

Sayyid Badr honoured with Lithuanian order

Vilnius, Lithuania - Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, was awarded the Commander's Cross of the Order for Merits to Lithuania on Tuesday in appreciation of his efforts to boost cooperation and relations between the two countries.

The order was presented to Sayyid Badr by President Gitanas Nausėda of Lithuania when he received Sayyid Badr at the Presidential Palace.

Ahead of the conferment, Sayyid Badr conveyed greetings and best wishes of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to President Nausėda and the people of Lithuania.

On his turn, President Nausėda expressed his sincere sentiments for His Majesty the Sultan, wishing His Majesty good health and happiness. The Lithuanian President also wished the relations between the two countries further development and growth.

The meeting underscored ties of friendship and cooperation between Oman and Lithuania and stressed the joint keenness to promote these in various diplomatic, economic, cultural and scientific fields.

Sayyid Badr expressed his gratitude for being honoured and said he looked forward to work-



Oman and Lithuania express keenness to enhance cooperation, notably in economic, commercial, investment and cultural fields

President Gitanas Nausėda confers the Commander's Cross of the Order for Merits to Lithuania on Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi on Tuesday

ing with his Lithuanian counterpart in advancing cooperation and partnership in different fields.

Political talks

As part of his official visit to Lithuania, Sayyid Badr held talks and political consultations with Gabrielius Landsbergis, Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The session affirmed the two countries' keenness to enhance cooperation, notably in economic, commercial, investment and cultural fields.

The talks, which also dealt with areas of transport, energy, science and technology, covered ways of achieving shared benefits and serving the peoples of the two countries by exploring new promising opportunities.

The two sides also exchanged views on current regional and international issues of common concern and they asserted their identical, permanent stands that advocate the establishment of global peace, security, respect for the sovereignty of countries and their territorial integrity.

The meetings were attended by Khalid Hashel al Muselhi, Head of the Minister's Office Department, Boleta Senkien, Honorary Consul of Oman in Lithuania, and other officials.

ONA

Reduced fares for citizens on two domestic routes

Our Correspondent
Muscat

National carrier Oman Air has announced new fares for Omani nationals travelling between Muscat, Salalah and Khasab.

The lower fares are intended to encourage domestic travel and generate economic activity for local communities, both of which will contribute to strengthening competitiveness across the country's tourism ecosystem, a press release stated.

Ahmed Ali al Mahrouqi, regional vice-president of sales - Oman and GCC, stated that the lower fares initiative reflects Oman Air's commitment to local communities as the official carrier of Oman, as well as its ongoing efforts to actively contribute to the revitalisation of domestic tourism and economic activity.



Fares to/from Salalah
One-way: RO32.900 onwards
Return: RO45.200 onwards
Fares to/from Khasab
One-way: RO17.900 onwards
Return: RO25.200 onwards

"Lower fares allow Omanis to discover (and rediscover) the geographical, historical, and natural richness that sets Oman apart from other places in the region as a destination to be enjoyed year-round."

UK records highest-ever temperature of 40.2°C

London, United Kingdom - A fierce heatwave left western Europe sweltering on Tuesday, fuelling ferocious wildfires and stretching emergency services, as it swept north and pushed temperatures in Britain over 40°C for the first time.

After the UK's warmest night on record, the Met Office said 40.2°C had been recorded by lunchtime at Heathrow Airport, in west London, taking the country into uncharted territory.

Britain's previous all-time temperature record of 38.7°C, set in Cambridge in eastern England in 2019, was smashed earlier on Tuesday. The Met Office warned that "temperatures are still climbing in many places".

Experts blame climate change for the latest heatwave and note the more frequent extreme weather will only worsen in years to come.

AFP

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BIG 4 DAYS

From July 20th to 23rd, 2022

100 BAIZA/KG

200 BAIZA/KG

300 BAIZA/KG

400 BAIZA/KG

500 BAIZA/KG

600 BAIZA/KG



Ash Pumpkin Oman

100 BAIZA/KG



Onion India

200 BAIZA/KG



Orange Valencia Egypt

300 BAIZA/KG



Garlic China

400 BAIZA/KG



Grapes White Egypt

500 BAIZA/KG



Pears Rosemary South Africa

500 BAIZA/KG



Mandarine South Africa

600 BAIZA/KG



Noor Sunflower Oil 2x1.5 Ltr

3.250 R.O



India Gate Basmati Rice 5kg+1kg

6.500 R.O



Indomie Noodles 15x70gm

1.550 R.O



Aquafina Water 12x1.5 Ltr

0.850 R.O



Pepsi 6x330ml

1.250 R.O



Omani Eggs 30's

1.350 R.O



Puck Cheese Jar 2x500gm

2.200 R.O



Kellogg's Corn Flakes 2x375gm

1.790 R.O



Tide Detergent Powder 2x2.5kg

3.990 R.O



Hascever Cookingpot Gastro10pc Set

19.990 R.O



Impex Drip Coffee Maker (CM 1915)

9.490 R.O



Clikon Steam Iron 1100-1300W CK4105-N

3.990 R.O

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*TERMS AND CONDITIONS APPLIED



Oman joins meeting to bring peace to Yemen

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The sultanate, represented by the Foreign Ministry, participated in a meeting to support peace efforts and arriving at a comprehensive diplomatic solution to resolve the conflict in Yemen on Monday.

H E Sheikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, and several Omani officials represented the sultanate in the meeting.

Held virtually, the meeting was organised by the British Foreign Office and chaired by Amanda Milling, Minister of State for Asia and the Middle East.

Saudi Arabia, United Arab

Emirates, United Kingdom, United States and Hans Grundberg, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for Yemen, also participated.

The five countries issued a joint communiqué after the meeting reinforcing their full support for UN efforts to secure an extended and expanded truce in Yemen on August 2, 2022.

They welcomed the continuing implementation of agreed confidence building measures

by the Government of Yemen, and called upon the Houthis to be flexible in negotiations over road closures around Taiz, and to immediately open main roads.

The five countries agreed that a permanent ceasefire and a durable political settlement must be the ultimate objectives of the UN-led process, and that such a settlement should build on past agreements and relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

They also agreed on the urgency of securing the required funding to enable the transfer of oil from Safer, the floating storage and offloading unit moored off the coast of Yemen in the Red Sea, to prevent an oil spill.

They noted the pledges from Saudi Arabia and the US, and welcomed the additional £2mn pledge from the UK, expressing their full support for UN efforts towards a comprehensive plan to eliminate the catastrophic humanitarian and ecological risk.

The five countries welcomed Saudi Arabia and the UAE's joint US\$3bn economic support package for Yemen, announced in April, and an additional commitment by Saudi Arabia of a US\$200mn grant to provide oil derivatives to operate electricity power stations in Yemen.

Oman, Saudi Arabia, UAE, UK, US, and Hans Grundberg, the Special Envoy of Secretary-General of the UN for Yemen, met to find a lasting solution to the Yemen conflict

MHT opens exhibition of meteorites in Dhofar



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) inaugurated an exhibition of meteorites in the Land of Frankincense Museum in the Governorate of Dhofar on Tuesday.

A statement issued by the ministry said, 'This is a first-of-its-kind exhibition in the sultanate and has been launched in an effort to increase awareness on the importance of meteorites

as well as to diversify museum exhibits. The exhibition also aims to promote heritage and tourism destinations in various governorates.'

The exhibition includes several rare meteorites, including a lunaite that was found in January 2002 and Martian meteorites.

At the exhibition opening, Hussein bin Ali al Ghafri, director of Department of Geological Heritage in MHT, said, "Using hi-tech digital devices, the ministry

has succeeded in documenting more than 7,000 meteorites of a total weight of more than 6,000kg."

In a first-of-its-kind project in the world, Oman has been successful in monitoring and documenting the entry of meteorites into its airspace in real time and pinpointing the exact location of their fall.

In the first four months of 2022, MHT documented several meteorites through its Meteorite Monitoring Project.

IndiGo to launch two new routes to Muscat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Indian low-cost airline IndiGo will start two new routes from India to Muscat. The airline will operate four weekly flights between

Lucknow and Muscat and two weekly flights from Thiruvananthapuram to Muscat.

A statement issued by Oman Airports said, 'Oman Airports congratulates IndiGo Airline on the launch of the two new flights

coming from Chaudhary Charan Singh International Airport in Lucknow to Muscat International Airport and from Thiruvananthapuram International Airport to Muscat International Airport.'

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SEARCH EFFORTS FOR TWO MISSING ASIANS CONTINUE IN MUGHSAIL



Efforts to find two missing people in Dhofar, who were swept into the sea in Mughsail Beach on July 10, are continuing, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) stated on Tuesday. ‘Search efforts for two missing children continue in the Mughsail area of Dhofar governorate. They were swept into the sea by crashing waves when they crossed the safety barricade on the rocky cliff in the area,’ the CAA stated (Supplied photos)

Field teams to protect environment, monitor visitors during khareef

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environment Authority (EA) has formed a team called Environmental Protectors as part of its efforts to protect tourist sites during the khareef season in Dhofar.

According to an EA official, the field team will monitor all tourist sites for violations such as littering, cutting trees and damaging green spaces during khareef in Dhofar.

The initiative aims to spread awareness among visitors and tourists of the importance of preserving tourist sites and the environment.

Additionally, it will promote social responsibility among visitors to the governorate.

About efforts to preserve the greenery of Dhofar, Ali Akak, environmental specialist in EA, said, “The authority has launched a green belts project in the Dhofar mountains. The project will fence off 45 areas, each having approximately 660 trees. The project aims to restore vegetation cover and rehabilitate the ecosystem.”

He informed that in Dhofar, there are about 900 species of indigenous flora that are suitable and tolerant to diverse climatic conditions. “These trees have many environmental benefits.”

The authority recently concluded the sixth phase of a project to treat perennial trees and combat insect pests in the Dhofar mountains. “A total of 1,228 trees affected by stem borers



(Supplied photos)



EA has launched a green belts project in Dhofar. The project will fence off 45 areas, each having approx 660 trees

ALI AKAK

wild fig trees in the governorate. This month, EA launched the second phase of its programme to plant 700,000 wild tree seeds in Dhofar in cooperation with volunteer teams.

In January 2020, EA and Petroleum Development Oman launched an initiative to plant 10mn wild tree saplings in ten years.

The authority has included species such as ghaf, al samar and sidr in the programme for which nurseries are being set up across the country.

ect to treat perennial trees and combat insect pests in the Dhofar mountains. “A total of 1,228 trees affected by stem borers

were treated.”

The stem borer larvae hatch out of eggs laid by certain types of beetles and moths and attack

Dhofar Municipality wins global award for use of artificial intelligence

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dhofar Municipality has been awarded Special Achievement in GIS (SAG) for use of artificial intelligence (AI) in geographic information system.

A statement issued by Dhofar Municipality said, ‘SAG is awarded for the best innovative practices in the use of AI in GIS.’

The award was presented by ESRI - an international supplier of geographic information system (GIS) software - at its annual conference. The largest GIS meet in the world, it sees participation of at least 100,000 government and private institutions competing for recognition. This year, the conference was held in San Diego, USA, from July 11 to 15.

The award was presented by



(Supplied photo)

Jack Dangermond, president and founder of ESRI, and received by Dr Ahmed bin Mohsen al Ghasani, chairman of Dhofar Municipality.

Muscat was selected the Arab

Digital Capital for the year 2022 during the 25th session of the Arab ICT Ministers Councils held on December 25, 2021.

Oman has taken significant steps to set up a digital society

and create a modern ICT sector for all economic and social spheres in response to requirements of sustainable development. Additionally, several promising national initiatives and projects have been implemented based on Oman Vision 2040.

Due to the importance of this vital sector and in line with the strategic directions of Oman Vision 2040, the sultanate has placed communications and information technology among the priorities of its economic and social growth strategies. This is with the aim of creating a diversified and sustainable economy based on technology, knowledge and innovation, with integrated and competitive frameworks, accommodating industrial revolutions and achieving financial sustainability.

Abandoned vehicles towed away in Seeb

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Municipality removed abandoned vehicles from commercial and residential areas in Seeb on Tuesday.

‘The municipality carried out a campaign to remove abandoned vehicles from commercial and residential areas in the wilayat of Seeb following expiry of time given for their removal,’ a statement said.

Leaving vehicles unat-



(Supplied photo)

tended for an extended period of time violates Administrative Decision No 171/2018 issued for the regulation of neglected vehicles in public places in Muscat governorate.

The statement added, ‘Article 4 states that the municipality can tow away abandoned vehicles from public places at the expense of the owner 14 days after a warning notice is left on it, without being responsible for any damage caused during the towing process to the yard.’

Two arrested for stealing vehicle in South Batinah

Muscat - Two people were arrested on charges of stealing a vehicle in South Batinah on Tuesday.

A statement issued by Royal Oman Police said, ‘The South Batinah Governorate Police Command arrested two people for stealing a vehicle. They entered the victim’s house, transported the vehicle to another area and dismantled it for the purpose of selling it. Some parts of the stolen vehicle were seized from their possession.’

Legal procedures have been initiated against the thieves.

Floward Launches “Floward Community”



July, 2022: As part of its efforts to always offer the best services to its customers, Floward, the go-to online flowers and gifts delivery destination in the MENA and UK launched its new feature “Floward Community” which allows people to design, easily display and sell their own flower arrangements.

In its effort to engage with its clients, build relationships with them, and include their creations, Floward’s new feature allows any talented aspiring florist, anywhere in the world, to upload pictures of their flower arrangements along with a description of the design to Floward Community’s hub. The design will then get evaluated by a team of Floward experts, and if chosen, it will be sold as a product on Floward’s app and website, and designers of selected arrangements will get a percentage of each sale as specified in the terms & conditions of the feature.

Floward Chairman & CEO, Mr. Abdulaziz B. Al Loughani said: “We are ever very proud of the innovative thinking of our team at Floward and their ability to come up with

numerous ideas that are translated into features and services giving our customers a unique experience. We are also proud of our various community outreach initiatives, and since our customers play an integral part in our success story, we wanted to thank them by granting everyone an open invitation to the world of floristry. Giving back to our communities and encouraging them is a core element of our corporate social responsibility; therefore, we made sure that the creators of the selected designs are compensated as they will gain a second source of income as a percentage of the sales of their products.”

Established in 2017, Floward is a full-fledged e-commerce solution that offers prime fresh-cut flowers sourced from the best growers and farmers around the world and arranged locally by a team of florists and designers. Floward also offer cakes, chocolate and perfumes curated by the region’s most exciting designers bundled with its flower arrangements and manages the last-mile same-day delivery to ensure the best customer experience.

MARKET WATCH

MSX30	4,240.21
SENSEX	54,767.62

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

Indian Rs	207.75
Pakistani Rs	575.50
Bangladeshi taka	244.43
Philippines peso	146.22
Sri Lankan Rs	931.18

*Rates as on JULY 19
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Euro area inflation surges to 8.6% in June

Euro area annual inflation spiked to 8.6 per cent in June, the highest level on record, the European Union's statistics office reported on Tuesday.

The figure marked a significant jump from 8.1 per cent in May and 1.9 per cent in June 2021.

"In June, the highest contribution to the annual euro area inflation rate came from energy (4.19 percentage points), followed by food, alcohol and tobacco (1.88 percentage points), services (1.42 percentage points) and non-energy industrial goods (1.15 percentage points)," read a Eurostat update.

Annual inflation in the European Union, meanwhile, spiked to 9.6 per cent in June. It was 8.8 per cent in May and 2.2 per cent in June 2021.

Confidence in Oman's financial system significantly rises in 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The removal of COVID-19 restrictions and higher oil prices have boosted Oman's economic recovery and significantly raised the confidence in the stability of macro-financial system in 2022, according to the results of a survey conducted by the Central Bank of Oman.

The CBO's Systemic Risk Survey (SRS) is an annual survey that asks market participants and other stakeholders about perceived risks to, and their confidence in, the stability of Oman's macro-financial system. Results of the survey were published in the CBO's Financial Stability Report 2022.

'As revealed by responses to SRS 2022, the relative improvement in the overall economic dynamics due to the ease of COVID-19 restrictions and rising oil prices significantly raised the degree of confidence in the stability of Oman's macro-financial system in 2022,' CBO said in the report.

The percentage of respon-



dents who described themselves as 'very confident' or 'fairly confident' in Oman's macro-financial system jumped from 54 per cent in 2021 to 86 per cent in 2022.

Meanwhile, the percentage of respondents to SRS 2022 who were 'just confident' declined to 13 per cent from 42 per cent in 2021, and the responses in favour of 'not at all confident' dropped to only one per cent in 2022 from four per cent in the previous year.

The survey is generally completed by officials from banks, non-banking financial establishments, financial sector regulators, other governmental institutions, professionals from public and private business sectors, and academics in the fields of economics and finance. The

confidence over the last six months preceding taking the survey compared to only 15 per cent in 2021, while 41 per cent declared 'unchanged' confidence compared to only 8 per cent a year ago.

Remarkably, only 8 per cent of participants to SRS 2022 responded that their confidence 'decreased' this year as compared to 77 per cent in 2021.

According to responses to SRS 2022, the perceived probability of an event with a high negative impact occurring in Oman's financial system over the short term (up to one year ahead) dropped considerably in line with recovering demand as the pandemic lockdown measures eased globally as well as the recent surge in oil prices.

Only 8 per cent of the respondents judged this probability to be 'high' or 'very high' in 2022, compared to 27 per cent in SRS 2021. Moreover, the percentage of respondents who viewed this probability as 'low' or 'very low' increased from 37 per cent in 2021 to 55 per cent in 2022.

Interestingly, the participants' expectations of such a negative event occurring over the medium term (1-3 years ahead) witnessed a smaller change between 2021 and 2022. The percentage of respondents who viewed this probability as 'high or very high' slightly declined to 20 per cent in 2022 from 24 per cent in 2021. However, the percentage of those who judged this probability as 'low or very low' jumped to 39 per cent in 2022 from 25 per cent a year ago.

Within Oman's financial system, conventional banks, Islamic banks, and currency exchange companies are viewed as the most solid financial intermediaries in 2022, while finance and leasing companies, mutual funds, and capital market institutions are perceived as the most vulnerable to adverse shocks, as per the survey.

CBO's Financial Stability Report 2022 noted that the policy actions taken during the pandemic and post-pandemic recovery so far have diminished the short-term risks to financial stability.

Oman's LNG exports grow 8% to 5.9mn tonnes in first half of 2022

Muscat - Oman's exports of liquefied natural gas (LNG) grew by 8 per cent to nearly 5.9mn tonnes during the first half of 2022, compared with 5.5mn tonnes exports recorded in the same period of 2021.

During the first quarter of this year, the sultanate exported about 3mn tonnes of LNG, while during the second quarter of this year the country exported about 2.9mn tonnes.

These high export figures confirms that Oman LNG's plant is operating at its production capacity which is estimated at 11.4mn tonnes annually. During the first six months of 2022, LNG exports from Oman recorded high lev-



els, ranging from 0.9mn tonnes to 1mn tonnes per month.

This year Omani LNG shipments also reached new desti-

nements who described themselves as 'very confident' or 'fairly confident' in Oman's macro-financial system jumped from 54 per cent in 2021 to 86 per cent in 2022.

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shipment of 67,000 tonnes in June.

Oman LNG also started implementing a project to remove bottlenecks at the liquefaction plant with an aim to raise export capacity by 1.5mn tonnes annually.

Major Asian markets accounted for the majority of Omani gas exports, led by South Korea which received about 2.25mn tonnes during the first half of 2022, equivalent to about 38 per cent of the total exports.

Japan imported 1.51mn tonnes with a share of 26 per cent, in addition to China, India, Taiwan and Thailand.

ONA

CBO issues RO90mn treasury bills

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A tender of the government treasury bills (issue number 141) was issued by the Central Bank of Oman this week.

Total value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO90.50mn, for a maturity period of 28 days, from July 20, 2022 until August 17, 2022. The average accepted price reached RO99.847 for every RO100 bill, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO99.830.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 2.00073 per cent and 2.00386 per cent, respectively. The interest rate on the repo operations with CBO is 2.25 per cent, while the discount rate on the treasury bills discounting facility with the central bank is 2.75 per cent.



Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds. The Central Bank of Oman acts as the issue manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (repo).

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

Indian rupee hits new record low

Mumbai, India - The Indian rupee fell to more than 80 per US dollar for the first time on record Tuesday, as the greenback extended its rally and foreign capital outflows intensified.

The rupee hit 80.0600 against the US dollar in early trade, Bloomberg data showed, before paring losses on suspected central bank intervention to close at 79.9487.

High inflation and rising interest rates in the United States coupled with fears of an impending recession in the world's biggest economy have fuelled a broad dollar rally in recent weeks as investors become increasingly risk-averse.

Tighter US monetary policy has exacerbated outflows from emerging markets such as India, where foreign investors have withdrawn a net US\$31bn in debt and equity this year.

Data released last week showed that US consumer price inflation hit a fresh four-decade high in June, exceeding market forecasts and stoking expectations of another large Federal Reserve rate hike next week.

In a written statement to the Indian parliament on Monday, fi-



nance minister Nirmala Sitharaman attributed the rupee's sharp fall to external reasons.

"Global factors such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict, soaring crude oil prices and tightening of global financial conditions are the major reasons for the weakening of the Indian Rupee against the US dollar," she said.

At the same time, the Indian currency has strengthened against the British pound, the Japanese yen and the euro in 2022 so far, Sitharaman added.

But higher crude prices have resulted in a deteriorating trade balance in a country that imports 80 per cent of its oil.

India's merchandise trade deficit widened to a record US\$26.18bn in June, official data

per cent in June after hitting an eight-year high of 7.79 per cent in April.

But price rises have persisted well above the central bank's two-to-six per cent target range despite consecutive interest rate hikes in May and June.

The central bank has also sold more than US\$34bn of its foreign currency reserves in an effort to stabilise the rupee.

"The near-term outlook for the rupee will continue to be weak as it tracks developments on the oil and gas front in international markets," forex market expert K Harihar told AFP.

"The weakness will persist until trade deficit numbers come down or capital inflows counter it," he said, adding that the rupee could fall to 81 per US dollar without an agreement between Europe and Russia on gas supply.

The rupee's move followed Russia's Gazprom telling Europe late Monday that it cannot guarantee gas supplies following maintenance work on its Nord Stream pipeline.

India's benchmark SENSEX index closed 0.45 per cent higher on Tuesday.

AFP

Eni, Occidental and Total sign \$4bn Algeria oil contract

Algiers, Algeria - Italy's Eni, US major Occidental, France's Total and the Algerian group Sonatrach signed a US\$4bn oil and gas production-sharing contract Tuesday for the Berkine field in the country's southeast.

Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, hosting his Italian counterpart Mario Draghi on Monday with whom he sealed a clutch of deals, said the 25-year accord would provide Rome with "significant volumes of natural gas", as Europe seeks alternatives to Russian supplies. The accord aims to produce one billion of oil equivalent barrels, Sonatrach said in a statement.

The partners will "develop additional liquid hydrocarbon resources, while reducing these fields carbon intensity through a dedicated carbon reduction program", Total said in a separate statement.

The deal was signed under Algeria's 2019 hydrocarbon law that allows for production sharing with foreign partners. It drew heavy criticism from the Algerian opposition and street protests over an alleged sell-out of national resources.

According to an Algerian government source, the North African country will increase gas exports to Italy by four billion cubic metres in the coming days.

Italy buys the majority of its natural gas from abroad, with some 45 per cent of its imports historically coming from Russia.

But Rome has increasingly looked to Algeria, historically its second biggest supplier, to reduce that dependence after Russia's invasion of Ukraine sparked sanctions against Moscow and sent energy prices soaring.

Algeria is Africa's biggest gas exporter and supplies around 11 per cent of the natural gas consumed in Europe.

AFP

EU efforts won't be enough to replace Russian gas, IEA warns

Paris, France – Europe's efforts to diversify suppliers will not be enough to get it through winter without Russian gas, the head of the International Energy Agency has warned, urging immediate efforts to cut demand.

The comments by the IEA's director Fatih Birol came as European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen signed an energy deal in Baku, under which deliveries of Azerbaijani gas will double over the next few years.

But Birol said in an article published by the IEA: "It is categorically not enough to just rely on gas from non-Russian sources – these supplies are simply not available in the volumes required to substitute for missing deliveries from Russia.

"This will be the case even if gas supplies from Norway and Azerbaijan flow at maximum capacity, if deliveries from North Africa stay close to last year's levels, if domestic gas production in Europe continues to follow recent trends, and if inflows of LNG increase at a similar record rate as they did in the first half of this year," he added.

Europe is also waiting to see this week if Russia resumes gas shipments via Gazprom's key Nord Stream 1 pipeline, on which 10 days of scheduled maintenance will soon be completed.



It has been seeking to import more liquefied natural gas (LNG) to replace some Russian gas, but it has a limited number of terminals to offload it from tankers and supplies are also limited.

While the EU has not put Russian natural gas under sanctions over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, it has sought to cut imports so as to reduce its dependence on Moscow.

'Constant uncertainty'
Russia has already cited various

reasons for cutting energy supplies to the west.

European nations now want to see it resumes gas shipments via the Nord Stream 1 pipeline on Thursday, when compressor maintenance is due end.

"Europe is now forced to operate in a constant state of uncertainty over Russian gas supplies, and we can't rule out a complete cut-off," said Birol.

The head of the IEA, which advises industrialised nations on energy policy, called "Russia's latest moves to squeeze

natural gas flows to Europe ... a red alert for the European Union".

According to an IEA analysis, EU nations need to fill their reserves to 90 per cent within the next few months to put themselves to be able to get through the winter without shortages.

Even if Nord Stream comes back online and delivers normal volumes for the next several months, the IEA estimates an addition 12bn cubic metres of gas would need to be saved and stored – the equivalent of 130

LNG tanker shipments.

"Achieving that 90 per cent storage level is still possible, but Europe needs to act now and make every remaining day count," said Birol.

"I'm particularly concerned about the months ahead," he added.

The IEA recommends shifting the production of electricity from natural gas to other fuels where possible, while reducing air conditioning in buildings to reduce electricity demand.

AFP

Gazprom tells German clients gas cuts are 'force majeure'

Frankfurt, Germany – Russia's state-owned energy giant Gazprom is blaming cuts in gas deliveries to Europe on "force majeure", two major German customers said on Tuesday, adding to fears about further disruptions.

"We confirm that we have received a letter from Gazprom Export claiming force majeure retroactively for past and current gas supply shortfalls," said Uniper, one of Germany's biggest importers of Russian gas.

Fellow German energy giant RWE told AFP it had received a similar letter from Gazprom but declined to comment further.

Force majeure is a legal measure allowing companies to free themselves from contractual obligations in light of circumstances beyond their control.

"We do not believe this is justified and have formally rejected the force majeure claim," a Uniper spokesman told AFP.

Bloomberg News said Gazprom's letter was dated July 14 and the force majeure claim was being applied from a month earlier.

Gazprom has cut flows to Germany via the vital Nord Stream 1 pipeline by some 60 per cent in recent weeks, blaming the absence of a Siemens gas



turbine that was undergoing repairs in Canada.

The repaired turbine is currently understood to be en route to Russia, according to German media.

The German government has rejected Gazprom's turbine explanation and believes Russia is squeezing supplies in retaliation for Western sanctions on Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine.

The Nord Stream 1 pipeline under the Baltic Sea has been shut down since July 11 to undergo annual maintenance.

It is due to reopen at 0400 GMT on Thursday but Germany fears Russia will seize the opportunity to simply keep the taps closed, plunging the continent into an energy crisis.

AFP

UK's new finance minister promises to control inflation

London, UK – New UK Finance Minister Nadhim Zahawi on Tuesday was to outline his plans to control inflation and "seize the opportunities of Brexit", despite fears London is going too far in deregulation.

Zahawi, who replaced Rishi Sunak as Chancellor of the Exchequer after his resignation earlier this month, was set to announce his vision in his first speech in the role at London's Mansion House amid a tumultuous political period in Britain.

Sunak's departure alongside other government figures led to Prime Minister Boris Johnson's resignation and now a bitter fight is playing out to become the next leader.

Zahawi will hope to push that all aside when he addresses London's business representatives, promising to "control inflation, boost private sector recovery



Nadhim Zahawi

and deliver a post-Brexit vision for financial services", the finance ministry said.

The minister will commit to "repeal hundreds of pieces of retained EU law and replacing them with a coherent and agile approach to financial regulation that is right for us" in Britain, the ministry added in a statement.

Zahawi subscribes to the same view as his predecessor, Sunak – a candidate running to take over from Johnson – who had promised a new "Big Bang" in the finance sector after the

deregulation of the 1980s.

The statements will fuel fears of a showdown with the Bank of England, while some media reports say the government will seek to reduce regulators' powers.

Bank of England officials including governor Andrew Bailey have defended the institution's independence after criticism over being too timid in the fight against inflation.

UK inflation spiked in May to a 40-year peak of 9.1 per cent, a level set to hit double figures this year.

A parliamentary report in June warned against "any inappropriate weakening of the UK's strong regulatory standards", which could "reduce the financial resilience of the UK's financial system and undermine international confidence in that system".

AFP

Pharmaceutical industry urges fairer vaccine access in future

Geneva, Switzerland - The pharmaceutical industry on Tuesday proposed a system to allow for more equitable access to vaccines and treatments in future pandemics, saying it was willing to set aside doses to distribute to lower-income countries.

The Covid-19 pandemic has seen a wide gap in vaccination rates between wealthy and less well-off countries, sparking demands from several countries for intellectual property rights on vaccines to be lifted.

IFPMA, a group that represents pharmaceutical firms around the world, has strongly opposed those measures, saying they would not solve the core problem.

The Geneva-based group instead proposed a framework to governments and international organisations aimed at improv-



ing "the real-time delivery of vaccines, treatments and diagnostics for priority populations in lower-income countries, as determined by health authorities, for future pandemics," it said in a statement on Tuesday.

"Even now, when there is an abundance of vaccines available, quite a few countries have a vaccination rate of only 10 per cent of their population," IFPMA head Thomas Cueni told AFP.

"Industry cannot do it alone, it requires a social contract," Cueni

said.

Wealthy countries must "be ready to say that they cannot supply exclusively to themselves," he added.

IFPMA, whose members include Covid vaccine makers such as Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca, called the proposal the Berlin declaration.

"The success of the proposal requires open borders and no trade restrictions," it said.

The group also called for a network of clinical sites to be set

up across the world to support the rapid deployment of new treatments and vaccines.

Jose Manuel Barroso, the head of the Gavi vaccine alliance, welcomed the proposal, urging world leaders to "engage with industry on how to make this work".

"The industry's commitment to reserve part of production of vaccines and treatments at real time for vulnerable populations in low-income countries provides an opportunity to work together strategically to forge a new social contract," he said in the statement.

IFPMA also maintained that intellectual property rights "should be respected since society depends on them to stimulate innovation and the scale up of supply".

AFP

Global stocks advance despite Apple report concerns

London, UK – Stock markets mostly advanced on Tuesday despite fresh recession worries on a report tech titan Apple may scale back hiring and investment.

Meanwhile, the euro rallied against the dollar as traders looked ahead to a key European Central Bank meeting later this week, while oil gave up some of its strong gains on Monday.

European stocks were higher in afternoon trading, with London Stock Exchange up 0.5 per cent and both Frankfurt and Paris climbing 0.7 per cent.

Wall Street opened higher, with the blue-chip Dow adding 0.7 per cent, and the broader S&P 500 and tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite rising more than one percent.

Asian equity indices closed mixed after an overnight sell-off on Wall Street fuelled by fresh recession worries on the Bloomberg report on Apple's plans.

"Apple put the cat among the pigeons following a media report that it plans to pull back hiring and growth spending next year in anticipation of the possible economic downturn," noted Richard Hunter, head of markets at Interactive Investor.

Apple's shares were 0.4 per cent up shortly after trading began.

The euro meanwhile jumped around one percent against the dollar, as traders mulled whether the European Central Bank could hike interest rates more than expected to fight runaway inflation.

The ECB has signalled it would raise eurozone interest rates on Thursday for the first time in more than a decade but is under pressure to do more to tackle spiralling prices.

It intends to raise borrowing costs by a quarter point, the first such move since 2011.

"In all likelihood, the ECB will raise interest rates by 25 basis



points this week and follow this up with a 50-basis-point move in

September," noted Matthew Ryan, head of market strategy at

financial firm Ebury.

"That said, we do not rule out

a 50-basis-point rate hike at this week's meeting.

"We have already seen most major central banks deliver bumper rate increases in recent weeks in an attempt to control rampant price growth," Ryan added.

The Federal Reserve's aggressive rate tightening this year has sent the dollar soaring against most other currencies in recent weeks.

Last week, the euro fell below parity with the dollar for the first time in nearly 20 years, also on growing fears of a eurozone recession as high inflation hampers growth.

On Tuesday, the dollar briefly hit a record high above 80 rupees, with the Indian unit hampered by massive outflows of capital as the economy struggles.

While some are predicting inflation may have reached its peak, oil prices – the key driver of soaring costs – remain elevated.

Both main contracts fell Tuesday after rocketing more than five per cent Monday on expectations that Saudi Arabia would not open up the taps further, with a plea by US President Joe Biden seeming to have fallen on deaf ears.

Traders were keeping a nervous eye on Europe, where a 10-day maintenance shutdown of the Nord Stream 1 pipeline from Russia is due to end this week.

Many fear Vladimir Putin will keep it shut in retaliation for sanctions imposed on Moscow for invading Ukraine.

That would deal another blow to the already creaking eurozone economy and could send crude prices soaring.

Supply fears are trumping worries about a demand hit in China from another possible lockdown in Shanghai as officials struggle to contain another Covid-19 outbreak.

AFP

ahlibank's programme for Omani youth to start career in banking

ahlibank continues its long-term commitment to empower Omani youth with leadership and professional skills to enhance their career development opportunities in the banking sector. HIMAM Graduate Programme has welcomed its new batch of graduates to its eighth edition.

Following the success of the previous batches of HIMAM, ahlibank's management is pleased to open its doors for a new batch of graduates to join ahlibank and commence their career in banking through the prestigious two-year programme that will facilitate on-the-job training and skill refinement initiatives for enhanced career gains in the banking sector. Structured to meet the market's changing needs, the intensive course will equip chosen candidates with hands-on experience in the sector, with practical inputs from professionals in the industry.

Speaking on the sidelines of the induction ceremony, Hana al Kharusi, General Manager - ahlibank's Corporate Banking said: "This is a moment of pride and accomplishment for the Bank. Since 2015, when we first launched the programme, we have been investing our resources in aiding and shaping Oman's workforce with requisite skills, and have achieved significant milestones every year,



strengthening our foundation with trained employees who are well informed about the local and global banking industry.

"We have our finger on the pulse of the job market and are aware of the changing needs that require constant vigilance to upgrade and update our course modules," she added.

Highlighting the merits of the programme, Mohammed Mohsin al Mufargi, AGM-Head of ahlibank's Human Resources said, "At the core of HIMAM is

the bank's larger goal of partnering with the government in its youth development initiatives. Our programme is conceptualised to meet the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, which calls on youth to share in the march towards economic competitiveness and social well-being."

Accordingly, he said, "HIMAM has been steering the bank's youth development agenda with its well-defined employment program supported by training modules. It has significantly

contributed to the development of leadership skills among the youth with professional coaches and mentors who have assimilated their expertise and experience to bring up a new generation of professionals."

The course module is equally focused on building self-confidence and honing their acquired and inherited skills.

"ahlibank is receptive to the needs of the market and has bolstered its sustainable business practices by strengthening and

securing its human capital with training that is designed to build its competitiveness on the lines of regional and international job markets.

"Over the next two years, our new batch of graduates will get an insight into critical requirements of the industry to prove to be assets who will shape the next chapter of the bank's success story. We trust their abilities and await their successful transition as professionals and leaders of the industry," he added.

Besides theoretical training and practical experience, HIMAM program provides graduates with opportunities to work across departments, thereby enhancing their banking skills through assigned managers, trainers, and specialists.

As per the programme schedule, the chosen candidates are nominated - in the first year of their on-the-job training - to an in class room training for technical, functional and soft skills followed by a rotation across various departments of the bank while they simultaneously participate in group projects.

Following that the bank awards trainees who have successfully cleared the programme and assigns them to certain departments, depending on their leadership capabilities and acquired skills.

Nama Holding holds pre-tender roadshow for AMR project

Nama Holding organised a pre-tendering roadshow for Automated Meter Reading (AMR) project.

The roadshow was aimed to present a high-level briefing about NAMA Group and its plan for AMR usage.

It is also intended to provide enough time for interested parties to assess their capability and readiness and to discuss with their potential partners before purchasing tender documents, a press statement said.

They also wanted to have feedback from interested parties and ensure all concerns are covered in the tender, it added.

The participants/entities expressed interest in the project and were in line with the objective and size of the project.

The usage of AMR is expected to improve customers' experience by providing actual billing and other services such as live interaction and consumption monitoring, the company said.

It will also enhance the response of companies to outages, provide timely billing,

and loss reduction and improve network maintenance and planning.

The AMR project is in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 which is focused on keeping pace with global developments and employing technology in delivering electricity-related services effectively and efficiently.

The project will support the development of smart, sustainable cities with advanced basic services, improve GDP per unit of energy use and increase the contribution of renewable energy.

AMR is an integrated system of equipment, communications, and information management systems for utilities to automatically collect consumption, diagnostic the data from electricity meter and transfer that data to a central database for billing, troubleshooting, and analysis.

The implementation of this project will be based on the DBFOT (design, build, finance, own, operate, and transfer) model, which includes smart meters installation, communication, and Headend System (HES).

National Finance opens new branch in Mussanah

National Finance, Oman's leading finance company, continues to invest in customer-centric initiatives, catered through an expanding and enhanced branch network across the sultanate.

Adding yet another milestone to this journey, the company has recently inaugurated a new branch at Mussanah, National Finance said in a statement.

This location puts National Finance closer to its growing customer base, with the objective to enhance ease and comfort of both existing and new customers.

Ali al Mani, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, emphasised the company's 'customer-first' philosophy, saying, "Our branch network is a testament of our intent to stay connected with our existing customers across the

country".

"Moreover, we want to make finance solutions more accessible to the people, and our branch expansion plan enables us to do so," he added.

The company's new approach to branch accessibility is evident through the latest branches located at Airport Heights, Seeb, Sandan and Salalah where all branches are testaments of the Company's aim to improve the client's experience.

National Finance, established in 1987, has built a reputation as the market leader trusted by thousands of customers across the sultanate.

National Finance offers a wide range of products targeting both individual customers, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and Corporates.

Danube Home offers selection of bath solutions

Danube Home, one of the leading interior and home furnishing brands in the Middle East offers an extensive collection of bathroom solutions to cater to the growing demands of its cosmopolitan clientele.

The brand which promises customers a solution to everything a home needs under one roof, continue to prove time and again that their customers' needs will always be met. The bath collection, called Milano, includes a range of stylish and modern pieces to suit every home.

The Milano collection includes tiling solutions, sanitary ware, vanities, bath accessories, bathtubs, shower enclosures, and more.

The sanitary ware extends from wash basins to water closets and mixers. As expected from Danube Home, the Milano collection is of superior, durable quality and is offered at reasonable prices.

These affordable luxury



pieces would be a welcome addition to any home.

Danube Home's Milano products are sourced from Italy,

Spain, Germany, Turkey, and China. Each of the tiling solutions undergo a strict quality check before dispatch from factory as well

as from the warehouse before reaching customers' homes. The attention to detail also ensures that the Milano Tiles designs

have a guaranteed continuity of minimum 1 year.

Seeking to make customers' lives as easy as possible, the brand offers free delivery and installation for shower rooms and massage bathtubs. The sanitary ware also comes with up to ten years warranty.

Danube Home's technicians will provide free expert services and offer any assistance necessary during the warranty period, it said in a statement.

Additionally, Danube Home also offers free installation supervision for large format tiles like the Milano Islabz and others.

The exhaustive tile collection is sourced from Italy, Spain, India, Turkey, Egypt and Oman to offer a wide variety of finishes and designs.

Danube Home's Milano collection and complete range of home furnishings can be browsed in store at their major showrooms across the country, the company said.

Huawei projects Mate Xs 2 as Oman's favourite flagship phone in 2022

Huawei recently announced the launch of its flagship foldable smartphone Mate Xs 2, which embodies the tech giant's latest explorations in the development of foldable phones. Due to its excellent features, Huawei chose this newly launched foldable flagship from Huawei as our favourite choice in Oman.

Inheriting Huawei's classic outward folding design, Mate Xs 2 leverages its strengths of being ultra-light and ultra-thin, ultra-flat and ultra-reliable, bringing consumers the best experience. As smartphone manufacturers seek new solutions to accommodate bigger and better screens, foldable smartphones became an inevitable answer.

"We have been talking about foldable phones for numerous years now, but it is only now that they have gone mainstream," Huawei said in a statement. "There were countless hurdles,

but foldable phones eventually made it to the markets in the late 2019. However, judging by the enthusiasm towards this new phone form factor, there is optimism that the trend will slowly but steadily catch on. That brings us to the question - what is the best foldable phone you get lay your hands on today?"

The Ideal Foldable Phone: Ultra Light, Ultra Flat, Super Durable Huawei Mate Xs 2 also presents the new generation Double-rotating Falcon Wing Hinge, Huawei bestowed its flagship foldable with an elegant unibody design, which boasts a flat and seamless fold.

The phone is also equipped with flagship features, including an industry-leading 7.8" True-Chroma Foldable Display and a 50MP True-Chroma Camera System that supports Huawei XD Optics, taking its excellent performance to new heights.



New Falcon Wing Design, Ultra Light, Ultra Flat and Super Durable

The Huawei Mate Xs 2 comes with the New Falcon Wing Design, which is minimalist and natural, giving an ultra-flat form factor for a foldable smartphone.

Through the industry's first Double-rotating Falcon Wing Hinge, the movement trajectory of the hinge and the screen is precisely synchronised via the fixed-length linkage control, which makes the screen as flat as a mirror.

Thanks to the industry-first

lightweight materials, the Huawei Mate Xs 2 has a lighter and more seamless body; achieving an ultra-light and ultra-thin body that only weighs 255g with a thickness of 5.4mm, which is close to the weight of a typical smartphone on the market.

Additionally, the Huawei Mate Xs 2 adopts an industry-first Composite Screen, which helps to absorb shock and buffer thanks to Huawei's self-developed innovative material - ultra-light, high strength steel. This shock barrier not only improves the phone's resistance to impact, crushing or drops, but also further improves the durability and reliability of the device from the inside out.

True-Chroma Camera System - The New Huawei XD Optics

The Huawei Mate Xs 2 is equipped with the True-Chroma Camera System that comprises a 50MP True-Chroma Camera, a

13MP Ultra-Wide-Angle Camera and an 8MP Telephoto Camera. The improved Huawei XD Optics, with its brand-new information recovery technology, further elevates image clarity by ten per cent. Taking full advantage of the Huawei XD Fusion Pro True-Chroma Image Engine, the Huawei Mate Xs 2 faithfully reproduces enriched colours of imaging, allowing users to accurately capture all the vibrancy in the world.

All new Smart Multi-Window and Immersive Experience

Huawei's Ideal Foldable Phone is loaded with new smart multi-window and immersive experiences. The split-screen function empowers the Huawei Mate Xs 2 with multitasking capabilities, enabling collaboration and interaction between different applications for better continuity. It also supports using two applications in parallel. For example,

users can chat while editing emails, shop online while watching videos or take notes while reading. This enables consumers to increase efficiency and operate freely.

When using two apps in parallel and wanting to run a third app without any interruption, the user can open a window to process a quick action, such as quickly replying to a message, or opening or closing apps in the background.

Additionally, Swipe Gesture supports easy access and control of the floating windows, allowing buttery-smooth operations with one quick swipe. Users can swipe diagonally to the top left corner to split screen; swipe diagonally to the top right corner for a new window pop-up; swipe sideways to minimise the window; swipe up for full screen display, and swipe down to close the window instantly.

Visa announces Saudi GM to lead operations in Oman, Bahrain

Visa, world leader in digital payments, has announced that Ali Bailoun, General Manager for Saudi Arabia, will take up the additional role of leading the company's operations in Bahrain and Oman, effective from July 12. Ali will continue to be based in Riyadh, said a press statement.

As part of his expanded role, Ali will lead in driving Visa's innovation agenda and meeting the growing demand among consumers, businesses and governments in Oman and Bahrain for seamless, secure digital payments.

Dr Saeeda Jaffar, Visa's SVP and Group Country Manager for GCC, said: "We are pleased Ali will take on the additional role of leading our operations in Bahrain and Oman, and to strengthen our Saudi operations to serve as a hub for this cluster of key markets."

During the pandemic, she said, "we saw consumers' increasing expectations for digital payments and as a result the growing need for businesses to be part of the digital economy not only to survive but also grow".

"We are confident that under his leadership we can continue to expand the acceptance of seamless, secure digital payments in Oman and Bahrain and support the local economies in their digi-



tal transformation," she added.

"I am honoured to have the opportunity to lead Visa's operations in Bahrain and Oman and further strengthen our presence and role as a trusted engine of commerce in those key markets," said Ali Bailoun, Visa's Regional General Manager for GCC Cluster - Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Oman. "I look forward to further deepening our relationships with banks, fintechs, governments, merchants and other businesses, whose partnership and collaboration are critical to our strategy of expanding access to the digital economy for more consumers and businesses in Oman and Bahrain," he

elaborated on his plan.

Ali is an accomplished business leader bringing almost 20 years of payments, banking and management experience to support issuers, acquirers, merchants and governments in Visa's key market to improve their profitability and grow their business. He joined Visa in 2012 and has since been responsible for the overall strategy that has successfully led Visa's business in Saudi Arabia.

Under Ali's leadership, Visa grew its portfolio of client financial institutions including Saudi's leading banks; supported clients and merchant partners including national airlines in bringing global

best in class payment products to Saudi-based consumers and merchants. Under him, Visa partnered with largest Saudi MNO to deliver the issuance of Visa payment credentials to millions of customers; launched first non-banking FI and fintech in Saudi Arabia as well as low-cost acceptance solution (Tap to Phone) for local SMBs; besides launching first card to card remittance solution in Saudi (Visa Direct).

Visa enabled digitising of government payments in line with Saudi government's Vision 2030; and collaborated with local industry stakeholders to help drive Saudi's MENA-leading adoption of contactless payments.

NBO debit card customers' chance to win FIFA tickets

National Bank of Oman (NBO) is offering Visa debit card customers the chance to win an all expenses paid trip for two to attend a FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 group stage match, courtesy of Visa.

Until August 20, NBO said customers will receive one free entry into the prize draw for every purchase of RO20 or more using their Visa debit card.

The prize includes two match tickets, return flights to Doha, accommodation and much more.

Maha al Raisi, Head of Product at NBO Retail Banking, said, "The FIFA World Cup is one of the world's biggest sporting events and for football fans, its the trip of a lifetime that they can share with a friend or loved one, thanks to our partnership with Visa."

While asserting that the bank continues "to pursue partnerships that unlock opportunities for our customers and cater specifically to their needs and lifestyle preferences", Raisi said, "The draw is a great way to motivate customers to use our se-



cure payments platforms while adding extra value to their everyday purchases."

To be eligible for the prize draw, customers must spend RO20 or more in one transaction on their eligible Visa debit cards. Plus, customers who replace their existing debit card with a Visa card during the campaign period will get one extra chance

in the draw, on activation and first use of card.

You can replace your debit card with a Visa debit card, by visiting NBO's self-service kiosk located at the bank's headquarters in Azaiba, log into the mobile banking app or contact the Call Centre on 24770000 where a specialist customer advisor will be available to assist.

Saudia airline to sponsor Gamers8 Esports festival as strategic partner

National carrier to sponsor world's biggest Esports event as part of ongoing commitment to supporting the growth of the kingdom's entertainment, cultural and tourism sectors.

Saudia, the national flag carrier of Saudi Arabia, has been announced as a strategic sponsor and the official airline of Gamers8, the world's biggest and most exciting Esports event. Organised by the Saudi Esports Federation, the global gaming and Esports festival kicked off last Thursday.

To continue over eight weeks in the kingdom's capital city of Riyadh, Gamers8 will host a series of elite competitive tournaments that will see the world's top Esports teams compete across five different titles for a total prize pool of US\$15mn.

The unique immersive event will also feature a diverse range of entertainment, activities, and attractions, including incredible music concerts and shows, all hosted in a state-of-the-art, purpose-built venue at Boulevard Riyadh City.

Moataz al Andijani, GM - partnerships and sponsorships at Saudia, said, "We are proud to team up with the Saudi Esports



Federation to support this innovative festival and bring the excitement of Esports to Riyadh. Our participation comes as part of Saudia's ongoing efforts to contribute to the growth of the Kingdom's vibrant entertainment sector and thriving tourism industry.

"As the 'Wings of Vision 2030', we look forward to bringing the world to Saudi Arabia to experience this landmark gathering, which is sure to be an unmissable occasion for dedicated gaming fans across the globe."

Ahmed al Bishri, Chief Operations Officer of the Saudi Esports Federation, said: "We are delighted to welcome Saudia on board as a strategic partner for Gamers8, and thank them for pledging their support to the esports and gaming sector in Saudi

Arabia. Gamers8 is set to be an incredible, showpiece spectacle in Riyadh this summer, blurring the lines between the physical and virtual worlds, and providing elite esports action, concerts, shows and activities for all ages. We look forward immensely to seeing you all there."

According to a statement, Gamers8 will welcome international teams as well qualifiers from the Saudi-based Gamers Without Borders, the world's biggest charitable Esports festival. Participating teams include Saudi Arabia's Team Falcons, together with North America's Clan and Rogue, who will compete across a series of popular games including Dota 2, Fortnite, Rocket League, Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Siege, and PUBG MOBILE.

AGAE offers Changan CS85 luxurious crossover at EMI RO156 over 8 years

Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment LLC (AGAE), which is part of Bahwan International Group, is offering an EMI starting from RO156 for eight years on the 2023 CHANGAN CS85 Coupe a sporty crossover designed SUV which reflects one's personality.

A manufacturer's warranty of six years or 250,000km (whichever is earlier) is available on the model, the company said. Redefining the definition of smoothness, CS85 coupe SUV is outfitted with turbocharged direct in-

jection engine that produces 224 HP and a maximal torque of 360 Nm, partied with an 8-speed automatic transmission, while accelerating from zero to 100km per hour in just 7.5 seconds and four driving modes.

CHANGAN CS85 Coupe with elegant design and characteristic dexterity is now available at low EMI 156 for eight year loan tenure through bank muscat auto loan division; subject to finance approval from bank only; terms and conditions apply.

Changan CS85 premium

coupe SUV, the model stands out from its counterparts through its lustrous appearance, focus on high quality and application of latest technology with radar features.

A spokesperson for Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment LLC (AGAE) said, "We are pleased to extend special EMI and warranty benefits on 2023 model CHANGAN CS85, the luxurious crossover coupe that combines the dynamic handling of an SUV with the sporty aesthetics of a coupe to give owners the best of both

worlds. Style and fashion will be the new constant in your life once you own this sporty coupe. Blue Core Powertrain Technology based on the principles of power, clean and quiet provides highly efficient and energy saving performance."

With all the vehicles' key parts originating from the world's leading suppliers, the CS85 Coupe offers top grade enjoyment from every angle - visual, tactile, auditory and safety - coming together to create the perfect driving experience.

MOTOR launches first fully electric car-sharing platform in UAE

MOTOR, the electric vehicle car-sharing platform, has announced its launch in the United Arab Emirates.

As a part of its mission to reduce the region's carbon footprint through responsible transportation, MOTOR said, "It provides access to world-leading electric vehicles (EVs) through its car-sharing platform, Motor SHARE, which offers users short and long-term options at affordable prices."

With fuel costs on the rise around the world alongside the ambitious visions of the UAE, including the 'UAE Net Zero 2050' and the government's commitment to converting 20 per cent of its fleet of government-owned automobiles to electric alternatives by 2030, has seen a substantial increase in demand for electric vehicles across the Emirates.

Thanks to a simple registration process on the MOTOR



Share app, UAE residents can locate and rent MOTOR's electric vehicles, which feature the

Tesla Model 3 and soon the Tesla Model Y alongside other leading brands, in just a few

taps.

The platform provides lucrative perks, including compli-

mentary parking in all public RTA spaces across Dubai, free EV charging, comprehensive in-

surance, and affordable tariffs.

In addition to accessing features of leading EVs state-of-the-art technology and design, the MOTOR Share app offers advanced features, including the option to cool the car ahead and during rides.

Additional AI features will also soon be rolled out, including a 'safety score', which will reward safe drivers and warn drivers at risk.

The MOTOR Share platform offers car-sharing opportunities for consumers, who can enjoy the flexibility of renting a vehicle by the hour or for up to two years.

Moreover, consumers also have the option to display their owned vehicles on the platform.

Businesses who utilise the platform will benefit from many efficiencies, allowing companies to aggregate car rentals into one platform thanks to custom mobility solutions, provid-

ing a flexible opportunity to increase their car rentals' own fleet utilisation.

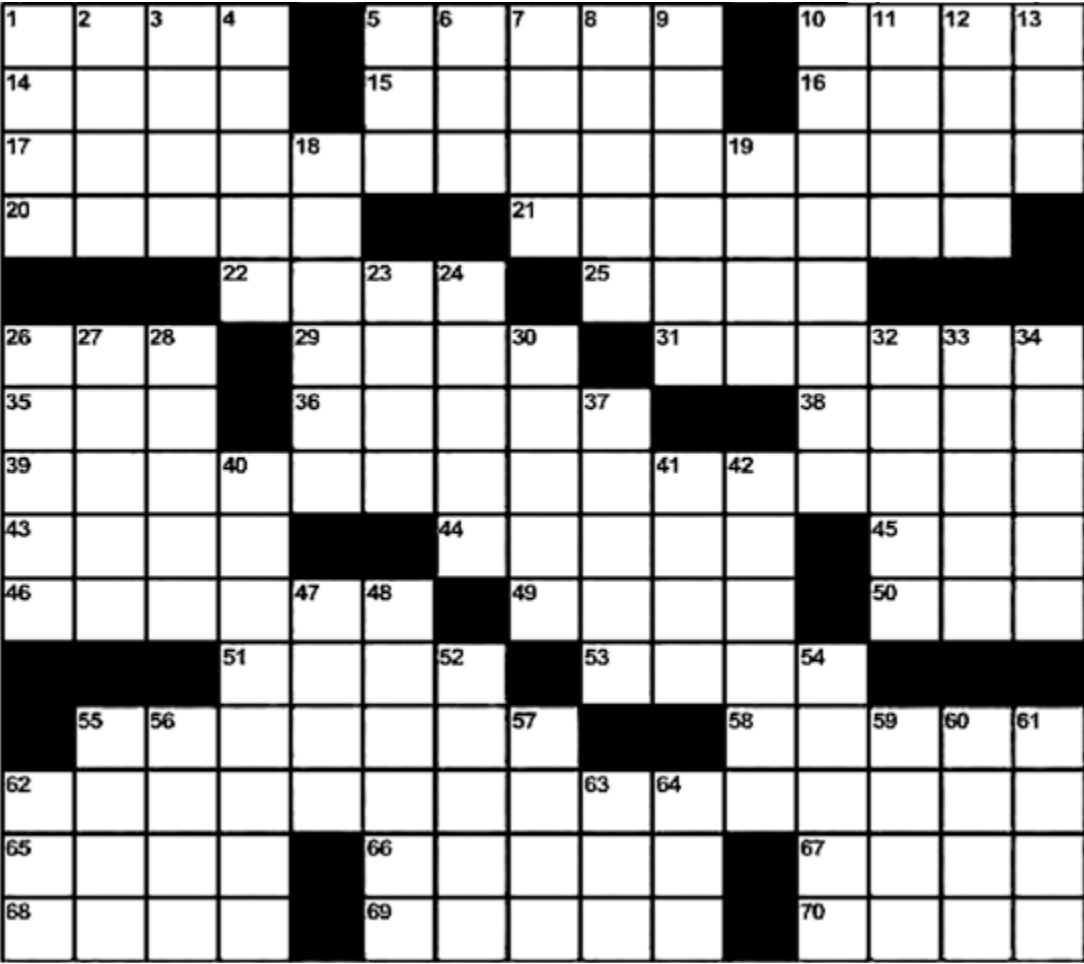
Hamad al Mazrooei, Co-Founder of MOTOR, said: "As the UAE moves towards reinforcing its resolve to fight climate change through the ambitious 'UAE Net Zero 2050', more and more businesses and residents are looking to convert to electric vehicles.

"Our goal at MOTOR is not only to further accelerate the sustainable transition to EVs, but we also want to make sustainable mobility more accessible, affordable, and flexible."

Following the launch of its EV sharing platform, MOTOR aims to roll out its EV subscription service and a charging network by the end of 2022.

Moreover, the platform plans to roll out a sustainable driving award points system aimed at unlocking rides and discounts.

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**

1) Closure for loose clothing

5) Movie theater yell

10) Coin hole

14) Eye lasciviously

15) Make up for, as sins

16) Well-drawn character?

17) Traveling at 186,500 miles per second

20) Add bells and whistles

21) Baltimore's nine

22) Celestial spheres

25) Show gloominess

26)_ about (wander)

29) Japanese aborigine

31) Make a second account

35) Bobby, Bruins' #4

36)_ for the mill

38)_ weight (precious metal measurement)

39) How actions speak?

43) Abu Dhabi dignitary

44) Art photo shade

45) This may be inflated

46) Titles for chair-
- women

49) Lunar valley

50)_ Monte (food giant)

51) Stake-driving hammer

53)_ on (put trust in)

55) Tilted

58) Like porridge or granola

62) Tooth-cleaning product's claim

65) Fifties audiophile's purchase

66) A fine playing marble

67) Heavy burden

68) Oil cartel letters

69) Did a cobbler's job

70) Big name in elevators

DOWN

1) Place for lost change

2) "By gosh!"

3) As well

4) The first "M" in M-G-M

5) "A Bridge Too..."

6) Giant legend "Master Melvin"

7) Silver salmon

8) Divest of munitions

9) Fourth-year student

10) Small dagger

11) Opera house box
- 12)_ and aahs

13) Dangerous stick

18) Make enemies of

19) Carefree gait

23) Whirring sound

24) Peevish states

26) Automaton of Jewish legend

27) It lures people to the kitchen

28) Tree worshiper

30) Poe's doomed house

32) Went the wrong way

33) Skier's quarters

34) Household antiseptic brand

37) Fleshy-snouted beast

40) Striking in appearance

41) Shade of green

42) Rejoice in

4 7) Long, heavy hair

48) Buddhist sennons

52) Set free

54) Web company

55) Liner or tanker

56) Term for some judges

57) Indian dish made with stewed legumes (var.)
- 59) Add a little color to

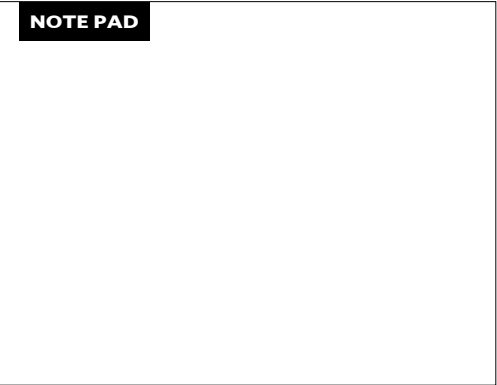
60) Vanity case for milady

61) Costner role

62) One of the five W's

63) Donned the feedbag

64) "Waking_Devine" (1998 film)



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You don't hog the ball. No, you pass when it's time to pass. You shoot when it's time to shoot.

You play defense when it's time to play defense. You're not calling tricky plays except when it's a good time to call a tricky play. You don't ham for the camera. You don't have chocolate stains on your jersey. You don't expect to be voted MVP. But you wouldn't mind being so either. Good for you!

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Treat today like it's a ride on your favorite roller coaster. It's thrilling! It's exciting! It's kind of scary! The closer you get to the top, the scarier it is! You may or may not be aware of the sounds of seagulls, cotton candy vendors, and the ocean. You may or may not feel your stomach about to hit the roof of your mouth. You may or may not scream. One thing is for sure, though, and that is once you've climbed to the top, there's nothing you can do to stop the ride. Wheel!

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Right now, your job is to keep your eye on the ball. First, identify the ball. Is it a great big tan-colored basketball? Is it a reddish oblong football? Is it a little white golf ball? Is your ball actually a badminton birdie? Does it make a hollow sound when it hits the ground like a table tennis ball?

Once you know what to look for, stay sharp. Keep the ball in your sights and you won't go wrong.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You're always interested in questions concerning how what you do fits into a larger context. You might wonder about your work's impact on the environment, on your community, or on society at large. Right now, you'll be particularly interested in these sorts of questions, and you could well get some very interesting and perhaps even spiritually satisfying answers. So how do you fit into the grand scheme of things?

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You might be planning a party, and if you aren't, maybe you should start. It doesn't have to be a giant catered affair (though it could be).

If you want, you can call a few people, tell them to dress in pink and green, and come over this evening for an impromptu Hawaiian pizza and punch dance-a-thon in your living room. Or whatever you think sounds like fun.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Do you wish your town had a Ferris wheel? Because you'd love to head out to it in the evening, go up in the sky in those brightly colored seats, maybe see the moon rise over a field, perhaps feel a crisp breeze in your hair, and, once in a while, take somebody along to hold hands with while you're up there. Petition the mayor! And if you're having some other great idea, do what it takes to make that a reality too.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You've got a knack for getting your message across clearly and convincingly. Maybe you're ready for a bigger audience?

Whether it's a new fund for a children's hospital or a new design approach for the next ad campaign, it's almost a sure bet that your concept will take with the public. So the question is how do you expand your public? Set yourself to work on this project and you'll figure out something fabulous.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You're a visionary. You envision a lot of things: What kind of job you'd like, what kind of apartment you'd like, what kind of partner you'd like, what kind of wardrobe you'd like, what kind of society you'd like, what kind of world you'd like.

What's great about you is that whatever it is you're envisioning, it's more than likely that you take steps to make your vision a reality. Good for you.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You are a real visionary on most days.

You see new beginnings and possibilities and potentialities where other people just see a regular job or an abandoned old building or a park bench. You're seeing even more than usual.

And it burns brighter and with more promise than usual.

This is great. It means that you're really on to something. Follow your instincts!

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Today is a good day to slow down a little. Take a long, hard look at what you've accomplished lately. Count everything, not just the big things. Have you made your bed most days? Point for you! Have you brushed twice a day and flossed at least once? Big points! Have you in the last week or so told at least one person you're close to that you appreciate them? Really gargantuan big point! What does your list of accomplishments look like?

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

This is a day for action. Whether you're planning an after-work party or a hostile takeover, you have to make a decision and stick with it. If you think that the cafe up the street is a better place for your colleagues to get to know each than the cafe down the street, then up the street it is. If you think that a certain defunct doughnut conglomerate should be owned by your company, don't hesitate to bid on it. This is the kind of thing that you're good at.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

If there's something you're good at, it's knowing when it's time to take a little break from the go-go-go world and spend some time turning the microscope of the mind on yourself.

What do you see? Little emotions floating around like amoebas? Changing form, merging, separating, and doing their little amoeba thing? What emotions are those that you're seeing under the glass, do you think?



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Which landmass has a feature often referred to as The Horn?

- A. The Sinai Peninsula
- B. Australia
- C. Africa
- D. Antarctica

02. Which of these was a boxer born in 1958 and known as "The Hit Man"?

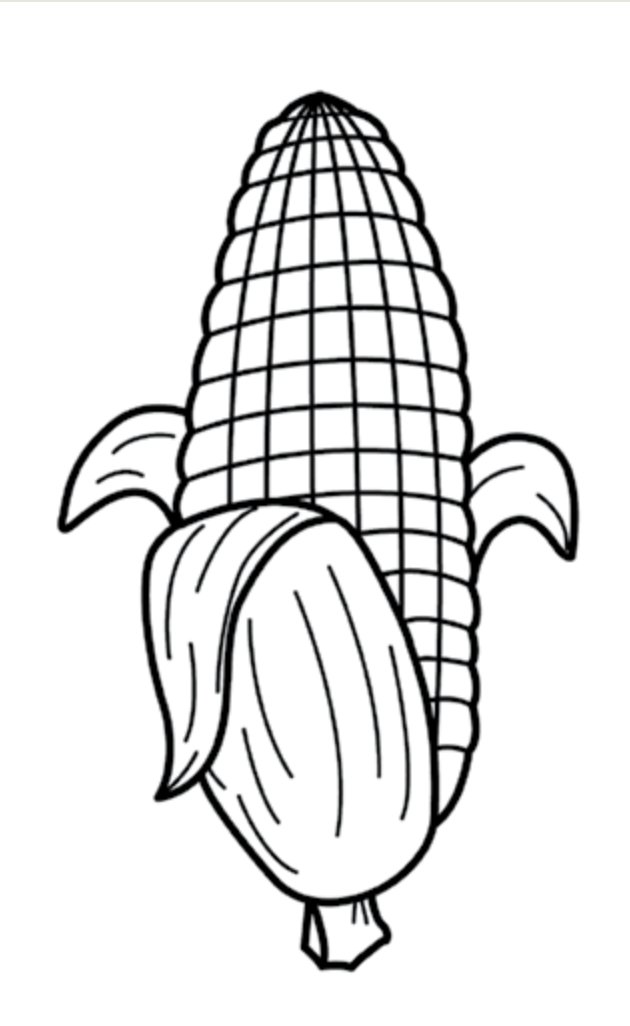
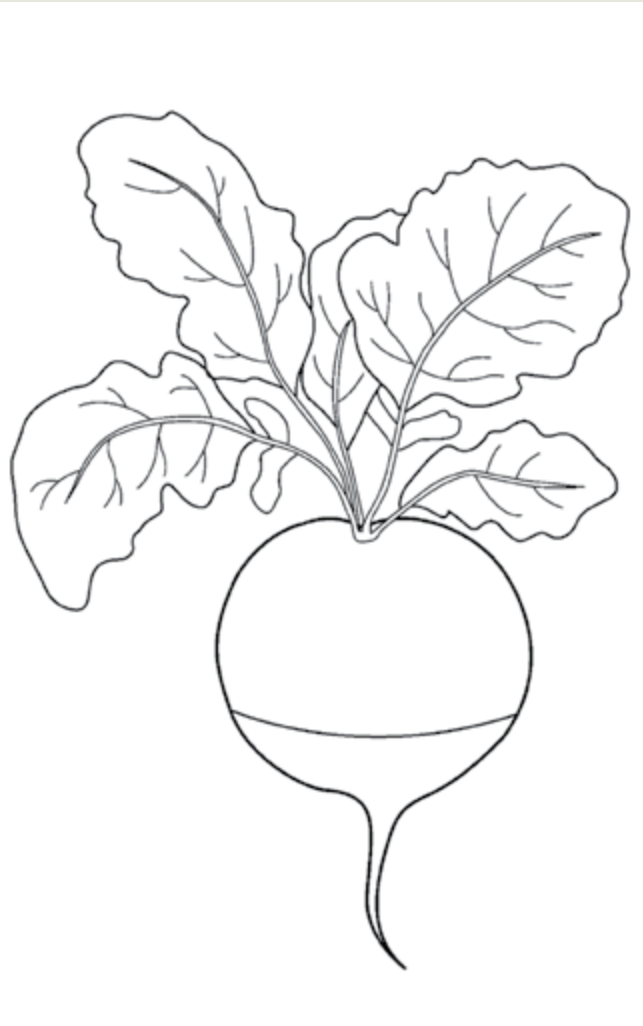
- A. Thomas Hearns
- B. Mike Tyson
- C. Joe Frazier
- D. Marvin Hagler

03. What is "emf"?

- A. Electric and magnetic fields
- B. An alternative spelling of "oomph"
- C. An electrical frequency
- D. External major force

Answers: 1.C 2.A 3.A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

O	U	R	Y
R	E	I	N
A	A	L	M
S	L	R	N

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.

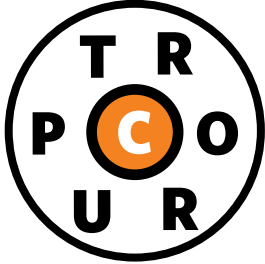
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

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

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

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

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

Harrowing video played at death penalty trial of US school shooter

Fort Lauderdale, US - A harrowing video of the Valentine's Day 2018 shooting at a high school in Florida that left 17 people dead was played at the sentencing trial on Monday of the man who admitted to carrying out the massacre.

Nikolas Cruz pleaded guilty in October to 17 counts of murder and 17 counts of attempted murder for the attack at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

A 12-person jury is to decide whether the now 23-year-old should receive the death penalty or a life sentence for what prosecutor Mike Satz called a 'cold, calculated, manipulative and deadly' massacre.

"I'm going to speak to you about the unspeakable, about this defendant's goal-directed, planned, systematic murder, mass murder, of 14 children, an athletic director, a teacher and a coach," Satz said in opening arguments. A cell phone video recorded by a student, Danielle Gilbert, was played for the jury. The audio was made available to the public gallery and reporters.

Screams, cries and moans were punctuated by multiple



State witness Brittany Sinitch, a teacher at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, cries during direct examination in the trial of Nikolas Cruz at Broward County Courthouse in Fort Lauderdale on Monday (AFP)

shots as students huddled in their classroom trying to seek cover from bullets coming through the door.

"This can't be real," someone was heard whispering.

Gilbert, who broke down in tears as the video was played, said one person was killed in the classroom and three wounded.

Cruz, who was wearing a black COVID mask, covered his

face with his hands and stared down at the table in front of him as the video was played.

Several anguished relatives of the victims fled the courtroom while others wept openly and hugged their loved ones.

'Next school shooter'

Satz, the prosecutor, told the jury that three days before the shooting, Cruz made a cellphone video

in which he said 'I'm going to be the next school shooter of 2018'.

"My goal is at least 20 people with an AR-15 and some tracer rounds," Cruz said in the video.

"It's going to be a big event and when you see me on the news, you'll know who I am."

Satz said that Cruz, after fleeing the school, ordered a drink at a Subway sandwich shop and then went to a McDonald's,

where he asked the brother of a girl he had just shot for a ride.

The boy, who was not aware at the time that Cruz was the assailant, declined. Cruz was arrested shortly afterwards.

The trial in Fort Lauderdale is the rare instance of a mass shooter facing a jury, as they often either take their own lives or are killed by police.

The death penalty requires that the jury be unanimous. Cruz will otherwise be handed life without parole.

The Florida shooting stunned a country accustomed to gun violence and sparked new efforts, led by students from the school itself, to get lawmakers to pass tougher gun control laws.

'March for Our Lives'

Parkland survivors founded 'March for Our Lives', organising a rally that drew hundreds of thousands of people to the nation's capital, Washington, in 2018. Thousands turned out for demonstrations organised by the group last month following two other mass shootings: one at a Texas elementary school that killed 19 children and two teachers, and another at a New York

supermarket that left 10 Black people dead.

Those shootings helped galvanise support for the first significant federal bill on gun safety in decades. President Joe Biden signed the bill into law in June but it fell far short of steps he had called for, including a ban on assault weapons.

Cruz bought the AR-15 semi-automatic he used in the attack legally, despite having a documented history of mental health problems.

Expelled from school for disciplinary reasons, Cruz was known to be fixated on firearms - and had been identified as a potential threat to his classmates.

On the day of the attack, he arrived at the school in an Uber, began shooting indiscriminately at students and staff, and fled nine minutes later, leaving behind a scene of carnage.

The Justice Department reached a US\$127.5mn settlement in March with survivors and relatives of Parkland victims who had accused the FBI of negligence for failing to act on tips received prior to the attack that Cruz was dangerous.

AFP

'Europe must stand firm with Taiwan'

Taipei, Taiwan - Europe must support Taiwan's democracy, a senior EU lawmaker said on Tuesday at the start of a trip to the island, citing both Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China's crackdown in Hong Kong.

Nicola Beer, one of the European Parliament's vice presidents, arrived for what Taiwan's foreign ministry described as 'the first official visit' by an MEP of her rank. Beer told reporters just after touching down that 'now is the moment to stand firm on the side of Taiwan', calling Europe and the island part of a 'family of democracies'.

"Taiwan's bloom is also Europe's bloom. We won't have a blind eye on China's threats to Taiwan. Europe was late for Hong Kong, we won't be late for Taiwan," she said, referring to Beijing's recent dismantling of Hong Kong's democracy movement. "There is no room for Chinese aggression in democratic Taiwan. For the moment, we witness war in Europe; we do not want to witness war in Asia."

Taiwan's 23mn people live under the constant threat of invasion by authoritarian China.

AFP

US gun lobby hails 'hero' who killed gunman in mall attack

Washington, US - The US gun lobby on Monday seized on the 'heroic' acts of a civilian who used a pistol to shoot dead a young man who had opened fire in a shopping mall, pushing its case in the midst of a fierce debate over the regulation of firearms.

On Sunday evening, Jonathan Sapriman, a 20-year-old white man whose motives remain unknown, opened fire with a semi-automatic rifle in an Indiana shopping mall.

He killed a 30-year-old man and a couple seated in a restaurant space, and injured two more, before being shot dead himself by Elisjsha Dicken, a 22-year-old customer who was carrying an unlicensed pistol, as recently authorised under local laws.

"Many more people would have died last night if not for a responsible armed citizen that took action very quickly within the first two minutes of the

shooting," said Greenwood police chief James Ison during a press briefing.

Ison said the shooter appeared to have prepared for his deadly assault by dropping his cell phone in a toilet and burning his computer in an oven before he set out. He also had a second assault rifle, a pistol and a large amount of ammunition, the police official said.

The powerful lobby group, the National Rifle Association (NRA), immediately seized on the tragedy to reassert its line that an armed public is good for public security.

"We will say it again: The only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun," the NRA said on Twitter.

Another group pushing against any restrictions on firearms ownership, the CCRKBA, echoed the NRA line.

"We carry guns to defend ourselves and others from criminals and crazy people in

sudden emergencies," its chief, Alan Gottlieb, said in a statement.

"That courageous young man is rightfully being hailed as a hero," he said.

Kris Brown, president of the Brady Campaign, which is pushing for stricter gun-control laws, hit back on Twitter. "Let me be clear: If more guns made us safer, America would be the safest country in the WORLD," he said.

In the same vein, Shannon Watts, founder of the organisation Moms Demand Action, shared graphs placing the United States at the head of the developed countries in terms of weapons per capita but also for deaths by firearms.

Nearly 400mn guns were in circulation among the civilian population in the United States in 2017, or 120 guns for every 100 people, according to the Small Arms Survey project.

AFP

EU opens membership talks with Albania and North Macedonia

Brussels, Belgium - The European Union launched membership negotiations on Tuesday with Albania and North Macedonia - a long-delayed step towards joining the bloc.

European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen warmly congratulated prime ministers Edi Rama of Albania and Dimitar Kovacevski of Macedonia. "This is what your citizens have been waiting for so long and have been working for so hard, and this is what they deserve," she said.

The process of joining what is today a 27-member bloc could still take years, but the formal step marks a small victory for the candidates. "It is a great satisfaction that, after 17 years today, we are finally starting the negotiations," said Kovacevski, whose country faced many hurdles, including a forced name change, on the path towards the EU.

"We are opening new perspectives for our country and for



European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen addressing the Parliament during a visit in Skopje, North Macedonia last week (AFP)

the citizens and steadily but surely we are joining the large European family."

Rama, whose country applied for membership in 2009, admitted that the talks might take a while. "We know it's not the beginning of the end, it's just the end of the beginning," he said, paraphrasing British premier Winston Churchill's comment in 1942 - three years before the end of World War II.

ety. You've done countless reforms, and you've modernised your economy."

Macedonia declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1991 and changed its name to North Macedonia in 2018 to overcome a bitter dispute with Greece that had blocked its NATO membership bid.

The route to the European Union was still blocked, however, first by reticence in western capitals, particularly Paris, about allowing in their relatively poor and politically unruly Balkan neighbours. Then Skopje's neighbour Bulgaria ambushed the bid, vetoing any progress over a raft of complaints about recognition of North Macedonia's history, culture and language.

On Saturday, Kovacevski's government announced that it had reached a compromise with Sofia involving further constitutional changes, but he could yet face more opposition at home.

AFP

Protesters' target emerges favourite for Sri Lanka presidency

Colombo, Sri Lanka - A veteran politician backed by the party of ousted Sri Lankan president Gotabaya Rajapaksa has emerged as the favourite to replace him, analysts said after nominations closed on Tuesday.

Ranil Wickremesinghe is a six-time former prime minister who became acting president after Rajapaksa resigned, but is despised by the protesters who forced his predecessor from office. Wickremesinghe, 73, has the formal backing of the Rajapaksa's SLPP, the largest bloc in the 225-member parliament that will elect the president on Wednesday.

His main opponent will be SLPP dissident and former education minister Dulas Alahapperuma, who is being supported by the opposition. The winner of the three-way contest will take charge of a bankrupt nation that is in talks with the IMF for a bailout, with its 22mn people en-

during severe shortages of food, fuel and medicines.

Sri Lanka ran out of foreign exchange to finance even the most vital imports in a crisis triggered by the coronavirus pandemic but exacerbated by mismanagement, critics say. Months of protests culminated in Rajapaksa fleeing his palace before flying to the Maldives and then Singapore, from where he submitted his resignation.

As acting president, Wickremesinghe has extended a state of emergency that gives police and security forces sweeping powers, and last week he ordered troops to evict protesters from state buildings they had occupied. An opposition MP said Wickremesinghe's hardline stance against demonstrators was going down well with MPs who had been at the receiving end of mob violence, and most SLPP legislators would side with him.



Demonstrators burn an effigy of interim Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe during a protest in front of Presidential Secretariat in Colombo on Tuesday (AFP)

"Ranil is emerging as the law-and-order candidate," Tamil MP Dharmalingam Sithadhan told AFP.

Political analyst Kusal Perera agreed that Wickremesinghe had a 'slight advantage' despite

his own party securing just one seat at the August 2020 elections. "Ranil has regained the acceptance of the urban middle classes by restoring some of the supplies like gas and he has already cleared government build-

ings showing his firmness," Perera said.

Former president Mahinda Rajapaksa, the deposed Gotabaya's elder brother and head of the clan that has dominated Sri Lankan politics for

years, remains in the country and party sources said he was pressing SLPP legislators to support Wickremesinghe.

Observers believe that Wickremesinghe will crack down hard if he wins and the demonstrators - who have also been demanding his resignation, accusing him of protecting the Rajapaksa's interests - take to the streets.

Thousands of students held a protest march against him in the capital on Tuesday but, unlike recent demonstrations, there were no clashes with security forces.

"We are not afraid of Ranil," said student leader Wasantha Mudalige. "We will chase him out like we did Gotabaya."

'Overnight deal'

Wickremesinghe's main opponent Alahapperuma, a former journalist, is not the object of so much scorn from the demonstrators, despite being an SLPP member.

He promised to form 'an actual consensual government for the first time in our history', in a tweet three days ago.

Moments before the formal nominations in parliament, opposition leader Sajith Premadasa announced he was withdrawing from the race in favour of 63-year-old Alahapperuma.

"For the greater good of my country that I love and the people I cherish, I hereby withdraw my candidacy for the position of President," Premadasa tweeted.

Alahapperuma was a rights campaigner in the late 1980s, when Premadasa's late father Ranasinghe ruled the country with an iron fist.

But a legislator from Premadasa's SJB party told AFP that the two men struck a deal overnight for Premadasa to be chosen as the new prime minister should Alahapperuma become head of state.

AFP

Sunak widens lead in race to become UK PM after party vote

London, UK - Former finance minister Rishi Sunak widened his lead in the latest round of voting on Monday by Conservative MPs to decide Britain's next prime minister, but the race to get in the final two tightened.

Sunak won the support of 115 Tory lawmakers, followed by Penny Mordaunt on 82 votes, Liz Truss on 71, Kemi Badenoch on 58 and Tom Tugendhat on 31, who drops out as the last-placed candidate, the party announced.

MPs will keep voting until only two candidates remain, the winner then being decided by the party members. Mordaunt had been bookmakers' favourite before the weekend, but lost votes from the previous round.

Foreign Secretary Truss closed the gap to 11 and can probably expect more support switching to her from Badenoch's backers, should the insurgent candidate be eliminated in the next round, promising a tense race to make the final cut on Wednesday. Television bosses earlier on Monday scrapped a planned debate between the remaining contenders for Tuesday night after Sunak and Truss pulled out, said Sky News, which was due to host it. "Conservative MPs are said to be concerned about the damage the debates are doing to the image of



L-R: Rishi Sunak, Liz Truss, Kemi Badenoch and Penny Mordaunt are still in the race to become the next UK PM (AFP)

the Conservative party, exposing disagreements and splits within the party," it added in a statement. Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced on July 7 he was quitting as Conservative leader. He is staying on as prime minister until his successor is announced on September 5.

‘Hunger Games’

In the two previous televised debates - on Channel 4 Friday and

the ITV network on Sunday - the contenders clashed notably on whether to cut taxes to help ease a soaring cost of living crisis.

But Sunday's clash turned more acrimonious - and personal - with candidates encouraged to directly criticise one another and their proposals.

Sunak called out Truss for voting against Brexit, her previous membership of the Liberal Democrats, and her position on tax.

In turn, Truss questioned Sunak's stewardship of the economy. Badenoch attacked Mordaunt for her stance on transgender rights - a rallying call in the 'culture wars' exercising the Tory right. Paul Goodman, from the ConservativeHome website, likened the debates to a political version of *The Hunger Games* questioning their decision to agree to them.

"Tory MPs and activists will

have watched in horror as several of the candidates flung buckets of manure over each other," he wrote. He asked why they would agree to publicly criticise the record of the government that all but one of them served in, or the policies they supported as ministers.

‘Out of ideas’

The main opposition Labour party has called for Johnson to leave office immediately.

Its leader, Keir Starmer, called the candidates' withdrawal a sign of a party 'out of ideas (and) out of purpose'. "Pulling out of a TV debate when you want to be prime minister doesn't show very much confidence," he added.

The government blocked attempts by Starmer to call a confidence vote in parliament to get rid of Johnson immediately, instead bringing forward its own confidence vote on the government as a whole. During the debate, Johnson defended his government's record, citing the vaccine rollout and support of Ukraine. "I believe this is one the most dynamic governments of modern times, not just overcoming adversity on a scale we haven't seen for centuries but delivering throughout adversity."

AFP

Mexico court blocks extradition of drug lord temporarily

Mexico City, Mexico - A Mexican court on Monday temporarily blocked the extradition of a drug lord wanted for the murder of a US undercover agent, dimming Washington's hopes of a quick handover.

Rafael Caro Quintero, 69, is on the FBI's list of 10 most-wanted fugitives for the kidnap, torture and murder of Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) special agent Enrique 'Kiki' Camarena in 1985.

A federal judge in the western state of Jalisco ruled that Caro Quintero cannot be handed over to the United States without a proper extradition process.

It is unknown how long the procedure will take, but any delays are likely to disappoint US officials.

US Attorney General Merrick Garland had said on Friday that Washington would seek the drug kingpin's 'immediate extradition'. Caro Quintero's arrest on Friday came nine years after he was freed by a court on a technicality, having served 28 years of a 40-year sentence in Mexico for Camarena's murder. By the time Mexico's Supreme Court overturned the decision, Caro

Quintero had already gone into hiding.

His defense team is trying to secure his release again, alleging procedural errors in his capture, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador told reporters. "We're going to take care that there's no corruption or any act contrary to the law," he said.

Asked about the US request for Caro Quintero's extradition, Lopez Obrador said only that it would be 'decided by the competent authority'.

Caro Quintero was detained by Mexican marines in the town of Choix in the north-western state of Sinaloa, and is being held in the high-security Altiplano prison in central Mexico. Lopez Obrador insisted that no DEA personnel had participated in the drug kingpin's capture and denied that it was the result of pressure from Washington, saying: "We're an independent government."

Caro Quintero, alias 'Rafa', has a US\$20mn bounty on his head. He is accused of co-founding the now-defunct Guadalajara drug cartel and currently runs an arm of the infamous Sinaloa cartel, according to US authorities.

AFP

Iran filmmaker Jafar Panahi must serve six-year sentence: Judiciary

Tehran, Iran - Award-winning dissident Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi, arrested last week in Tehran, must serve a six-year sentence previously handed to him in 2010, the judicial authority announced on Tuesday.

Panahi, 62, has won a number of awards at international festivals for films that have critiqued modern Iran, including the top prize in Berlin for *Taxi* in 2015, and best screenplay at Cannes for his film *Three Faces* in 2018.

He is the third director to be detained this month, alongside Mostafa Aleahmad and Mohammad Rasoulof, who won the Golden Bear in Berlin in 2020 with his film *There Is No Evil*.

"Panahi had been sentenced in 2010 to a total of six years in prison... and therefore he was entered into Evin detention centre to serve his sentence there", judiciary spokesman Massoud Setayeshi told reporters.



Iranian film director Jafar Panahi

He was arrested in 2010, following his support for anti-government demonstrations.

He was convicted of 'propaganda against the system', sentenced to six years in jail, banned from directing or writing films and blocked from leaving the country.

But he served only two months in jail in 2010, and was subsequently living on conditional release that could be re-

voked at any time.

Panahi was arrested again on July 11 after he went to the prosecutor's office to follow up on the situation of Rasoulof. The arrests come after Panahi and Rasoulof denounced in May the arrests of several colleagues in their homeland in an open letter.

Series of arrests

Despite the political pressures, Iran has a thriving film industry and the country's products regularly win awards at major international festivals.

Panahi's detention has sparked condemnation from fellow filmmakers.

Cannes film festival organisers said they 'strongly condemn' the arrests as well as 'the wave of repression evidently under way in Iran against its artists'.

The Venice film festival called for the 'immediate release' of the directors, while the Berlin film

festival said it was 'dismayed and outraged' at the arrest. France's foreign ministry on Friday expressed concern at the 'arbitrary' arrests of the filmmakers, citing a 'worrying deterioration in the situation of artists in Iran'.

Iran has in recent weeks arrested several leading figures, including reformist politician Mostafa Tajzadeh who was detained on July 8.

Tajzadeh 'is currently in pre-trial detention in Evin' prison and 'his accusation is gathering and collusion with the intention of acting against the country's security and propaganda against the system', Setayeshi said on Tuesday.

The politician, who last year made an unsuccessful bid for the presidency, was arrested in 2009 during protests disputing the re-election of former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

AFP

Fresh roadblocks in Panama as protesters reject agreement

Panama City, Panama - Fresh roadblocks went up in Panama on Monday as social groups turned their backs on a deal signed with the government to clear the highways in exchange for a fuel price cut.

After union leaders consulted grassroots supporters on the deal announced on Sunday, it was decided to continue the protest, said Luis Sanchez, a leader of the Anadepo civic grouping. "We had warned the executive that we still have to consult the rank and file," he told the TVN-2 channel.

The agreement, he added, 'was signed under pressure' and members have opted to continue the mobilisation that had seen trucks and banner-waving demonstrators paralyse the strategic Pan-American Highway. "In the meantime, there is no agreement," said Sanchez as he tore up a sheet of paper.

On Sunday, the government



Union workers block a highway in Panama City, on Monday (AFP)

and some protest leaders announced a deal to end more than two weeks of demonstrations over high fuel prices and rising living costs in the country of 4.4mn people. The biggest protest on Monday was in the capital Panama City, with members of the Suntracs construction union closing access roads with burning tire barricades, causing massive traffic backups.

There were also new blockades of the Pan-American High-

way that connects Panama with the rest of Central America and is the main transport route for goods through the country.

The protests have led to shortages of fuel and food in some areas. "We are in a bad way; no food, no buses. I wanted to buy rice and... what little can be found is very expensive. The vegetables are bad," said Angelica Ruiz, a resident of Pacora, east of Panama City.

AFP

‘Shocking’ report lists devastation to Australia’s wildlife

Sydney, Australia - Australia's unique wildlife is being devastated by bushfires, drought, habitat loss and global warming, a government report said on Tuesday, warning that more species are headed for extinction.

The five-yearly State of the Environment report prompted calls for dramatic action to reverse the 'poor and deteriorating' state of flora and fauna depicted by scientists on land and at sea.

The damage is being hastened by a climate that has warmed Australia's average land temperature by 1.4 degrees Celsius since the early 20th century, the report said. A failure to manage the pressures 'will continue to result in species extinctions', scientists warned in the report.

Australia's environment minister, Tanya Plibersek, said it was a 'shocking document'.

"If we continue on the trajectory that we are on now, we will see more threatened species, we will see drier rivers, we will see degraded landscape, we will see reefs dying," she told journalists.

"The path we are on is not sustainable."

Plibersek, a member of the centre-left Labour Party that came to power in May elections, criticised the previous conservative government for failing to publish the report, which it had received in December 2021.

She promised to carve out more of Australia's land and oceans for protection, pursue 'fundamental reform' of environmental laws and empower a new environmental protection agency.

‘Ecological bomb’

Australia's 2019-2020 'Black Summer' bushfires burned more



Extinction Rebellion members protest outside the State Parliament of Victoria in Melbourne on Tuesday, following the release of the report (AFP)

than eight million hectares of native vegetation and killed or displaced 1-3bn animals, the report found.

The fires were an 'ecological bomb' ripping through south-

eastern Australia', Plibersek said.

Marine heatwaves caused mass coral bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef in 2016, 2017 and 2020, scientists said in the

report. Since then, a government report in March found the reef had again suffered mass bleaching. Millions of hectares of primary forest had been cleared since 1990, the report said.

More than seven million hectares of habitat for threatened species were cleared between 2000 and 2017 without being assessed under Australia's environmental conservation laws, it found.

In five years, more than 200 plant and animal species of national significance had been added to the list of threatened species under Australia's environmental laws.

"Australia has lost more mammal species than any other continent," the report said, with the number of new species listed as being under greater threat up by eight per cent in

five years.

‘Heartbreaking’

Australia's cities are also growing at a rapid clip, scientists found, raising urban heat, pollution and waste while stretching water and energy resources.

"Sydney has lost more than 70 per cent of native vegetation cover through development," the report said. Sydney Harbour's stormwater drains also created hotspots of pollution with concentrations 20 times higher than when the harbour was pristine.

"The findings of this report are heartbreaking, and the leadership failures that have led to loss at this scale devastating," said WWF-Australia acting chief executive Rachel Lowry.

"If we ignore the warnings of this report then iconic species like koalas across eastern Aus-

tralia, or our largest gliding mammal, the greater glider, will disappear forever on our watch."

WWF-Australia said the report should be a 'turning point' that lead to greater investment and stronger laws to protect Australia's wildlife and wilderness. Lowry urged the new government to act quickly, condemning existing environmental legislation for 'failing miserably' to protect threatened species. The 'devastating' new report showed coasts and marine environments were deteriorating, the Australian Marine Conservation Society said. "We need to do more now, or we put at risk everything we rely on our oceans for - our health, wellbeing, livelihoods and our culture," said the society's chief executive, Darren Kindleysides.

AFP

Putin, Erdogan in Iran for summit on Syria

The summit comes days after US President Joe Biden visited the Middle East for the first time in his presidency

Tehran, Iran - Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in Tehran for talks on Tuesday on the Syrian war at a three-way summit overshadowed by fallout from his country's war on Ukraine.

Putin travelled abroad for only the second time since ordering the invasion of Ukraine in order to attend the gathering that also involves Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The summit comes days after US President Joe Biden visited the Middle East for the first time in his presidency, with stops in Iran's regional foes Israel and Saudi Arabia. It is the first hosted by Iran's ultra-conservative president Ebrahim Raisi since he took office last year and is ostensibly aimed at ending more than 11 years of conflict in Syria.

All three are involved in the conflict, with Iran and Russia supporting Syria's President Bashar al-Assad and Turkey backing rebel forces.



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi hold a meeting in Tehran on Tuesday (AFP)

Ahead of the trilateral meeting, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei met Erdogan, who has repeatedly threatened to launch a new military offensive against Kurdish militants in northern Syria.

Khamenei warned the Turkish leader that such a move would be 'detrimental' for the region

and called for the issue to be resolved through dialogue between Ankara, Damascus, Moscow and Tehran. Erdogan, speaking later at a joint news conference with his Iranian counterpart, said Kurdish militias caused 'great trouble' for both Iran and Turkey.

"We should fight against these terrorist organisations in solidar-

ity and alliance," he added.

The presidents also oversaw the signing of a number of agreements in different fields, including in trade and economy.

Ukraine grain
Erdogan has for months been offering to meet Putin in a bid to help resolve heightened global

tensions.

"The timing of this summit is not a coincidence," Russian analyst Vladimir Soltnikov said.

"Turkey wants to conduct a 'special operation' in Syria just as Russia is implementing a 'special operation' in Ukraine."

Turkey has launched waves of attacks on Syria since 2016, tar-

geting Kurdish militias as well as Islamic State group militants and Assad loyalists. In their talks, Putin and Erdogan would discuss mechanisms to export grain from Ukraine, a Kremlin source said.

Russia's war on Ukraine has massively hampered shipments from one of the world's biggest exporters of wheat and other

grain, sparking fears of global food shortages.

Turkey - a NATO member on speaking terms with both Russia and Ukraine - has spearheaded efforts to resume the grain deliveries. Ultimately, Erdogan is hoping to get 'the green light' from Putin and Raisi for Turkey's military operation in Syria, said Sinan Ulgen, a visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell warned on Monday that Russia's blockade of Ukrainian ports threatens supplies to countless thousands vulnerable to starvation. Borrell dubbed the issue 'one of life and death for many human beings'.

'Iran-phobia'
On Sunday, a day after Biden ended his tour of the Middle East, Iran accused the United States of provoking crises in the region. Biden had vowed the US would not 'tolerate efforts by any country to dominate another in the region through military buildups, incursions, and/or threats', in reference to Iran.

On Sunday, Iran accused the US of having 'once again resorted to the failed policy of Iran-phobia, trying to create tensions and crises in the region'.

The US last week alleged Iran plans to deliver 'hundreds of drones' to Russia to aid its war on Ukraine, an accusation the Islamic republic dismissed as 'baseless'.

AFP

Israeli jets strike Hamas post in Gaza after gunfire: Army

Jerusalem - The Israeli army said it launched strikes on Tuesday on a position belonging to the Islamist movement Hamas in the Gaza Strip, after gunfire from the Palestinian enclave.

"Following the firing of a bullet from the Gaza Strip into Israel, the IDF (military) is currently striking a Hamas military post in the northern Gaza Strip," the army said in a statement. It added on Twitter that 'fighter jets' were carrying out the strikes.

"Earlier today (Tuesday), a bullet was found in the community of Netiv Haasara," the army statement said, referring to an Israeli agricultural community adjacent to Gaza's northern border.

"After an inquiry, it was found that the bullet hit an industrial building earlier today after being fired from the Gaza Strip," the army added.

A witness in Gaza's Beit Hanoun area told AFP they saw

multiple strikes on a security site controlled by Hamas, the militant group which rules the enclave. The latest strikes come after Israeli warplanes targeted a Hamas site in the Gaza Strip over the weekend in response to rocket fire from the enclave, the military said.

That exchange of fire came hours after US President Joe Biden had visited Israel and the occupied West Bank. "The military site consists of an underground complex containing raw materials used for the manufacturing of rockets," the Israeli army said on Saturday.

The weekend strike 'will significantly impede and undermine Hamas' force-building capabilities', it said, adding that Israel was responding to 'attacks from the Gaza Strip on Israeli territory'. Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem condemned Saturday's strikes, which Palestinian news agency WAFA said caused no injuries.

AFP

Sudan's Hausa angry after deadly clashes

Khartoum, Sudan - Thousands of Sudan's Hausa people protested in multiple cities on Tuesday, demanding justice for dozens of comrades killed in a deadly land dispute with a rival ethnic group in the country's south.

The protests sparked by anger at the recent violence is the latest unrest to hit the northeast African nation, already reeling from months of mass demonstrations demanding the restoration of a transition to civilian rule following a military coup last year.

At least 79 people have been killed and 199 wounded since heavy fighting broke out last week between the Berti and Hausa groups in Blue Nile state, the health ministry says.

While the army has been deployed in Blue Nile and the fighting there quashed, protests have since erupted in other states, with marches on the streets of the capital Khartoum, as well as in the key eastern cities of Gedaref, Kassala and Port Sudan.

On Tuesday, Hausa protesters in Khartoum held up signs



Sudan's Hausa people protest in El-Obeid, capital of North Kordofan state, on Tuesday (AFP)

At least 79 people have been killed and 199 wounded since heavy fighting broke out last week in Blue Nile state

demanding 'justice for the Blue Nile martyrs' and 'no to the murder of Hausas'.

Fighting reportedly broke out on July 11 after Bertis rejected a Hausa request to create a 'civil authority to supervise access to land', a prominent Hausa member told AFP on condition of

anonymity.

But a senior Berti leader said the group was responding to a 'violation' of their land by the Hausas.

In Sudan, deadly clashes regularly erupt over land, livestock, access to water and grazing, especially in areas awash with

weapons still struggling from the impact of decades of civil war.

'Revenge'
Experts however say an October coup led by army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan has stroked a resurgence in ethnic violence.

In Gedaref, some 4,000 people marched chanting 'Hausa are citizens too' and 'revenge for the martyrs of the Blue Nile'.

Some 500 people also 'blocked the highway' in the town of Al-Showak in Gedaref state, eyewitness Saleh Abbas told AFP.

In El Obeid, capital of North Kordofan state, some 3,000 marched on the streets chanting 'the Hausa will win', while in Port Sudan, on the Red Sea, thousands of Hausa gathered outside local government offices calling for 'justice for the martyrs'.

In Kassala, authorities have banned public gatherings after thousands of Hausa demonstrators 'set government buildings and shops on fire', said Hussein Saleh, another witness.

AFP

UK breaches 40C for first time as heatwave batters Europe

London, UK - A fierce heatwave left western Europe sweltering on Tuesday, fuelling ferocious wildfires and stretching emergency services, as it swept north and pushed temperatures in Britain over 40 degrees Celsius for the first time.

After the UK's warmest night on record, the Met Office said 40.2C had been provisionally recorded by lunchtime at Heathrow Airport, in west London, taking the country into uncharted territory.

Britain's previous all-time temperature record of 38.7C, set in Cambridge in eastern England in 2019, had already been smashed earlier on Tuesday.

"For the first time ever, 40 Celsius has provisionally been exceeded in the UK," the Met Office meteorological agency said,



A firefighter works to extinguish a forest fire in Louchats, western France, on Tuesday (AFP)

warning 'temperatures are still climbing in many places'.

Experts blame climate change

for the latest heatwave and note the more frequent extreme weather will only worsen in years

to come.

The high temperatures have triggered an unprecedented red

alert for extreme heat in much of England, where some rail lines were closed as a precaution and schools shuttered in some areas.

All trains were cancelled from London's usually busy Kings Cross station, leaving many travellers stranded.

"It's a little frustrating," said American tourist Deborah Byrne, trying to reach Scotland.

But with road surfaces and runways melting and rails buckling, Transport Secretary Grant Shapps conceded much of Britain's infrastructure 'is just not built for this temperature'.

Tim Wainwright, chief executive of the charity WaterAid, said the situation should be 'the wake-up call the world needs to stop climate change from claiming any more lives'.

Wildfires

In France, towns and cities in the country's west registered their highest-ever temperatures on Monday, the national weather office said. The western region of Brittany - normally cool and often wet in summer - set new record highs on Monday above 40C.

Despite cooler air from the Atlantic offering some respite there on Tuesday, dozens of departments remained on orange alert, with temperatures still expected to top 40C in the east and south and violent thunderstorms forecast locally.

The heatwave - the second to engulf parts of Europe in recent weeks - has contributed to deadly wildfires in France, Greece, Portugal and Spain, destroying vast tracts of land.

AFP

25 dead, scores injured in Egypt bus crash: Media

Cairo, Egypt - At least 25 people were killed and more than 35 injured in Egypt on Tuesday when the bus they were travelling in smashed into a parked truck, official media reported.

The bus carrying around 45 passengers crashed into the stationary truck near the village of al-Barsha, some 300km south of Cairo. The truck was parked on the side of the road to change a tyre when it was hit from behind by the bus travelling from Sohag governorate to Cairo.

Ministry of Social Solidarity said it would offer 'emergency benefits' of 10,000 Egyptian pounds (around US\$530) to the families of those killed.

AFP

{ A CHEF'S TRYST }

TASTE FOR change

Leonor Espinosa is not only a cook but also an activist, having travelled to all corners of her motherland to study indigenous cuisine and give a voice to people who feel abandoned in areas blighted by poverty and decades of violence

From its jungles to its deserts: The world's newly-minted best female chef, Leonor Espinosa, draws her inspiration from Colombia's vast biodiversity, painful history and oft-neglected traditional communities.

She is not only a cook but also an activist, having travelled to all corners of her motherland to study indigenous cuisine and give a voice to people who feel abandoned in areas blighted by poverty and decades of violence.

"My cuisine tastes of relegated cultures, of forgotten regions, it tastes of ancestral techniques, of smoke... of pain," the 59 year old told AFP in Bogota after she was voted World's Best Female Chef 2022 by the panel that elects The World's 50 Best Restaurants.

"It also tastes of joy, of plantain, of cassava, of the soil after it rains, of a desert ecosystem. There is a lot of poetry in my kitchen."

In naming Espinosa its winner, the 50 Best panel described her as a 'multi-talented Colombian chef marrying art, politics and gastronomy'.

At her restaurant Leo in central Bogota, it added, "she has forged a unique, cerebral and profound cooking style that sets her apart from her contemporaries, at the same time as she seeks to use gastronomy as a tool of socio-economic development."

Self-taught

Born in Cartago in the country's southwest, Espinosa grew up in Cartagena on the Caribbean coast and taught herself to cook.

She studied economics and arts and worked in advertising before making the leap to the kitchen at the age of 35.

In 2017, she was anointed Latin America's best female chef.



Leonor Espinosa poses with dishes, which she (below right) prepared at her restaurant in Bogota; Leonor (bottom left) with her award



To give her restaurant its trademark native- and peasant-infused menu, she has criss-crossed Colombia to document its culinary history.

She has incorporated many traditional ingredients into her repertoire - everything from exotic fruits and Andean tubers to ants and larvae, traditions taken from the bush and served to five-star palates in the city.

Espinosa's exploration and upliftment agenda has often taken her to parts of the country deeply marred by Colombia's nearly 60-year civil conflict.

Much of this work is done with her Funleo foundation, created in 2008 and awarded the Basque Culinary World Prize nine years later for promoting the gastronomic traditions of indigenous and afro-Colombian communities.

"The award shines a light on those communities that for years have struggled to be recognised for their ancestral value and contribution to national cultural identity," Espinosa said at the time.

"It is a way of mitigating the silence generated by the armed conflict, injustice and exclusion."

With her nose rings and shy smile, Espinosa told AFP that any cook worth their salt is also an anthropologist, political scientist and artist.

If the chef is a woman, they must also be thick-skinned and tenacious.

While women have traditionally been in charge of food in Colombia, the world of haute cuisine has always been a male domain, said Espinosa of the hurdles she experienced.

But she was not easily put off.

"I was quite clear from childhood that I will not be what other people want me to be," she told AFP.

"I am who I am... I am rebellious, irreverent, curious."

AFP

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DINING AT WORLD'S NORTHERNMOST RESTAURANT

REMOTE
REPAST

KOKS restaurant - housed in a narrow black wooden house, one of the oldest in Greenland, - is located in Ilimanaq, a hamlet of 50 inhabitants hidden behind icebergs



You can only get there by boat or helicopter, but Michelin-starred chef Poul Andrias Ziska hopes his restaurant in remote Greenland, far above the Arctic Circle, is worth the journey.

The 30 year old chef relocated his restaurant KOKS from the Faroe Islands in mid-June, leaving behind his relatively accessible address for Ilimanaq, a hamlet of 50 inhabitants hidden behind icebergs on the 69th parallel north.

Housed in a narrow black wooden house, one of the oldest in Greenland, the restaurant can only accommodate about 20 people per service, and experiments with local produce, including whale and seaweed, with fresh produce almost impossible to find in the harsh climate.

"We try to focus on as much Greenlandic products as possible, so everything from Greenland halibut to snow crabs to musk ox to Ptarmigan, different herbs and differ-

ent berries," the tousled-haired, bearded chef tells AFP.

The young chef previously ran KOKS at home in the remote Faroe Islands, where he won his first star in 2017, his second in 2019, and the title of the world's most isolated Michelin restaurant.

He plans to return there for a permanent installation, but explains he had always wanted to stretch his gastronomic legs in another territory in the far north, like Iceland, Greenland or even Svalbard.

He finally chose Ilimanaq, located an hour's boat trip from Ilulissat, the third-largest town in Greenland and famous for its huge glacier.

Local products

"We just found it more suitable, more fun to do something completely different before we move back in our permanent restaurant," he tells AFP from his kitchen, set up in a trailer outside the house with the dining area.

With 20 courses, the extensive tasting menu will delight the taste buds for some 2,100 kroner (US\$280 approx), excluding wine and drinks.

"The menu is exquisite and sends you to the far north and back," Devid Gualandris, a charmed visitor, tells AFP.

"From the whale bites to the wines, from the freshly caught fish and shellfish to the curated desserts, everything is bursting with flavour."

While whale meat is a staple food in Greenland and Ziska's native Faroe Islands, whaling is banned in most of the world and activists have called for an end to the practice.

An unlikely locale for a gourmet restaurant, Ilimanaq - Greenlandic for 'place of hope' - is home to a small community living in picturesque wooden houses, next to hiking trails and more fittingly a luxury hotel, making it an ideal stopover for wealthy tourists seeking to explore new frontiers.

For Ziska, the customers in Greenland are different.

"There are a lot of people for which the number one priority is to visit Greenland and then they come to our restaurant," he says.

"In the Faroe Islands we had mainly people interested in coming and eating at our restaurant and then obviously also visiting the Faroe Islands," the chef explains.

In addition to the adventurers who have already been lured by the Arctic landscape, the Greenlandic Tourist Board hopes the restaurant will also help attract gourmet travellers.

"The unique combination of high-level gastronomy, the inherent sustainability of the North Atlantic cuisine and the characteristic nature and resources of the Disko Bay, speaks to all our senses," Visit Greenland's director, Hjortur Smarason, said when announcing the arrival of KOKS.

A long-overlooked destination, Greenland - an Arctic island territory nine times the size of the UK - welcomed more than 100,000 tourists in 2019, nearly double its population, before COVID-19 cut the momentum.

Smarason said the presence of KOKS 'is exactly what we strive for in our effort to reach a certain distinguished kind of guests'.

AFP

A chef from the KOKS restaurant of double-Michelin-starred Faroese chef Poul Andrias Ziska carries supplies into the restaurant housed in the Poul Egedes House in Ilimanaq, Greenland



A KOKS chef prepares food at the kitchen of the restaurant

We just found it more suitable, more fun to do something completely different before we move back in our permanent restaurant

POUL ANDRIAS ZISKA

ADVANTAGE PAKISTAN

Ton-up Abdullah Shafique drives Pakistan's record chase against Sri Lanka at Galle

Galle, Sri Lanka - Opener Abdullah Shafique hit a gritty century to keep Pakistan in the hunt to chase down a victory target of 342 in the opening Test against Sri Lanka on Tuesday.

Pakistan ended day four on 222 for three, still needing 120 runs to take the lead in the two-match series at Galle, where the highest successful fourth-innings chase is 268 by Sri Lanka against New Zealand in 2019.

Sri Lanka need seven wickets to get their second straight win at a venue where they beat Australia last week to end that two-match series level at 1-1.

Shafique, batting on 112, and skipper Babar Azam, who made 55, put together 101 runs for the third wicket but spinner Prabath Jayasuriya broke through just a few overs before the close of play.

"He is one of the best players, so he provided good support while batting and guided me all along on how to play," Shafique, who called his ton a "special one", said of captain Azam.

"So was a not a good thing when he got out but now the responsibility lies on me."

Left-arm spinner Jayasuriya bowled talisman Azam around the batsman's legs with a delivery that spun sharply from outside leg to rattle the stumps of the right-hander, who looked visibly shocked.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Mohammad Rizwan was batting on seven at stumps alongside Shafique, who had so far faced 289 balls and hit five boundaries and one six.

Pakistan began strongly with a 87-run partnership between Shafique and fellow opener Imam-ul-Haq, who made 35, but an alert stumping from wicket-keeper Niroshan Dickwella broke the stand.

The left-handed Imam missed a delivery from off-spinner Ramesh Mendis and Dickwella clipped off the bails, with the de-



Pakistan's Abdullah Shafique celebrates after completing his century against Sri Lanka on the fourth day of the first Test in Galle on Tuesday (AFP)

He (Babar Azam) provided good support while batting and guided me all along on how to play. So was a not a good thing when he got out but now the responsibility lies on me

ABDULLAH SHAFIQUE

cision going up to the third umpire.

Various TV angles established

that Imam's foot was just millimetres off the ground when the bails were dislodged.

Azhar Ali was the next to go when he edged a ball from Jayasuriya, who claimed a five-wicket haul in the previous innings, to first slip. He made six off 32 deliveries.

Azam, who hit a defiant 119 in Pakistan's first innings total of 218, then joined Shafique as the two rebuilt the innings on a turning pitch.

Azam reached his fifty and two balls later Shafique got his

second Test hundred with a single off Maheesh Theekshana, raising his bat to a standing ovation from the dressing room.

"All of a sudden the wicket went flat... still we kept them under three runs and we did a marvellous job on that track," Sri Lanka's spin coach Piyal Wijetunga told reporters.

"We are still in the game. If we grab two wickets in the morning session we have a great chance

of winning this game."

Azam, who crossed 10,000 international runs on day two and averages over 45, went past 3,000 Test runs during another stubborn knock in which he hit Jayasuriya for a few boundaries and one six.

Shafique also hit his only six against Jayasuriya and said things went to plan.

"He has done well in the first innings and if we figure him out

well here then we have a pretty good chance of batting well against them," said Shafique.

Sri Lanka took the second new ball in the 81st over but the spinners kept up the attack in the tense final overs of the day.

In the morning, Sri Lanka resumed the day on 329-9 in their second innings. Dinesh Chandimal was stranded on 94 when they were all out for 337.

AFP



Yasir Shah (L) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Sri Lanka's Kusal Mendis (AFP)

Yasir ripper evokes memories of Warne's 'ball of the century'

Galle, Sri Lanka - A Yasir Shah delivery was drawing comparisons with Shane Warne's "ball of the century" on Tuesday, the day after the Pakistan leg-spinner ripped out Kusal Mendis.

Sri Lanka's Mendis had reached 76 on the third day in Galle when Yasir pitched one outside leg stump only for it to take huge turn and hit the top of the shellshocked batsman's off stump.

The dismissal had echoes of the late great Warne's magical delivery to remove England's bamboozled Mike Gatting during the first Ashes Test at Old Trafford in 1993.

"While it will be difficult to

surpass Warne's stunning ball, Yasir certainly went close as he produced a delivery that is sure to be talked about over the coming years," wrote the International Cricket Council.

Sri Lanka Cricket on their Twitter page said: "Ball of the Century candidate? Yasir Shah stunned Kusal Mendis with a stunning delivery which reminded the viewers of Shane Warne's 'Ball of the Century'."

Warne, who died aged 52 of a suspected heart attack in March, ended his stellar Test career in 2007 with 708 Test wickets.

AFP

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South Africa's Rassie van der Dussen hits a shot during his knock of 133 in the first ODI against England (AFP)

Van der Dussen hits ton for SA in Stokes's farewell ODI

Chester-le-Street, United Kingdom - Rassie van der Dussen's century was the cornerstone of South Africa's imposing 333-5 as the Proteas threatened to spoil England star Ben Stokes's farewell to one-day international cricket on Tuesday.

Van der Dussen made a career-best 133 and shared a partnership of 151 with Aiden Markram (77) after putting on 109 with opener Janneman Malan (57).

South Africa's total might have been greater had not both Markram and van der Dussen fallen in the same over from spinner Liam Livingstone.

Markram, who faced just 61 balls and struck nine fours, holed out in the deep to Jonny Bairstow and, two balls later, a tired van der Dussen, was bowled trying to muscle a slower ball that kept low.

Dynamic all-rounder Stokes announced on Monday that Tuesday's game at his Durham home ground in Chester-le-Street would be his 105th and last ODI, with the now Test captain saying the demands of a congested fixture schedule made it impossible for him to give of his best across all three international formats.

Stokes led the team on to the field but an expensive bowling re-

turn of 0-44 in five overs left his loyal fans in the northeast hoping to witness some batting heroics from the player of the match in England's 2019 World Cup final triumph.

England made three changes to the side that lost the third ODI, and with it a three-match series, against India at Old Trafford on Sunday. They gave a debut to seam bowler Matthew Potts with Adil Rashid, who missed the India series while on the Hajj pilgrimage, and Sam Curran returning in place of the in-form Reece Topley, David Willey and Craig Overton.

AFP



Graeme Smith

Graeme Smith to oversee new South African T20 league

Johannesburg, South Africa - Former South Africa captain Graeme Smith was on Tuesday named as the head of a new Twenty20 franchise tournament to be staged in the republic in January and February next year.

The announcement was made by Cricket South Africa (CSA) six days after it revealed it had withdrawn from a scheduled World Cup Super League ODI series in Australia in January, which would have clashed with the new tournament.

CSA and South African television company SuperSport are the major shareholders in the league.

Reports from India claim the league will in effect be an offshoot of the Indian Premier League, with IPL owners having bought six franchises in South Africa.

AFP

China to host Asian Games in 2023 after COVID postponement

Kuwait City, Kuwait - China will host the 2022 Asian Games in autumn 2023, organisers said on Tuesday, after postponing the event in Hangzhou because of COVID-19.

The Games were originally scheduled for September this year, but organisers postponed them in May as China tried to stamp out a large Covid resurgence in several parts of the country.

The event will now be held in Hangzhou from September 23 to October 8 2023, the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) said.

Hangzhou lies less than 200 kilometres (120 miles) from the country's biggest city Shanghai, which endured a months-long lockdown earlier this year as part of the ruling Communist Party's zero-tolerance approach to the virus.

The OCA said on Tuesday that the new dates were chosen to avoid "conflict with other major international sporting

events".

The Hangzhou organising committee vowed to "present a wonderful and marvellous sports and cultural event with Chinese characteristics", in a statement confirming the new dates.

Hangzhou will be the third city in China to host the Games after Beijing in 1990 and Guangzhou in 2010

China is the last major economy committed to stamping out domestic spread of the virus through harsh lockdowns, mass testing and strict controls on international travel.

But that has hurt the country's international sporting ambitions, with the world's most populous



The logo of the 2022 Asian Games is marked on a lawn in Hangzhou, in China's Zhejiang province (AFP)

nation cancelling or postponing almost all events since the start of the pandemic, with the exception of this year's Winter Olympics in Beijing.

The World University Games, scheduled to begin in June in Chengdu and already delayed from last year, have also been postponed again, until 2023.

The Asian Games typically attract over 10,000 athletes from across the region.

Organisers said in April that Hangzhou, a city of 12 million in eastern China, had finished constructing 56 competition venues for the Asian Games and Asian Para Games.

Hangzhou will be the third city in China to host the continental competition after Beijing in 1990 and Guangzhou in 2010.

Some events are also expected to be held in other provincial cities including Ningbo, Wenzhou, Huzhou, Shaoxing and Jinhua.

AFP



Italy's Manuela Giugliano is desolate as Belgium players celebrate their victory in the Euro 2022 on Monday (AFP)

Belgium reach Euro 2022 quarters, France held by Iceland

Manchester, United Kingdom - Belgium secured the last spot in the Euro 2022 quarter-finals as Tina De Caigny's goal beat Italy 1-0 in sweltering temperatures in Manchester on Monday.

The Hoffenheim striker's predatory finish early in the second half made sure of second place in Group B behind France to set up a last eight meeting with Sweden on Friday.

Despite scoring a late penalty, a 1-1 draw for Iceland against a

much-changed France was not enough for them to progress as they became the first side to bow out of a women's Euro from the group stage unbeaten.

In just their second ever major tournament, Belgium reached the knockout phase for the first time to round off a miserable few weeks for Italy.

"This is a historic night for Belgian women's football," said Belgium coach Ives Serneels.

"This might be the best mo-

ment yet. It has been a long time in the making.

"I've been with the Belgian women's national team for 11 years now, so I'm ecstatic that we're going to the quarter-finals."

Hopes had been high for the Azzurre given Juventus' promising run in the Champions League last season and the upcoming professionalisation of the women's Serie A.

However, they failed to re-

cover from shipping five goals in the first half to France in their opening game.

"We lacked calmness," said Italy coach Milena Bertolini. "We put too much pressure on ourselves."

That 5-1 defeat meant Italy needed to win to progress due to their inferior goal difference to both Belgium and Iceland.

Chances were few and far between in a first half affected by the conditions with tempera-

tures reaching 36 degrees celsius as a heatwave hit Britain on Monday.

Belgium got the goal just four minutes into the second half when a free-kick into the Italian box fell at the feet of De Caigny to sweep home her 38th international goal.

Italy nearly hit back immediately when Cristiana Girelli curled a brilliant effort off the underside of the bar.

AFP

Haller vows to 'come back stronger' after testicular tumour diagnosis

Berlin, Germany - Borussia Dortmund striker Sebastien Haller on Tuesday vowed to 'come back stronger' as he thanked fans for their support following his diagnosis for a testicular tumour.

Ivory Coast's Haller joined the German club earlier this month as a replacement for Erling Haaland, who has signed for Manchester City.

But the 28-year-old left the team's pre-season training camp in Switzerland on Monday after a tumour was found in his testicle.

"I want to thank you again from the bottom of my heart for all these many warm messages received," the 28-year-old said in a post on Twitter.

"I was very moved to see these beautiful reactions and I even feel like I don't deserve so much."

"But I said that thanks to you it will only be one more challenge in our journey."

AFP

Martial scores as United beat Crystal Palace in Melbourne

Melbourne, Australia - New coach Erik ten Hag said his players' belief was improving after Anthony Martial scored his third goal in three games as a slick Manchester United beat Crystal Palace 3-1 on Tuesday.

In front of 76,500 fans at Melbourne Cricket Ground, French forward Martial struck in the first half while Marcus Rashford and Jadon Sancho both collected their second goals of the pre-season tour after the restart.

Joel Ward pulled one back for Palace, but they were always chasing a game that saw United reduced to 10 men in the dying minutes after Will Fish was sent off for a deliberate foul.

The friendly victory was Ten Hag's third since taking over after their 4-0 thumping of Liverpool in Bangkok and a 4-1 win over Melbourne Victory.

In contrast, it was a second straight defeat for Patrick Vieira's young Palace side, who crashed 2-0 to Liverpool in Singapore on



Manchester United's Anthony Martial scores past Crystal Palace goalkeeper Remi Matthews (AFP)

Friday.

"We are happy with the improvement we are seeing, but there is also a lot of work to do," said Ten Hag. "We did score some wonderful goals, that's true."

"We played well and I think

the belief is increasing," he added while praising his forwards in particular. "They did a lot of running, a lot of work. They have a lot of energy and were rewarded by scoring goals."

The Dutchman is beginning to

stamp his mark on the Old Trafford side, with his team - who finished a disappointing sixth last season in the Premier League - producing some fluid, one-touch football.

AFP

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FLYING HIGH

Qatar’s Mutaz Essa Barshim claims third world title in men’s high jump

Eugene, United States - Qatar’s Mutaz Essa Barshim won his third world high jump gold at the World Athletics Championships in Eugene, Oregon, on Monday.

Barshim, who shared gold at the Tokyo Olympics with Italian friend and rival Gianmarco Tamberi, delivered a faultless display of jumping for a winning 2.37m in front of a baying crowd at Hayward Field.

South Korea’s Woo Sanghyeok claimed silver with a best of 2.35m, while Andriy Protzenko claimed Ukraine’s first medal of these champs with bronze (2.33m).

Tamberi had to be happy with fourth place.

“Winning for the third time has never been done before,” said Barshim. “For me that’s a

great stat.

“I always say to myself, ‘How do you want to be remembered?’ I want to do great things, I want to be the high jumper that does stuff that sticks in history.

“I’ve done that today so I’m really happy about it.”

Meanwhile, Untouchable Venezuelan Yulimar Rojas led a raft of familiar faces to glory when she claimed her third straight triple jump title.

“This is my third consecutive world (outdoor) title, it still hasn’t sunk in yet,” said Rojas, who had been hoping to better her world record but was frustrated by wind affecting her run-up.

“I wanted a longer jump, but I am happy to return to this beautiful stadium, to see the crowd,” Rojas added.

Rojas was among three female two-time Olympic champions to strike gold in Eugene.

Belgium’s Nafi Thiam earlier claimed a last-gasp victory in the heptathlon over Dutch rival Anouk Vetter, while imperious Faith Kipyegon of Kenya won her second 1500m title.

The evening session kicked off, however, with all eyes on the track as Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, fresh from winning a record fifth world 100m title on Sunday, went in round one of the 200m.

“Oh man, it was hard!” said Fraser-Pryce, who coasted into Tuesday’s semi-finals.

“It was a late night and I needed to come back and try to qualify as easy as I can to preserve my strength for tomorrow.



I always say to myself, ‘How do you want to be remembered?’ I want to do great things, I want to be the high jumper that does stuff that sticks in history

MUTAZ ESSA BARSHIM

“I am feeling OK so far. Just have to go home and get some recovery done and see how it goes tomorrow. I need to eat some food, get a massage, some compression, and just rest, get some sleep.”

Joining the 35-year-old, a world 200m champion in 2013, in Tuesday’s semi-finals will be her two teammates who helped snatch an unprecedented clean-sweep of the 100m podium for Jamaica on Sunday.

Shericka Jackson, who has the quickest time this season of 21.55sec, and four-time Olympic sprint champion Elaine Thompson-Herah, a world silver medalist over 200m in 2015, are still both seeking their first individual world titles.

AFP

Trump urges golfers to ‘take money’ and join LIV circuit

Los Angeles, United States - Former US President Donald Trump on Monday urged golfers to “take the money” and sign with the Saudi-backed LIV series amid reports more players were poised to join the controversial circuit.

Trump, who is hosting LIV events at two of his golf courses this year, said in a post on his Truth Social network that players should not hesitate to abandon the PGA Tour, which he branded “disloyal.”

“All of those golfers that remain ‘loyal’ to the very disloyal PGA, in all of its different forms, will pay a big price when the inevitable MERGER with LIV comes, and you get nothing but a big ‘thank you’ from PGA officials who are making Millions of Dollars a year,” Trump wrote.

“If you don’t take the money now, you will get nothing after the merger takes place, and only say how smart the original signees were,” he added.

Trump concluded the post with a message of congratulations to newly minted British Open champion Cameron Smith, the Australian who stormed to victory at St Andrews on Sunday with a superb final round.

Smith is among the latest list of names who are reportedly poised to sign with LIV Golf, which has already recruited a slew of top names with jaw-dropping contracts which in some cases are reported to have run into the hundreds of millions of dollars.

LIV Golf, which is fronted by Australian great Greg Norman, is bankrolled by Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund. Human Rights groups have criticized the venture saying it exists solely to boost Saudi Arabia’s international reputation, a phenomenon labelled “sportswashing.”

AFP

El Bakkali stuns Kenyans in steeplechase

Eugene, United States - Olympic champion Soufiane El Bakkali of Morocco produced a tactical masterclass to end Kenya’s 15-year reign in the 3000m steeplechase at the World Athletics Championships in Oregon on Monday.

El Bakkali took his time before surging into the lead with just under 200m to go at Eugene’s Hayward Field, with a lethal late kick after the final water jump powering him to gold in a time of 8min 25.13sec.

Ethiopia’s Lamecha Girma – silver medallist behind El Bakkali at last year’s Tokyo Olympics – was second in 8:26.01.

Kenya’s reigning world champion Conseslus Kipruto took bronze in 8:27.92.



Morocco’s Soufiane El Bakkali celebrates after winning the men’s 3000m steeplechase at the World Athletics Championships on Monday (AFP)

El Bakkali’s masterpiece was almost a carbon copy of last year’s Olympic final, when the Moroccan again conjured a dev-

astating late kick in the final 200m to surge to gold.

El Bakkali’s victory brought an end to Kenya’s 15-year domi-

nance of the steeplechase at the world championships.

Kenyan runners had won gold in the event in every edition of the championships since Brimin Kipruto’s gold in Osaka in 2007.

It was a happy return to Eugene for El Bakkali, who got his first taste of international competition at Hayward Field in 2014 when he competed in the World Under-20 Championships.

“That was my first international experience. I return eight years later as a champion,” El Bakkali said.

“The course was very tactical, slow,” he added. “I positioned well in the last lap. I am very strong in the 400m and it worked out for me.”

AFP

Retired tennis star Ashleigh Barty rules out golf as a career

Melbourne, Australia - Former tennis world number one Ashleigh Barty has dashed hopes she will make a return to professional sport, after speculation the Australian could switch to golf.

The 25-year-old three-time Grand Slam winner stunned the sporting world with her bombshell retirement in March, just weeks after becoming the first home Australian Open champion in 44 years.

Barty had been coy on what she would do next, but has always been a keen golfer, winning the Brookwater Golf Club women’s title near Brisbane in 2020 and playing the Icons Se-



Ashleigh Barty

ries exhibition in the United States in April.

It heightened speculation that the multi-talented Australian,

who has also been a professional cricketer, could take up golf seriously. But in an interview with Melbourne radio late Monday she put the rumours to bed, ruling out playing any form of professional sport again.

“You guys just can’t accept that I don’t want to play professional sport any more,” Barty said. “I love golf, it’s a hobby of mine. It will not be my profession, I have no intention of making it my profession but I hack around once a week if I can. There’s no need, there’s no desire for me to play professional sport, particularly golf,” she added.

AFP

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