



3.2mn sqm robotics park in Rusayl soon

Expected to start robotics revolution in the region; generate close to 35,000 jobs

Shaddad al Musalmay
Muscat

The sultanate is set to become a hub for technologies of the future, including robotics and artificial intelligence, with the launch of the largest robotics park in the Middle East soon.

Authorities have allocated 3.2mn sqm of land for the one-of-its-kind Sandy Valley Robotics Park, which will not only host a number of robotics companies but also attract innovators and those looking for entertainment.

Driven by the objective of creating a better society through research and education, the park will open its doors for youth inventors and innovators and entrepreneurs in the field of robotics, while promoting startups in Oman.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Dr Biju John, chairman and managing director of Sandy Valley Robotics, said, "The park will be the pride of Oman. Set to come up in Rusayl Industrial City, the first phase will spread over 864 acres of land on scenic hills." A land survey is underway for the



project.

John believes the park will start a robotics revolution in the region, particularly in Oman, and generate close to 35,000 jobs for Omanis.

"Initially, the project was planned in Dubai, but then we found Oman to be a more suitable location. Omanis themselves are keen on technology

Omanis themselves are keen on technology and the youth here are actively engaged in 4IR technologies

DR BIJU JOHN

and the youth here are actively engaged in 4IR technologies."

The project will include a five-star hotel, a theme park, cable cars, a robotics research institute and a robotics themed shopping centre.

"The park will be a community of people who seek innovation in robotics. We will support the Omanisation process by provid-

ing training to the youth in AI and robotics," John informed.

"Omanis are friendly, hard-working and futuristic. We invite companies and entrepreneurs to join in the robotics revolution which is likely to change the future of human beings."

The park will support companies in research and development by providing modern facilities and offering sustainable technology programmes. "The park will also promote Omani startups in the field of robotics," John added.

The park is being supported by several companies based in the USA, UK, Germany, Japan and Taiwan, among others.

John is confident that following opening of the park, "Oman will be the focal point for the entire world for companies that work in robotics".

@shadadm

Decision on Schengen visa waiver for Omanis soon

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A longstanding demand of Omanis to be exempted from the Schengen visa requirement to enter Europe will be looked into within two weeks.

This was announced during a press conference in Muscat on Tuesday addressed by H E Sheikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs in the Foreign Ministry.

Enrique Mora, Deputy Secretary General and Political Director of European External Action Service, also addressed the press conference.

The European Union official stressed on the 'historic role' of Oman and its efforts in resolving several regional and international issues, especially with regard to the Iranian nuclear issue.

He said that there are ongoing negotiations with GCC countries related to free trade. Mora added that the EU is looking forward to enhancing cooperation with the countries of the region in several areas, including maritime security, training, energy and technology.

H E Harthy informed that EU



EU official stressed on the 'historic role' of Oman and its efforts in resolving regional and international issues

will soon open a representative office in the sultanate. He affirmed that relations between Oman and EU are developed and growing further. "The sultanate welcomes the EU Strategic Partnership with the Gulf and looks forward to strengthening

relations in various fields."

The European Commission adopted a Joint Communication on Strategic Partnership with the Gulf with the aim of broadening and deepening EU's cooperation with the GCC and its member countries on May 18.

The Joint Communication addresses a series of key policy areas, presenting concrete proposals for strengthened EU-GCC cooperation on energy, green transition and climate change, trade and economic diversification, regional stability and global security, humanitarian and development challenges, and closer people-to-people contacts.

Exports increased by 33.7% in 2021

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's exports increased by 33.7 per cent to RO20.1bn in 2021, according to the annual report of Oman's Directorate General of Customs.

Total merchandise imports reached RO13.7bn compared to RO12.99bn in 2020, an increase of 5.47 per cent.

The biggest destination for

the sultanate's products was China, followed by India and the UAE.

As more trading partners of the sultanate recorded economic recovery last year, the robust growth in Omani exports was led by strong demand from China, India, UAE and other countries.

'The total Omani exports to China was RO7.45bn. Exports to India reached RO1.89bn and

RO1.6bn to the UAE in the year ended December 31, 2021.'

The report affirmed that the volume of trade exchange of the sultanate increased by 20.7 per cent to RO33.8bn in 2021, compared to RO28bn in 2020.

The report indicated that the volume of trade surplus reached RO6.39 in 2021 compared to RO2.04bn in 2020. 'The increase was due to increase in oil exports,' the report added.

Al Mouj Muscat has delivered significant sustainable socio-economic impact for the Sultanate of Oman

Life — inspired

We are committed to the goals of Oman Vision 2040 Nasser Al Sheibani drives this		We have directly created 2,200 permanent jobs Hawra Al Lawati has one of them		We have attracted 844mn USD in Foreign Direct Investment Ahmed Al Massan oversees this	
	There are already 2,550 homes at Al Mouj Muscat Badriya Al Suqri helped build these		Home to 2,000 hotel rooms, Al Mouj Muscat drives tourism growth Carsten Wiegandt oversees some of them		150 SMEs operate at Al Mouj Muscat Aisha Al Kharousi owns one of them

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Call for collective action to preserve oceans

200kg of fishing nets entangled in corals of Daymaniyat Islands removed to support World Oceans Day

Muscat - In line with the United Nations World Oceans Day theme of 'Revitalisation: Collective Action for the Ocean', several stakeholders came together to remove abandoned fishing nets entangled in the corals of the Daymaniyat Islands.

Oman Sail teamed up with sister company SeaOman, official logistics provider DB Schenker Oman (formerly known as Schenker Khimji's), environmental partner Environment Society of Oman (ESO) and the Environment Authority to mark the day, which is celebrated on June 8.

SeaOman provided powerboats, dive equipment, divers and cutting tools to support the volunteers, while Environment Authority waived the cost of the visit permits and assisted with the removal of the nets.

It took nine divers, seven snorkellers and surface support volunteers over two hours to safely remove the nets. In the process, the team was able to release fish that had been caught in the nets. The critically endangered Hawksbill turtles watched as the divers patiently and carefully cut the fishing nets entangled in the coral. 'It was a relief for all that the disregarded nets, that weighed approximately 200kg, were removed from the seabed,' stated a press release.

World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has reported that on average between 500,000 and 1mn tonnes of fishing equipment are abandoned in the ocean each year. In 2018, Earth.Org revealed that up to 650,000 marine animals are killed by abandoned nets every year.



(Supplied photo)

Oman has national plan for management of reefs: EA

Muscat - The sultanate, represented by the Environment Authority (EA), will mark World Oceans Day under the theme 'Revitalisation: Collective action for the ocean' on Wednesday.

The purpose of the day is to raise awareness on the impact of human actions on the ocean, develop a worldwide movement

of citizens for the ocean, and mobilise and unite the world's population for the sustainable management of the world's oceans.

EA explained that the celebration of the occasion is within the framework of Oman's efforts to save coral reefs, which are one of the most important

marine resources and ecosystems.

According to the EA, Oman has made great efforts to preserve coral reef environments by implementing a national plan for their management and developing a plan for periodic cleaning campaigns for coral reef environments.

The coast of Oman extends over 3,165km where more than 21 species of whales and dolphins, in addition to five species of sea turtles, are found.

The authority added that it is continuing its efforts to study coral reef environments in Musandam governorate, and rehabilitation and cultivation of coral

reefs in the Daymaniyat Islands Reserve.

The authority informed that it is continuing to work on organising campaigns to remove waste, especially fishing nets and gear, from coastal areas with the support of the public and private sectors and the local population.

We are hugely dependent on it for our own health and yet we continue to take more from the ocean than can be replenished

SUAAD AL HARTHI

at least 50 per cent of the planet's oxygen. "We are hugely dependent on it for our own health and yet we continue to take more from the ocean than can be replenished. It is our shared duty to protect it.

"Abandoned fishing gear is the most significant source of entanglements in all documented records regarding sea turtles and other marine animals. These entanglements result in injury and often death. We continue to advocate for all fishing communities to ensure that fishing nets are disposed of appropriately. We also call on the public to do their part - dispose of your litter correctly and limit your consumption of single use plastics to help reduce the amount of plastics entering the ocean each year."

Richard van Schie, managing director of DB Schenker Oman, said, "Being able to support World Oceans Day ties into our ongoing efforts to confront climate change by clearing the seas of man-made waste, taking action on behalf of the ocean and protecting the wildlife and the communities that depend on it."



(Supplied photo)

Al Wusta Municipality invites bids for 18 development projects

Our Correspondent Muscat

Al Wusta Municipality has invited bids for 18 development projects in the governorate, including public parks, internal roads, markets, a slaughterhouse and livestock barns.

An official of Al Wusta Municipality informed that the tenders include recreational projects - construction of public parks in the wilayats of Mahout and Al Jazer, and two parks in Haima.

Waterfront projects will also be developed in Ras Madrakah in the wilayat of Duqm, Ras Sawqra in Al Jazer and Shanna in Mahout through tenders, besides a slaughterhouse in Duqm and a market in Haima.

Additionally, several industrial and internal roads will be laid and lighting facilities erected for a bridge in the Adam-Haima road.

The last date for submission of bids is July 7.

The new development projects will be financed by a finan-

cial allocation of RO20mn for each governorate under the Governorates Development Programme.

The Ministry of Economy confirmed that the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq to increase the amount allocated to each governorates from RO10mn to RO20mn during the current five-year plan will support the implementation of strategic programmes, helping priority development of governorates and sustainable cities.

Oman to hold Saudi roadshow

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism will organise a road show in Saudi Arabia to promote the sultanate as a tourist destination.

A statement said, 'The ministry is planning to organise a road show in Saudi Arabia in coordination with our marketing representative office based in the kingdom from June 19 to 22.'

The road show will be held in Jeddah on June 19, Dammam on June 20, and Riyadh on June 21 and 22.

The participation fee is RO1,000. The ministry urged travel and tourism companies to register via https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSciuOrfRbtE7mQDP4_rQJFWFV-GY5wBMSx2f1WQ-TizJzjWONyg/viewform

Salalah Airport receives first seasonal flight of Kuwait Airways

Our Correspondent Muscat

A Kuwait Airways flight from Kuwait City landed at Salalah Airport on Tuesday. It was greeted with a traditional water salute.

The airline is scheduled to operate two weekly flights between the two destinations during the khareef season.

This season's first international flight was received by Salim bin Awad al Yafei, executive vice-president of Salalah Airport, in the presence of several officials of Oman Airports, Salalah Airport, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Royal Oman Police, and the Embassy of Kuwait in Muscat.

Welcoming the flight, Sheikh Aiman Ahmed Sultan al Hosni, CEO of Oman Airports, said, "On behalf of all partners, I am pleased to welcome Kuwait Airways at Salalah Airport. This would not have been achieved without the efforts of our colleagues at Oman Airports Com-



(Supplied photo)

mercial Unit who are keen to promote our airports."

He added that the direct flight will contribute to the consolidation of brotherly relations and support tourism, the economy and trade exchange between the two countries, representing a milestone in the bilateral partnerships.

"This is part of our endeavours to offer direct travel options to Salalah Airport through reputable airlines such as Kuwait Airways," Hosni added.

He concluded his speech by saying that these seasonal flights

to Dhofar are an important pillar for the local tourism sector, which is one of the main tourist destinations for GCC citizens and residents.

Yafei stated that the return of flights to Salalah Airport this year, after a pause of two years due to the pandemic, will meet the increasing demand for travel to Salalah from various GCC countries. "The governorate is expected to witness a significant increase in the number of visitors this year, especially with more direct flights from the Gulf countries."

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	43	27
Doha	40	27
Kuwait City	43	33
Manama	41	30
Muscat	38	29
Riyadh	45	28

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	3.53am
Sunrise	5.19am
Duhr	12.11pm
Asr	3.29pm
Maghrib	6.57pm
Isha	8.19pm

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OMAN SENDS FOOD RELIEF FOR 20,000 SOMALI FAMILIES



Oman Charitable Organisation (OCO) has begun distributing food aid among people of Mogadishu, Somalia. A statement issued by OCO on Tuesday said, "The aid is part of the programmes of the organisation for Somalia; 20,000 families will benefit from this consignment of aid." On May 2022, OCO delivered medical devices and equipment to hospitals in the Gaza Strip, as part of an urgent relief plan to help those affected in the State of Palestine. On Tuesday, the charity organised a blood donation campaign, in cooperation with the Hayah Blood Donation Team. The drive saw a large number of donors coming together for a good cause (Supplied photo)



MAFWR issued 900 water licences in May

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A total of 913 water licences were issued in May 2022, according to statistics issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR).
Maqbool Hussain al Rawahi, director of Water Licensing Department in MAFWR, said, "The licences issued include requests for registering wells, dams and aflaj, for drilling wells, and development projects in various governorates."

The ministry framed conditions and controls related to issuing water licences factoring in the requirements of community members

to issuing water licences factoring in the requirements of community members.
The ministry strives to facilitate and simplify the procedures for granting water licences while preserving aflaj as a natural water resource.
According to Rawahi, the

maximum number of licences - 242 - were issued in Dakhliyah, followed by 156 in North Batinah, 143 in Dhahirah, 131 in South Batinah, 120 in North Sharqiyah, 49 in South Sharqiyah, 36 in Buraimi, 16 in Muscat, nine in Dhofar, six in Al Wusta and five in Musandam governorate.
"The ministry deals with these projects in accordance with the technical requirements and gives conditional approvals in coordination with other government agencies," Rawahi said.
Oman received an average rainfall of 123mm in 2020 and 183mm in 2019, according to MAFWR statistics.
Ministry data indicates that the volume of surface runoff during 2020 was 913mn m3 compared to 303mn m3 in 2019.

Royal Hospital uses immunotherapy to treat cancer patient

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A medical team at The Royal Hospital has successfully treated a patient with cancer using immunotherapy.
The hospital claimed that this process has been used for the first time in Oman and the GCC. 'Immunotherapy was done as the patient's treatment with chemotherapy was difficult,' the Royal Hospital stated. The patient has Down syndrome.
Dr Alia Mohammed al Mughiriyah, consultant pediatric hematologist and oncologist at the hospital, explained that immunotherapy is provided in other countries in case of relapse of cancer. "Giving immunotherapy at an early stage of treatment is an



Dr Alia al Mughiriyah

advanced process."
Immunotherapy is the treatment of a disease by activating or suppressing the immune system. Immunotherapies designed to prompt or amplify an immune response are classified as activation immunotherapies, while immunotherapies that reduce or suppress are classified as suppression immunotherapies.

Ministry of Health starts vaccination for hajj pilgrims

Muscat - The Ministry of Health (MoH) has started vaccination for hajj pilgrims, starting from June 7.
In a statement, MoH said, 'The ministry would like to announce to citizens and residents who have been accepted to perform the hajj pilgrimage this year (1443H/2020G) that vaccines are being provided in health institutions from June 7 to July 3.'
According to the requirements of Saudi Arabia, pilgrims need to take:-
► COVID-19 vaccine (two doses)
► Quadric-vaccination against Meningococcal Meningitis (ACYW135)
► Seasonal flu vaccine
'MoH urges all citizens and residents who want to perform hajj this year to get the vaccines at least ten days before traveling. The above requirements are a prerequisite to enter Saudi Arabia.'

Zero fuel station fire in 2021; CDAA urges observance of safety guidelines

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) has urged drivers to observe safety precautions while filling fuel, especially in the summer months.
CDAA stated that although incidents of fuel station fires decreased in 2021, safety guidelines must continue to be followed to avert accidents.
Speaking to Muscat Daily, an official of CDAA informed that there was no incident of fuel station fire in the sultanate in 2021, compared to two in 2020.
"With the onset of summer and obvious increase in temper-



atures, motorists should be cautious at fuel stations because there is high risk owing to the presence of flammable materials. Fire accidents in fuel stations can lead the loss of life and property," the CDAA official said.
Elaborating on the causes of fuel station fires, he said, "Some motorists fail to comply with the safety measures issued by CDAA on health and safety

while refilling. Additionally, inability of employees to deal with a fire when it breaks out worsens the situation. Another reason is leakage of oil from the vehicle while refilling."
Measures that need to be followed to prevent fires include not smoking at filling stations at all times, not using mobile phones, turning off the engine, and not moving the vehicle before the hose has been pulled out of the fuel tank.
CDAA called on fuel marketing companies to ensure all staff are adequately trained on how to deal with any emergency or fire and adequately maintain storage tanks and dispensing pumps.

Tender Announcement

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG invites Bidders to submit their proposal for the below detailed tender:

Tender No.	Description	Tender Fee (Nonrefundable)	Tender Purchase deadline	Clarification deadline	Tender Submission Date
TENDER/2022/06/ENG/001	Construction of New Filling Station, Service Centre, Drive Through and Sales Buildings At Falaj Al Sham In Muscat Governorate	200/-	15.06.2022	19.06.2022	22.06.2022
TENDER/2022/06/ENG/002	Revamping of Sahalnoot Filling Station in Dhofar Governorate	100/-	15.06.2022	19.06.2022	22.06.2022

Bank Name & Account Number

Bank Muscat (0423005687760617)

The Conditions:

- Collection of Tenders:** Interested, specialized companies and establishments registered under grade 3 and above (in C.R) with minimum of 3 years' experience in the same field. Bidders can collect the tender documents from the procurement department by sending a copy of the payment slip to procurement@almaha.com.om the tender may be collected on any working day between 08:00 AM - 03:00 PM.
- Bank Guarantee:** The bidder should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount equivalent to (1%) of the tender value, with a validity of (90) Days from the last date of submission and addressed to Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG.
- Offer Submission:** Tender bid should be submitted a sealed envelope and addressed to the **Chairman of Tender Committee**, Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG marked with tender number and subject. Other marks or any reference must not be printed outside the envelope. The exterior of the envelope containing the tender document must not reveal the identity of the bidder.
- Submission Location:** The bid should be deposited in the tender box at Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG head office located in Ghala before 01:00 PM on the submission date.
- Any bid received after the specified date or if it does not meet the conditions will not be considered.
- Each bid shall be signed and stamped with the signature of the authorized person.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to accept, reject or cancel the tender without giving any reasons.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to add or cancel some of the works mentioned in the tender if necessary.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG is not bound to accept the lowest bid or any other bid without giving any reasons.
- For any enquiry email us at (procurement@almaha.com.om) or by calling 24610289/24610287/24610355

MARKET WATCH	
MSX30	4,129.72
Sensex	55,107.34
FOREX RATES (RO1 equals)	
Indian Rs	201.74
Pakistani Rs	517.86
Bangladeshi taka	240.23
Philippines peso	137.40
Sri Lankan Rs	933.89
*Rates as on JUNE 7 Sources: xe.com	

BRIEFS

Safe boxes struck in Iran bank heist

Thieves broke into more than 160 safe boxes at a branch of Iran's biggest bank and made off with the contents, the bank said on Tuesday.

State-owned Bank Melli said on its website that 168 rented safe boxes had been broken into at the branch, one of its most important. Neither the bank nor police revealed the amount of the loss, as is customary in such cases.

The thieves took advantage of a national holiday on Sunday to enter the branch on Enghelab Street, a major artery in Tehran.

According to Fars news agency, they forced the lock of a rear door and escaped the same way, locking the door behind them. Police denied local media reports the bank's alarm went off to alert the branch manager, who failed to respond because of previous false alarms.

Internet users said the crime "resembles a Hollywood film".

Oman to host conference of Arab insurers in 2024



Our Correspondent Muscat

The Capital Market Authority (CMA), which supervises and regulates the insurance sector in the sultanate, on Tuesday announced that Oman will host the General Arab Insurance Federation's Conference in 2024.

This major event will be jointly organised by the CMA and the Oman Insurance Association. The conference is the most important event of the Arab insurance industry as it brings together more than 2,500 participants from Arab and global insurance companies, the CMA said in a statement.

The participants in the conference will discuss key issues and topics related to the development of insurance industry at the regional and international levels.

Ahmed Ali al Ma'mari, vice president for insurance sector at the CMA, welcomed Oman's hosting of the 34th session of the General Arab Insurance Federation's Conference, which is held once in every two years.

"It reflects the confidence of the Arab and global insurance markets in the Omani insurance sector," he said.

The event will add value to Oman's insurance sector and present opportunities to high-

light the capabilities and prospects of the Omani insurance market at regional and global levels, Ma'mari added.

Sayyid Nasser Salem al Buisaidi, chairman of Oman Insurance Association, expressed his happiness that the sultanate is hosting the Arab insurers' conference in its next session, given the importance attached to this event by the Arab and global insurance industry.

He added that Oman's hosting of the conference coincides with the General Arab Insurance Federation's 60th anniversary.

Headquartered in Cairo, Egypt, the General Arab Insurance Federation was established

in 1964.

The federation holds many conferences run by experts specialised in insurance to find solutions to the challenges facing the Arab insurance market in general.

The Omani insurance market consists of 21 insurance companies and one reinsurance company. The size of the Omani insurance market is about RO500mn and the sector's total assets amount to RO1.197bn.

Oman Insurance Association is a professional institution licensed by the Ministry of Social Development and comprises all insurance companies and brokers operating in the sultanate.

World Bank slashes 2022 global growth forecast to 2.9%

Washington, US - The World Bank slashed its growth estimate for the global economy to 2.9 per cent, 1.2 percentage points below the January forecast, due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine which has caused a severe downturn.

"The world economy is expected to experience its sharpest deceleration following an initial recovery from global recession in more than 80 years," the bank said Tuesday in its Global Economic Prospects report.

The slump comes after growth recovered to 5.7 per cent in 2021 following the downturn caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Russia invasion and Western sanctions on Moscow have sent grain and oil prices soaring, and drivers around the world are facing eye-popping prices at the pump.

"The war in Ukraine, lockdowns in China, supply-chain disruptions, and the risk of stagflation are hammering growth. For many countries, recession will be hard to avoid," said World Bank President David Malpass.

The war is compounding the damage from the Covid-19 pandemic, magnifying the slowdown in the global economy, "which is



entering what could become a protracted period of feeble growth and elevated inflation," according to the report.

"This raises the risk of stagflation, with potentially harmful consequences for middle- and low-income economies alike."

The report notes some similarities to the 1970s when growth stalled and inflation skyrocketed with supply factors fueling price hikes and a long period of low interest rates.

But in contrast to that period, the US dollar is strong, and major financial institutions are in solid position.

The bank warned against trying to resolve the inflation spike with price controls or export restrictions. Malpass said it "is urgent to encourage production and avoid trade restrictions."

AFP

Al Mouj creates ideal location for SMEs to thrive

Muscat - Al Mouj Muscat has contributed to significant sustainable socio-economic growth as Oman's first Integrated Tourism Complex (ITC), with the award-winning lifestyle destination creating targeted support that has benefited 150 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

As SMEs form the backbone of the economy and contribute 15 per cent to the GDP, the sultanate recognises small and medium-sized enterprises as a key driver for growth. Small businesses create job opportunities as well as diversification in the economy, an essential factor in ensuring that an economy remains robust.

The partnership behind Al Mouj Muscat, between Majid Al Futtaim, Omran Group and Tanmia, is committed to Oman's vision of long-term sustainable expansion and its support for

SMEs has had a notable effect, details of which are set out in its Al Mouj Impact campaign.

In total, 150 SMEs are now connected to Al Mouj, with a blend of location and support from the organisation creating the ideal conditions for enterprise to flourish. The lifestyle destination attracts over 3.9mn visitors each year, and with 8,000 residents, the location has very high footfall.

Al Mouj also offers businesses access to regional and international markets as it is connected to all major transport networks. The ITC has also invested in world-class amenities, such as the Gold anchor Marina, which creates opportunities for local businesses to set up businesses that serve the growing tourism sector.

There are now 30 SMEs operating within Al Mouj with a further 120 utilising trading



platforms it supports, such as pop-up markets like Muscat Eats and Souq Es Sabt. Adding to this, Al Mouj Muscat provides access to investment and training, such as in customer service and booking systems for sea tour operators.

Al Mouj's strategy is to support companies as they establish

lifestyle, retail and leisure offering drives considerable footfall. Add to that the opportunities that it creates through including SMEs in its own marketing and its year-round calendar of events, and Al Mouj is the place to do business," she said.

Nasser al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, said, "From our inception, Al Mouj set out to have a positive socio-economic impact on Oman. Part of that is our commitment to creating an eco-system for enterprise, where local talent can thrive, where employment opportunities will be created, and where the next generation of successful businesses can grow."

Established in 2006, Al Mouj Muscat has delivered significant socio-economic benefits, including growth in the tourism sector, job creation, development, foreign direct investment as well as in the SME sector.

MSX inches down amid thin trading

Our Correspondent Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange decreased 0.13 per cent on Tuesday to close at 4,129.72 points.

Sectoral indices posted mixed performance. While Financial Index increased 0.12 per cent, Industrial Index fell 0.89 per cent and Services Index dropped 1.0 per cent. MSX Sharia Index was down by 0.87 per cent at 460.84 points.

Trading activity continued to remain weak on Tuesday. However, volumes increased by 29.3 per cent to 11.26mn shares against 8.7mn shares traded on Monday. Market turnover rose by nearly 91 per cent to RO2.35mn com-

pared with RO1.23mn recorded in the previous trading session.

The market breadth of the MSX remained highly negative with 10 advancing stocks to 26 decliners. As many as 15 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

The gainers for the day were Al Madina Investment (11.32 per cent), Aman Real Estate Investment Fund (4.44 per cent), Ahlibank (4.24 per cent), Phoenix Power (4.0 per cent) and BankDhofar (2.66 per cent).

Top losers were Sembcorp Salalah (-8.97 per cent), Gulf International Chemicals (-8.08 per cent), Voltamp Energy (-6.54 per cent), Al Hassan Engineering (-4.17 per cent) and Sohar International Bank (-3.67 per cent).



CBO issues RO183mn treasury bills

Our Correspondent Muscat

A tender of the government treasury bills (issue number 561) was issued this week by the Central Bank of Oman.

Total value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO183mn, for a maturity period of 91 days, from June 8 until September 7, 2022. The average accepted price reached RO99.607 for every RO100 bill, while the minimum accepted price arrived at RO99.605.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 1.5777 per cent and 1.584 per cent, respectively. The interest rate on the repo operations with the CBO is 1.5 per cent while the discount rate on the treasury bills discounting facility with the central bank is 2.0 per cent.

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 sur-

plus 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.

Abu Dhabi exchange reaches AED2tn milestone

Abu Dhabi, UAE - The Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange's (ADX) market capitalisation opened above AED2tn (US\$545bn) on Monday for the first time in its history, marking a landmark milestone that has made the region's youngest exchange the second largest in the Middle East in just two decades.

The 25 per cent year-to-date spike in ADX's market capitalisation was bolstered by a spate of IPOs and listings over the past year, including Abu Dhabi Ports, Fertiglabe, Adnoc Drilling, Alpha Dhabi and Multiply Group.

Most recently, petrochemicals company Borouge raised US\$2bn in an IPO and listed last week, while ADQ and Chimera Capital launched the first ADX-listed SPAC.

The significant milestone has been supported by 'ADX One,' the exchange's strategy to enhance liquidity through listing incentives, trading fees reductions and rolling out innovative products and services. The ex-



change's benchmark index, the FTSE ADX General Index, has gained 16 per cent this year, making it one of the best performing stock markets worldwide.

Since the launch of 'ADX One' at the beginning of 2021, the exchange has developed several new initiatives to boost market liquidity, including the introduction of a derivatives market in the fourth quarter of 2021. This was followed by an agreement with FTSE Russell to develop co-

branded indices, including a tradable version of the FTSE FADX 15 Index that will be launched in 2022.

ADX has also established a framework for listing Special Purpose Acquisition Company (SPAC) on the exchange, approved by the Securities and Commodities Authority (SCA) in January.

The advances in ADX's market capitalisation come on the heels of a bumper year in 2021, when its market capitalisation

more than doubled to AED1.6tn from AED750bn. That followed several new listings on the growth market, including Palm Sports, Zee Stores and Easy Lease, three subsidiaries of IHC, and an exchange traded fund (ETF). Previously known as the Second Market, the Growth Market was rebranded in April to accelerate Abu Dhabi's fast-developing ecosystem for emerging companies.

During the first quarter of 2022, the Abu Dhabi bours recorded an 87 per cent year-on-year increase in the value of total trades made in the first quarter of 2022. Traded values (buy and sell) on the exchange rose to AED202bn in the first quarter 2022 from AED108bn in the first quarter of 2021.

Meanwhile, the market value of shares owned by foreign investors in the first quarter of this year jumped 163 per cent to AED131bn from AED50bn in the same period of 2021.

WAM

EU agrees single charger standard for smartphones, in blow to Apple

Brussels, Belgium – European officials on Tuesday agreed the text of a proposed EU law imposing a standard charger for smartphones, tablets and laptops sold in the bloc, in a blow to Apple.

EU member states and MEPs believe a standard cable for all devices will cut back on electronic waste, but iPhone juggernaut Apple argues a one-size-fits-all charger would slow innovation and create more pollution.

For most portable devices the requirement for charging via a USB Type-C port will come into effect from late 2024, negotiators said, while laptops will be given more time.

The USB-C rule will also stretch to digital cameras, headphones, headsets, portable speakers and E-readers, they said.

Lawmakers agreed on the common charger based on a proposal that was made by the EU executive – the European Commission – in September, but came more than a decade after the European Parliament first pushed for it.



A file picture taken in Brussels shows plugs for mobile charger next to a European Union flag (AFP)

The decision will be formally ratified by European Parliament and among EU member states later this year before entering into effect.

"We have been able to do it in nine months, that means that we can ... move fast when there is a political will," the EU internal market commissioner Thierry

Breton said.

"We are able to say to the lobbies, 'sorry, but here it is Europe and we're working for our people,'" he said.

The 27-nation union is home to 450mn people, some of the world's richest consumers, and the imposition of the USB-C as standard could affect the entire

global market.

"This is a rule which will apply to everyone," said MEP Alex Agius Saliba, who led the negotiations for the European Parliament.

"If Apple ... or anyone wants to market their product, sell their products within our internal market, they have to abide by our

rules and their device has to be USB-C," he said.

The rules will also give shoppers the option to opt out of receiving a new charging cable when purchasing an electronic device.

'Planning ahead'

And in order to prepare for the future, the law has provisions to set a standard on wireless charging.

This was "not to end up ... legislating for a technology which is basically dying out, so we are also planning ahead," Saliba said.

Apple, which already uses USB-C connectors on some of its iPads and laptop computers, has insisted any legislation to force a universal charger for all mobiles in the European Union is unwarranted.

"The proposal is vastly disproportionate to any perceived problem," the company said in its response to the commission when the law was being drafted.

Imposing a charger standard, it argued, would stifle innovation and "reduce European consumer choice by removing more afford-

able older models from the market".

Consumers currently have to decide between phones served by three main chargers: "Lightning" for Apple handsets, the micro-USB widely used on most other mobile phones and the newer USB-C that is increasingly coming into use.

That range is already greatly simplified from 2009, when dozens of different types of chargers were bundled with mobile phones, creating piles of electronic garbage when users changed brands.

In making its proposal last year, the EU said the current situation remained wasteful and that European consumers spent approximately 2.4bn euros (US\$2.8bn) annually on stand-alone chargers they bought separately.

The European Commission had long defended a voluntary agreement it made with the device industry that was set in place in 2009 and saw a big reduction in cables, but Apple refused to abide by it.

AFP



Recep Tayyip Erdogan

Erdogan says Turkey won't raise rates

Istanbul, Turkey – Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan insisted on Monday that his government was opposed to higher interest rates even as inflation in the country soars to its highest level in nearly 25 years.

"This government will not hike interest rates. On the contrary, it will reduce them," Erdogan said in a televised address after a weekly cabinet meeting.

The Turkish central bank, which is nominally independent, holds its next policy-setting meeting on June 23. But Erdogan's comments came after official data showed that inflation in Turkey hit 73.5 per cent in May, the highest level since 1998.

Contrary to economic orthodoxy, Erdogan is convinced that high interest rates fuel inflation rather than rein it in.

AFP

European stock market plans tech-only index

Paris, France – Europe's biggest stock exchange on Tuesday set out its plan for an index focused on tech firms to boost a sector that has long lagged behind US competitors.

Euronext announced 108 firms will be part of its Euronext Tech Leaders "segment", an initiative that has drawn comparisons to the Nasdaq in New York, an exchange housing many top tech companies.

The European tech index, set to be launched in July, includes Finnish telecom giant Nokia, French software developer Ubisoft and the Netherlands-based food delivery firm Just Eat Takeaway.com.

The 108 firms have a total market capitalisation of 258bn euros (US\$276bn) and include 41 French companies.

By comparison, Google parent Alphabet, the biggest firm on the Nasdaq, has a market capitalisation of more than US\$1.5tn.

The pan-European exchange



said its ambition was "to strengthen the European tech sector and be a catalyst for the next generation of tech leaders".

As well as listing firms on its new index, the exchange said it would offer a "suite" of other services to tech companies including help with initial public offerings.

"In Europe and particularly in France, we need a platform that is able to offer initial investors... and growing companies a capacity to raise equity capital," Euronext boss Stephane Bouj-

nah told a press conference.

Boujnah dismissed the comparison with the Nasdaq, telling reporters his exchange was aiming for a completely different approach.

The desire to forge a tech sector to compete with Silicon Valley has long consumed European leaders, with French President Emmanuel Macron at the forefront.

He has invested heavily in initiatives like incubator hubs designed to foster start-ups.

AFP

Sri Lanka urgently seeks \$6bn in loans to keep economy afloat

Colombo, Sri Lanka – Cash-strapped Sri Lanka on Tuesday asked the International Monetary Fund to arrange a creditor meeting for US\$6bn in loans to help keep the country afloat during its unprecedented economic crisis.

Months of daily blackouts, long queues for petrol and record inflation have made daily life a misery in the South Asian island nation of 22mn people.

The government has already defaulted on its US\$51bn foreign debt, and a critical shortage of foreign currency has left traders unable to import adequate supplies of food, fuel and other essential goods.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said the country needed US\$5bn for its daily needs in the next six months, along with another billion to stabilise Sri Lanka's rapidly depreciating rupee.

"We call on the International Monetary Fund to hold a conference to help unite our lending



People queue up to buy LPG gas cylinders in Colombo on June 5 (AFP)

partners," the premier told parliament.

He said a meeting under IMF auspices with China, Japan and India – Sri Lanka's three biggest bilateral lenders – would be a "great strength" in helping source more loans.

Sri Lanka is already in talks

with the IMF for a bailout and has appointed international experts to help restructure its debt, about half of which is in international sovereign bonds.

Wickremesinghe again warned the country was heading for serious food shortages and said the United Nations had

agreed to issue an urgent appeal on Thursday to raise humanitarian funds.

A disastrous ban on agricultural chemical imports, introduced by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa last year, dramatically curtailed crop yields and led to protests by farmers.

The policy was reversed months later, but Sri Lanka is now out of foreign currency to import fertiliser, pesticides and other much-needed farming chemicals.

Wickremesinghe became premier in May after his predecessor, Mahinda Rajapaksa, the elder brother of the president, stepped down after months of protests against the government's economic mismanagement.

At least nine people were killed and many more wounded in riots that followed an attack on peaceful demonstrators outside President Rajapaksa's office in Colombo last month.

AFP

Global stocks tumble as World Bank slashes economic growth forecast

London, UK – Major stock markets fell Tuesday as investors fret over central bank actions against inflation and the World Bank cut its global economic growth forecast following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The World Bank slashed its growth estimate from 4.1 per cent to 2.9 per cent, warning that "recession will be hard to avoid" in many countries.

Craig Erlam, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said the markets gave back the bulk of Monday's gains "in a sign of ongoing uncertainty as to the direction of equity markets and the economy".

Stock markets in London, Paris and Frankfurt, already in the red earlier, were dragged down further by a weak opening on Wall Street.

Forex.com analyst Fawad Razaqzada warned that markets



would continue on their downward trend for some time to come as central banks wind down easy money policies in efforts to combat soaring inflation.

"We are still in a bear market and with central banks ending (quantitative easing) and reducing their balance sheets, the good days of the stock markets may well be behind us," he said.

"Keep your seat belts fas-

tened because there will be more turbulence ahead, as central banks are forced to withdraw support."

Earlier in Asia, Sydney's stock market had closed down more than one per cent after the Australian central bank announced a bigger-than-forecast rate hike to quell inflation.

Elsewhere, the pound fell against both the dollar and euro,

even though British Prime Minister Boris Johnson survived a vote of no confidence from his own Conservative MPs.

"Although the leader came out victorious, the triggering of the confidence vote itself along with the fact that 41 per cent of Tory MPs failed to back him are both politically corrosive, leaving the prime minister wounded," said Victoria Scholar, head of investment at Interactive Investor.

"History suggests that this could mark the beginning of the end of his time as prime minister."

Johnson has been under fire for months after a string of scandals, including the so-called "Partygate" controversy over Covid lockdown-breaking events at Downing Street, where the prime minister was found to have broken the law.

AFP

US trade deficit posts sharp retreat on falling imports

New York, US – A jump in exports and similar decline in imports caused the US trade gap in April to reverse most of the prior month's increase, retreating from a record to US\$87.1bn, according to government data released Tuesday.

The US\$20.6bn drop from March was the largest decline on record, the Commerce Department reported.

Imports fell by US\$12.1bn, half of which was due to the decline in purchases of consumer goods, added to a drop in industrial supplies, while auto imports rose, according to the data.

Companies in recent months have rushed to replenish depleted inventories amid strong demand from American shoppers, and while spending so far has not slowed significantly, sky-high inflation has raised concerns consumers will close their wallets.



Container ships are seen docked at the Port of Oakland, California (AFP)

Exports increased by US\$8.5bn, pushed by jumps in industrial supplies, and foods, notably soybeans, the report said.

While analysts say a narrower trade gap could help growth in the second quarter, Mahir Rasheed of Oxford Economics cautioned that the trade deficit is likely to be a "sharp drag" on economic expansion this year.

"In the near term, export demand will continue to face strong headwinds from fragile eco-

nom conditions in Europe amid the ongoing war in Ukraine, while the threat of new lockdowns will keep China's growth outlook uncertain despite the reopening of Shanghai," he said.

The US trade deficit with China decreased US\$8.5bn to US\$34.9bn in April, on a big drop in imports.

For the year-to-date, the total trade gap increased 41.1 per cent from the same period in 2021, according to the data.

AFP

Lulu, KR and P&G UAE create Guinness record



Lulu Hypermarket in association with Khimji Ramdas and P&G UAE, made a successful bid to break into the Guinness World Record for the Largest Packaged Product Sentence created.

The feat read 'UP TO 100% STAIN REMOVAL, 0% POWDER RESIDUE AVAILABLE NOW IN LULU' all in capital letters with the help of a mammoth

12,430 Ariel & Tide Nano Pod packets, a press release said.

The record breaking achievement was adjudicated by the Guinness World Records team and was an engagement activity to mark the new benchmark in laundry innovation and technology. The results of the attempt were announced at LuLu Hypermarket, Avenues Mall on June 6

in the presence of officials from Khimji Ramdas, Lulu, the Guinness team, as well as officials of Procter & Gamble UAE.

Speaking about the achievement, Sridhar Moosapeta, CEO Consumer Products Cluster, Khimji Ramdas, stated, "The Guinness World Record is a wonderful recognition of our hard work and partnership with

Lulu. We hope that the product exceeds the expectations of our customers. At Khimji Ramdas, we are committed to introducing new and innovative products that make life easier for our customers."

Ananth A V, director - Oman, Sri Lanka and India of Lulu Group, remarked, "We are extremely happy to be part of Khimji Ram-

das and P&G's celebrations, and we congratulate the team for this remarkable achievement. This accomplishment is even more special considering how the entire team has worked harmoniously towards this commendable record. I congratulate the determination demonstrated by one and all towards successfully attaining this goal."



The world's most recognisable laundry brands, Ariel & Tide, recently launched the first-of-its-kind NANO Pods to meet consumers' needs in the Gulf. The revolutionary Ariel & Tide NANO pods delivers unprecedented levels of cleaning power and is the newest form of detergent in the world, designed to solve the region's number one laundry challenge of getting up to 100% stain removal with 0% powder residues on clothes. It is also the first ever laundry innovation exclusively designed for

the people of the GCC and is available in all supermarkets across the GCC.

The single unit-dose sachet is built from the finest powder detergent and super soluble film that instantly dissolves upon contact with water, perfectly dosed for ease and convenience. Upon dissolving in water, the sachet releases fine, highly concentrated detergent particles that penetrate deep into the fibres of fabrics to give the ultimate stain removal without powder residues.



Al Futtaim Malls win two ICSC MAXI 2022 awards

Al Futtaim Malls has won two awards at the International Council of Shopping Centres (ICSC) MAXI ceremony, which took place during ICSC LAS VEGAS Conference on May 23.

The event is held in recognition of creative and innovative practices which paint the picture for the future of the industry, highlighting events, campaign and initiatives that add value to iconic destinations globally, a press release said.

Taking home the gold and silver trophies for campaigns in Egypt and the UAE, Al Futtaim Malls was recognised for excellence within the global shopping centre industry and outstanding achievement in retail campaign marketing and development. The awarded campaigns have demonstrated a reflection of market trends in an ever-changing industry.

Cairo Festival City Mall's 'All for Summer' campaign received a Gold Award in the Experiential

category, which focused on Egyptians' love for summer. To establish the mall as a destination for the season and maximise footfall and sales, the two-month activation engaged customers, generated traffic and elongated visitation hours while building a lasting connection.

In addition, Dubai-based Festival Plaza's Book Club won a Silver Award in the Community category. Launched in 2021, the Festival Plaza Book Club has become a much-anticipated fixture on Dubai's literary scene, attracting book lovers from far and wide.

Genevieve Colaco, regional general manager, Marketing & Customer Experience at Al Futtaim Malls, said, "The International Council of Shopping Centres MAXI Awards is among the benchmarks for industry excellence. We are honoured to have been awarded for two very successful campaigns, as it highlights our commitment."

NBO welcomes Ministry of Housing delegation

Continuing to foster partnerships with the public sector, National Bank of Oman (NBO) welcomed 60 members from Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning for a special learning and development session.

The event was part of the Ministry's leadership development programme, and aims to initiate a network for sharing best practices to enhance the delivery of services and empower professionals, contributing directly to the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, a press release said.

Mustahil al Mamari, head of CEO Office, spoke about the bank's Tamkeen programme that acts as a catalyst to drive NBO's strategy forward by focusing on simplifying the internal customer workplace towards better services for external customers and to achieve the set target. Said al Marhoobi, head of Customer Experience, shared the bank's approach to the customer experience journey and Dr Ali al



Sheikaili, head of Digital Channels gave a brief about the various digital banking services and features. The Ministry members also visited the bank's Ibtikar Lab, which taps into the talent of its staff to come up with innovative ideas and solutions, and finally

were introduced to NBO's portfolio of products and services.

Hassan Shaban said, "As the country's national bank, we enjoy a solid and long-term relationship with the government sector and we continue to support them, whether it's through

knowledge-sharing or by providing our innovative financial solutions. It was our pleasure to welcome the esteemed members from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning. By sharing our experience and best practices, we are strengthening our national capabilities, and more broadly, Oman's standing as an empowered and knowledge-based society."

NBO has long been an active participant in supporting government projects that add value to the development and diversification of the economy. The bank also partnered lately with the Ministry of Labour to provide supplementary courses to graduates of the national leadership development programme.

Sohar Islamic inaugurates branch in Khasab

Sohar Islamic - Sohar International's Islamic window, officially inaugurated its new branch in Wilayat Khasab recently, making it the very first Islamic bank in the Governorate of Musandam.

The inaugural ceremony welcomed H E Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidi, Minister of State and Governor of Musandam, as guest of honour, and also witnessed the presence of Ahmed al Musalmi, CEO of Sohar International and Abdul Wahid al Murshidi, chief Islamic Banking officer at Sohar International, among other officials from the bank.

Musalmi said, "The opening of



Khasab branch is another milestone in our strategy and to expand our Islamic Banking network across the nation to meet existing and potential market demands. This latest opening for Sohar Islamic in the Governorate of Musandam is essential to our drive in promoting higher levels of financial inclusion for customers seeking Islamic banking facilities. In planning for such strategic activities, we always make sure that we are aligned with the government's socio-economic development plans and are contributing positively to the economy overall."

Manned with an experienced

team of professionals, the branch ensures quick, convenient, and responsive banking services catered to meet the varying needs of all customer segments. Besides catering to customers with the full range of Sharia compliant products and services, the branch also provides a 24-hour fully functional ATM/CDM.

The branch is open to welcome customers and visitors from 8am - 2pm from Sunday till Thursday. With the addition of this branch, Sohar Islamic's network of branches includes 9 full-fledged branches in Oman offering a comprehensive gamut of innovative banking solutions.

Ras Al Hamra hosts Omantel Monthly Pairs contest

The inaugural Omantel Monthly Pairs competition took place at Ras Al Hamra golf club on May 27 with participation of 48 golfers (maximum field size).

The event was played in a format of 'country pairs' where by two golfers of the same nationality play together as a team. A total of twelve countries were represented with two teams playing under the United Nations flag as the team members were from two different countries, a press release said.

A total of 24 teams took part with several teams decorating their golf carts with their country flags making the event feel like a



mini-golf Olympics in Oman.

The competition commenced with a 3pm shotgun start and was scored under stableford format.

With much improved temperatures and pleasant light winds following the recent heat wave, it was a perfect day for golf

at Ras Al Hamra.

A team from Ireland, represented by Trevor Grainger and Gordon Mooney, secured the top

spot with a score of 48 stableford points with the second place going to a team of Jas Dhanju and Atulya Sharma, representing

India, who scored 46 points. In third place was a team from Oman, represented by Haider al Lawati and Suhail al Junaidi, who

scored 44 points winning on countback from a team of Terence and Michelle Shelby, representing South Africa, who also scored 44 points.

Simon Walker, Ras Al Hamra Golf Club captain, thanked Omantel for their support in promoting golf in Oman and at the club. He also thanked all the participants who took part in this inaugural event which will now become a monthly fixture at Ras Al Hamra golf club with different formats played every month. Special thanks to the golf operations and F&B teams at the club who put considerable effort to ensure the success of the event.

Bank Muscat honoured by Ministry of Social Development

Bank Muscat was recently honoured by the Ministry of Social Development at a grand event held under the patronage of H H Sayyid Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, assistant secretary general of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Cabinet Affairs, in recognition of its pioneering role in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

The accolade was received by Sheikh Waleed K al Hashar, CEO, Bank Muscat, at the ceremony which was attended by a number of ministers, undersecretaries and senior officials from public and private sectors, a press release said.

Hashar said, "Bank Muscat's programmes and social initiatives are aligned to Oman's development goals, especially the pillar of CSR and Partnership in Oman Vision 2040, and this award is a great honour and inspiration to drive forward the bank's pioneering role in social responsibility. We thank the Ministry of Social Development for this accolade, and for enabling public-private partnership in a manner that benefits our society and the nation.

Bank Muscat always pays great attention to occasions of national importance, community-based activities and social responsibility programmes, including those that aim to develop facilities and services for persons with disabilities. It is our privilege to continue to work tirelessly to serve everyone better, every day, through a number of sustainable initiatives and programmes."

Every year, as part of its commitment, Bank Muscat implements different CSR and sustainability programmes that serve various segments of society including the youth and children, people with special needs, social welfare families, entrepreneurs, students and communities across the country.

It is a matter of great pride that Bank Muscat works in partnership closely with the Ministry of Social Development on a number of programmes, including the Tadhmun programme, which has benefitted over 1,690 families since it was first launched in 2013.

Earlier in 2021, the Bank provided laptops and tablets to 1,240 students from low-income families with the aim of supporting the government's efforts to make online education available for all students in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through its partnership with the ministry, the bank has supported a number of students facing financial constraints in completing their higher education.

In line with its commitment to helping persons with disabilities integrate into mainstream society, the bank previously partnered with the ministry for a number of activities including the construction of a playground at the Al Aman Rehabilitation Centre for children with severe disabilities and a sports field at the Al Wafa Centre for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities.

The bank has also provided an agricultural Greenhouse at the Vocational Rehabilitation and Evaluation Center in Al Khoudh to help in the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities.

In 2022, Bank Muscat partnered with the Omani Association of the Hearing Impaired to provide a number of hearing aids to school and university students in Oman while training a number of its employees at different branches across the Sultanate in Arabic Sign Language so as to improve financial inclusion for all.

For the past five years, the bank has also extended its strong support to the Fak Kurba initiative launched by the Oman Lawyers Association to help secure the release of over 1,000 people, especially from lower income groups, who have been jailed for failing to clear financial obligations.



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Dubai's Yiwu Market eyes trade revolution

Scheduled to open soon in the Jebel Ali Free Zone (Jafza), Yiwu Market will be the first smart free-zone market in the Middle East to cater to the retail and wholesale industries.

The market is a result of a partnership between DP World and the China Commodity City Group which built and manages the world's largest wholesale market in China for small commodities, spanning over six million square metres and attracting nearly 210,000 daily visitors.

Dubai's Yiwu Market spans over 200,000 square metres, split between 324 customs-bonded warehouses and 1,600 mainland showrooms. Currently, 99 per cent of the showrooms are already occupied.

The AED 600 million investment is just the first phase of the Dubai Traders Market (DTM). It will enable businesses to access wholesale discounts with reduced supply chain costs and turnaround times by leveraging Dubai's strategic location, and DP World's advanced logistics solutions.

Documentary on 'Going Circular' screened in Dubai

Commemorating World Environment Day, Unilever, in partnership with the UAE Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, the UAE Ministry of Economy and Emirates Nature-WWF (World Wildlife Fund), hosted a private screening of the new environmental documentary 'Going Circular'.

Attended by environmental advocates, youth boards, industry partners, and members of the local press, 'Going Circular' the new documentary by the Oscar-winning producers of 'My Octopus Teacher' revolves around the concept of circularity - a system of economics and design that eliminates waste and saves the planet's resources by utilising solutions inspired by nature.

In line with the UAE National Climate Change Plan 2017-2050, the implementation of circular economy in certain identified sectors is a key agenda for the UAE given its linkage to lowering material and resource consumption and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Transitioning to a circular economy can help mitigate carbon dioxide emissions that emerge from extractive industries, manufacturing, construction, transportation and other sectors.

As part of the screening, a panel of speakers addressed the current environmental concerns in the UAE as well as those for a circular economy.

Oman Air returns to terminal 4 at London Heathrow

Oman Air has announced that its daily Muscat to London flight will return to Terminal 4 at London Heathrow Airport (LHR), effective 22 June.

Oman Air has flown a daily flight into Terminal 2 on a temporary basis for the past one and a half years of post-pandemic operations. The presence at one of the world's busiest airports will further streamline the customer journey on one of Oman Air's signature routes, as Terminal 4 provides guests with a world-class shopping experience, including retail shops, booksellers, electrical outlets, souvenir shops, and much more, a press release said.

Oman Air passengers flying out of Terminal 4 will continue to enjoy access to the dedicated Lounge, which offers state of the art amenities to premium travellers prior to their journey.

Oman Air welcomes all guests to the Sultanate of Oman on board its award-winning flights. All remaining COVID-19 precautionary safety measures and procedures in place at airports across Oman were lifted on May 22. Guests departing Oman should, however, ensure that they are aware of all pre-departure requirements and requirements during their flights, which are provided at omanair.com.



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Nexen Tire scoops two coveted Red Dot Awards in Germany

Leading global tyre brand Nexen Tire came away with a pair of prestigious prizes at the renowned Red Dot Awards 2022 held in Germany recently. They were the latest in a series of accolades garnered by the reputable Korean tyre brand over the past several years, a press release said.

Nexen Tire's N'blue 4Season 2 and N'blue 4Season Van scooped the coveted honours in the product design category of this year's Red Dot Awards - one of the world's best known design competitions. More than 7,900 product entries from over 60 countries competed for recognition in this category.



They were evaluated against nine design elements, including aesthetics, functionality, quality, ergonomics, durability, and innovation.

An all-weather tyre that performs reliably even in the most challenging climatic conditions, the N'blue 4Season 2 is simply revolutionary in its design with a wide range of grooves on its surface for smooth drainage performance on wet roads. The N'blue 4Season 2 is ideal for passenger cars, the equally successful N'blue 4Season Van is an all-season tyre designed specifically for vans.



OOMCO partners with Dhofar Insurance and Waypoint Systems

Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) has signed with top insurance provider Dhofar Insurance, and specialist insurtech firm Waypoint systems & Auratech Technologies to offer car warranty services at its service stations.

This unique programme offers clients repairs to car engines due to sudden or unforeseen breakdowns, just on purchase of oil change service and lube packages, in which this is embedded from its car care service center 'OptimoSwift Service Centre' a press release said.

The programme covers the cost of both, parts and labour, for the car's engine and will be available at all Oman Oil OptimoSwift Service Centres.

Oman Oil plans to extend the offering later to cover comprehensive dealer warranty repairs for cars that are out of dealer warranties.

This is a first time ever initiative in the car industry in the region and is designed to give utmost peace of mind for car owners whereby not only services but even repairs are taken care of for their car engines due to sudden and unforeseen breakdowns.

Tarik al Junaidi, CEO of OOMCO, said, "Our focus at OOMCO is to provide customers with the best-in-class services to meet the high demands in the automotive industry in Oman. Along with our partners, we are addressing a gap in the market for the unforeseen repair of engines of vehicles where the manufacturer and dealer warranties have otherwise expired.

We are delighted to be able to provide customers with the technical expertise of our qualified staff, genuine parts, and timely service, ensuring they have absolute peace of mind when driving their cars."

Sunil Kohli, CEO of Dhofar Insurance Company added, "Dhofar Insurance has always endeavored to bring world class insurance products to the Sultanate of Oman.

We are thrilled to partner with Oman Oil Marketing Company, a leader in fuel marketing to give innovative product offerings to its customers."

Training held for early education teachers

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Private Schools, Early Education Department, continues to implement the training seminar 'Correcting the recitation of the Holy Qur'an (Juz Amma) for early education stage teachers'.

The seminar is being held at Al Awael Private School (Al Khoud Branch) and continues for five consecutive days, and targets 25 teachers from the schools of Seeb and Bausher, a press release said.

The seminar aims to correct the teachers' recitation, including the 'obvious melody and hidden melody' in the recitation, train teachers to achieve the intonation movements correctly, and evaluate their letter pronunciation. It deals with the provisions of ghanan (1 and 2), the provisions of the modud (1 and 2), the provisions of amplification and thinning, and correcting the recitation of parameters with practical application.

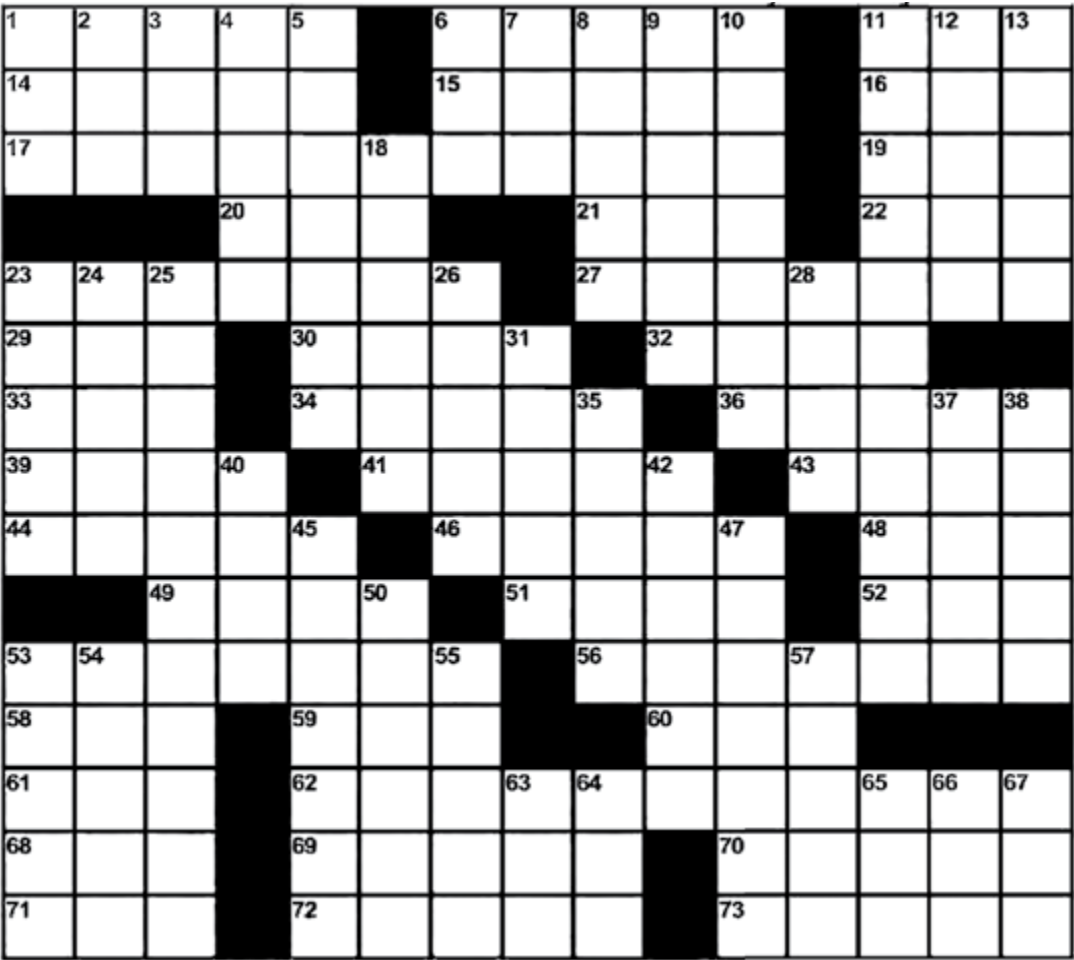
The seminar also focuses on the practical and applied aspect of recitation with exposure to the theoretical aspect necessary to adjusting Qur'anic performance. This seminar comes based on the supervisory visits carried out by the Technical Supervision Department.

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DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**

 - 1) "The Reed Show"
 - 6) Garden bulb
 - 11) Impressive degree
 - 14) Steer clear of
 - 15) Protective layer
 - 16) Apiece, in scores
 - 17) Wood lighters?
 - 19) Game for "it"
 - 20) "Yo!"
 - 21) Shake a leg
 - 22) Dream Team country
 - 23) Involve deeply
 - 27) Emancipate
 - 29) Secret agent org.
 - 30) Carve in stone
 - 32) Like a pink steak
 - 33) Guinness World Records suffix
 - 34) Put off
 - 36) Health store beans (var.)
 - 39) Brought into play
 - 41) Some bays
 - 43) Viral internet item
 - 44) Fiery funeral mounds
 - 46) Trials and tribulations, essentially
 - 48) Subsidy
- 49) Part of a foot

51) Protein, often

52) Genetic material

53) Freeway catastrophe

56) Offspring acquired by marriage

58) "Aviv" header

59) Bird that can't take flight

60) Address for a dot-com

61) Foreman vanquisher

62) Old cinema star

68) Felt topper

69) "+" pole

70) Barely leading on the scoreboard

71) Service charge

72) Have a hunch

73) Three-player cardgames

DOWN

1) Beaver's work

2) Egg cells

3) "Ask_ what your country ..."

4) Corner of the market

5) Clung

6) Young'un
- 7) Certain machine gun

8) Ness and Lomond

9) More like a squid's defense

10) Former Spanish coins

11) Time for the elderly?

12) World-weary

13) Pond buildup

18) It may be beaten or bucked

23) Become frozen

24) Hip-hop's Elliott

25) Appear in thin air

26) Brilliant acclaim

28) Gift tag word

31) Female seal group

35) Affirmative responses

37) Acid type

38) It's hardly a convertible

40) Some animal shelters

42) Lady Liberty, for one

45) Frameworks

47) Common sound systems

50) Caring and decent to others

53) Group on the payroll
- 54) Donnybrook

55) Stage, as a show

57) Sound of a BB striking tin

63) Things displayed at

checkpoints

64) "Originally named"

65) Narc's org.

66) Caught off base

67) CD predecessors
- NOTE PAD**
- | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| L | A | D | S | | B | O | L | T | S | | S | A | K | E |
| A | S | E | A | | A | W | A | R | E | | W | H | I | R |
| B | A | L | L | | C | A | N | D | Y | | C | H | E | E |
| S | P | E | A | R | | E | S | T | E | E | M | S | | |
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| T | O | P | | | T | A | P | A | | R | E | P | A | S |
| A | M | A | | | I | C | O | N | S | | E | T | C | H |
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YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Do you tell the truth or take that dare? If it's up to you, you say yes to both! No challenge can stump you for long. You bring it to all chores, quizzes, or competitions that leave your lessers scratching their heads in confusion. You're completely fearless when it comes to taking on any rules, and you're quite willing to go above and beyond, particularly if it lets you exercise a new talent or skill.

Who can keep up with you?

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You're expansive, genuine and full of vigor, and that should set the tone for your day.

Making new contacts and finding new ways to learn more about your people, or those you'd like to bring closer, is easier than usual for you too. With this kind of lovely warmth, it's all a piece of cake.

Tonight, try to set up some fun activity so everyone can get together and rela

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

One thing is vital for you to get much satisfaction from life, and it's not cash, romance, or rock stardom. No, it's a good sense of humor. With that, everything feels like a win. Without it, everything feels like a distraction. Luckily, you can appreciate the silly side of almost anything, and that talent is infectious. You're an especially fun companion right now, and most people are glad to be close to you and your positive attitude.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. The Trendalyzer software, which enabled display of information in animated bubble graphs, was originally developed by a team working where?
- A. Bjarne Stroustrup
- B. Google
- C. Linus Torvalds
- D. Gapminder Foundation

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

They say that water always seeks its own level, and your energy delivers on that lesson. Like-minded people should help you get your life in motion now.

Seek out and bond with those people you know are similar to or compatible with your personal style. Opposites certainly do attract, but at times like these they could just draw more conflict than anything else and stymie your efforts.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You have a really hard time dealing with it when you see someone being treated unfairly. It totally offends your sense of justice. For now, you're feeling extra feisty and totally up for a big, bruising fight. You just need a mask and a cape to turn into a superhero defending anyone who's been misused or abused. Your motives are impeccable and your powers are tremendous, so go right ahead and find someone to protect.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Listen carefully and you might be able to hear some grumbles of discontent from colleagues or even your boss. Don't worry too much, but try to keep their objections in mind as you go about marshaling resources for the next big push you've got to take care of. You work hard and you need access to the highest-quality supplies to do things right, but others could feel like they're being left out.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Someone is trying to get a rise out of you by acting in an unusual or controversial way. They could be deliberately saying and doing things in order to get your attention. Could it be that they have a little crush on you? Probably. But to you, their weird behavior is nothing you can't roll with, so their little plan is going to backfire on them! They have underestimated how smart you are, but they're still intrigued. Enjoy the chase.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

To encourage more growth in one of your friendships, you should be more generous with your constructive criticism. This person can take honesty, and they want you to be honest with them. You just have to be sure that you give them that honesty with a coating of sugar. Focus on the positive and amp up your enthusiasm before telling them the downside of their behavior. You have a right to be a more active part of this relationship, and in order to do so you have to speak up more.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You know what happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object, right? You know it can be a lot more fun than people give it credit for, especially if both parties know how to give. When it comes to your relationships, don't ask how much you can get. Try instead asking how much you can both benefit. If you both can give a little, you should move forward quite a lot. If you both can give a lot, you might just end up somewhere memorable!

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You're feeling a bit too much impulsively extravagant right now, but it sure feels good! Go right ahead and enjoy these freakishly wild and wacky times, but do remember to return to business as usual before the end of the day.

Hold off on the racy humor, major purchases on your credit card, or telling off your parents for the hundredth time. After all, you do still need to work with these people tomorrow.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You need to tune out from the madness a bit and give yourself some quiet time. Take a break from the dramatic fireworks going on at work or at home, and be sure not to wade into the fray even if you're positive you could smooth things over. You're quite persuasive, of course, but for now your special brand of personal energy could actually intensify the situation to an explosive level that has unpleasant results for all involved.

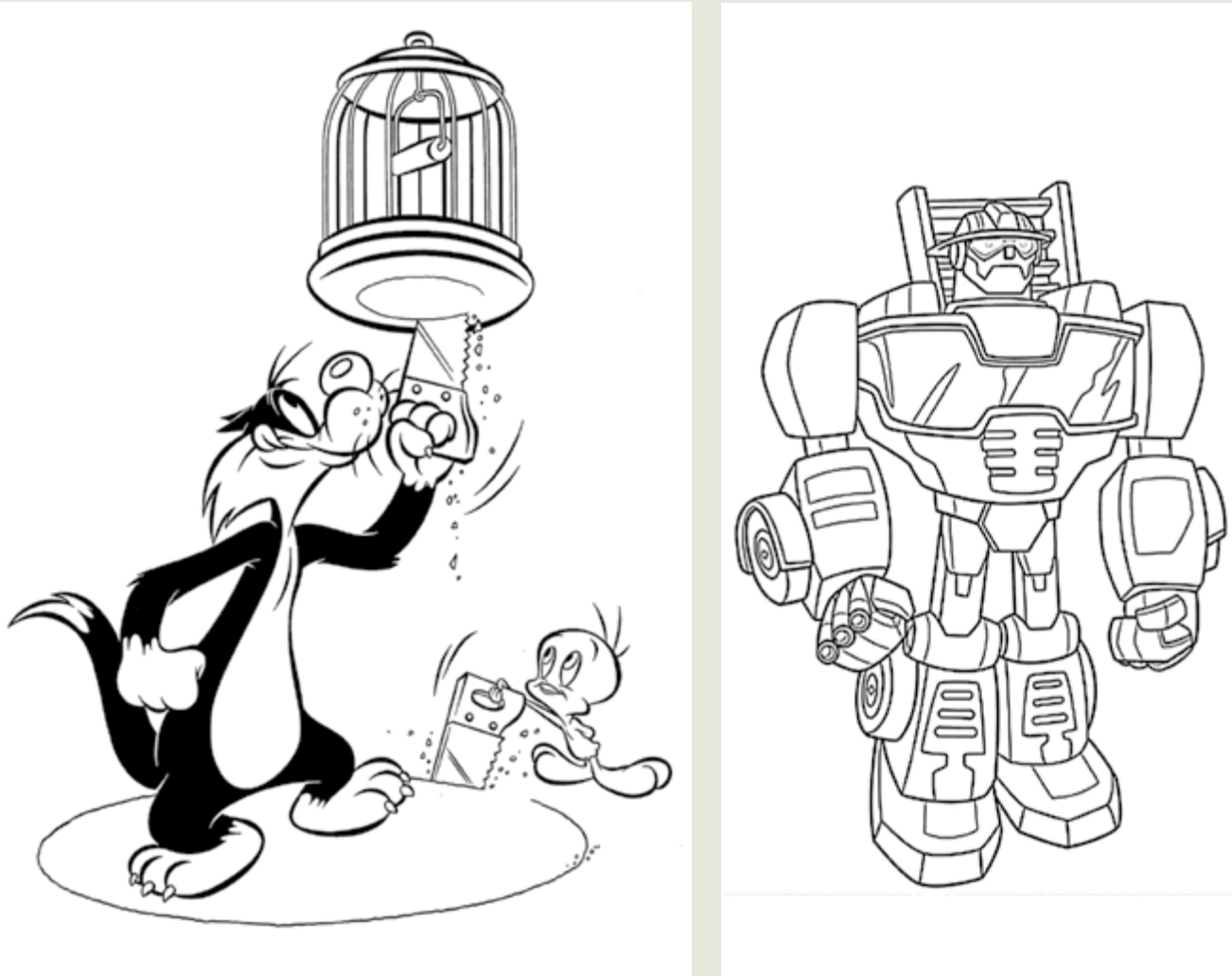
PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Keep pushing even if it gets repetitive, especially if someone keeps bugging you who just doesn't get the message. Be totally firm and draw clear boundaries that they can't cross, or you could find yourself stuck right in the middle of their insane drama as a supporting character.

Back off and keep your mind occupied with your own matters if you want to take care of it quickly.

Answers: 1.D 2.B 3.D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

T	S	T	A
O	I	B	U
Y	A	U	B
B	P	Y	T

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

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

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

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

US, S Korea fly warplanes after North's missile tests

Seoul, South Korea - South Korea and the United States flew warplanes including stealth fighter jets over waters around the Korean peninsula on Tuesday in a fresh show of force following recent missile tests by the North, Seoul said.

Sixteen South Korean warplanes, including F-35 stealth fighters and four US F-16 jets, formed an attack squadron over the West Sea - also known as the Yellow Sea - to 'respond to the enemy threat', Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement on Tuesday.

The allies 'demonstrated their strong ability and will to strike quickly and accurately against any provocation from North Korea', it added.

The air manoeuvres, which involved some 20 warplanes, come a day after the allies fired eight ballistic missiles into the Sea of Japan in the wake of Pyongyang's Sunday weapons tests.

On Sunday, North Korea fired eight short range ballistic missiles from four different locations in the space of 30 minutes - one of its largest-ever tests, analysts said.

The nuclear-armed country has carried out a blitz of sanctions-busting weapons tests this year, including firing an intercontinental ballistic missile at full range for the first time since 2017.

US and South Korean officials have been warning for weeks that Kim Jong Un's regime is preparing to carry out a fresh nuclear test.



South Korean warplanes, including F-35 stealth fighters, and US F-16 jets flying in tactical formation in airspace over South Korea on Tuesday (AFP)

Any nuclear test would be in complete violation of UN Security Council resolutions. The entire world will respond in a strong and clear manner. We are prepared

WENDY SHERMAN

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, in Seoul on a three-day visit, warned there

would be a 'swift and forceful' response were Pyongyang to go ahead with what would be its

seventh such test.

"Any nuclear test would be in complete violation of UN Security Council resolutions," she told reporters after meeting with her South Korean counterpart.

The entire world will respond in a 'strong and clear manner', she said. "We are prepared," she added.

Sherman said the United States was still willing to en-

gage in dialogue with North Korea, saying that Washington 'harbours no hostile intent towards' Pyongyang.

Tuesday's air manoeuvres are the third such joint show of military force by the allies under South Korea's hawkish new President Yoon Suk-yeol, who has vowed a tougher stance against Pyongyang.

AFP

HK not becoming 'police state', says city's top cop

Hong Kong, China - Hong Kong is not becoming a 'police state', the city's top law enforcement officer said on Tuesday, days after his officers stamped out the city's once-permitted commemorations marking Beijing's deadly Tiananmen crackdown.

The Chinese business hub is preparing for an upcoming leadership change as well as the 25th anniversary of the city's handover from Britain, for which President Xi Jinping is widely expected to visit.

Speaking to local outlet HK01 about beefed-up security activity around the event, commissioner Raymond Siu Chak-yee rejected criticism that the police were becoming too powerful. "A police state is where the government forcibly controls various aspects of people's life with administrative measures and without going through legal procedures. Do people think Hong Kong is like that?" he said.

"Hong Kong is a society of rule of law, not a police state."

His comments come after police arrested six people on Saturday as authorities pounced on any attempt to publicly remember China's 1989 crackdown on peaceful protesters.

Amnesty International has accused authorities of 'harassment and indiscriminate targeting' for the arrests.

Police closed the site of a once annual Tiananmen vigil and jampacked the surrounding area, one of the busiest shopping districts in Hong Kong, with officers.

People were stopped and

searched for carrying flowers, wearing black and, in one case, carrying a toy tank box.

On Tuesday authorities rolled out a 'counter-terrorism reporting hotline' for residents to report 'violent acts, suspected terrorism-related activities, in particular extremist plots'. People would be paid for 'reliable' information, they said.

Protest documentary

Since Beijing imposed a national security law on Hong Kong in 2020 after large and sometimes violent pro-democracy demonstrations, authorities have cracked down on dissent.

In another interview with the *South China Morning Post*, Siu 'advised' residents they should not watch or download an award-winning documentary about the 2019 protests if they are uncertain about the legal risk. The film, *Revolution of Our Times*, has recently become widely available on US streaming platform Vimeo.

Siu did not however specify whether the movie or the production team had violated any law or had been investigated by the force's national security unit. "If they're not sure whether this would commit (offences under) the national security law, then I would advise them to try to distance themselves from doing such acts," Siu told the *Post*.

Produced by Hong Kong director Kiwi Chow, the movie takes its name from a then popular - but now outlawed - protest slogan.

AFP

Countries submit motion to censure Iran to UN atomic energy watchdog

Vienna, Austria - The United States, Britain, France and Germany have submitted a motion to the UN atomic energy watchdog to censure Iran over its lack of cooperation with the agency, two diplomats said on Tuesday.

'The text was submitted overnight' from Monday to Tuesday, a European diplomat told AFP. A second diplomat confirmed the news.

The resolution urging Iran to cooperate fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) marks the first time since June 2020 when a similar motion censuring Iran was adopted.

It is a sign of growing Western impatience after talks to revive the 2015 landmark nuclear accord with Iran stalled in March.

The vote is likely to happen on Thursday during the week-long meeting of the IAEA's 35-member Board of Governors, one of the diplomats said.

In a report late last month, the IAEA said it still had questions that were 'not clarified' regarding traces of enriched uranium previously found at three sites, which Iran had not declared as having hosted nuclear activities.

IAEA head Rafael Grossi told reporters on Monday after opening the board meeting that he hoped 'to solve these things once and for all'.

The negotiations to revive the accord started in April 2021 with the aim of bringing the United States back into the deal, lifting sanctions and getting Iran to scale back its stepped-up nuclear programme.



IAEA head Rafael Grossi (AFP)

The deal - promising Tehran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs in its nuclear programme - started to fall apart in 2018 when the then US president Donald Trump withdrew from it.

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh told state TV on Monday that Iran would reject the resolution, saying it would have 'a negative impact both on the general direction of our cooperation with the IAEA and on our negotiations'. China and Russia - who with Britain, France and Germany are parties to the Iran nuclear deal - have warned that any resolution could disrupt the negotiation process.

"Russia will not associate itself with such a resolution," Russia's ambassador to the UN in Vienna, Mikhail Ulyanov, said in a tweet late on Monday.

Analysts say the high stakes negotiations are unlikely to fall apart because of the resolution.

AFP

Israel coalition government loses key vote

Jerusalem - Israel's government suffered a defeat at the hands of the opposition on Monday which voted down a push to uphold Israeli law in settlements on the occupied West Bank, posing a challenge to the ruling coalition.

In force since Israel's 1967 occupation of the West Bank the law, giving settlers in the West Bank the same rights as citizens in Israel, is automatically ratified by parliament every five years.

But two members of the broad coalition, a member of the Arab Raam party and a member of the leftist Meretz party, voted at first reading against the bill.

Their rebellion does not for the moment call into question the continuation of Israeli law in the West Bank, but rather the stability of the government led by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett.



This file photo shows Israeli PM Naftali Bennett (right) and FM Yair Lapid, attending a weekly cabinet meeting in Jerusalem on May 29 (AFP)

nett. The opposition, which had announced that it would vote against the bill simply to show its distrust of the government, gathered a total of 58 votes to 52 for the coalition.

The government recently lost its majority in the house, setting

the stage for a showdown over the 'Judea and Samaria Law', as Israel calls the occupied West Bank.

If is not passed on July 1, the more than 475,000 Israelis living there will no longer receive the same rights as other Israelis

- including voting rights.

According to Israeli commentators, the right-wing opposition, led by former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, will not block the renewal of the pro-settlement measures.

Rather it will seek to weaken the government of Bennett, a leader who himself favours settlement expansion, by showing the coalition cannot pass the law.

"Bennett, go home. It's time to bring Israel back to the right," Netanyahu's Likud party responded in a brief post-vote message in Hebrew.

Israel's foreign policy chief Yair Lapid, the ruling coalition's co-leader, acknowledged a 'defeat' for the government which he said would 'come back stronger' to 'win the next round'.

AFP

Norway princess Martha announces engagement to US shaman partner

Oslo, Norway - Norway's royal court on Tuesday announced the engagement of Princess Martha Louise to her US boyfriend Durek Verrett, a self-professed shaman and guru to celebrities such as Gwyneth Paltrow.

Fourth in the order of succession behind her brother Prince Haakon and his children, Princess Martha Louise, 50, has previously relinquished most of her official titles and duties in order to devote herself to her private activities. "His Majesty the King and Her Majesty the Queen send their most heartfelt congratulations and wish them all the best in the future," the Royal House of Norway said in a statement. Martha Louise has three



This file photo shows princess Martha posing on stage with shaman Durek Verrett in Stavanger, Norway, on May 20, 2019 (AFP)

daughters from a previous marriage to Norwegian author Ari Behn, who committed suicide in December 2019. The couple had divorced in 2016. The princess confirmed her relationship to

Verrett, 47, also known as Shaman Durek, in 2019.

Martha Louise has been an enthusiast of 'alternative therapies' and has an eccentric image in Scandinavia, claiming to com-

municate with angels, a gift she tries to share through courses and books. Verrett, who is based in California, has become known as a celebrity shaman, serving as a guru to likes of Paltrow, the Oscar-winning actress turned businesswoman, who founded the lifestyle brand, Goop.

Verrett also confirmed the engagement on social media.

"She said YES!" Verrett said in a post to Instagram.

The couple's relationship has been scrutinised in the Norwegian media, and the princess was criticised for mixing business and royal affairs when she promoted a speaking tour called 'The Princess and the Shaman'.

AFP

Shrine attack in Iran: Court sentences man to death

Tehran, Iran - An Iranian court sentenced a man to death over an April shrine attack in the Shiite holy city of Mashhad that killed two clerics, the judiciary said on Tuesday.

The April 5 attack on the Imam Reza shrine, where pilgrims had gathered to worship during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, killed two clerics and injured a third.

Local media at the time identified the assailant as Abdolatif Moradi, a 21-year-old Sunni fighter and ethnic Uzbek who had entered Iran illegally via the Pakistani border a year earlier.

"The person who stabbed two clerics in the Imam Reza shrine at Mashhad was sentenced to death," judiciary spokesman Massoud Setayeshi told a news conference in the capital Tehran.

The defence has appealed the verdict at the Supreme Court, which will review the case, the spokesman added.

One of the clerics, Mohammad Aslani, died immediately while the death of the second, Sadegh Darai, was announced two days later.

The attack came days after two Sunni clerics were shot dead outside a seminary in the northern town of Gonbad-e Kavus.

The three suspects, also Sunnis, were arrested in late April, but were said to have 'no connection with terrorist groups', state media reported at the time. Sunnis make up between five and 10 per cent of Shiite-majority Iran's population of 83mn people.

AFP

UK's 'wounded' PM Boris Johnson promises 'to continue delivering'

London, UK - UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson lauded the loyalty of his cabinet and vowed to 'get on with the job' on Tuesday after surviving a confidence vote of his Conservative MPs that has still left him severely weakened.

The beleaguered leader has insisted that Monday evening's dramatic ballot, which saw 211 Tory party lawmakers support him remaining prime minister but 148 vote against, was a 'conclusive' result.

"Thank you... everybody for all your good work yesterday, which was a very important day because we're able now to draw a line under the issues that our opponents want to talk about," he told his team of two dozen or so top ministers and officials.

"We're able to get on with talking about what I think the people in this country want us to, which is what we are doing to help them."

But most critics and commentators disagreed, arguing that Johnson's authority has been hugely undermined and his days in Downing Street are numbered.

The *Times* called him 'a wounded victor' while his former employers at the *Daily Telegraph* branded it 'a hollow victory that tears Tories apart'.

The vote - just over two years after the Brexit architect won a landslide general election victory - was brought after a string of scandals that have left the Conservative party's standing in tatters. Chief among them was the 'Partygate' controversy over



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson (left) speaks as he chairs a Cabinet meeting at 10 Downing Street, in London, on Tuesday (AFP)

lockdown-breaking events at Downing Street, which caused public outrage and saw him become the first serving UK prime minister to have broken the law.

'Continue delivering'

Johnson, 57, needed the backing of 180 of the 359 Conservatives MPs to survive the vote. Defeat would have meant the end to his time as party leader and prime minister.

Most of Johnson's cabinet publicly backed him in the secret ballot. But more than 40 per cent of the parliamentary party - and almost certainly a

majority of backbenchers - did not, setting up potentially tougher times ahead for the government in parliament.

Under current party rules the prime minister cannot be challenged again for a year, which leaves little time for any new leader to emerge before the next general election due by 2024.

In previous Tory confidence ballots, Margaret Thatcher and Theresa May scored better than Johnson yet despite narrowly winning their votes, both ultimately resigned after deciding that their premierships were terminally damaged.

Johnson has steadfastly refused to resign over 'Partygate' and shows no sign of doing so now.

"Today, I pledge to continue delivering... we are going to get on with the job," he said before the cabinet meeting.

'Not a win'

Johnson has spent months fighting for his political survival after a series of controversies culminating in the 'Partygate' saga.

Various opinion polls have shown the public think he lied about the scandal and should resign.

His Tories have lost several once-safe seats in by-elections and scored dismally in recent local elections.

They are expected to lose two upcoming by-elections later this month, including one in a previously rock-solid Conservative constituency.

The smaller opposition Liberal Democrats urged Tory rebels to resign from their party and sit as independents while Johnson remained leader.

However, Conservative MPs who voted against him were highly unlikely to take up the suggestion and appeared to be bid-

Indian court sentences man to death for holy city bombings

Lucknow, India - An Indian court has sentenced a man to death over deadly bomb blasts that rocked the Hindu holy city of Varanasi, in a trial that took 16 years to reach a verdict.

Wasiullah Khan was convicted on murder and terrorism charges last week over the 2006 attacks, which targeted an ancient temple packed with worshippers and a nearby railway station.

Around 20 people were killed in the blasts while dozens more were injured.

Other unexploded bombs were also found and disarmed by police including at the bustling Dashashwamedh Ghat, a popular riverside prayer site where large numbers of Hindu pilgrims gather each evening.

"The accused has been found guilty of murder and has been fined Rs 50,000. He will be hanged until death," the trial judge said in a court order released late on Monday.

Khan was arrested just weeks after the blasts, but the trial was delayed after lawyers in Varanasi refused to represent him, prompting the Allahabad high court to transfer the case to Ghaziabad city.

The death sentence will need to be approved by the Allahabad High Court before it is confirmed.

Nearly 500 people are on death row in India, and capital sentences for murder and terrorism convictions are common, but executions are rare.

AFP



Employees and contractors of Optimum Coal Mine, owned by Gupta family, demonstrate in Hendrin, South Africa on February 22, 2018 (AFP)

Graft: SA Brothers arrested in UAE, face extradition

Johannesburg, South Africa - Two Indian-born businessmen brothers have been arrested in Dubai and are facing extradition to South Africa, where they were allegedly at the centre of a web of state corruption, police said on Tuesday.

Atul and Rajesh Gupta are accused of paying bribes for state contracts and influence over ministerial appointments in a scandal that dogged former South African president Jacob Zuma's administration.

"Dubai Police made the arrest after receiving a red notice for the Gupta brothers by Interpol," Dubai Police said in a statement.

"The force has also coordinated with the authorities in South Africa regarding the extradition file to complete the legal procedures."

South Africa's justice ministry confirmed late on Monday the brothers were being held in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The arrests came as a probe was concluded into massive plundering of state institutions during Zuma's nine-year administration until 2018.

Their arrests came almost a year after Interpol issued a red notice in July last year.

Red notices are a global alert

enabling law enforcement to arrest a person sought for prosecution or to serve a custodial sentence and hold them pending extradition.

'Racketeering enterprise'

The Guptas came to South Africa in 1993 to build a sprawling business empire in mining, computer technology and media.

They had been granted South African citizenship but fled the country shortly after a judicial commission probing corruption started in 2018.

After four years of investigations, Chief Justice Raymond Zondo compiled a report revealing how the brothers became intertwined with the highest levels of government and the ruling African National Congress (ANC).

In a series of reports being published this year, the investigators said procurement contracts for rail, ports and pipelines amounted to 'planned offences of racketeering activity conducted by a racketeering enterprise' linked to the Guptas.

The corruption scandals engulfing Zuma led to his downfall. He was forced to resign in 2018.

AFP

China's 'epidemic generation' sits 'gaokao' exam

Beijing, China - High school seniors across China lined up on Tuesday to sit the gruelling 'gaokao' college entrance exam under the shadow of COVID-19.

The class of 2022 are the first to have had all three years of China's high school curriculum disrupted by the pandemic, bouncing between online and offline classes and adapting to frequent COVID tests and sudden closures.

The constant uncertainty has compounded the already intense stress of the three-day gaokao, which can determine a teenager's life path in China's highly competitive academic and job environment.

"These kids haven't had it



Students arrive for the first day of the National College Entrance Examination in Nantong, in China's Jiangsu province on Tuesday (AFP)

easy," Jin Lijuan, mother of a gaokao candidate, told AFP outside a high school in Beijing.

Anxious parents offered words of encouragement to their

children and took photos outside the school as students shuffled through its gates, some cramming last-minute.

Police officers guided traffic

Death of three sisters spotlights India dowry violence

Jaipur, India - Before the three sisters and their children were found dead in a well, they left a message blaming the family they had married into.

Kalu, Kamlesh and Mamta Meena were victims of a dispute over dowries, the often hefty sums Indian parents pay to marry off their daughters.

The sisters had wed brothers from the same household and lived under the same roof, but suffered constant violence from their husbands and in-laws, according to the trio's grieving relatives. They were abused constantly, they say, including when their father failed to meet demands for more money.

All three were found dead last month near their marital home, a village on the outskirts of Jaipur, along with Kalu's four-year-old son and infant child. Both Kamlesh and Mamta were pregnant.

"We don't wish to die but death is better than their abuse," read a message on WhatsApp



Sardar Meena stands next to the well where his 3 married daughters and 2 grandchildren were found dead on May 28, in Dudu village in Rajasthan (AFP)

left by one of the sisters after their disappearance, a cousin said. "Our in-laws are the reason behind our deaths. We are dying together because it's better than dying every day."

Authorities are investigating and currently treating the deaths as suicides, a senior police officer in Jaipur told AFP.

The sisters' distraught father, Sardar Meena, said life had been

ing their time.

"This is far from a conclusive result - it's not a defeat, but it's not a win," said Tory lawmaker Tobias Ellwood, who has been calling for Johnson to resign since February.

He said he accepted Monday's result 'for the moment'.

'Honourable exit'

Johnson's plans to move on include an upcoming joint speech with finance minister Rishi Sunak to tackle a worsening cost-of-living crisis.

He is expected to head to Rwanda for a meeting of Commonwealth leaders, then go to Germany and Spain for G7 and NATO summits.

Speculation is also mounting that he may reshuffle his senior ministerial team to reward those who backed him.

But many question whether he can recover his authority and voters' trust. Former Tory party leader William Hague argued that Johnson should now 'look for an honourable exit'.

"Words have been said that cannot be retracted, reports published that cannot be erased, and votes have been cast that show a greater level of rejection than any Tory leader has ever endured and survived," he wrote in *The Times*.

"Deep inside, he should recognise that, and turn his mind to getting out in a way that spares party and country such agonies and uncertainties."

AFP

around the campus. Signs near the school asked drivers not to honk.

Tuesday was the first time in weeks that many students had seen their classmates, as the Chinese capital had closed schools and offices to try and eliminate a coronavirus outbreak.

Students taking the exam in Beijing this year must wear masks, show proof of a negative virus test from the past 48 hours and pass a temperature check.

Local governments across the country have similar requirements. Authorities in China are committed to a zero-COVID strategy - using rapid lockdowns, mass testing and strict travel re-

strictions to eliminate even the smallest outbreaks.

In Shanghai, where 25mn residents are gradually emerging from two months in lockdown, authorities have delayed the exam by a month. A record 11.93mn people registered for this year's gaokao, state news agency Xinhua said on Tuesday, with teens in some locked-down neighbourhoods taking the tests in individual hotel rooms.

"This generation of kids entered high school in 2019... so the entire second semester of their first year was done at home," Zhao said.

"They are like an 'epidemic generation'."

AFP

a living hell for his daughters, whose husbands banned them from pursuing their education and constantly harassed them for more payments.

"We had already given them so many things, you can see them in their home," he told AFP, counting off the beds, television sets and refrigerator he provided to the family.

"I am the father of six girls, there is a limit to how much I can give," added Sardar, who earns a meagre income as a farmer.

"I had educated them and just doing that was difficult."

Police have arrested the three husbands, their mother and a sister-in-law on charges of dowry harassment and spousal abuse.

AFP's attempts to contact the men's family were unsuccessful.

'Dignity of the family'

India outlawed the practice of paying dowries more than 60 years ago, and harassment or ex-

tortion over the payments is a criminal offence.

But the custom persists, particularly in rural areas, undergirded by social conventions that treat women as an economic burden and demand compensation for accepting them as brides.

A pervasive taboo around divorce - only one in 100 Indian marriages end in dissolution - has kept married women from contemplating escape from abusive situations.

For the Meena sisters, leaving was never seen as an option, even though their relatives were aware of the violence.

"Once they were married, we thought they should remain in their marital homes, to maintain the dignity of the family," Sardar said.

"If we had gotten them remarried in another home, and if that situation turned out to be worse, then what will we do? We'll lose face."

AFP

Fighting rages in Ukraine's Severodonetsk

Russia claimed full control of residential neighbourhoods in Ukraine’s flashpoint city of Severodonetsk

Kyiv, Ukraine - Russia on Tuesday reported its forces had taken full control of residential neighbourhoods in Ukraine's flashpoint city of Severodonetsk, after Kyiv said its troops were fighting on in the eastern hub despite being outnumbered.

"The residential areas of the city of Severodonetsk have been fully liberated," Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu told a defence ministry meeting.

The Russian army was still seeking to establish control over the city's 'industrial zone and the nearest settlements', he added, amid conflicting reports of who is in control of what.

Moscow has been pushing for control of the strategic industrial hub as part of its bid to conquer a vast swathe of eastern Ukraine but Kyiv's forces have so far managed to hold out. "Our heroes are holding their positions in Severodonetsk. Fierce street fights continue in the city," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in a video address late on Monday.

Zelensky warned Ukrainian forces in the key city were outnumbered and the Russians 'are stronger'. He was speaking to journalists after visiting frontline positions in Lysychansk, across the river from Severodonetsk.

Thousands of civilians have been killed and millions forced to flee their homes since President Vladimir Putin ordered Russian troops into Ukraine on February



Smoke and dirt rise from shelling in the city of Severodonetsk during fight between Ukrainian and Russian troops in the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas on Tuesday (AFP)

24. After being repelled from other parts of the country, including Kyiv, Russia has concentrated its assault on the eastern Donbas region and had been making slow

but steady progress. Severodonetsk - the largest city still in Ukrainian hands in the Lugansk region of the Donbas - has been the focal point in recent

weeks.

‘General killed’

The leader of Ukraine’s pro-Russian separatists in Donetsk, Denis

Pushilin, on Tuesday confirmed the death of another Russian general in the fighting.

Pushilin expressed on Telegram his ‘sincere condo-

lences to the family and friends’ of Major General Roman Kutuzov, ‘who showed by example how to serve the fatherland’. Ukraine’s forces have claimed

to have killed several of Russia’s top brass but their exact number is not known as Moscow is tight-lipped on losses.

Defence Minister Shoigu said Russia had completed demining of the eastern port city of Mariupol, the second busiest in Ukraine before the conflict.

"It is operating as normal and has accepted the first cargo ships," Shoigu said.

With fighting raging in the east of Ukraine, Kyiv hit out at the UN's nuclear watchdog for trying to visit Europe's largest nuclear reactor in the south of the country while it is under Russian occupation.

The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Rafael Grossi, said on Monday his agency was preparing an expert mission to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant.

Grossi said on Twitter the visit was arranged after Ukraine had 'requested' it.

But Ukraine’s nuclear agency, Energoatom on Tuesday accused Grossi of lying and said it did not greenlight the trip.

"The visit to the plant will only become possible when Ukraine takes back control of the site," Energoatom wrote on Telegram.

"We consider this declaration a new attempt to gain access to the Zaporizhzhia power plant to legitimise the presence of the occupiers and approve their actions." AFP

More countries summon India’s envoys over Prophet remarks

Jakarta, Indonesia - Indonesia and Malaysia have both summoned India's envoys in their countries over 'derogatory' remarks made about the Prophet Mohammed by two officials with the South Asian nation's ruling party, their foreign ministries said on Tuesday.

It comes as anger spreads across the Arab and Muslim world, with various Middle Eastern nations summoning New Delhi's envoys and a Kuwaiti supermarket removing Indian products.

Remarks by a spokeswoman for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), who has since been suspended, sparked the furore.

Another official, the party's media chief for Delhi, posted a tweet last week about the Prophet that was later deleted. Indonesian foreign ministry spokesperson Teuku Faizasyah told AFP that India's ambassador in Jakarta, Manoj Kumar Bharti, was summoned on Monday, with the government lodging a complaint about anti-Muslim rhetoric.

In a statement posted on Twitter, the ministry said Indonesia - the most populous Muslim-majority country - 'strongly condemns unacceptable derogatory remarks' made by 'two Indian politicians' against Prophet Mohammed.

The tweet did not mention the officials by name but was an apparent reference to BJP spokeswoman Nupur Sharma and the party's Delhi media chief Naveen Jindal, who was expelled from the BJP, according to Indian media reports.

Malaysia also 'unreservedly

condemns the derogatory remarks' by the Indian politicians, its foreign ministry said in a statement late on Tuesday, adding that it had conveyed its 'total repudiation' to India's envoy.

"Malaysia calls upon India to work together in ending the Islamophobia and cease any provocative acts in the interest of peace and stability," it said.

Modi's policies

Modi's party, which in the past decade has established domi-

Indonesia and Malaysia were the latest to have summoned India's envoys in their countries over the 'derogatory' remarks made about the Prophet

nance in India by championing Hindu identity, has frequently been accused of discriminatory policies towards the country's Muslim minority.

On Sunday, it suspended Sharma for expressing 'views contrary to the party's position' and said it 'respects all religions'.

Sharma said on Twitter that her comments had been in response to 'insults' made against the Hindu god Shiva.

But the remarks, which stoked protests among Muslims in India, sparked another backlash from Indonesia's Muslim community.

AFP

US Capitol assault: Proud Boys leader, members indicted on sedition charges

Washington, US - A leader of the Proud Boys and four other members of the far-right group were indicted on sedition charges on Monday in connection with the January 6 assault on the US Capitol.

Henry 'Enrique' Tarrio, 38, is already facing other charges related to the failed attempt by supporters of former president Donald Trump to block Democrat Joe Biden's election victory.

A superseding indictment unveiled on Monday added the more serious charge of seditious conspiracy to the charges against Tarrio, the former 'national chairman' of the Proud Boys, and the four other members. Tarrio was arrested in Miami in March and is also charged with conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding, obstruction of law enforcement, destruction of government property and other offenses.

More than 800 people have



This file photo shows Trump supporters fighting with police and security forces at the US Capitol in Washington D.C on January 06, 2021 (AFP)

been arrested in connection with the storming of Congress by Trump supporters, according to the Justice Department, but only a handful face the charge of seditious conspiracy, which carries a sentence of up to 20 years in prison. Stewart Rhodes, 56, founder of another far-right organisation, the Oath Keepers, has

been charged with seditious conspiracy along with 10 other members of the group.

Three members of the Oath Keepers have pleaded guilty.

According to the superseding indictment, Tarrio was not in Washington on January 6 but he met with Rhodes on January 5 in an underground parking garage in

Washington and was in contact with members of the Proud Boys who breached the Capitol.

Along with Tarrio, four other members of the Proud Boys - Dominic Pezzola, 44, Joseph Biggs, 38, Ethan Nordean, 31, and Zachary Rehl, 36 - were charged with seditious conspiracy in addition to their previous charges.

The indictment comes three days ahead of a public hearing by the House select committee investigating the storming of the US Capitol. The committee is trying to see if Trump or members of his circle had a role in planning or encouraging the violent attack, and has subpoenaed advisors and aides to the former president.

The assault on the Capitol left at least five people dead and 140 police officers injured and followed a fiery speech by Trump to thousands of his supporters near the White House.

AFP

Two year old accidentally shoots and kills father in Florida

Miami, US - A two-year-old boy accidentally shot and killed his father in Florida after his parents left a loaded gun unattended, local authorities said on Monday.

When police officers, alerted by a 911 call, arrived at the victim's home near Orlando on May 26, they found the child's mother Marie Ayala providing CPR to her husband, Reggie Mabry.

Law enforcement initially believed the 26-year-old, who died shortly afterward in hospital, had shot himself, but the eldest of the couple's three children later told investigators that the trigger was pulled by his two-year-old brother. The gun was in a bag that Mabry had left on the ground and the child came across it and shot his father in the back while he was playing a video game on a computer.

AFP

British journalist, indigenous expert missing in Brazil

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil - A British journalist and a Brazilian indigenous expert have gone missing in a remote region of the Amazon rainforest after receiving threats, authorities and indigenous-rights groups said on Monday, raising fears for their safety.

Veteran foreign correspondent Dom Phillips, 57, went missing while researching a book in the Brazilian Amazon's Javari Valley with respected indigenous expert Bruno Pereira, said *The Guardian* newspaper, where Phillips has been a long-time contributor.

The pair had traveled by boat to Jaburu lake, in the northern state of Amazonas near Brazil's border with Peru, and were expected to return to the city of Atalaia do Norte by around 9am on Sunday, two rights groups said in a statement.



Veteran foreign correspondent Dom Phillips (centre) takes notes as he talks with indigenous people at the Aldeia Maloca Papi, Roraima State, Brazil, on November 15, 2019 (AFP)

The men had 'received threats in the field' last week, said the groups, the Union of Indigenous Organizations of the Javari Valley (UNIVAJA) and the Obser-

vatory for the Human Rights of Isolated and Recently Contacted Indigenous Peoples (OPI).

They did not give further details, but Pereira, an expert at

Brazil's indigenous affairs agency FUNAI with deep knowledge of the region, has regularly received threats from loggers and miners trying to invade isolated indige-

nous groups' land.

FUNAI told AFP it was collaborating with local authorities on the search effort. It added that Pereira was on leave from the agency 'to pursue personal interests'. Phillips and Pereira had traveled to the region around a FUNAI monitoring base, and reached Jaburu lake on Friday evening, UNIVAJA and OPI said.

They started the return trip early on Sunday, stopping in the community of Sao Rafael, where Pereira had scheduled a meeting with a local leader to discuss indigenous patrols to fight the 'intense invasions' that have been taking place on their lands, the groups said.

When the community leader did not arrive, the men decided to continue to Atalaia do Norte, about a two-hour trip, they said.

AFP

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RELIEF,
CAUTION
IN BEIJING
AS CITY
LIFTS
COVID-19
DINE-IN
CURBS



People dine at a restaurant in Beijing

CURBS BY THE KERB



People wait outside a restaurant along a street in Beijing on June 6, following an easing of COVID-19 restrictions in the Chinese capital

After staying home for more than a month, Chen Chunmei joined a long line of customers at a popular Beijing restaurant where diners tucked into massive bowls of crayfish following an easing of Covid restrictions in the Chinese capital.

Last month, the city of 22 million stopped people from eating out, closed gyms and sealed off dozens of subway stations to try and stamp out a coronavirus outbreak. The curbs are now finally easing, including at restaurants.

"I'm very excited, mainly because we'd been sealed off for so long," Chen

I'm nervous and alert... but I also wanted to feel my tastebuds again

SUN TAO

told AFP. "I've been ordering takeout or cooking every day. I really wanted to come out for meals."

At its peak, Beijing logged just dozens

of infections every day. But authorities in China are committed to a zero-Covid strategy - using rapid lockdowns, mass testing and severe travel restrictions to eliminate even the smallest outbreaks.

Chen, 28, said her compound was initially locked down for two weeks but when she was finally allowed to leave, the nearby subway station was closed.

"Since then, I'd been staying at home," she said. "At first I thought working from home was pretty good but after a while, I got bored."

As Beijing's case numbers fell - it reported just two local asymptomatic infections on Tuesday - authorities told residents they could return to work this week, while schools would reopen from June 13.

The Universal Beijing resort said it will reopen on June 15, while Chinese media reported that cinemas and gyms will run at 75 per cent capacity from this week in most areas.

Dine-ins at restaurants have also mostly resumed, although two districts still have restrictions in place because of recent Covid cases.

Losing money

While authorities have persisted with their zero-Covid policy, its economic

costs have piled up. Businesses in Beijing say the last month bit a large chunk out of their earnings.

"Our revenue for the month of May fell around 65 per cent on-year," said Zhang Shengtao, operations director at Beijing Huda Catering. He added that staff income at the restaurant chain, which employs nearly 800 people, also dropped by around 30 percent last month.

Some breathed a sigh of relief on Monday as restrictions on dining-in were eased.

"I've been longing for the resumption," said Wu Ziwen, a manager at restaurant chain Nanjing Dapaidang. "There's no doubt that we were losing money," he told AFP, adding that the outlet has been relying on food deliveries to survive.

The dine-in resumption in Beijing is still partial. However, due to COVID-19 controls, his restaurant can only accept up to 50 per cent of regular capacity even if customers flood in, Wu said.

Beijing is requiring people to produce a negative test done within three days if they want to take public transport or enter office buildings.

The outbreak in the capital has also kept visitors like 33-year-old Sun Tao from returning home to Shanxi. But, the dine-in relaxation gave him some respite.

"I'm nervous and alert," said Sun, who ventured out of the hotel where he was staying with his wife on Monday evening and waited for a table at a restaurant. "But I also wanted to feel my tastebuds again."

AFP

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INDIAN FISH CURRIES



Summer Seafood

When the markets are teeming with fish during summer, it's the right time to enjoy a variety of seafood. Here are a few popular Indian fish curries that go well with steamed rice or bread. They all are spicy and tangy, so be prepared for a blow that's out of this world

MACHER JHOL (BENGALI FISH CURRY)

Ingredients
For marination
6 slices of fish (Rohu /Katla)
1tsp salt, 1tsp turmeric powder

For the spice paste
1½tsp red chilli powder,
2tsp cumin powder,
1½tsp coriander powder
2tsp mustard seeds, 2tbsp water

Other ingredients
2 medium potatoes – peeled, sliced into thick wedges
2 tomatoes - deseeded and cut lengthwise,
2-3 green chillies, 1tsp cumin seeds
1tsp turmeric powder, 1¼ cups water - for gravy
Salt to taste, ¼ cup mustard oil

Method
Marinate the fish slices with salt and turmeric powder. Keep them aside for 10 minutes. Heat ¼ cup mustard oil and add the marinated fish pieces. Fry both sides of the fish pieces for 2-3 minutes on medium flame. Remove the fish and set aside. Strain the excess oil and reserve.
In the same pan, if required, add some more mustard oil and wait until the oil becomes hot. Add 1tsp cumin seeds and let them crackle. Add the potato pieces into the pan and cook on medium flame for a couple of minutes.
Add 1tsp turmeric powder, salt, and mix. Cook over medium flame for another 3-4 minutes. Add tomato slices, 2-3 green chillies into the pan and stir. Cover the pan and cook on low flame for 5-6 minutes until the potatoes get cooked and tomatoes get mushy.
In the meantime, take a bowl and add 1tsp red chilli powder, 1½tsp coriander powder, 2tsp cumin powder and 2tbsp water. Mix it thoroughly to make a smooth paste. Add this paste into the pan and stir. Cook on low flame for 2-3 minutes till the raw smell disappears. Add 1¼ cups of water into the pan and give stir well.
Cover the pan and cook on high flame until the gravy starts boiling. Lower heat to simmer and add the fried fish pieces into the gravy carefully. Cover and cook for 5-6 minutes. Remove from heat and serve hot with steamed rice.



MEEN GASSI (MANGALOREAN FISH CURRY)

Ingredients
For the curry
500g fish slices (kingfish /pomfret /mackerel), 4tbsp coconut oil
2 tomatoes - finely chopped, 1 medium onion - finely chopped
4 green chillies - slit, 2cm piece ginger - grated, 3½ cups water
2tsp salt, 2-3 sprigs of curry leaves

For curry paste
1 cup grated coconut, 4-5 dried red chillies
2tsp coriander powder
1tsp turmeric powder, ½tsp cumin seeds
¼tsp fenugreek seeds, ¼tsp carom seeds
½tsp black peppercorns, 6 garlic cloves
½ onion - sliced, 1 lemon sized tamarind ball
Salt, to taste

Method
In a heavy-bottom pan, heat some coconut oil and add ginger, green chillies, and onion. Saute until the raw smell disappears. Add the tomatoes, salt, and cook until tomatoes turn slightly mushy.
Blend all the curry paste ingredients with little water to make a fine paste. Add this paste into the cooked tomatoes and saute for about 5-6 minutes on medium flame. Let the rawness of the masala disappear, then add half a cup of water and cook until the oil separates and is visible on top.
Add 3 more cups of water, salt, and bring it to boil on medium flame. Add the fish, cover and cook for another 10 minutes on medium-low flame. Then, open the lid and let the curry simmer. In another pan, heat oil and splutter curry leaves and sliced onion, fry until brown, and pour this tempering over the curry. Serve hot with rice, roti or dosa.



MEEN MOLEE (KERALA FISH STEW)

Ingredients
For the marinade
½kg fish (pomfret, mackerel)
1tbsp lemon juice, 1tsp turmeric powder
1tsp pepper powder, Salt (as required)

For the fish molee
2cm sized ginger piece - minced, 2-3 garlic cloves - minced
1 medium sized onion - sliced, 3-4 green chillies - slit
¼tsp turmeric powder, 1tsp pepper, 2 sprigs of curry leaves
1 cup thin coconut milk, 1 cup thick coconut milk,
1tbsp lemon juice, 1 tomato - sliced,
Salt, to taste, 2tbsp coconut oil

Method
Marinate fish pieces with lemon juice, pepper, salt and turmeric powder for 15-20 minutes. In a pan, add little oil and shallow fry the fish on both sides. Set aside. In a separate pan, add oil and heat on a medium flame. Add curry leaves, ginger, garlic and green chillies, and saute for a minute until its raw smell subsides. Add the sliced onions and saute until it turns translucent. Add turmeric powder, pepper powder, and thin coconut milk. Close the lid and allow the curry to boil for 5-6 minutes on a medium flame. When the oil starts separating, reduce the flame to a low and add lemon juice, and mix well. Now add the fried fish, cover it with the gravy, and allow the curry to blend well with the fish. Bring it to a boil but do not stir once the fish is added. Now add the thick coconut milk and simmer on a low flame for another 2 minutes. Add the tomatoes and more curry leaves, close the lid, and switch off the flame. Let the tomato cook in the remaining steam.
Serve with appams, rice or chapatis.

EYEING THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Phil Mickelson joins Saudi-backed golf series, plans to play US Open

Washington, United States - Phil Mickelson confirmed on Monday he has signed to play in the lucrative Saudi-backed LIV Golf Invitational Series, saying he also plans to play major events, including next week's US Open.

The six-time major winner will be in the field of 48 at the controversial new tour's inaugural event in London this week.

"I am ready to come back to play the game I love but after 32 years this new path is a fresh start," Mickelson wrote in a statement posted on Twitter.

Mickelson later Monday told Sports Illustrated that he plans to play all eight LIV Golf events and compete in majors after talks with major sanctioning bodies.

"I'm looking forward to playing the US Open," Mickelson told SI. "I'm under the understanding that I'm able to play."

Mickelson told SI he will keep his US PGA Tour membership, unlike some who joined LIV Golf, but has not spoken with PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan or long-time rival Tiger Woods.

"I'm uncertain how I will play given that I haven't played in a few months," Mickelson told SI. "But I'm optimistic."

Mickelson has not played since the publication of comments in February where he criticized the PGA Tour and LIV Golf's Saudi backers.

In an interview with author Alan Shipnuck, the 51-year-old American left-hander said the Saudi-funded LIV Golf was an opportunity to gain leverage over the PGA Tour.

"But I have seen the good that game of golf has done throughout history. And I really believe that LIV can be good for the game of golf as well."



I am ready to come back to play the game I love but after 32 years this new path is a fresh start

PHIL MICKELSON

Mickelson said in his statement that he remains in therapy.

"Time away and self-reflecting has been very humbling," Mickelson said. "I still have a long way to go but I am embracing the work ahead."

During his absence, however, LIV Golf has torn at the fabric of world golf, with dozens of household names joining the new tour.

Last week, former world number one Dustin Johnson joined the money-spinning new series,

whose tournaments will offer among the richest purses in golf history. This week's event teeing off at Centurion Club at St Albans, north of London, will have a \$25 million purse -- almost double that of any major, with \$4 million going to the winner.

The Washington Post reported Monday that LIV Golf commissioner Greg Norman said 15-time major winner Woods turned down a "mind-blowingly enormous" LIV overture.

"We're talking about high nine digits," Norman said.

Woods said last month he supported the US PGA Tour, noting its legacy to such icons as Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer.

Others going to LIV Golf include European Ryder Cup stars Ian Poulter, Lee Westwood and Sergio Garcia.

Players opting into LIV Golf have done so despite PGA Tour warnings of disciplinary action.

Several PGA Tour golfers had

requested releases to play this week's LIV event, which clashes with the PGA's Canadian Open, but were refused. Mickelson denied he turned to LIV due to gambling debts, telling SI, "My family and I are, and have been, financially secure for some time."

Mickelson said his gambling had become "reckless and embarrassing" and said he has addressed it for several years and in therapy.

AFP



Dustin Johnson speaks during a press conference ahead of the LIV Golf Invitational Series event in St Albans on Tuesday (AFP)

Johnson quits PGA Tour to play in LIV Series

St Albans, United Kingdom - Former world number one golfer Dustin Johnson confirmed on Tuesday he has resigned his membership of the US PGA Tour to play in the breakaway LIV Golf Invitational Series.

The decision effectively rules the American two-time major winner out of participating in the Ryder Cup, which pits the United States against Europe every two years.

Johnson was speaking at a press conference at Centurion Club, near London, ahead of the opening event of the Saudi-backed series, which starts on Thursday.

The world number 15 said in February he was committed to playing on the PGA Tour, which has refused releases for members to play in LIV Golf's opener, which clashes with the Canadian Open.

But he has now quit, following a similar decision by veteran US golfer Kevin Na, who is also in the field for the event in St Albans.

"I'm very thankful to the PGA Tour and everything that it's done for me... but this is something I felt was best for me and my family and I'm very excited about playing," said Johnson.

The 37-year-old, who is reportedly receiving \$150 million in appearance fees to play in the series, said it was difficult to predict the consequences of his decision.

"Right now, I've resigned my membership from the Tour," he added. "I'm going to play here for now and that's the plan."

"The Ryder Cup is unbelievable and it's something that has definitely meant a lot to me," added Johnson, who won all five of his matches in the United States' record 19-9 win over Europe at Whistling Straits last year.

"I'm proud to say that I've played and represented my country and hopefully I will get a chance to do that again, but I don't make the rules."

The former Masters and US Open champion said he was exempt to play in the majors due to his record.

Ryder Cup

Graeme McDowell, whose Ryder Cup eligibility is tied to membership of the DP World Tour (European Tour) told the press conference he had not felt the need to resign from the PGA Tour, although he admitted he did not want to get involved in a "legal situation" with the organisation.

AFP

Raducanu injured at Nottingham in blow to Wimbledon preparations

London, United Kingdom - Emma Raducanu admitted she had "no idea" if she would be fit for Wimbledon after the US Open champion was forced to retire from the Nottingham Open on Tuesday.

Raducanu needed a medical timeout in the early stages of her first-round clash with Switzerland's Viktorija Golubic after suffering an injury.

The 19-year-old Briton received treatment on her left side and took painkillers in an attempt to carry on, but had to pull out after just 33 minutes while trailing 4-3 in the first set.

It was the third time Raducanu had withdrawn from a tournament due to injury since she burst onto the tennis scene with her stunning US Open triumph in September last year.

The world number 11 also bowed out of matches in Guadalajara in February and Rome in May with injuries.

Raducanu is due to play in Birmingham next week, but she has "no idea" if she will be ready for Wimbledon, with the grass-court Grand Slam starting on June 27.

"I think I pulled something. I'm not really sure what exactly happened. An absolute freak injury. I don't know what I could have done about it," Raducanu said.

"I need to get a scan first. I am not going to 'Google doctor' myself. I will get it checked out. Then



Emma Raducanu

we will see from there.

"I have no idea (about Wimbledon). It could have just seized up and gone into spasm and then it is really bad for a few days. I cannot diagnose myself. I will get it checked out."

The latest retirement will raise further questions about Raducanu's fitness as she continues to struggle with the physical demands of life on the WTA Tour.

Raducanu, who made her WTA debut at Nottingham 12

months ago, has not won more than two matches at a tournament since her remarkable journey from the qualifying rounds to the title at the US Open.

"It is just a shame. I am obviously disappointed and it is really bad luck," Raducanu said.

"That's out of my control, but right now all I can focus on is what I am doing and I think I am

I think I pulled something. I'm not sure what happened. An absolute freak injury

EMMA RADUCANU

doing a lot of good work.

"I just need to trust that it will come and right now it is happening for a reason and I am exactly where I need to be."

In her first match on British soil since that astonishing victory at Flushing Meadows, the signs of discomfort were there early on as Raducanu was seen holding her side in the opening game of the match.

Her first round of treatment came at the first change of ends and although she was able to open a 3-1 lead, it was clear she was in pain and called time having lost three games in a row.

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Pakistan seek Windies rout to boost World Cup hopes

Multan, Pakistan - High-flying Pakistan aim to boost their chances of qualifying for next year's World Cup with a clean sweep against an inexperienced West Indies side when their three-match one-day international series starts in Multan on Wednesday.

A 3-0 win will lift the Babar Azam-led team to third from their current 10th place in the 13-team World Cup Super League, the qualification process for 2023 World Cup.

The West Indies, led by wicketkeeper-batsman Nicholas Pooran, are fourth after winning 3-0 in the Netherlands, but have just six of their 24 qualifying ODIs remaining.

Defeat in the oppressive heat of Multan will put West Indies in danger of needing to play in the qualifying round, while Pakistan have a further nine ODIs after the series to secure direct passage.

Hosts India and the top seven teams will qualify automatically, while the remaining five will have to battle for the last two berths later this year. Pakistan's confidence is sky high after a 2-1 home series win over Australia two months ago, and skipper Azam is hoping for a similar display of intensity from his side.

"As a team, as a captain, you go into the series thinking about a clean sweep, whoever the opponent is," said Azam.

"The intent is the same, but it's not like we are underestimating the West Indies."

Pakistan have won their previous nine ODI series against the West Indies, with their last defeat in 1991.

The West Indies are without



Pakistan captain Babar Azam (L) and his West Indies' counterpart Nicholas Pooran pose with the ODI series trophy in Multan on Tuesday (AFP)

leading players Jason Holder who is being rested, Shimron Hetmyer who is on paternity leave and Evin Lewis who was left out after not reaching required fitness levels, while former skipper Kieron Pollard retired in April.

Batsmen Shai Hope, Kyle Mayers and Shamarh Brooks hit hundreds in the Netherlands series while left-arm spinner Akeal

Hosein took eight wickets.

The series, initially scheduled in December 2021, was postponed because of a Covid-19 outbreak in the West Indies camp and has since been moved to Multan from Rawalpindi because of political uncertainty in Islamabad.

Azam admitted countering Multan's searing heat where

temperatures could touch 45 Celsius (113 Fahrenheit) will be a challenge, although to counter the blistering sun the matches will start late afternoon.

The series will also be the first without a bio-secure bubble after Pakistan lifted all coronavirus restrictions in March following a steep decline in infections.

The other two matches will be

on June 10 and 12, also in Multan.

Pakistan (from): Babar Azam (captain), Shadab Khan, Abdullah Shafique, Fakhar Zaman, Haris Rauf, Hasan Ali, Iftikhar Ahmed, Imam-ul-Haq, Khushdil Shah, Mohammad Haris, Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Rizwan, Mohammad Wasim Junior, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shah Nawaz Da-

hani, Zahid Mahmood
West Indies (from): Nicholas Pooran (captain), Shai Hope, Nkrumah Bonner, Shamarh Brooks, Keacy Carty, Akeal Hosein, Alzarri Joseph, Brandon King, Shermion Lewis, Kyle Mayers, Anderson Phillip, Rovman Powell, Jayden Seales, Romario Shepherd, Hayden Walsh Junior
AFP



Colin de Grandhomme

New Zealand lose de Grandhomme for rest of series against England

London, United Kingdom - All-rounder Colin de Grandhomme has been ruled out of the remainder of New Zealand's Test series against England with a heel injury, the Black Caps said on Monday.

After the 35-year-old bowled only 3.5 overs in England's second innings in the first Test, a scan revealed a tear to his right heel. New Zealand lost the Test at Lord's by five wickets on Sunday.

Coach Gary Stead said de Grandhomme would need 10 to 12 weeks to recover.

"It's a real shame for Colin to suffer this injury so early in the series," said Stead. "He's a massive part of our Test side and we'll certainly miss him."

De Grandhomme will be replaced in the squad by Michael Bracewell, 31, who was already with the squad for the first Test as cover for Henry Nichols.

"It's great to be able to call on someone like Michael who's been with the squad for the past month and is match ready."

Bracewell, the nephew of former New Zealand Test players Brendan and John Bracewell, played three ODIs against Netherlands earlier this year.

AFP

Step aside football: Women's cricket booms in Brazil

Pocos de Caldas, Brazil - On a concrete playground in a poor hillside neighborhood in Brazil, ecstatic children are chasing a ball at top speed.

But in an unusual scene for the football-mad country, they are indifferent to the goalposts nearby, instead swinging cricket bats and fielding drives.

Welcome to Pocos de Caldas, a city of 170,000 people that is the capital of a lovably quirky quest to turn the land of Pele and Neymar into a passionate cricketing nation.

Defying stereotypes, Brazil is emerging as a force to be reckoned with in cricket, especially the women's national team, who were given professional contracts in 2020 - making the country the first in the world to take its women's team pro before the men's.

Most players have learned the game from 63 community youth programs run by the organization Cricket Brasil, whose president is ex-professional cricketer Matt Featherstone, an Englishman who married a Brazilian and



Brazil women's team train at a high performance centre in Pocos de Caldas, Minas Gerais state

moved here two decades ago.

"My wife thinks I'm mad" for trying to get Brazilians playing cricket, jokes Featherstone, 51, a strapping sportsman with infectious enthusiasm.

But his charisma and community spirit have turned Pocos de Caldas, a tiny spa hub nestled in the mountains of southeastern coffee country, into what Mayor

Sergio Azevedo boasts is "the only city in Brazil where more kids play cricket than football."

Cricket, samba style

When Featherstone moved to Brazil in 2000, he tried spreading his love of cricket at private schools, but soon realized he was competing against rugby, hockey, sailing and "everything else you

can imagine," he says.

But in poor neighborhoods, where the options were "football or football," he discovered families were elated to have a new sports program.

Unlike in England, where cricket is sometimes seen as a game for rich men, "here we have a blank piece of paper to invent cricketing culture as we wish," he

says. Women's team captain, Roberta Moretti Avery recalls her first reaction seeing cricket on TV.

"It wasn't the best impression," laughs the 36-year-old. "I didn't understand it, I just saw all these people dressed in white. And it seemed to last forever."

But she noticed the sport was similar to a Brazilian street game she liked, known as "bats" or "taco."

The story goes that Brazilian slaves invented the game, played with broomsticks for bats and bottles for wickets, after seeing cricket played by Brits brought over to build Brazil's railroads in the 19th century.

The enthusiasm and openness at Cricket Brasil ended up winning her over, says Moretti Avery, a petite dynamo with a wide grin and a mean swing honed by playing golf.

The women's team play Brazilian funk at practice, samba before matches, and prefer loud parties at the grounds to tea and cucumber sandwiches.

AFP

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Kramaric penalty rescues Croatia against France in Nations League

Split, Croatia - Andrej Kramaric scored a late penalty as Croatia salvaged a 1-1 draw at home to world champions France on Monday that left both teams still chasing a first win in the Nations League.

Juventus midfielder Adrien Rabiot fired France ahead on 52 minutes in Split as coach Didier Deschamps selected an inexperienced side without star forwards Kylian Mbappe and Karim Benzema.

Croatia equalised seven minutes from time when Andrej Kramaric won and converted a spot-kick.

Group 1. France were beaten 2-1 by Denmark in their opening game at home last week, while Croatia crashed to a 3-0 loss to Austria.

Denmark top the section on six points after defeating Austria 2-1 in Vienna in a game that was delayed Monday by an hour and a half because of a power outage.

On a night Luka Modric earned his 150th cap for Croatia, Deschamps handed a number of fringe players the chance to make an impression before the World Cup starts in Qatar in November.

But it was experienced defender Presnel Kimpembe who



Croatia's Andrej Kramaric celebrates after scoring against France in their UEFA Nations League match at Stadion Poljud in Split on Monday (AFP)

The result doesn't fully satisfy me. But there's tiredness to factor in and with all the other matches I'm forced to make changes. It's an ideal preparation for the World Cup

DIDIER DESCHAMPS

"We did some good things taking into account all the changes. We were ahead and we could have got the second goal. It's a shame we gave them the equaliser with the penalty," Deschamps told M6.

"Of course, the result doesn't fully satisfy me. But there's tiredness to factor in and with all the other matches I'm forced to make changes. It's an ideal preparation for the World Cup."

France and Croatia have just one point apiece in League A,

raced back to block as Ante Budimir hesitated to shoot with team-mate Lovro Majer also in position for a tap-in.

Christopher Nkunku, coming off a brilliant season with RB Leipzig, dinked the ball home over Dominik Livakovic but was adjudged offside on the half-hour.

Moussa Diaby was then denied by Livakovic as he burst towards goal down the right, with Aurelien Tchouameni's long-range drive punched away by the

Croatia goalkeeper.

Rabiot broke the deadlock when he was played in by a superb ball from Wissam Ben Yedder, sweeping clinically inside the near post for only his second in-

ternational goal.

Substitute Antoine Griezmann saw a shot repelled by Livakovic shortly before Croatia were awarded a penalty following a VAR review after it was ini-

tially overruled for offside.

Mike Maignan saved at the feet of Luka Sucic, but Jonathan Clauss caught Kramaric from behind, the Hoffenheim striker calmly rolling in from the spot

after a lengthy wait to review the incident.

Nikola Vlasic threatened to snatch a first win for Croatia over France in nine attempts, but Maignan got down sharply to

turn behind.

Griezmann was then unable to take advantage of a miskick by Josip Juranovic in the closing moments as he dragged wide.

AFP

Lewandowski looking for 'more emotions' than Bayern can offer

Warsaw, Poland - Bayern Munich star Robert Lewandowski revealed on Tuesday he wants to call time on his career with the Bundesliga giants because of his desire for "more emotions in life".

The Polish forward announced last week that his time with Bayern "had come to an end" without specifying his future plans.

Asked Monday during a podcast on Polish website Onet.pl if his departure was dictated by a desire for more money or emotions in life, the 33-year-old answered without hesitation it was for him "emotions in life".

"Firstly, something went out inside me and it's something you can't recover, can't make up for," he explained.

Barcelona are reported to have made an offer of 32 million euros (\$34 million) for Lewandowski, FIFA men's best player for 2020 and 2021, whose contract with Bayern expires in June 2023.

The only way the Bavarians can make a financial profit from



Robert Lewandowski

Lewandowski's departure would be to sell him this summer.

"With what I acquired thanks to Bayern - and (reciprocally)

Bayern thanks to me - it would be better to find a solution acceptable to both parties," he said.

After eight seasons together,

"loyalty and respect are more important than business, I think," continued the striker, insisting he would leave behind 'friends' rather than 'colleagues'.

"Even close friends. With some, we spent eight years together seeing each other almost every day," he said.

Lewandowski notably won the 2020 Champions League and eight German league titles with Bayern Munich since 2014. He won his first two titles with Borussia Dortmund before his move.

The Pole also broke a number of goalscoring records, the most notable being the number of goals scored in a single Bundesliga season.

His 41 goals last season overtook Germany's Gerd Muller's 40 achieved in the 1971-72 season.

In the Champions League, he is the third top scorer of all time, tied with Karim Benzema (86 goals), but still far behind Cristiano Ronaldo (140) and Lionel Messi (125).

AFP



Sepp Blatter (L) shakes hands with Michel Platini

Fallen FIFA, UEFA chiefs Blatter and Platini face fraudulent payment trial

Lausanne, Switzerland - Sepp Blatter and Michel Platini, once the chiefs of world and European football, face trial on Wednesday over a suspected fraudulent payment that shook the sport and torpedoed their time at the top.

Former FIFA president Blatter, 86, and Platini, 66, start a two-week trial at Switzerland's Federal Criminal Court in the southern city of Bellinzona, following a mammoth investigation that began in 2015 and lasted six

years.

The pair are being tried over a two million Swiss franc (\$2.08 million) payment in 2011 to Platini, who was then in charge of European football's governing body UEFA.

They are accused of having, to the detriment of FIFA, illegally obtained the payment, plus social security contributions of 229,126 francs, in favour of Platini.

The former French football

great "submitted to FIFA in 2011 an allegedly fictitious invoice for a (alleged) debt still existing for his activity as an adviser for FIFA in the years 1998 to 2002," according to the court.

The defendants are both accused of fraud and forgery of a document. Blatter is accused of misappropriation and criminal mismanagement, while Platini is accused of participating in those offences.

AFP

Inoue beats Donaire, eyes undisputed bantamweight crown



Japan's Naoya Inoue (L) fights against Philippines' Nonito Donaire

Saitama, Japan - Japan's unbeaten "Monster" Naoya Inoue set his sights on becoming the undisputed world bantamweight champion after demolishing Nonito Donaire inside two rounds on Tuesday to claim his third title.

Inoue had edged Philippines veteran Donaire in a tightly fought classic in 2019 but there was nothing close about the rematch in Saitama as Inoue added

the WBC title to his WBA and IBF belts.

Inoue floored the 39-year-old Donaire at the end of the first round and then continued the onslaught into the second, dropping him again with a juddering left hand that persuaded the referee to stop the fight. The 29-year-old Inoue immediately turned his attention towards becoming undisputed world bantamweight champion before the

end of the year, with Britain's WBO title-holder Paul Butler now all that stands in his way.

"My next goal is to unify the bantamweight titles," said Inoue, who is now unbeaten in all his 23 fights, winning 20 by knockout.

"I've come this far and there's only one left. I've put myself in a good position and I want to concentrate on unifying the titles."

The 33-year-old Butler captured previous champion John

Riel Casimero's vacant WBO title when he beat Jonas Sultan by unanimous decision in April.

He was elevated from interim to full champion last month when the WBO stripped Casimero of the full title.

Inoue said fighting Butler was his top priority but warned he was also interested in taking "a new challenge" by stepping up to super-bantamweight.

"If I can't fight Butler next then

maybe I would have to fight someone from the rankings," said Inoue. "I want to choose a good option. There are many years still to come so I want to take my time and think about what I want to do."

Whoever Inoue does fight next will come up against the ferocious punching power that put Donaire on the canvas in the first round.

AFP