killing three employees and wounding seven, Oleg Kiper, the head of the region's military administration, said on Telegram.

"There may be people under the rubble," he added.

Six other people were wounded after a business centre, shops and a residential complex in central Odesa were damaged 'as a result of air combat and the blast wave', he said.

A historic city on the Black Sea, Odesa was once a favourite holiday destination for many Ukrainians and Russians.

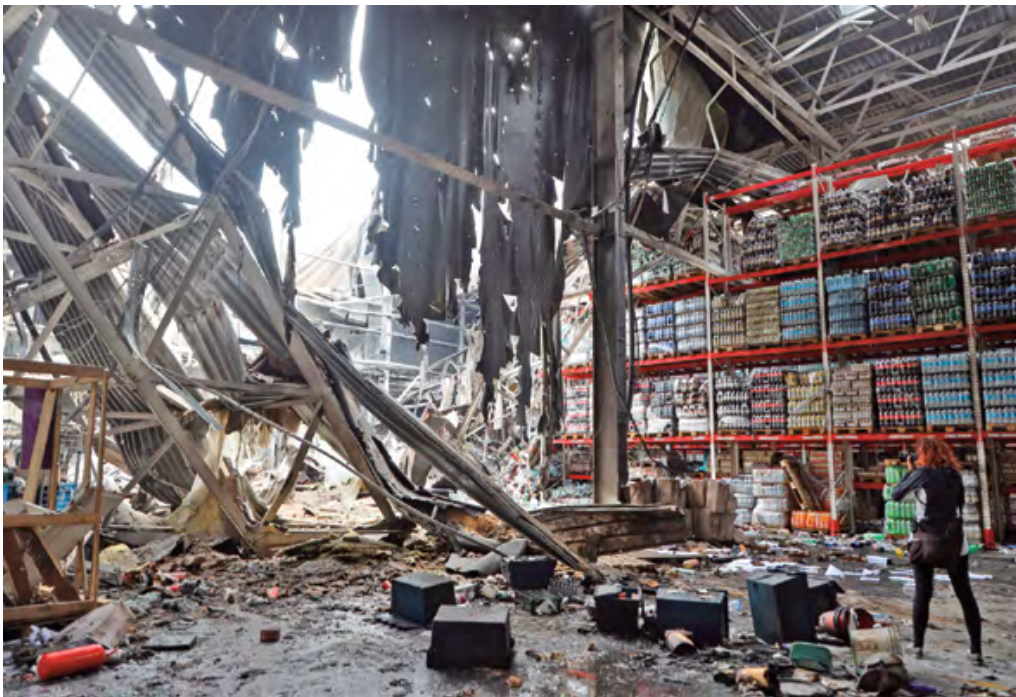
It has been repeatedly bombed since Russia invaded in February last year.

In January, the United Nations cultural agency UNESCO designated the city's historic centre as a World Heritage in Danger site.

In the eastern cities of Kramatorsk and Kostiantynivka, Russian missile strikes overnight killed three people and destroyed dozens of private houses, regional authorities said.

Kyiv also reported that Russian shelling of a van in northeastern Ukraine, near the border with Russia, had left six people dead a day earlier.

Ukrainian prosecutors said the Soviet-era van was hit near the village of Seredyna-Buda, on the border with Russia in the northeastern region of Sumy. Four of the victims were



A woman takes a picture of a damaged warehouse after a strike in Odesa on Wednesday (AFP)

One of the missiles hit a food warehouse, killing three employees and wounding seven others

foresters, they said.

Moscow has intensified its nightly attacks on major Ukrainian cities in recent weeks while Kyiv has launched a long-awaited counter-offensive to reclaim territory occupied by Russian forces.

Ukraine said on Wednesday that in the last three days Kyiv has retaken around three square kilometres (about one square mile) of territory and advanced in some areas as deep as 1.4km, while fighting continued near recaptured villages.

The latest strikes came as the death toll from Tuesday's missile strikes on Kryvyi Rig - the hometown of President Volodymyr Zelensky - rose to 12.

Authorities in the central Dnipropetrovsk region, which includes Kryvyi Rig, also reported a fresh Russian drone attack overnight.

"All three 'Shaheds' were shot down in the sky over the region," regional governor Sergiy Lysak said on Telegram, referring to the Iranian attack drones used by Russia.

While Kyiv says it was making gains after launching its counter-offensive, Putin on Tuesday claimed his forces were inflicting 'catastrophic' losses on Ukrainian troops.

IAEA chief to visit plant

Putin conceded during a Kremlin

meeting with war bloggers that Russian forces were suffering from diminishing stockpiles of some military equipment, pointing in particular to attack drones and missiles.

Kyiv quickly fired back, insisting that Ukraine's push, bolstered with Western weapons and training, had 'certain gains, implementing our plans, moving forward'.

According to military analysts, Ukraine has not yet committed the bulk of its forces in its counter-offensive, and is currently still testing the front with probing attacks to determine weak points.

In recent days, Kyiv has claimed to have re-captured several villages in the eastern and southern regions.

"Ukrainian forces continued counter-offensive operations in at least three directions and made further limited territorial gains on June 13," the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War said.

UN nuclear chief Rafael Grossi was expected at the Moscow-occupied Zaporizhzhia atomic power plant on Wednesday, but Russian news agencies reported the visit had been delayed by a day. "The mission is being postponed by a day," state news agency TASS quoted a nuclear official as saying, without giving a reason. Moscow-installed officials in Zaporizhzhia also said Grossi would now visit the plant on Thursday.

AFP



Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri heads the 12th parliamentary session to elect a new president in the capital Beirut on Wednesday (AFP)

Bitter divisions: Lebanon fails for a 12th time to elect a president

Beirut, Lebanon - Lebanese lawmakers on Wednesday failed for a 12th time to elect a new president, as bitter divisions between the Iran-backed Hezbollah and its opponents risk miring the country in a protracted power vacuum.

Crisis-hit Lebanon has already been without a head of state for more than seven months, and the previous attempt to elect a president was held on January 19.

The vote for the presidency, reserved for a Maronite Christian under Lebanon's delicate sectarian power-sharing system, pitted the Hezbollah-backed Sleiman Frangieh against financial official Jihad Azour, who has mainly been endorsed by Christian and independent legislators.

But neither had enough support to get across the line, with Azour garnering 59 votes and Frangieh 51 in the 128-seat parliament. All lawmakers showed up for the election, but many left the chamber after placing their bal-

lots in the box and quorum was lost before a second round of voting - where the winner only requires 65 ballots - was able to go ahead.

"Enough passing the buck... for prolonging the vacuum," parliament speaker Nabih Berri said in a statement after the session.

'Only consensus and dialogue' will speed up the election of a president, he added, without immediately scheduling a new ballot. Analysts said the vote risked further entrenching a political stalemate, dimming hopes of saving the economy after three years of meltdown.

"At this stage, the most likely scenario is a prolonged vacuum," analyst Karim Bitar said.

The international community has urged politicians to elect a consensus presidential candidate who can help the country enact reforms required to unlock billions of dollars in loans from abroad.

AFP

Death toll rises to 106 after Nigeria boat disaster

Kano, Nigeria - The death toll from a Nigeria riverboat disaster has risen to 106 people as rescue teams continued to search for more survivors, police said on Wednesday.

The boat, carrying around 250 passengers travelling from a wedding, capsized in the early hours of Monday in north-central Kwara state.

The accident was the latest boat tragedy in Nigeria, where river capsizees are common due to overloading, poor safety and heavy flooding in the rainy season. "One part of the boat by the engine side collapsed where water penetrated the boat, which ultimately led to the boat capsizing," Kwara police spokesman Okasanmi Ajayi said.

"All efforts to draw the attention of the villagers hosting the wedding ceremony for assistance by the persons in the boat proved abortive, leading to the deaths of about one hundred and six people."

On Tuesday, 103 people had been reported dead. More than half of the victims were from one village.

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu offered his condolences to the families of the victims on Wednesday, and said his government would look to improve inland water transport safety. "I am deeply saddened by the news of the tragic boat accident that claimed the lives of our people in Kwara State. That the victims were guests at a wedding ceremony made the unfortunate accident more painful," he said.

The Kwara State governor's office said the victims had been returning from a wedding ceremony to Kwara's Patigi district.

AFP

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AFP

Afghan farmers in anguish as locusts plague crops

Kandali, Afghanistan - Hundreds of thousands of locusts have descended on crops in northern Afghanistan, under the helpless gaze of farmers and their families already stalked by famine.

In the village of Kandali in northern Balkh, one of eight affected provinces in the country's breadbasket, a staggering swarm of grey insects has amassed on a fallow wheat field.

After feasting on the harvest they laid eggs to hatch anew next spring, continuing a cycle of destruction in a nation where nine in 10 families already struggle to afford food, according to the UN.

"They eat everything that is green: wheat, peas, sesame," Baz Mohammad, the representative of Kandali village, told AFP.

Desperate farmers used nets to sweep up the plague of Moroccan Locusts - one of the world's most voracious pests - before burying them in trenches, but their numbers are still multiplying. "We walk with hungry stomachs to kill the locusts. If we



Farmers walk amidst a locusts swarm near a wheat field at Kandali in Sholgara district, Balkh province, on June 4 (AFP)

don't kill them, our agriculture will be ruined," Mohammad said.

This year's outbreak could destroy 1.2mn tonnes of wheat, a quarter of the annual harvest, at a loss of up to US\$480mn, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Afghanistan is facing its third consecutive year of drought, with farmers in Kandali reporting no

rains since March, which could have helped wash away the bugs.

"Harvest forecasts this year are the best we have seen for the last three years," FAO Afghanistan representative Richard Trenchard said last month.

"But this outbreak threatens to destroy all these recent gains and dramatically worsen the food in-

security situation later this year and into next year."

The agency said conditions were 'perfect' for locusts with 'overgrazing, drought and very limited control measures'. The last two major infestations, which took place 20 and 40 years ago, cost the country an estimated eight per cent and 25 per cent of production, respectively.

The head of locust control at the provincial agricultural ministry, Sifatullah Azizi, said 7,000 hectares (17,000 acres) of land has been treated chemically and manually, but it is not enough.

"We have acted within our means. To eradicate them you need a budget, to hire workers, pay for fuel, products," he told AFP.

Afghanistan's economy, already battered by decades of war, has been mired in crisis after billions of dollars in international aid were cut following the Taliban government's takeover in August 2021.

Economic output has collapsed and nearly 85 per cent of the country lives in poverty, according to the latest report from the United Nations Development Programme.

"Afghanistan used to have a very strong locust control system in place. But this has been heavily eroded in the last two years," Trenchard said.

AFP

US for open lines of communication with China

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with China’s FM, ahead of face-to-face discussions in Beijing

Beijing, China - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken called on Wednesday for open lines of communication as he spoke with China's foreign minister, ahead of planned face-to-face discussions in Beijing.

Relations between the world's two largest economies have tanked in recent years over Taiwan, trade and human rights, among a litany of other issues.

Blinken is due in Beijing on Sunday for talks aimed at calming nerves, after a previous planned visit was abruptly cancelled in February.

In his call with Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang, which took place on Wednesday Beijing time, Blinken said they 'discussed ongoing efforts to maintain open channels of communication as well as bilateral and global issues'.

State Department spokesman Matthew Miller also said Blinken had stressed 'the importance of maintaining open lines of communication to responsibly manage the US-PRC relationship to avoid miscalculation and conflict'.

Blinken 'made clear the US would continue to use diplomatic engagements to raise areas of concern as well as areas of potential cooperation', Miller said.

A Beijing readout of the call struck a more confrontational tone, reporting that Qin had warned that relations between the two countries had faced 'new difficulties and challenges' since the beginning of the year.

"It's clear who is responsible," Qin said, according to the Chinese foreign ministry.

"China has always viewed and managed China-US relations in accordance with the principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation put forward by President Xi Jinping," he added.

Blinken in Beijing
Blinken's planned visit to Beijing



China's Foreign Minister Qin Gang (left) and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (AFP)

would be the first trip by a top US diplomat to China since his predecessor Mike Pompeo in October 2018.

Presidents Joe Biden and Xi met in Bali in November and agreed to try to prevent tensions from soaring out of control, including by sending Blinken to Beijing.

But Blinken abruptly cancelled a trip scheduled in early February after the United States said it detected - and later shot down - a Chinese surveillance

balloon flying over the US mainland. The two sides have more recently looked again to keep tensions in check, including with

China has always viewed and managed China-US relations in accordance with the principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation

QIN GANG

an extensive, closed-door meeting between Biden's national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, and senior Chinese diplomat Wang Yi in Vienna last month.

Biden has sought limited areas for cooperation with China, such as climate change, in contrast with the more fully adversarial position adopted at the end of the administration of his predecessor Donald Trump.

But the two countries remain at deeply at odds over several issues.

The White House last week accused China of operating an intelligence unit in Cuba for years and upgraded it in 2019 in an effort to enhance its presence on the Caribbean island.

A base in Cuba, which lies 90 miles (150km) off Florida's southern tip, would be viewed in Washington as a direct challenge to the continental United States.

Asked about the base at a regular press briefing, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said he was 'unaware of the situation' before criticising US policy on Cuba.

AFP

Two killed in shooting at Japan army training range

Tokyo, Japan - A new military recruit shot and killed two fellow soldiers and wounded a third at a training range in central Japan on Wednesday, the military said, with the 18-year-old suspect detained at the scene.

"During a live-bullet exercise as part of new personnel training, one Self-Defense Forces candidate fired at three personnel," the Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) said in a statement, confirming two deaths.

The shooter was an 18-year-old SDF candidate who joined the military in April, GSDF chief of staff Yasunori Morishita told reporters, adding he was detained on the spot by other soldiers.

"This kind of incident is absolutely unforgivable for an organisation tasked with handling weapons, and I take it very seriously," Morishita said.

He said the three victims had been tasked with training new recruits, including the attacker, at the range, without further elaborating on their relations.

The suspect, whose identity is being withheld for now, has been charged with the attempted murder of a 25-year-old soldier,



Vehicles and members of Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force are seen outside a building at Hino basic firing range in Gifu, on Wednesday (AFP)

a local police spokesman told AFP, declining to be identified.

The cadet 'fired a rifle at the victim with the intent to kill', the spokesman said.

National broadcaster NHK reported the casualties were a man in his fifties and two other men in their twenties.

Details of the casualties' identities have yet to be officially confirmed.

Aerial footage broadcast by the station showed military and civilians gathered around an emergency vehicle and police

tered by the region's Camp Moriama and is a covered facility of more than 65,000 square metres.

Gun possession is tightly controlled in Japan, where violent crime is rare.

But several high-profile incidents have rattled the country over the last year.

In July 2022, former prime minister Shinzo Abe was shot dead on the campaign trail by a man who allegedly targeted him over his links to the Unification Church.

The accused assassin, Tet-suya Yamagami, was due to make his first appearance in court this week, but the session was cancelled after a package sent to the facility set off a metal detector.

It was later found to contain no explosives, but rather a petition signed by thousands calling for a lenient sentence for Yamagami. He has garnered surprising sympathy from some quarters over the effect his mother's devotion to the Unification Church had on his family and childhood.

AFP

Pyongyang faked popular South Korean website to steal data

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea created a fake version of Naver, South Korea's largest internet portal, as part of a sophisticated phishing attack designed to harvest personal information, Seoul's spy agency said on Wednesday.

One of South Korea's biggest tech companies, Naver's myriad services - including Google-like maps, financial services similar to Apple Pay, and popular blogs and chat forums - are used daily by many Koreans.

South Korea's National Intelligence Service said Pyongyang had created a phishing site that replicated Naver's main page, including its real-time news, trading and real estate sections. The site, naverportal.com, was designed to hack South Koreans' Naver IDs and passwords, giving Pyongyang access to valuable personal data, NIS added.

"As North Korea's hacking attack methods against our people are becoming more sophisticated, we ask people to be extra vigilant," NIS said in a statement, adding measures have been taken to block the

phishing site from South Korean users.

"Please cease accessing it immediately if you spot a page that's not a standard Naver access domain URL," it said.

North Korea has previously attempted to steal South Korean IDs and passwords by duplicating Naver's log-in page but creating a fake portal was a new approach, the agency said.

"The North has upgraded its attack scheme in order to better extort private information," it said. "We are tracking the activities of the hacking group in cooperation with foreign agencies as the server is located overseas."

Naver warned users to continue to exercise caution. "We urge users to check if the address is the right one and pay extra attention when accessing Naver," the company said.

'Clumsy' but effective
Experts said that, on close inspection, the fake Naver site appeared 'clumsy' but was probably more than good enough to fool people who were not paying attention.

"By the nature of this kind of attack, South Koreans are at a disadvantage because we are on the receiving end," Choi Gil-il, a former national security official, told AFP.

"We have to be constantly on guard to fend off cyber phishing."

The Yonhap news agency reported that North Korea - possibly the state-backed hacker group Kimsuky - hacked into the intranet of the Seoul National University Hospital in May and stole personal information about more than 800,000 patients and workers.

According to Seoul, Tokyo and Washington, Pyongyang stole as much as US\$1.7bn in cryptocurrency last year alone and supported its weapons programmes in part by gathering information through 'malicious cyber activities'.

Seoul's foreign ministry also announced on Wednesday it had decided to strengthen its collaboration with Mandiant, an American cybersecurity firm and Google subsidiary, to better respond to North Korea's cyber activities.

AFP

'GOODWILL VISIT'



Philippine Navy personnel wave flags as they welcome the arrival of Chinese naval training ship Qi Jiguang in Manila on Wednesday. "It's a goodwill visit," Chinese ambassador to the Philippines Huang Xilian said (AFP)

Before a federal judge, Trump denies mishandling US government's secrets

Miami, US - Donald Trump pleaded not guilty on Tuesday to dozens of criminal counts of mishandling some of the US government's most sensitive secrets and scheming to prevent their return, in a historic first court appearance as a federal defendant.

The former president - and the favourite to fight next year's election for the Republicans - gave himself up to US Marshals in Miami for a hearing that set up the unprecedented scenario of a White House race litigated from the courtroom as well as at the ballot box.

On the eve of his 77th birthday, Trump appeared before a magistrate judge to be formally presented with 37 counts under seven charges brought by a special counsel probe that opened after an FBI raid of his Florida mansion 10 months ago.

But he dismissed his prosecution as politically-motivated in a speech to supporters framing the indictment as an effort to inter-



Former US President Donald Trump delivers remarks at Trump National Golf Club Bedminster in Bedminster, New Jersey, on Tuesday (AFP)

fere in the 2024 election. "Today we witnessed the most evil and heinous abuse of power in the history of our country. Very sad thing to watch," Trump said after returning to his summer residence in New Jersey.

The hearing - just weeks after Trump denied state level financial fraud charges in a separate case in Manhattan - came with the former reality TV star's

mounting legal woes threatening to derail his bid to return to the Oval Office.

The US government - which has never before prosecuted a former president - accuses Trump of violating the Espionage Act and other laws when he removed classified documents upon leaving office in 2021 and failed to give them up to the National Archives.

Authorities say he conspired to thwart investigators and knowingly shared national security secrets with people who did not have the requisite clearance.

After the hearing Trump jetted from Miami back to his golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey, where he blamed President Joe Biden for his prosecution.

"A corrupt sitting president had his top political opponent arrested on fake and fabricated charges - of which he and numerous other presidents would be guilty - right in the middle of a presidential election, in which he's losing very badly," said Trump, speaking from the front of the clubhouse, at a podium flanked by American flags.

He was cheered by several hundred supporters, including 100 members of a conservative organisation of Vietnamese Americans who had donned matching red dresses and chanted: "We love Trump."

AFP

IN BRIEF

Sri Lanka: Doctors remove ‘world’s largest kidney stone’
Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lankan military doctors have removed what is now recorded as the world’s largest kidney stone from a 62-year-old retired soldier, the army said on Wednesday.

The stone removed from ex-sergeant Canistus Coonge weighed 801 grams (28.25 ounces), more than five times the weight of an average male kidney, the army said.

Coonge’s kidney stone measured 13.37cm (5.26 inches) long, compared to an average kidney which is about 10 to 12cm long. The Sri Lankan case surpassed the largest kidney deposit previously recorded of 620 grams from a patient in Pakistan in 2008.

Doctors in England stage 72-hour walkout

London, UK - Hospital doctors in England began a new 72-hour strike over pay on Wednesday, prompting warnings from health officials of huge disruption to patients and services. The strike is the latest in the state-funded National Health Service (NHS), which has also seen nurses and other medical staff picket for more pay.

The walk-out by junior doctors - those below consultant level - started at 7am (0600 GMT) and is set to last until Saturday.

The British Medical Association’s Junior Doctors Committee says medics have seen a 26 per cent pay cut in real terms in the last 15 years, as salaries have failed to keep pace with soaring inflation.

Record 110mn people now forcibly displaced

Geneva, Switzerland - A record 110mn people worldwide have been forcibly displaced from their homes, the United Nations said on Wednesday.

Russia’s war in Ukraine, refugees fleeing Afghanistan and the fighting in Sudan have pushed the total number of refugees forced to seek shelter abroad, and those displaced within their own countries, to an unprecedented level, said UNHCR.

At the end of last year, 108.4mn people were displaced, UNHCR said in its flagship annual report. AFP

More than 100,000 evacuated as cyclone threatens India and Pakistan

Biparjoy is expected to make a landfall as a very severe cyclonic storm

Jakhau, India - More than 100,000 people have been evacuated from the path of a fierce cyclone heading towards India and Pakistan, with forecasters warning on Wednesday it could devastate homes and tear down power lines.

Biparjoy, meaning ‘disaster’ in Bengali, is making its way across the Arabian Sea and is expected to make landfall as a ‘very severe cyclonic storm’ on Thursday evening, government weather monitors said.

Powerful winds, storm surges and lashing rains were forecast to hammer a 325km (200-mile) stretch of coast between Mandvi in India’s Gujarat state and Karachi in Pakistan.

India’s Meteorological Department predicted the storm will hit near the Indian port of Jakhau late on Thursday, warning of ‘total destruction’ of traditional mud and straw thatched homes.

At the usually bustling Jakhau port, sounds of activity were replaced by the howls of wind and the roar of rough seas.

Gusts battered more than 30



High tides crashes into stalls at the seafront, in Mumbai on Wednesday, as cyclone Biparjoy is making its way across the Arabian Sea (AFP)

We are following a policy of caution rather than wait and see. Our first priority is saving lives

SHERRY REHMAN



large fishing boats dragged up out of the water onto the shore, as dozens of stray dogs roamed around the port’s entrance.

At sea, winds were already

gusting at speeds up to 180km per hour (112 miles per hour), forecasters said.

Wind speeds are predicted to reach 125-135kph, with gusts up to 150kph, by the time it makes landfall.

“Over 47,000 people have been evacuated from coastal and low-lying areas to shelter,” said C.C. Patel, an official in charge of relief operations in Gujarat.

More were expected to be moved inland throughout Wednesday.

India’s meteorologists warned of the potential for ‘widespread

damage’, including the destruction of crops, ‘bending or uprooting of power and communication poles’ and disruption of railways and roads.

‘High to phenomenal’

Pakistan’s climate change minister Sherry Rehman said on Wednesday that 62,000 people had been evacuated from the country’s southeastern coastline, with 75 relief camps set up at schools and colleges.

She said fishermen had been warned to stay off the water and small aircraft were grounded,

while urban flooding was possible in the megacity of Karachi, home to around 20mn people.

“We are following a policy of caution rather than wait and see,” she told reporters in Islamabad. “Our first priority is saving lives.”

The Pakistan Meteorological Department forecast gusts up to 140kph in the southeastern province of Sindh, accompanied by a storm surge reaching 3.5 metres (11.5 feet).

Fishing has also been suspended along the Gujarat coast, with conditions expected to es-

calate from ‘rough to very rough’ on Wednesday to ‘high to phenomenal’.

India’s armed forces were ‘ready to provide every possible assistance’, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh wrote on Twitter, with disaster response teams mobilised and warning of the risk of ‘flooding in some low-lying areas’. Five people have been killed in India, including two children who were crushed when a wall collapsed, and a woman was hit by a falling tree while riding a motorbike.

AFP

ITALY BIDS FAEWELL TO BERLUSCONI



People gather outside the Duomo cathedral in Milan on Wednesday for the state funeral of Italy’s former prime minister and media mogul Silvio Berlusconi (AFP)



People gather near the wrecked and charred remains of houses following fresh violence that occurred in several areas of Manipur, on Monday (ANI)

9 killed in fresh ethnic clashes in India’s northeast

Imphal, India - At least nine people were shot dead in the remote northeast Indian state of Manipur, officials said on Wednesday - the latest incident in weeks of violence sparked by long-standing ethnic tensions.

Manipur saw days of deadly clashes in May, prompted by a dispute over access to government jobs and other perks.

More than 100 have died in the resulting unrest, during which mobs raided police stations and stole weapons, while tens of thousands of others fled their homes to seek safety.

Unidentified gunmen stormed Kamenlok village on the outskirts of state capital Imphal late on Tuesday and shot indiscriminately at houses using ‘sophisticated weapons’, Manipur government information officer Heisnam Balakrishna told AFP.

“Nine persons including a woman was killed during the firing,” he added.

Ten others were injured in the attack and were taken to a hospital in Imphal for treatment.

Another nine people were injured in a separate attack on

Monday in the same village, according to police.

Tensions in the state came to a head last month between the majority Meitei, who are mostly Hindus and live in and around Imphal, and the mainly Christian Kuki tribe in the surrounding hills.

The Kuki community had protested Meitei demands for reserved public job quotas and college admissions as a form of affirmative action.

This also stoked long-held fears among the Kuki that the Meitei might also be allowed to acquire land in areas currently reserved for them and other tribal groups.

Manipur is part of India’s remote northeast, a region linked to the rest of the country by a narrow land corridor.

The area is home to dozens of tribal groups and small ethnic guerrilla armies whose demands range from greater autonomy to secession from India.

A curfew remains in force and internet shut in most of Manipur, where tens of thousands of soldiers were sent to control the violence last month.

AFP

At least 78 migrants dead as boat sinks off Greece

Athens, Greece - At least 78 migrants died after their fishing boat sank off the Peloponnese, Greece’s coastguard said on Wednesday, as fears mounted that the death toll could rise much higher.

Some 100 people were rescued after the boat capsized in international waters in the Ionian Sea in an operation complicated by strong winds, the coastguard said.

A migration ministry source told AFP that according to the coastguard there could have been ‘hundreds’ of people on the fishing boat.

“We fear there will be a very large number of missing persons,” the official said.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) ac-



Medics carry a survivor on a stretcher, after a boat carrying hundreds of migrants sank, at the port in Kalamata town, on Wednesday (AFP)

knowledge fears of a large number of missing people, noting in a tweet: “We fear more lives were lost. Initial reports suggest up to 400 people were onboard.”

Greece’s head of state, President Katerina Sakellaropoulou, said she would visit the port of Kalamata later on Wednesday to confer with senior officials on the

rescue and accommodation response. The worst migrant tragedy in Greece was in June 2016 when at least 320 people were listed as dead or missing, according to AFP records going back to 1993.

The IOM until Wednesday had listed 48 migrants missing in the eastern Mediterranean so far this year, compared to 378 a year earlier. Along with navy vessels, the rescue operation included an army plane and helicopter as well as six other boats that were in the area.

“Since very early Wednesday, an extensive rescue operation is underway off Pylos, after a fishing boat capsized with a large number of migrants onboard,” the coastguard said.

Greek media reported that

nearly 30 people have been taken to the port’s hospital, though the coastguard limited the number to just four.

The coastguard said a surveillance plane with Europe’s Frontex agency had spotted the boat on Tuesday afternoon, but the passengers had ‘refused any help’.

It added that none on board were wearing life jackets, and did not immediately disclose their nationalities.

Authorities said it appeared the migrants had departed from Libya and were heading for Italy.

The migration ministry would begin looking for accommodation for those rescued once they are processed by the coastguard to determine gender and nationality, an official said.

AFP

'We will be fighting for win'

Early season leaders Al Zubair and Schiller return to International GT Open action in Hungary

Hungaroring, Hungary - After missing the second round of the series in Spa, Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair and German team-mate Fabian Schiller return to 2023 International GT Open action at the Hungaroring in Hungary this weekend.

The Al Manar Racing by Getspeed Mercedes AMG GT3 duo led the prestigious endurance championship by two points after claiming a race win and a second place at round one in Portugal.

With the Belgian event not part of their diverse 2023 racing programme, the duo arrive in Hungary holding fourth place in the championship behind the

2023 INTERNATIONAL GT OPEN - POSITIONS AFTER

ROUND TWO:

1. Charlie Fagg/Samuel de Haan	50pts
2. Marcos Siebert/Diego Manchaca	45pts
3. Christopher Haase/Simon Reicher	42pts
4. Al Faisal al Zubair/Fabian Schiller	27pts, etc

British duo of Charlie Fagg and Samuel de Haan, Argentina's Marcos Siebert and Mexican team-mate Diego Manchaca and Eastalent Racing's Simon Reicher and Christopher Haase.

Al Zubair said: "I am really looking forward to this weekend's round of the International GT Open near Budapest. I believe

that Fabian and I, along with the Getspeed car, have a great package and will be fighting for the win in both races, hopefully.

"The first round of GT Open was great for us. We did miss the second round, as we are not doing the full championship. Budapest is a track I have been on before and so has Fabi and we

feel quite confident on that track with the Mercedes. Hopefully, it will be a good round."

International GT Open drivers will take to the famous circuit in Mogyoród for a pair of one-hour free practice sessions on Friday from 10.04am and 3.02pm, respectively.

The first 30-minute qualifying session takes centre stage at 9.45am on Saturday and precedes the opening 70-minute race that gets underway with a rolling start from 2.25pm.

Q2 takes place at a similar time on Sunday morning and is followed by a shorter second one-hour race, starting at 2 pm.



Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair and his German team-mate Fabian Schiller

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Oman’s Paralympic Sailing team to compete in Berlin Special Olympic World Games

Muscat - Oman’s Paralympic Sailing team will join more than 7,000 athletes with intellectual disabilities from 190 countries in Berlin, Germany, for the 16th Special Olympics World Games to be held from June 17-25.

Mohammed al Wahaibi and Saleh al Raisi will represent Oman in the RS Toura dinghy as part of a 32-strong fleet. The team will be coached by Ali al Shuhaimi.

Speaking ahead of the team’s departure for Germany, Al Shuhaimi said, “We are very proud to continue supporting the Special Olympics World Games and participate for the first time under the SailFree banner. Oman Sail has made sailing accessible for everyone in communities across Oman and this is a chance to join sailors from around the world in celebrating our joy for a life on the water while representing Oman at the world’s largest



We are very proud to continue supporting the Special Olympics World Games and participate for the first time under the SailFree banner.

ALI AL SHUHAIMI

sports movement for people with intellectual disabilities.”

Sailing joins 25 other disciplines for nine days of inspiring competition which proves that sport is accessible for all and is capable of achieving greater recognition and social participation of people with intellectual disabilities in society.

Racing will be held at the Seglerhaus am Wannsee club, the second oldest sailing club in Germany. The competition will see sailors with the same abili-

ties compete in the Divisioning stage, scheduled for the first two days.

The leading sailors will then advance to the preliminary competition where the winners over those two days will qualify for the final medal races on June 24.

The Special Olympics is the world’s largest sports movement for people with intellectual disabilities, with more than 5 million athletes in 174 countries, and is officially recognised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

Held every two years, the Special Olympics World Games has been changing the lives of people with intellectual disabilities since being first held in Chicago, USA, in 1968. As well as sport, the Special Olympics World Games also supports people with intellectual disabilities through health, education, and skills development programs.

ULTIMATE TEST

England’s ‘Bazball’ revolution faces toughest challenge against World champs Australia

London, United Kingdom - Can England regain the Ashes playing their ultraaggressive “Bazball” brand of cricket or will they come unstuck against battle-hardened Australia?

The answer will come over the coming weeks, starting with the first Test of a hotly anticipated five-match series at Edgbaston on Friday.

England have forced the rest of the world to sit up and take notice, with 11 wins in 13 Tests since captain Ben Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum joined forces last year.

But doubts persist as to whether their policy of all-out attack can work against arch-rivals Australia, who only last week hammered India by 209 runs at The Oval to win the World Test Championship final.

Steve Waugh, the last Australia captain to win an Ashes series in England, back in 2001, is not alone in questioning whether Stokes’s side have an alternative plan. “Have they got a Plan B?” Waugh said to the Australian media. “They have shown they are good enough to carry this style of cricket off but the ultimate test will be against a world-class bowling attack, which Australia has got.”

England had won just one out of 17 Tests before newly appointed English cricket chief Rob Key brought McCullum and Stokes together to oversee a dynamic revamp of their long-format game dubbed “Bazball”, in reference to the nickname of former New Zealand captain McCullum. And all-rounder Stokes is adamant he has no intention of altering his approach.

“Nothing is going to change



Ben Stokes with his team-mates during a training session

If we were to change anything from the last 12 months because we find ourselves in an Ashes series then anything from the last 12 months will have been completely pointless

BEN STOKES

because we’ve had unbelievable success with it,” the 32-year-old told the BBC.

“If we were to change anything from the last 12 months be-

cause we find ourselves in an Ashes series then anything from the last 12 months will have been completely pointless.”

England have scored at an

eye-watering 4.85 runs an over in the past year.

And England great James Anderson, Test cricket’s most successful paceman, said that had benefits for the bowlers as well.

“The (bowling) run-rate is irrelevant to Ben in particular,” explained Anderson.

“He’s like ‘I don’t care how many runs you go for, I want 20 wickets as quickly as possible’. You’re constantly thinking, as a bowler then, about ‘How am I taking my next wicket?’”

Of more immediate concern to England fans than Stokes’s philosophy is his fitness.

Stokes, a lively seamer, opted against bowling himself in England’s recent 10-wicket win over Ireland after struggling with a knee injury. He has since declared himself fit to bowl and with Anderson and fellow paceman Ollie Robinson suffering niggling injuries, the hosts will hope he can make good on those words.

Italy Nations League clash key for Spain coach De la Fuente

Enschede, Netherlands - Spain coach Luis de la Fuente faces a key moment early in his reign when his side take on Italy in the Nations League semi-final on Thursday in Enschede.

The 61-year-old was a surprise appointment in December in place of Luis Enrique after Spain crashed out of the World Cup against Morocco in the last 16. An unconvincing win over a Norway side without striker Erling Haaland, despite the emphatic 3-0 scoreline, and a 2-0 defeat in Scotland in his first two matches in March drew strong criticism in Spain.

Some reports have even suggested his future could be on the line if the team fall short in the Nations League final four in the Netherlands.

De la Fuente wants Spain to play in a broadly similar fashion to Luis Enrique’s possession



Luis de la Fuente

game, which bordered on the dogmatic, albeit with more capability to go direct when required.

While supporters and media are unsure about De la Fuente, his players stood up for him earlier this week.

“The coach is working very well, with enthusiasm and hope, and that’s the most important thing,” said defender Jesus Navas.

“I’d highlight the energy, the work and the unity, it’s very exciting. He’s with us in every moment, helping us.”



Argentina's coach Lionel Scaloni at a team training session ahead of their friendly match against Australia in Beijing, on Wednesday (AFP)

Argentina coach says Messi ‘deserves’ MLS move

Beijing, China - Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said Wednesday that Lionel Messi “deserves” his high-profile transfer to Inter Miami, as the world champions prepared for a friendly against Australia in Beijing.

Messi, the Argentina captain, last week announced he would join the MLS side after reaching the end of his two-year deal with French giants Paris Saint-Germain.

“I’m very happy that he has decided to go and play for a club in a city that is going to treat him very well,” Scaloni said at a press conference in the Chinese capital.

“Regardless of the league or the country, the important thing is that he feels good in the city and in the club.

“I believe he’ll have the conditions to enjoy himself there - he deserves it.”

Messi said Tuesday that last winter’s World Cup was probably his last.

The seven-time Ballon d’Or winner will turn 39 during the next World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

“I have said several times before that I don’t think so, that that (2022) was my last World Cup,” he said when asked by China’s Titan Sports if he might feature at the 2026 tournament.

Scaloni said Wednesday that Messi’s “statement seems to me to be very prudent”.

AFP

Nick Kyrgios says he spent time in psychiatric hospital

Sydney, Australia - Nick Kyrgios was admitted to a London psychiatric hospital because he contemplated suicide during Wimbledon in 2019, Australian media reported Wednesday citing a new episode of the Netflix documentary ‘Break Point’.

The Australian has previously detailed his mental health struggles and self-harm during that dark period in his life.

But in the new series of ‘Break Point’, to be released on June 21, he said he needed hospital treatment. “I was genuinely contemplating if I wanted to commit suicide,” he said, according to The Australian newspaper.

“I lost at Wimbledon. I woke up and my dad was sitting on the bed, full-blown crying. That was the big wake-up call for me. I was like, ‘OK, I can’t keep doing this’.

“I ended up in a psych ward in London to figure out my problems.”

Kyrgios posted a lengthy message on Instagram last year about his mental health issues, linking it to a photo from the 2019 Australian Open in which he pointed to marks on his arm.



Nick Kyrgios

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'GIVE IT YOUR ALL'

Oman Cricket chief urges players to put in their best effort in the World Cup qualifiers in Zimbabwe

Muscat - He has seen the highs and lows of Oman Cricket over the past many decades. Taking over a legacy left by Late Kanak Khimji, first president of Oman Cricket, he has been the fulcrum around which the sport has grown in the Sultanate of Oman. Today, Pankaj Khimji, the chairman of Oman Cricket (OC), is one of the most respected administrators in world cricket.

As the national team prepares for their biggest test ever, Khimji is filled with pride as he speaks about the team's journey to the ICC Cricket World Cup Qualifier, which will be played in Zimbabwe from June 18-July 9.

Khimji said: "We have been playing consistent cricket over the past eight years at the Associate level. Gone are the days when our team used to struggle in conditions overseas or while facing other Associate nations on the road. Today, it is a new Oman. It is no longer the squad of 2005 and 2009 (the previous occasions when Oman competed in the World Cup Qualifier) when the players faced a new ball game while playing abroad as we did not even have a turf pitch then.

"We are now a seasoned and one of the most respected teams among the Associate nations. Since our qualification for the 2016 T20 World Cup in 2015, our boys haven't looked back. Today, there isn't any team we haven't defeated in the Associate world."

'Oman in good hands'
Khimji, who is also the Asian



Oman would be hoping to put in their best effort in the ICC Cricket World Cup Qualifier in Zimbabwe from June 18.



We have some of the best players in Associate cricket, be it one of the best pace bowlers or the best allrounder or batters who are among the top-ten

PANKAJ KHIJMI



Cricket Council (ACC) vice-president, said: "Our team is in good hands under Duleep Mendis. The coaching staff of Avishkar Salvi [bowling coach] and Evert Laub-scher [assistant coach] have worked hard with Duleep to get

our boys ready for this important mission. "We have some of the best players in Associate cricket, be it one of the best pace bowlers or the best allrounder or batters who are among the top-ten. Leading from the front is classy

Zeeshan Maqsood. I believe we have a good chance in the Qualifier in Zimbabwe."

Oman face a challenging hurdle in their quest to make it to their first ICC Cricket World Cup later this year in India.

They along with nine other nations vie for the two available slots in Zimbabwe. Besides Oman, the other teams in Group B are World Cup winners Sri Lanka, Ireland, Scotland and the UAE. Group A comprises Zimbabwe, Netherlands, two-time winners West Indies, United States and Nepal.

On the team's prospects, Khimji said: "We have a good chance of making to the Super Six. Having played through the gruelling 36-match cycle in the ICC Cricket World Cup League 2,

our players are well-prepared. There is an excitement among players of taking on full-member nations and big teams and they are not overawed.

"We should be able to finish in the top half of the table and get into the next stage. I am confident and I couldn't have asked for a better team to achieve it. The bunch of players are a motivated lot and are carrying the momentum of their excellent display in Cricket World Cup League 2 where we finished second."

Khimji, who met the players

before their departure, urged his boys to give it all and go into the Qualifier with determination.

He told the players: "Once for all, give it your all. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. There is nothing easy at this level. Go into each match with a positive mindset."

Khimji added: "At this stage, it is time for team and players to produce something special. We have a good set of all-rounders and that is an advantage. Our skipper Shani [Zeeshan Maqsood] is our trump card."

Oman vice-captain Aqib Ilyas hopes to mark return with bang

Muscat - Aqib Ilyas hopes to hit the ground running on his ODI return as Oman attempt to secure their place at the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup for the first time.

The vice-captain became the first player from his country to score an ODI century in February 2020, hitting an unbeaten 109 against Nepal before backing it up two days later with a second ton against USA.

Those scores saw his average soar to 58 but an unfortunate run of injuries means he has played just once in the format since 2021, against Nepal in April, when he could not bat due to another injury sustained in the match.

But Ilyas remains confident heading into the upcoming ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Qualifier in Zimbabwe, with Oman in Group B alongside Ireland, Scotland, Sri Lanka and United

We will give everything we have to qualify for the top six and then for the top two

AQIB ILYAS

Arab Emirates, and has no doubt about the importance of his own role.

He said: "As a batter, I have to score runs. Having an average of almost 60 in the last 17 or 18 games is great but that is in the past now and I have to score again. Hopefully, I will get that confidence and if I get runs in the tournament then we have to believe we can win against anyone. It is the same for my bowling, as I am now taking wickets too.

"We know though that giv-

ing our best will take us to a big tournament and the big stage.

"We believe we have a good chance because we have some good players in the side - Zeeshan Maqsood, Jatinder Singh and then myself coming into the team. We'll give everything we have to qualify for the top six and then for the top two."

Oman know they must finish in the top three in their group to advance to the Super Six, from which the top two will claim the remaining places at ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023.

Their opponents in Zimbabwe are all familiar and Ilyas believes his side can draw confidence from past meetings.

"We have played all of these teams before," he said. "We did not play an ODI series with Sri Lanka, but we played some 50-over games against them and we won a game and we lost a game."

Nepal's World Cup hopes rest on rape-accused Lamichhane

Kathmandu, Nepal - Sandeep Lamichhane is set to play a key role in Nepal's bid to seal a place at the one-day World Cup for the first time despite the former skipper being on bail for an alleged rape.

Nepal face hosts Zimbabwe on Sunday in Harare at the start of a qualifying tournament pitting 10 teams fighting it out for two prized spots at the World Cup in India in October.

Sri Lanka, the West Indies, Ireland and the hosts are among the favourites but Nepal -- who only gained one-day international status in 2018 -- hope to spring a surprise.

Central to their chances is 22-year-old spin bowler Lamichhane, once the poster boy for the rise of cricket in Nepal.

"Lamichhane is a crucial player for our team," said Britant Khanal, general manager of the Cricket Association of Nepal.

"He has performed very well



Sandeep Lamichhane

in the last few matches despite a case against him in court."

Lamichhane is accused of raping a 17-year-old girl in a Kathmandu hotel room in August last year. He denies all wrongdoing.

He was suspended as national captain and arrested, but was freed on bail in January and Nepal then lifted his ban on playing.

Under his bail conditions,

Lamichhane is able to travel abroad.

In the capital Kathmandu there is excitement about the qualifiers, with many fans on social media backing the inclusion of Lamichhane -- and only a small number against it.

Nepal go into the qualifying tournament with momentum.

They won 11 of their last 12 matches to take third spot in World Cup League 2 and reach the tournament in Zimbabwe.

Top-order batsman Aasif Sheikh told the International Cricket Council that there was confidence within the squad.

"We believe that if we play our best cricket on that day, we are going to win," he said.

Khanal was more measured, calling Nepal's hopes of reaching the World Cup "a long shot", before adding: "But we are confident that our team's performance will be outstanding."

Najmul ton guides Bangladesh to 362-5 against Afghanistan

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Najmul Hossain struck his third Test century as Bangladesh dominated a hapless Afghanistan to score 362-5 on the first day of the one-off Test in Dhaka on Wednesday.

Najmul made 146 off 175 balls and set up an imposing total in his 212-run second-wicket partnership with Mahmudul Hasan, who hit 76 to make his third Test fifty.

Mushfiquur Rahim was not out on 41 alongside Mehidy Hasan Miraz on 43 when bad light

forced stumps with 11 overs left on the opening day.

Afghanistan, who are without talismanic all-rounder Rashid Khan, were on the back foot for most of the day after electing to bowl first on a rare green-top wicket at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

Debutant medium pacer Nijat Masood was the most successful Afghan bowler with 2-67, removing Zakir Hasan for one on his very first Test delivery in the second over.

The sharp catch from wicket-

keeper Afsar Zazai had to be confirmed by the television umpire after an initial decision of not out. But Najmul and Mahmudul immediately forged a strong partnership to take control of the proceedings and deny the visitors further momentum.

Najmul hit back-to-back fours off Yamin Ahmadzai in the first over he came to bat and brought up his fifty off 58 balls with a boundary off leg-spinner Zahir.

Occasional spinner Rahmat Shah broke their partnership when Mahmudul attempted a

cut shot only to edge a catch to Ibrahim Zadran at slip.

Mahmudul hit nine boundaries in his sedate 137-ball innings.

Afghanistan enjoyed a brief spell of success in the post-tea session when Nijat dismissed Mominul Haque, caught behind down the leg side, for 15.

Najmul fell soon after, heaving a catch to Nasir Jamal at deep midwicket off left-arm spinner Amir Hamza in his attempt for his third six in the innings.

AFP



Bangladesh's Najmul Hossain celebrates after completing his century on the first day of the one-off Test against Afghanistan in Dhaka on Wednesday (AFP)

Weekend



14

CUCUMBER TREATS

Cucumbers are your best bet to beat weight gain and harsh summers



15

IN TOWN

Korean boy band B.I.G concert and Joy Alukkas exchange opening



16

ENTERTAINMENT

A peek into tinsel town in Hollywood and Bollywood

RIDER SIBLINGS

ARABIAN KNIGHTS

TWO RIDER BROTHERS FROM THE ROYAL FAMILY RIDE 360KM TO QUALIFY FOR THE WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP 2024

Mohammed Taha

Raising the Omani flag in different countries, two rider brothers from the Royal Family recently successfully completed 360km of the qualifiers for the World Endurance Championship in 2024.

H H Sayyid Loay bin Ghalib al Said and H H Sayyid Ali bin Ghalib al Said won the third round of the qualifiers in the Buch Endurance Festival, in Germany, for the World Endurance Championship which will be held in France in 2024.

The third round was organised under a numerable of FEI Endurance World Championships. The victory achieved by the two riders now

marks a significant milestone in their journey towards the World Cup finals.

In the Buch Endurance Festival, Sayyid Loay showcased remarkable prowess by securing first place in the race of 140km (three stars category). Outshining a field of 70 participating knights from Europe across various distances, his exceptional performance earned him well-deserved recognition.

Moreover, his brother also demonstrated his skill and determination by clinching victory in the challenging 140km race (two stars category) which was divided into two days.

While Sayyid Loay has only one race remaining to secure a spot in the finals, Sayyid Ali faces three qualifying races.

Speaking to Muscat Daily Sayyid Loay, said, "One more race is left for me to make it to the World Endurance Championship in France in 2024. The qualifiers include four stages - 100 km, 120 km, 140km and 160 km. We succeeded to cross the third stage so far."

Sayyid Ali explained that the race

qualifiers in the German Strohn race were for a distance of 100km and featured the participation of international jockeys from different parts of the world.

"In April 2023, we successfully completed the Samorin Endurance Race over a distance of 120km in Slovakia and competed in the third endurance race in the German city of Buch - that was a 140km race in June," he said.

Talking about challenges, Sayyid Loay said "The race in Slovakia was one of the toughest stages of the race, so far. The terrain we crossed during the race was thick forest and we experienced chilly weather with temperatures going down to 4 degrees. We also experienced rain, making the track slippery and we had to be safe with our horses. This race forced us to wear more than five jackets to face the severe cold," he added.

Reaching the finals required immense concentration and determination, Loya said, adding that he prepared for the championship by training daily and studying the tracks of each race before participating.



Sayyid Ali (left, in white) and Sayyid Loay (centre, in white) with their technical team

"We will participate in the final stage on August 28 in the Munba-reez race, in France, which is allocated for a distance of 160km. This stage of the race is considered an international trial before participating in the World Cup," said Loay.

He added, "We are keen to continue representing the sultanate at world meets and raising the Omani flag in different countries." He also urged Omani youth to practice horse riding and walking, as these

activities build confidence and enhance their personality.

Sayyid Loay also expressed gratitude for H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, for his unflinching support. "It gave us the courage to take on the challenge. We also thank the Oman Equestrian Federation and technical team for their support as they prepared us to compete in next year's world championship.



We are keen to continue representing Oman at world meets and raising the Omani flag in different countries

H H SAYYID LOAY AL SAID



cook-up

White Cucumber Gazpacho

Ingredients

- 1/2 small loaf of old French bread - roughly torn
- 1 cup almonds - blanched, 2 cups green grapes
- 1/4 sweet onion - roughly chopped
- 2 garlic cloves - chopped, 1 yellow chilli - seeds removed, chopped
- 3 Persian cucumbers - peeled and chopped
- 1 lemon - zest and juice, 1/2tsp apple cider vinegar
- Salt and pepper, to taste, olive oil, 1 cup water

For garnish

Mint leaves, pinch of cayenne, lemon zest, edible flowers, olive oil

Method

First, tear up the pieces of bread and soak them in a bowl with water for about 10 minutes. In a food processor, blend almonds until they are as fine as possible. Squeeze out the water from the bread and add that to the almonds in the food processor as well as the grapes, onion, garlic, chile, cucumbers, lemon zest and juice, salt and pepper, vinegar and a good drizzle of olive oil.

Start with 1/2 cup of water and blend until everything is incorporated. Add more water, as necessary, and adjust seasoning.

When done, pour a ladle of soup through a fine mesh sieve over a large bowl and use a spatula or large spoon to push the soup through. Then take the solids and blend in the food processor again and continue to strain through a sieve, extracting as much liquid as possible.

Cover bowl with plastic wrap and chill in fridge for at least 2 hours. Garnish with lemon zest, cayenne, flowers, olive oil, and serve.



Cucumber coolers

There's nothing more cooling in summer than cucumbers. And, if you want to consume this summer vegetable/fruit to combat weight gain, you can get it onto your dinner table in many interesting ways



Pineapple, Cucumber Smoothie

Ingredients

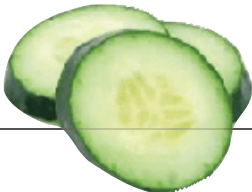
- 1/2 cup sliced cucumber
- 1 heaping cup cubed pineapple
- 1/2 large ripe, peeled, frozen banana
- 1/4 cup light coconut milk
- 1/2 cup water, 1 medium lime – zest plus juice
- 1 large handful greens (spinach or kale)
- 2-4 ice cubes

Method

Add cucumber, pineapple, frozen banana, light coconut milk, water, lime zest, lime juice, greens, and ice cubes to a blender and blend on high until creamy and smooth, scraping down sides as needed.

For a thicker smoothie, add more ice. For a thinner smoothie, add more liquid of choice. Taste and adjust flavour as needed, adding more lime juice or zest for acidity/brightness, banana or pineapple for sweetness, coconut milk for creaminess, and greens for more intense green colour.

Serve immediately. Leftovers will keep covered in the refrigerator up to 24 hours, though best when fresh.



Cucumber, Watermelon, Feta Salad

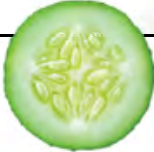
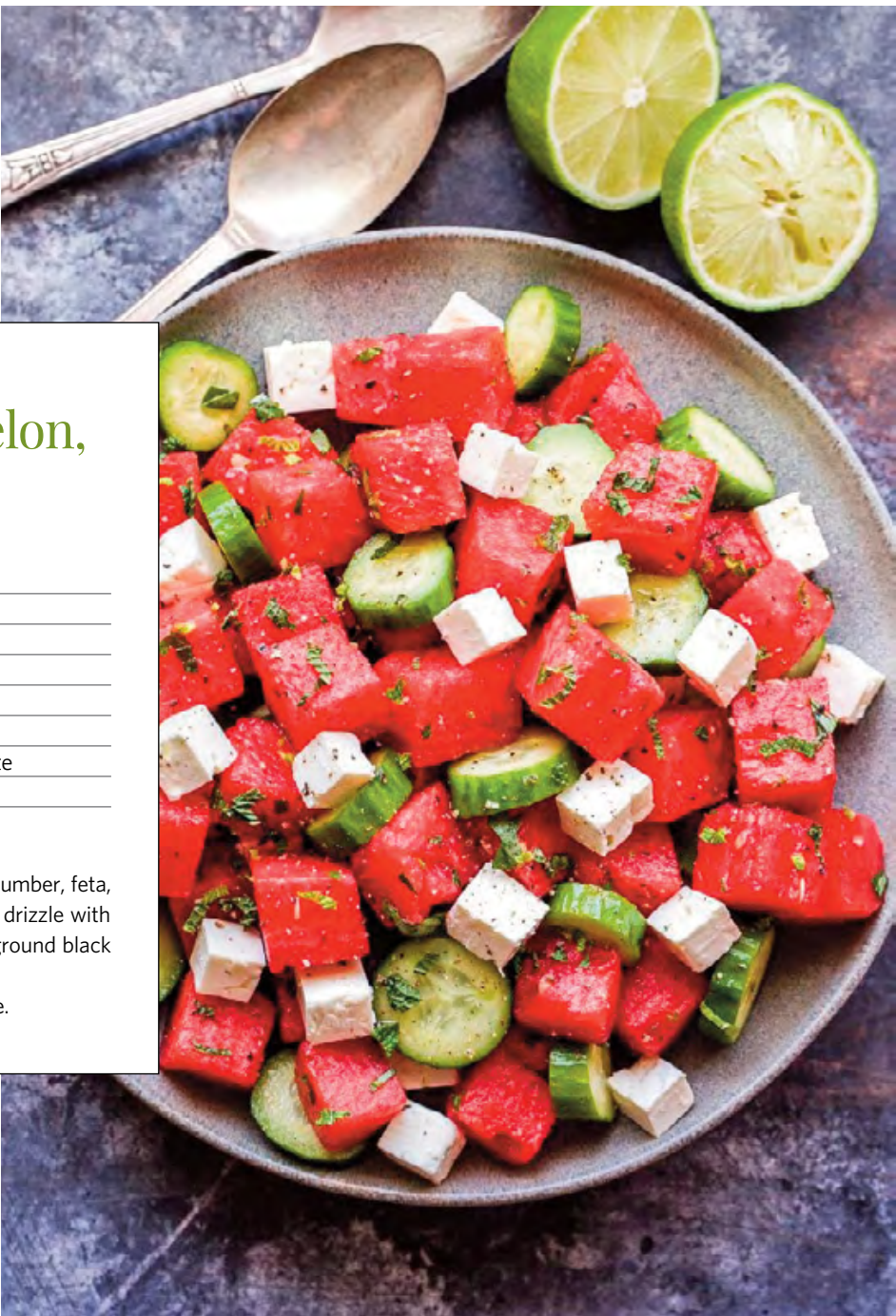
Ingredients

- 4 cups watermelon cubes
- 2 Persian cucumbers - sliced
- 100g feta cheese - cut into cubes
- 1tbsp chopped mint
- 1tbsp chopped basil
- 1 lime - juiced
- Kosher salt and fresh ground black pepper, to taste
- Olive oil, to taste

Method

In a large serving bowl, add the watermelon, cucumber, feta, basil and mint. Squeeze the lime over the salad, drizzle with olive oil and season with kosher salt and fresh ground black pepper. Toss to combine.

Chill for an hour, taste for seasoning, and serve.



Steamed Cucumber Cake

Ingredients

- 2 English cucumbers
- 1 cup semolina
- 1/4 cup sugarcane jaggery (grated)
- 1/4tsp cardamom powder
- 1/4 cup fresh grated coconut
- 8 to 10 cashew nuts - chopped
- 1tsp Eno fruit salt
- A pinch of salt
- Oil for greasing

Method

Peel cucumbers and grate it and reserve the grated cucumbers along with the liquid and discard the seeds and keep it aside. Lightly roast semolina in a pan and transfer it to a bowl and



add grated cucumbers, jaggery, coconut, cashew nuts and salt. With the heat from the roasted semolina, the jaggery will melt and sweeten the mixture - mix the batter well. Heat a steamer with water and lightly grease a deep dish with oil/ butter. When the water in the steamer comes to a boil, add the Eno fruit salt to the cucumber batter.

Mix it lightly to avoid deflating the air bubbles and spoon the batter into the greased dish. Steam the cake for 5 minutes or until cooked through. Carefully remove and cool. Run a knife along the edge of the dish and see if the cake comes off easily. Cut into pieces and serve as a tea-time snack with a hot cup of tea.

take a break

IN TOWN

B.I.G CONCERT



Korean boy band B.I.G performed at OCEC last weekend



(Photos: VK Shafeer)

Exchange opening



Joy Alukkas Exchange opened six new branches in Muscat



BOGGLER

V	K	A	B
S	O	R	S
V	E	R	O
Y	I	T	O

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

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.

Odontophobia is the fear of teeth - True or False?

True - People with odontophobia - also known as dentophobia or dental fear - do not enjoy going to the dentist.

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.

All camels have two humps - True or False?

When they're far from food and freshwater sources, fat in their humps that they use as energy and water. Both Bactrian and Arabian camels store one hump. But Arabian camels, called dromedaries, have only one hump. Answer: False - Bactrian camels have two humps.

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

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

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You are just finally coming around to understanding the true scope of the amount of work you have to do today at your job, in a romantic partnership, or in a friendship. This sudden realization could overwhelm you, but it doesn't have to. The soldier in you knows that you can do this! No task is too tough for you, especially if you are humble and honest about how you're feeling.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

The stakes are getting higher, and you'll need to up your competitiveness in order to stay in the game. Don't worry. You can do it! Even if you were never a college sports star, you've got the intensity you need to power through and stay focused on your end goal. You even have your own personal cheerleader.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Not everyone is on the same timetable as you are, and you shouldn't try to rush them to get to where you are. It's not too hard to see what's holding them back, but just because you understand the problem doesn't mean you can solve it. This is their issue to deal with, so let them do so. The only way you can help speed things up is to show them what you know.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

For a while now you've been wanting to do a certain something but haven't quite been able to give yourself the necessary nudge to get going. Until now. This push may come in the form of someone else's inspiring story, a sudden influx of cash, or maybe it's just that little voice inside of you getting louder.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

A burgeoning romantic flirtation could blossom if you start picking up on their signals. They are shyer than you think and a bit afraid of rejection, but who isn't? Be empathetic and meet them halfway. If you're currently in a relationship, it's time to ask the questions you've been wondering about.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Some big news could be coming to a member of your social circle today, and there could be some dramatic and emotional reactions. This is something that you've been suspecting for quite a while, so the news flash won't be much of a flash for you, and you'll have fun seeing how people are taking the news.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Trust the people who are in power right now even if you don't know them very well (or you know them too well). They know more about what's going on that you do and are capable of steering things in the right direction. Questioning authority is usually a smart thing to do, but right now it will only be a waste of time.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Your nonverbal communication is speaking several decibels louder than your words today, and it's sending out messages you aren't aware of. To play it safe, you should rely more heavily on using email and the phone to get your messages across, especially to that certain cutie you have your eye on!



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Flattering someone in order to get what you want is a completely legitimate tactic, but if you rely on it too often with the same people, it's going to start to backfire. If you need to ask someone a big favor or have a sensitive conversation today, don't be overly obvious about just how smart, attractive, clever, witty, or whatever else you think they are. Just be blunt and up front.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

The only trouble about working so hard at climbing that mountainous goal is once you get to the top, where do you go from there? After completing a big step, you could still be struggling with that question, but you'll have all the inward clarity you need to answer it. This sense of calm with help you figure out whether to find another mountain to climb or just sit tight and enjoy a wonderful view.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You've been going full steam ahead for way too long, and the wear and tear could start to show today. You need to reconsider what's on your plate and figure out which things you can put onto someone else's plate. Nothing is going to really help you relax until you're able to block out a big chunk of time, enough time to let you forget about outside pressures.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

At work, you will soon feel that the mood is shifting away from the serious and heading straight for the silly! A few of your coworkers will be of assistance in as many pranks as you want to pull, so don't be shy about enlisting their help with the hijinks. You can't take everything seriously all the time, so enjoy a little recreation at the office for a while.

entertainment



British producer Sonia Friedman

Actress Victoria Clark



FRANCE'S BALLET STAR ON GIVING UP THE AMERICAN DREAM

He conquered the New York stage, married a Hollywood star and directed a daring new film version of *Carmen*. But Benjamin Millepied says he had to give up the American Dream to return to France.

Millepied is best-known to tabloid gossip fans as the husband of actress Natalie Portman, whom he met while working as choreographer on the Oscar-winning film *Black Swan*.

But he was already a star in his own right - a former principal dancer with the New York City Ballet who formed the highly respected L A Dance Project. Now 45, he has grown tired of the California lifestyle and moved back to France.

Tom Stoppard's play *Leopoldstadt*, a look at how one Jewish family confronts anti-Semitism and loss, and intimate tragicomic musical *Kimberly Akimbo* earned the top prizes Sunday at the Tony Awards, the highest honors in American theater.

Inclusion and identity were key themes on a night at which history was made - J Harrison Ghee in *Some Like It Hot* and Alex Newell in *Shucked* became the first openly nonbinary actors to win trophies for their work on Broadway.

Winners, performers and presenters alike at the United Palace theater in Manhattan's Washington Heights neighbourhood also offered their full support to striking writers in Hollywood. Seen here, British producer Sonia Friedman poses with the award for best play for *Leopoldstadt* and Victoria Clark poses with the award for Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role in a Musical for *Kimberly Akimbo* in the Radio Hotel press room during the 76th Tony Awards.



CALIFORNIA LOVE: TUPAC HONOURED WITH STAR IN HOLLYWOOD

Slain rap legend Tupac Shakur was honoured with a star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame on Wednesday, almost three decades after the best-selling artist was gunned down in a drive-by shooting.

The ceremony paid tribute to a rapper who died at age 25 after a brief but spectacular career, in which he went from backup dancer to self-styled gangsta and one of the most influential figures in hip-hop.

"It fills my heart with honor to stand here today representing the Shakur family," said Shakur's sister Sekiywa 'Set' Shakur at the unveiling in Los Angeles. "Tupac knew deep down that he was always meant for something great. And as his sister, I had the privilege to watch that unfold."



COMING SOON

THE MINUTE YOU WAKE UP DEAD

After a shady small-town stockbroker begins dating a shy waitress, a shocking murder takes place - and one of them may be responsible. As word spreads that there's money behind the killing, every criminal in town wants their share of the cash. One shocking plot twist follows another, and a bloody showdown leads to a mind-blowing finale.

Genre: Thriller Starring: Jaimie Alexander, Morgan Freeman, Cole Hauser
Language: English

JOHNNY DEPP TO DONATE US\$1MN FROM DEFAMATION SETTLEMENT



Johnny Depp will be donating a portion of his settlement in his defamation case with Amber Heard to five separate charities. Make-A-Film Foundation, The Painted Turtle, Red Feather, Tetiaroa Society and Amazonia Fund Alliance are the five charities that will receive donations of US\$200,000 each, totaling US\$1mn, a source close to Depp confirmed

GUILLERMO DEL TORO HOOKED ONTO ANIMATION

Animation was his first love. And, if Guillermo del Toro has his way, it will be his last.

"There are a couple more live-action movies I want to do but not many," the *Pinocchio* and *Shape of Water* director told the audience at the Annecy animation festival on Tuesday. "After that, I only want to do animation. That's the plan."

Del Toro, who said he first started making animation when he was 8 years old using his father's Super 8 camera, is following up his Oscar-nominated *Pinocchio* with another animated feature for Netflix.



Tale of two Barry Allens

HOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW

THE FLASH

Genre: Action, adventure, fiction
Starring: Ezra Miller, Sasha Calle, Michael Shannon, Ron Livingston Maribel Verdu

The *Flash*, directed by Andy Muschietti, is a 2023 American superhero film based on the DC Comics character of the same name. Produced by Warner Bros Pictures, DC Studios, Double Dream, and the Disco Factory, it is intended to be the 13th installment in the DC Extended

Universe (DCEU).

Barry Allen/ *The Flash* travels back in time to prevent his mother's death, which traps him in an alternate reality without metahumans. Barry enlists the help of his younger self, an older Batman and the Kryptonian castaway Supergirl in order to save this world from the restored General Zod and return to his universe.

Using *Back to the Future*-esque time travel rules, *The*

Flash becomes a tale of two Barry Allens, two Batmans, and two versions of DC movie continuities colliding. What follows is a sincere and surprisingly humorous morality play where Barry must reconcile what his selfish, grief-stricken actions have wrought. It's especially effective in telling a story that includes the Flash's full origin without actually being a typical origin story movie.

Director Andy Muschietti is



probably the one having the most fun here, as he enthusiastically launches his film into the gothic, fog-encrusted aesthetics of Burton's work and the desaturated gloom of Zack Snyder's DC contributions (Michael Shannon's Zod, of

Man of Steel fame, also returns). There are additionally two Flash-centric sequences that pay unexpected homage to the Looney Tunes, complete with babies freefalling out of skyscrapers and a band's worth of musical instruments tumbling out of a truck.

There are a handful of other cameos, some of them so ludicrous you almost have to admire the tenacity, as well as a featherlight appearance from Sasha Calle's Supergirl.

DC Universe moviebuffs, go get your refill!

Rating ★★★★★