

Anyone can transport friends, family without attracting fines: MTCIT

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Transportation, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has issued a clarification that it is legal to transport friends and acquaintances in one's private vehicle, unless it is done for commercial purposes.

A statement issued by MTCIT said, 'The ministry has undertaken inspection campaigns recently to monitor road transport. We categorically state that the Land Transport Law is not violated by anyone who transports their acquaintances and/or friends, provided it is not done for a financial gain.'

The ministry stressed that its inspection teams are keen to ensure that drivers do not violate the Land Transport Law, and are not issuing violation notices without a thorough check.

'The inspection teams aim to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Land Transport Law and its executive regulations, in order to preserve the safety of land transport users and the rights of the parties to the land



transport contract.'

The ministry affirmed that if anyone has a grievance, they can submit a complaint at the Land Transport Department in MTCIT or the road departments in the governorates within 15 days of a fine being levied.

Social media is currently rife with reports of expats being fined 'unfairly', some claiming they drove with a friend to a supermarket where they were fined

RO200. Another complainant said that he was with his brother when he was stopped outside a supermarket and fined despite repeated requests to verify that the co-passenger was his brother.

MTCIT called on companies and individuals to follow the Land Transport Law, and further stated that it will continue its inspection campaigns to ensure compliance with the law.

Last week, the ministry announced that it registered more than 1,440 violations of transporting passengers without a licence against expatriate workers and 546 violations of transporting and delivering goods without a licence also against expatriate workers. These are in violation of the Land Transport Law issued by Royal Decree No 10/2016 and its regulations, MTCIT stated.

H M issues decree on marriage of Omanis with foreigners

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq issued Royal Decree No 23/2023 on Omanis' marriage to foreigners on Sunday.

Article 1 cancels Royal Decree No 58/93 and annuls all decisions issued in implementation of its provisions.

Article 2 states that the provisions of this decree will not prejudice the provisions of the Islamic Sharia or public order or any provision cited in the laws, Royal Decrees or applicable systems stipulating non-marriage to a foreigner as a condition for occupying or continuing to occupy certain public jobs of significance or special nature.

Article 3 stipulates that documents proving the cases of marriage of Omanis to foreigners within the Sultanate of Oman will be documented in accordance with the provisions of the relevant laws and Royal Decrees. Foreign documents proving these cases of marriage are treated as official Omani documents after being authenticated by the competent authorities in the respective foreign country/countries, as well as the Omani Foreign Ministry.

Article 4 validates the documents evidencing the marriage of Omanis to foreigners that are issued by foreign official authorities prior to the date of entry into force of this decree - even though they might be in violation of the



provisions regulating the marriage of Omanis to foreigners in force at that time - on condition that those documents be authenticated by the Omani Foreign Ministry, and in a manner that does not contradict the provisions of Article 2 of this decree.

Article 5 states that units of the State's Administrative Apparatus and other public legal persons will implement the provisions of this decree, each in their own areas of jurisdiction.

Article 6 repeals all that contravenes this decree or contradicts its provisions.

Article 7 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced starting the day following its publication. ONA

► NEWS BRIEF

SMES REGISTRATION REGULATION TO BE IMPLEMENTED STARTING MAY 1

Muscat - The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) will start implementing the regulations for registering micro and small and medium enterprises and issuing the entrepreneurship Riyada card from May 1, 2023.

In February, ASMED issued regulations for registering micro and SMEs and issuing Riyada cards. An enterprise is considered micro if it has 1-10 employees with annual revenues below RO150,000. A small enterprise has 11-50 employees and annual revenues between RO150,000 and RO1.250mn, while a medium enterprise has 51-150 employees with revenues of less than RO5mn.

TRA grants VoIP licence for voice, video services

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has granted a licence to Oman Data Park (ODP) to provide voice or video telecommunication services over Internet protocol (VoIP) expanding the services provided via Internet Protocol in the sultanate.

The service is considered a qualitative addition to the telecommunications sector, while the new licence reflects the confidence enjoyed by Oman Data Park in the effective contribution to the development of information and communication technologies in Oman.

The licence is based on the Telecommunications Regulatory Law and its executive regulations, issued by ministerial decision No 144/2008.

In accordance with the approval, ODP will work to enhance the benefits of users of the telecommunications sector from the technology of voice transmission, sending and receiving VoIP calls instead of transmitting it via the landline telephone network.

The technology of transmitting voice and receiving calls over Internet Protocol has many advantages, such as the feature of transferring calls to smart phones or computers, in addition to a lot of professional communication via the Internet such as video chats and sharing files while ensuring the privacy of user data, a press release stated.

Commenting on the development, Maqbool al Wahaibi, CEO of ODP, said, "The licence confirms our company's readiness to provide this type of advanced services at a time when Oman is keen to keep abreast of the new



Oman is keen to keep abreast of the new developments to take advantage of all the latest and useful Internet protocol technologies

MAQBOOL AL WAHAIBI

developments to take advantage of all the latest and useful Internet protocol technologies."

Wahaibi informed that ODP's capabilities in providing UCaaS service, which relies on voice and video communications over Internet Protocol in cooperation with Cisco, and its Nebula-Collaboration service, makes it more capable in dealing with customers of big data that require VoIP, PBX and video conferencing systems by adopting a flexible approach.

He added, "This government approval to provide voice or video communication service over Internet Protocol reinforces our conviction that cloud services for telephony are capable to open a new horizon for communication and enabling people to work from anywhere via IP telephony for voice calls, web conferencing, voicemail, desktop sharing, instant messaging and more."

At least 56 civilians killed as Sudan battles rage for second day

Khartoum, Sudan - Fighting in Sudan raged for a second day on Sunday in battles between rival generals who seized power in a 2021 coup, leaving at least 56 civilians dead, hundreds wounded and sparking international alarm.

Deafening explosions and intense gunfire rattled buildings in the capital Khartoum's densely-populated northern and southern suburbs as tanks rumbled on the streets and fighter jets roared overhead, witnesses said.

Violence erupted early Saturday morning after weeks of power struggle between army chief Abdel Fattah al Burhan and his deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, commander of the large and heavily-armed paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), with each accusing the other of starting the fight.

"The gunfire and explosions are incessant," said 34-year-old Ahmed Hamid from a northern Khartoum suburb.

"The situation is very worrying and it doesn't seem like it will calm anytime soon," said Ahmed Seif, another Khartoum resident, who said he feared his building had been damaged by gunfire but that it was too dangerous to go outside to check.

Both sides claim they control key sites, with state television broadcasting patriotic songs without commentary.

Daglo's RSF say they have seized the presidential palace, Khartoum airport and other strategic sites, but the army insist they are in charge, with the air force late Saturday urging people to stay indoors as it continued air strikes targeting RSF bases.

Footage obtained by AFP showed heavy smoke billowing from a building near the army headquarters in Khartoum, with the military saying a building had



Oman's embassy in Sudan provides helpline for citizens

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In view of the ongoing fighting in Sudan, the sultanate's embassy in Khartoum has issued a list of hotlines for citizens living in the country.

A statement issued by Oman's Embassy in Khartoum said, 'The embassy calls on all Omani citizens residing in or visiting the Republic of Sudan

to contact the embassy on the following phone numbers: 0 0 2 4 9 1 8 3 4 7 1 6 0 5 , 0 0 2 4 9 1 8 3 4 7 1 6 0 6 , 0 0 2 4 9 9 0 4 0 4 0 0 1 6 , 0 0 2 4 9 9 1 2 2 2 4 1 6 6 or get in touch via the embassy's e-mail: oman.emb.khr@gmail.com'

Egypt and Saudi Arabia called for an urgent meeting of the Arab League Council to discuss the situation in Sudan.

Meanwhile, the Foreign Ministry expressed deep concern over the developments in Sudan following the clashes.

In a statement, the Foreign Ministry urged all parties to exercise maximum restraint and prioritise peaceful dialogue to reach a desired political agreement and thus protect the lives of the Sudanese people to realise their aspirations of security and stability.

"caught fire" amid the clashes but that it had been contained.

'Very worrying'

Created in 2013, the RSF emerged from the Janjaweed militia that then-president Omar al Bashir unleashed against non-Arab ethnic minorities in the western Darfur region a decade earlier, drawing accusations of war crimes.

The RSF's planned integration into the regular army was a key element of talks to finalise a deal

that would return the country to civilian rule and end the political-economic crisis sparked by the military's 2021 coup.

The Central Committee of Sudan Doctors said they had recorded 56 civilians killed as well as "tens of deaths" among security forces, and around 600 wounded. Medics on social media have continued to call for help, pleading for safe corridors for ambulances and a ceasefire to treat the victims, warning the streets were too dangerous to bring many ca-

sualties to hospitals.

On Sunday, the stench of gunpowder wafted through Khartoum's streets, deserted except by soldiers as frightened civilians sheltered inside their homes.

Fighting has also erupted outside Khartoum, including in the troubled western Darfur region.

In the eastern border state of Kassala, army fired artillery at a paramilitary camp, witness Hussein Saleh said.

AFP

See also Page 10





(Supplied photo)

Hundreds turn out for Indian Embassy's Ramadan blood camp

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The ongoing second edition of a weekly Ramadan Blood Donation Drive held by the Indian Embassy saw participation of hundreds of people on Sunday. The event, which was inaugurated by H E Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, started on Friday with over 400 units of blood being donated.

The drive has been organised in association with the Ministry of Health and is aimed to help address the shortage of blood in Oman's blood banks, usually experienced during the month of Ramadan. The drive is being simultaneously organised in Muscat, Salalah and Sohar.

With more than 1,500 people donating

I appreciate the efforts of the Indian community in Oman for its wholehearted participation in the drive and promoting the cause of blood donation

HE DR HILAL AL SABTI

1,397 units of blood in the event in 2022, last year's drive was a resounding success. This year's drive is set to exceed expectations in terms of participation and enthusiasm.

Speaking at the event, H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to Oman, said, "The

colour of our blood is red and this is one of the best unifying factors among all of us irrespective of differences in religion and nationality. This can be the best way to show solidarity during the holy month. The Embassy of India and the Indian community in the sultanate remain committed to supporting the health needs of the Omani society, especially during the holy month of Ramadan when our Omani friends are involved in fasting and prayers."

H E Sabti added, "I appreciate the efforts of the Indian community in Oman for its wholehearted participation in the drive and promoting the cause of blood donation."

The Indian Embassy also extended its appreciation to all the participants who generously donated blood and helped make the drive a success.

IN THE EID HOLIDAY, I WILL...

With Ramadan coming to an end in a few days, citizens and residents of the sultanate are all getting ready for a break starting Thursday. As Eid approaches, preparations have started for the festivities, while others get ready for travel, making this a time of great anticipation and excitement. While some have decided to stay back and explore the various options within the sultanate, including staycations, others are planning trips abroad. All time favourites Georgia, Dubai and Sri Lanka top the list, even as Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia are the holiday destination for some others this Eid. With a five-day holiday starting on Thursday, what are your plans for Eid? Here is what Muscat Daily readers said -

Salman al Tariq Balushi
Cashier

I plan to stay back in Oman and visit the interiors of the country. It has been a long time since I visited my cousins and uncles in the village of Ibra. I plan to be there with my wife and children. I want to feel the village air and water. I also plan to get off all social media platforms, and take and make limited phone calls.

Salim Yahya
Businessman

I will have some friends, who I met at a conference a few years back, visiting from Bahrain. They have roots in Oman and family in Al Khoudh. I plan to spend some quality time with them and then leave for Bahrain where they will host me.

Manish Kumar
Private sector employee

I wanted to fly to India for a quick break but sadly I can't as ticket prices are too high. For

a family of three, it will be tough financially. I have now planned a two-day staycation in a resort with my family. It will be fun as well as relaxing.

Mohammad al Hinai
Government employee

I will fly to Georgia and then Dubai for a few days. I have been to Georgia a few times and am in love with the castles and the greenery. Though the country is getting slowly crowded with tourists, I have some contacts that let me escape from the hustle and bustle.

Kiran Choudhury
Homemaker

During the Eid holidays, I will spend time with my family and do social work. Substantial time will be used in cooking and stitching, both of which are my hobbies. To sum up all the activities, introspection will be the major activity during the Eid break.

YOUR SAY

? NEXT ON YOUR SAY

The Ministry of Transport has intensified inspection of vehicles involved in illegal transport of passengers and goods. How can it spread awareness on the matter and clarify the rules?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by Muscat Daily. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om. You can also log on to our Facebook page or tweet us your comments on the issue.

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

Share your comments in not more than 50 words along with your full name and profession before next Sunday, 10am, via WhatsApp, Facebook or Instagram

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WADI KABIR'S SOUQ JUMA BACK IN BUSINESS



Souq Juma - or Friday Market - in Wadi Kabir, Muscat, has reopened. The market was closed in the last three Eid al Fitr festivals due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Once bustling with shoppers looking for a quick bargain on electronic items, perfumes, household items and knick-knacks, although the weekend fair has reopened this Ramadan, it appears to have lost its attraction. People still visiting have an emotional attachment to the place, or it has a sentimental value for them (VK Shafer)



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Ready for Eid rush

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Preparations for Eid al Fitr have begun with authorities undertaking several measures in anticipation of an Eid rush to ensure a safe and enjoyable festive season for all.

As part of its efforts to cater to increased demand, Muscat Municipality has announced the readiness of its slaughterhouses in Seeb and Amerat to receive the public before and during Eid.

Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has announced that its directorates in the governorates have intensified inspection campaigns with commercial activities in markets increasing considerably as Eid approaches,

while the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources stressed on taking care when purchasing livestock.

A statement issued by Muscat Municipality said that its Directorate General of Health Affairs will oversee the availability of sufficient staff to ensure efficient operations of equipment to meet the Eid rush. 'The directorate will make sure that cooling, transportation and storage is done under supervision of specialised technical and veterinary staff.'

Slaughterhouses will be reserved for individuals from April 17 (Ramadan 26) from 6am to 1pm, and for companies from 7pm to midnight.

'To speed up the slaughtering process and delivery to the pub-

lic, time will be allocated for individuals from Friday, April 28 (Ramadan 30) to the second day of Eid al Fitr. Sheep and goats will be slaughtered 7am to 2pm, while cows and camels will be slaughtered from 4pm to 8pm.'

Muscat Municipality data shows 7,716 animals were sacrificed in its slaughterhouses during Eid al Fitr 2021 and 7,494 in 2022.

Cautious when purchasing livestock

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources stressed the importance of taking care and caution when purchasing livestock to ensure animals are disease-free, while emphasising on slaughtering livestock in municipal slaughter-

houses to preserve public health.

The ministry alerted about the precautionary measures that must be taken into account before, during and after slaughter, such as ensuring that the animal is free of external parasites, including ticks, as some diseases do not show any symptoms in livestock. However, the presence of ticks does not necessarily mean the presence of disease.

The ministry stressed on the need of disposing slaughter waste in a safe manner, not throwing it in open places to prevent any source of infection. It stated that Crimean Congo/he-morrhagic fever is a viral disease transmitted by ticks; the death rate of the infection is about 40 per cent.

RO9.6mn pact inked to build 300 homes for orphans, the needy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Al Rahma Association for Motherhood and Childhood and Shoba Group signed a memorandum of understanding on Sunday to build 300 homes for orphans and needy families, worth RO9.6mn, over the next ten years.

The signing ceremony was held under the aegis of H E Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development.

The pact was signed by Sana bint Abdul Rahman al Khan-jariya, Chairperson of the Board of Directors of Al Rahma Association for Motherhood and Childhood, and BNC Menon, Founder and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Shoba Group.

The agreement aims to establish integrated housing complexes for the target group that owns land, or build separate houses for those who will be



given land or for those who own an uninhabitable house.

The construction area of each house will be 200sqm, with cost of each not exceeding RO35,000.

Sana informed that the association sponsors more than 1,600 orphans in various governorates of the sultanate, and about 600 needy families, in addition to 1,700 families being

provided humanitarian assistance on a seasonal basis.

She noted that under the memorandum of understanding, the most needy group registered with the association will be given priority, while the association is working in cooperation with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning to provide land to the needy who do not own any under a government grant.

MoCIIP reviews investment environment

Muscat - The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) reviewed the investment environment in the governorates during a virtual meeting led by H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, on Sunday.

The meeting with the governors aimed to closely examine

the investment opportunities available in the governorates, and the challenges they face. It also discussed the involvement of local companies and sectors in contributing to the development of the governorates.

The meeting was held within the framework of joint efforts and coordination among relevant entities and all governorates to achieve decentralisation, which will contribute to enhancing the national economy and promote it.

In addition, it aimed to involve the governors in the decision-making processes and regulations that the ministry is working on, and to understand their vision for developing their governorates as integrated economic destinations.

Musandam Carnival on Bassah Beach from April 26 to 28



Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to stimulate tourism and create an atmosphere for families to enjoy outdoor activities, Musandam governorate will organise a carnival from April 26 to 28.

A statement issued by an official in the Musandam Governor's Office said that the three-day Musandam Carnival will be held on Bassah Beach.

"The carnival will include many events, entertainment

shows, traditional local food, and a wonderful shopping experience with the participation of many productive families."

Musandam is currently witnessing the implementation of several development projects, according to Musandam Municipality.

The municipality is working on developing a number of projects that serve the economic, tourism and social sectors of the governorate. Some of the major development projects underway include a Kamzar village, construction of a floating pier in Khor Najd, the Khorsham mountain pass project, and a waterfront project in the wilayat of Dibba.

Ninety per cent of the Kamzar village in Khasab has been developed. The project includes a waterfront, construction of a children's park and a sea wall. The Khorsham mountain pass is designed to the latest international standards and equipped with solar streetlights, the municipality informed.

MoHERI stops issuing licences for private training centres

Muscat - H E Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI), has issued a ministerial decision (No 39/2023) suspending licences to establish private training institutions.

Article 1 of the decision stipulates that requests for licences to establish private training institutions will be suspended temporarily for a period of three years.

Article 2 states that the decision does not apply to applications submitted to the ministry prior to announcement of this decision.

The decision was issued on March 30 and came into force a day following its publication in the Official Gazette.

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Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Ukraine GDP shrank 29.1% in 2022

Ukraine's economy contracted by 29.1 per cent in 2022, the state statistics service said, as the country has been ravaged by Russia's assault.

By comparison, the pro-Western country's gross domestic product grew 3.4 per cent in 2021 prior to the invasion ordered by Russian President Vladimir Putin in February 2022. Moscow's war has killed tens of thousands, prompted millions to flee and battered swathes of the economy.

Construction was the hardest-hit sector as it shrank by 67.6 per cent last year, the state statistics service said late Wednesday. The World Bank has said that Ukraine needs US\$411bn for its reconstruction and recovery in the wake of Moscow's invasion in February last year.

Russia damaged more than 50 per cent of Ukraine's power infrastructure in attacks on its neighbour over the autumn and winter months, the global lender said.

Bank Muscat's net profit rises 6.3% to RO51.3mn in Q1



Our Correspondent Muscat

Bank Muscat has reported a net profit of RO51.3mn for the first quarter of 2023 as compared to RO48.26mn net profit recorded in the same period of last year, an increase of 6.3 per cent.

The bank, which is the flagship financial institution in Oman, on Sunday announced its preliminary unaudited results for the three months ended March 31, 2023.

Bank Muscat said its net interest income from conventional banking and net income from Islamic financing stood at RO91.71mn for the three months period ended March 31, 2023 compared to RO82.08mn for the

same period in 2022, an increase of 11.7 per cent.

The bank's non-interest income came at RO31.5mn for the first quarter of 2023, remaining almost flat when compared to RO31.83mn for the same period in 2022. Operating expenses for the first three months of 2023 increased by 6.4 per cent to RO48.7mn as compared to RO45.76mn for the same period in 2022.

Net impairment for credit and other losses for the three months period ended March 31, 2023 increase to RO13.69mn as against RO12mn for the same period in 2022. Bank Muscat said its total assets increased by 2.1 per cent to RO13.079bn as of March 31, 2023 compared to RO12.806bn

a year ago. Its net loans and advances (including Islamic financing receivables) increased by 8.4 per cent to RO9.765bn at the end of first quarter this year as against RO9.009bn recorded a year ago.

The bank's customer deposits (including Islamic customer deposits) increased by 1.6 per cent to RO8.992bn as against RO8.853bn as at March 31, 2022.

Bank Muscat said its full results for the three month period ended March 31, 2023 along with the complete set of unaudited financial statements will be released following the approval of the board of directors at its meeting scheduled later during April.



EDO saves \$100mn interest cost from loan renegotiation

Muscat – Energy Development Oman (EDO) has successfully renegotiated the terms of its US\$2.5bn loan, resulting in cost savings of US\$100mn in interest.

The move sets a new benchmark for EDO and represents a significant saving for the company and is part of a broader initiative aimed at reducing interest costs across government-related entities in Oman in line with the government's objectives to achieve financial sustainability.

The borrowing cost of EDO is largely based on the credit rating of Oman. In 2022, the rise in oil and gas prices along with the government's continued efforts to ensure financial sustainability led to two ratings agencies, Fitch Ratings and S&P Global Ratings, raising their rating assessments.

This improvement in the credit outlook contributed to increasing the investment attractiveness of the sultanate.

S&P has revised its outlook on Oman to positive from stable while affirming its rating at 'BB'. According to the report, Oman's government is reforming its balance sheet, with debt repayments and strong nominal GDP growth.

Mazin Rashid al Lamki, CEO of EDO, said, "The latest credit rating upgrade by S&P is a strong testament to the government's prudent fiscal policies and ongoing economic reform efforts. As a result of this upgrade, we expect to see increased investor confidence and interest in Oman, which will, in turn, support economic growth."

He added, "For EDO, this means that we will have access to more favourable borrowing terms and is a positive step towards achieving our goal of supporting Oman's long-term development."

Lamki pointed out that taking advantage of the country's improved credit profile, EDO proactively sought to renegotiate its seven-year US\$2.5bn loan, issued in August 2021 and signed initially at a fixed credit margin of 2.95 per cent. EDO asked the bank group to voluntarily amend the existing loan to a lower margin. The company worked closely with the Debt Management Office (DMO) of the Ministry of Finance to set the margin at 2.05 per cent.

ONA

Global oil demand to rise in 2023 as China rebounds

Paris, France – The International Energy Agency (IEA) has kept its global oil demand forecast unaltered from its previous report, with demand set to rise by 2mn barrels per day (bpd) this year to a record 101.9mn bpd.

Global oil demand returned to growth in the first quarter of 2023, climbing by 810,000 bpd as the Chinese economy emerged from lockdowns, the IEA said in its monthly oil market report published on Friday.

According to the report, growth will gather momentum over the course of the year, with gains of 2.4mn bpd in the second half of 2023, lifting demand to 103.1mn bpd.

'The contrast between a lackluster OECD and resilient non-OECD continues to sharpen,' the report noted.

'OECD demand, dragged down by weak industrial activity and warm weather, contracted by 390,000 bpd year-on-year in the first quarter of 2023, its second consecutive quarter of decline,' the agency said, adding that 'for the year as a whole, OECD demand is forecast to rise by 260,000 bpd year-on-year in 2023, 150,000 bpd less than in last month's forecast.'

However, non-OECD oil demand posted 'substantial growth' in the first quarter of 2023, rising by an estimated 1.2mn bpd year-on-year.

'Strong recent reported data, most notably for China in January and February, mean that we increased our first quarter non-OECD growth expectation by 670,000 bpd compared with last month's report. Substantial 2023 gains of 1.8mn bpd, dominated by jet fuel with 730,000 bpd and gasoline with 430,000 bpd, will see oil use reach 55.7mn bpd,' the report explained.



Non-OECD economies account for 87 per cent of all forecast demand growth in 2023.

Global oil output decreases

Global oil supply in March fell by 450,000 bpd to 101.21mn bpd.

The daily crude oil production of the OPEC group decreased to 29.09mn bpd in March, a drop of about 140,000 bpd compared to the previous month. Production of OPEC natural gas liquids was recorded at 5.35mn bpd, bringing OPEC's total oil production to 34.44mn bpd last month.

Non-OPEC production also saw a decline of around 310,000 bpd to 66.77mn bpd in March.

According to the IEA report, global oil production fell largely because of Russia, which had announced that it would turn down the taps by 500,000 bpd 'purportedly due to sanctions and G7 price caps.'

'Based on our estimates, Moscow appears not to have delivered in full, but its decline helped push down total oil supply in the month to 101.2mn bpd,' the report said.

OPEC+ cuts to tighten oil market

The IEA warned that the unexpected supply cuts announced by some OPEC+ countries on April 2 are likely to tighten the global oil market balance for the rest of the year.

OPEC+ oil production is expected to plunge by 1.4mn bpd from March through December after extra curbs of 1.66mn bpd kick in next month and remain in place for the rest of the year.

'With supply from those outside the non-OPEC+ set to rise by around 1mn bpd, global output will reach 100.8mn bpd by the end of 2023, down 400,000 bpd from March,' the report said.

Anadolu Agency

Saudi Arabia transfers more Aramco shares to wealth fund

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia – Saudi Arabia has put a second four-per cent chunk of shares of the Aramco energy giant, worth tens of billions of dollars, under the control of the country's sovereign wealth fund, state media said Sunday.

The move underscores Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's campaign to use the Gulf kingdom's vast energy resources to open up the economy under his "Vision 2030" domestic reform agenda.

The official Saudi Press Agency said the shares had been transferred to Sanabil Investments, a firm controlled by the kingdom's Public Investment Fund (PIF), one of the world's biggest sovereign wealth funds with more than US\$620bn in assets.

Last year, four per cent of Aramco shares, estimated at the time to be worth US\$80bn, were transferred directly to PIF.

The latest shares are worth nearly US\$80bn, based on the current market capitalisation of Aramco, one of the world's most valuable companies.

Prince Mohammed, the kingdom's de facto ruler, "indicated that the transfer of part of the



state's shares in Saudi Aramco is a continuation of Saudi Arabia's long-term initiatives to boost and diversify the national economy and expand investment opportunities," the report said.

"The transfer will also solidify PIF's strong financial position and credit rating," it added, noting Riyadh still owns 90 per cent of Aramco's shares.

Sanabil's investments "include venture, growth capital and small buyouts", according to its website.

Aramco and its assets were once kept under vice-like government control, off-limits to outside investment.

But under Prince Mohammed the kingdom has shown readiness to cede some of that control.

The oil giant sold 1.7 per cent of its shares on the Saudi bourse in December 2019, generating US\$29.4bn in the world's biggest initial public offering.

The firm, which reported record profits totalling US\$161.1bn last year, has pledged to achieve "operational net-zero" carbon emissions by 2050.

That applies to emissions that are produced directly by Aramco's industrial sites, but not the CO2 produced when clients burn Saudi oil in their cars, power plants and furnaces.

Aramco CEO Amin Nasser and other top Saudi officials have simultaneously called for further investment in fossil fuels to ensure global energy security.

The PIF has made high-profile investments in firms including Uber and Disney, and its so-called mega-projects -- centrepieces of Prince Mohammed's reform agenda -- include Neom, a US\$500bn futuristic megacity under construction in the Saudi desert.

The crown prince has said he wants the fund to have one trillion dollars in assets by the end of 2025.

AFP

UAE and China promise Pakistan \$1.3bn

Islamabad, Pakistan – Pakistan announced financial support Friday from the United Arab Emirates and China totalling US\$1.3bn, giving the ailing economy a shot in the arm as it seeks to meet conditions for the resumption of an International Monetary Fund bailout.

Finance Minister Ishaq Dar said the UAE had promised a billion dollars to prop up Pakistan's forex reserves – which at their current level of US\$4.04bn can barely pay for four weeks of im-

ports. China on Friday released US\$300mn to Pakistan – the last tranche of a US\$1.3bn rollover loan, Dar said.

"UAE authorities have confirmed to IMF for their bilateral support of US\$ one billion to Pakistan," Dar tweeted.

He added that the country's central bank was preparing the documentation to receive the deposit.

Pakistan signed a US\$6.5bn bailout package with the IMF in 2019, but has repeatedly re-

neged on conditions and so far just US\$3bn has been released.

The IMF insists the nuclear-armed nation of 220mn people must boost its pitifully low tax base, end tax exemptions for the export sector, and raise artificially low petrol, electricity and gas prices meant to help low-income families.

The country's hopes for another round of IMF funding also depend on friendly countries rolling over existing loans or providing additional support.

Pakistan's economy has crumbled alongside a simmering political crisis, with the rupee plummeting and inflation at decades-high levels, while devastating floods and a major shortage of energy have piled on further pressures.

Year-on-year inflation hit 35.37 per cent in March – the highest in nearly five decades – while the average inflation rate for the past year was 27.26 per cent.

AFP

China's economy to rebound as zero-Covid era fades

Beijing, China - China is expected to announce an economic rebound on Tuesday, when Beijing releases its first quarterly GDP figures since abolishing growth-sapping Covid restrictions late last year.

The Asian giant's virus containment policy - an unstinting regime of strict quarantines, mass testing and travel curbs - strongly constrained normal economic activity before it was abruptly ditched in December.

The disclosures on Tuesday will give the first snapshot since 2019 of a Chinese economy unencumbered by public health restrictions, with analysts polled by AFP expecting an average of 3.8 per cent year-on-year growth in the period from January through March.

But the world's number two economy remains beset by a series of other crises, from a debt-laden property sector to flagging consumer confidence, global inflation and the threat of recession elsewhere.

"The recovery is real, but still in its early stage," said Larry Hu, chief China economist at the investment bank Macquarie.

Any rebound "will be gradual, largely due to the weak confidence" of consumers, which in turn makes companies "reluctant" to hire more staff, he said.

China's economy grew by just three per cent in the whole of last year, one of its weakest performances in decades.

It posted a 4.8 per cent expansion in the first quarter of 2022, though growth pulled back to just 2.9 per cent in the final three months of the year.

Property perils

A creeping crisis in the property sector - which together with construction accounts for around a quarter of China's GDP - con-



A file photo shows people at a vegetable marketing in Beijing

tinues to "pose challenges to economic growth", said Rabobank analyst Teeuwe Mevisen.

Real estate was a key driver of China's recovery from the initial wave of the pandemic in 2020, when Beijing managed to stop the coronavirus from spreading widely.

But weak demand has since plagued a sector already afflicted by falling home prices and crippling debts that have left some developers struggling to survive.

The situation appears to have eased slightly in recent weeks as official support helped prices stabilise in March, according to figures released on Saturday by the National Bureau of Statistics.

Economists will also be watching keenly on Tuesday for March's retail data, the main indicator of household consump-

tion.

Retail sales finally ticked up in January and February following four successive months of contraction, according to official figures.

But nearly 60 percent of urban households still prioritise saving money over investing or spending it, up from 45 per cent before the pandemic, according to a survey by China's central bank.

Consumer confidence "remains well in negative territory" despite the heartening abolition of Beijing's Covid curbs, said Harry Murphy Cruise, a macro-economist focusing on the Asia-Pacific region at the ratings agency Moody's.

"Households have long memories and will take time to forget the economic pain of recent years," he told AFP.

Beijing has set a comparatively modest growth target of around five percent this year, a goal the country's Premier Li Qiang has warned could be hard to achieve. While many experts tend to take China's official figures with a grain of salt, most expect Beijing to hit that mark.

An AFP analysts' poll predicted that the Chinese economy would grow by an average of 5.3 per cent this year.

That is roughly in line with the International Monetary Fund's forecast of 5.2 per cent.

Still, analysts warned that wider global trends could yet weigh on China's recovery.

They include geopolitical tensions with the United States, the threat of recession in other major economies and galloping global inflation.

AFP

Top US Fed official says more interest rate hikes needed

Washington, US - The US should continue tightening monetary policy to bring down inflation while assessing the impact of last month's financial turmoil on bank lending, a top official at the Federal Reserve said.

"Because financial conditions have not significantly tightened, the labor market continues to be strong and quite tight, and inflation is far above target, so monetary policy needs to be tightened further," Fed governor Christopher Waller told a conference in Texas during prepared remarks.

"How much further will depend on incoming data on inflation, the real economy, and the extent of tightening credit conditions," he said.

Waller is a voting member of the rate-setting Federal Open Markets Committee (FOMC), which voted last month to continue raising interest rates to tackle inflation, which remains



Christopher Waller

stubbornly above the Fed's long-term target of two percent.

The FOMC took this decision despite the banking turmoil unleashed when Californian high-tech lender Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) dramatically collapsed after taking on too much interest-rate risk.

SVB's collapse set off a chain reaction in the financial markets that led to the failure of another regional US bank and the merger under pressure of Swiss invest-

ment banking giant Credit Suisse with regional rival UBS.

The 25 basis-point rise by the FOMC was the ninth since March 2022, and brought the Fed's benchmark lending rate to between 4.75 and five per cent.

Waller said on Friday that "a significant tightening of credit conditions could obviate the need for some additional monetary policy tightening."

His remarks echo previous comments from the Fed that suggested the fallout from SVB's collapse could mean less interest rate hikes were now needed.

But Waller cautioned against "making such a judgement" in real time.

"I would welcome signs of moderating demand, but until they appear and I see inflation moving meaningfully and persistently down toward our two percent target, I believe there is still work to do," he said.

AFP

Europe to see sharp slowdown but not recession: IMF official

Washington, US - Europe will see a "sharp slowdown" in economic growth this year, but most countries will avoid a recession, the director of the International Monetary Fund's European department told AFP.

IMF forecasts published earlier this week predict the Euro area will grow by 0.8 per cent this year, although Germany is now expected to enter a mild recession.

The slight improvement for the Euro area from the IMF's previous forecast in January is down to a warmer-than-expected winter and "decisive policy action by policymakers," Alfred Kammer said in an interview.

"What this winter showed was policy action actually achieved results," he said.

The IMF now expects Euro area economic growth to materialize later this year before speeding up further in 2024, Kammer said.

"There is certainly in some countries a recession risk, but it's very different from what we foresaw and feared for, even in January," he said.

Germany is the only Euro area country the IMF now forecasts will enter recession this year.

A downward revision in its growth forecast from January means Germany will join the UK as the only G7 economies ex-

pected to shrink in 2023.

Much of Germany's contraction comes down to the ongoing economic impact of Russia's war in Ukraine, Kammer said.

Russia sharply reduced gas exports to Europe, forcing policymakers to look elsewhere for supplies of the crucial energy source.

"Germany is more affected than other countries by the energy crisis because their dependence on Russian gas was much more than other European countries," Kammer said.

"That explains really, the slowdown we are seeing," in Germany, he added.

AFP

TENDERS ADVERTISEMENT

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) Announce the following Tenders:

Sr.No	Tender No.	Tender Name	Last date for obtaining the documents	Bid Submission Date	Requirements from participants	Tender Document's Fees (Including VAT) (RO)
1	75/2022 (Refloat)	Protection System Model Update and Relay Setting Study with Performance Audit.	14/05/2023	30/05/2023	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration	52/500
2	30/2023	Provide Support Services for the Operation and Monitoring of Security for Three Years	14/05/2023	30/05/2023	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration	105/-

Participation:	Interested Companies may obtain Tender Document with the necessity Apply on E-tendering
Buying the Tender:	By E-Tendering System.
Fees:	Against non-refundable payment as mentioned above against each set of document. (Payment Through Bank Transfer) , SMEs are exempted from tender's fees.
The deadline for clarification:	Before (21) Days from bid submission date.
Submission:	The submission of hard copy will be only for Bid Bond & other documents by E-Tendering
Terms and conditions:	- No other writing or any reference thereto should be mentioned on the envelope. - The bid should be valid for not less than (90) days from bid submission date. - The Tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the bid value and should be valid for (90) days from bid submission date, addressed to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC). Small & Medium Enterprises are exempted from the submission of 1% of the bid bond. - Any bid not comply with the required guarantee, will not be accepted. - OETC is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offers.
Offer:	The bid bond should be submitted in Tender Box No. (1) at the company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission of the Tenders.
Company Address:	Muscat - Al Mawaleh Road No: 2153 - Building No. 423 0 Block No: 321 - Contact Details: 93515198
Email	tenders@omangrid.com
Website:	www.omangrid.com / link of E-Tendering System https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx



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المستندون
بالتعاون
مع الثقة

رؤية عمان
2040

إعلان طرح مناقصات

تعلن الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء عن طرح المناقصات التالية :

م	رقم المناقصة	عنوان المناقصة	آخر موعد للحصول على مستندات المناقصة	آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات	الدرجة	لمن الوثيقة (شامل ضريبة القيمة المضافة) (دع)
١	٢٠٢٢/٧٥ (إعادة طرح)	تحديث نموذج نظام الحماية ودراسة ضبط أجهزته مع تدقيق الأداء	٢٠٢٣/٠٥/١٤	٢٠٢٣/٠٥/٣٠	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال ولديها سجل تجاري ساري المفعول	٥٢/٥٠٠
٢	٢٠٢٣/٣٠	تقديم خدمات الدعم لتشغيل ومراقبة الأمن لمدة ثلاث سنوات	٢٠٢٣/٠٥/١٤	٢٠٢٣/٠٥/٣٠	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال ولديها سجل تجاري ساري المفعول	١٠٥/-

الاشتراك	يمكن للشركات والمؤسسات المتخصصة الحصول على مستندات المناقصة بعد تقديم الطلب عن طريق نظام التناقص الإلكتروني.
طريقة الشراء	من خلال نظام التناقص الإلكتروني.
الرسوم	مقابل دفع المبلغ المحدد أعلاه للنسخة الواحدة - لا ترد - (الدفع عن طريق التحويل البنكي) . تُعفى المؤسسات الصغيرة والمتوسطة من دفع ثمن الوثيقة.
آخر موعد للإستفسارات	قبل (٢١) يوم من تاريخ آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات
تقديم العروض	يتم تسليم النسخة الأصلية فقط من الضمان البنكي للعطاء في الصندوق . أما العرض فيتم تسليمه من خلال نظام التناقص الإلكتروني.
الشروط و الضمانات	- عدم تحديد اسم صاحب العطاء أو ما يشير إليه على المظروف. - أن تكون العروض صالحة المفعول لمدة لا تقل عن (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء . - إرفاق تأميناً في صورة ضمان مصرفي من أحد البنوك العاملة في البلاد قدره (٪١) من قيمة العطاء ساري لمدة (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء .ويعتدوا بإسم الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء . تُعفى المؤسسات الصغيرة والمتوسطة من تسليم الضمان المصرفي . - كل عطاء لا يستوفي التأمين المطلوب لن ينظر فيه . - يجب الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء غير مقبولة بقبول أقل العروض أو أي عطاء آخر .
العرض المقدم	يجب وضع الضمان البنكي للعطاء فقط في صندوق المناقصات رقم (١) بمبنى الشركة قبل الساعة ١١ صباحاً من التاريخ المحدد لتقديم العطاءات
عنوان الشركة	عنوان الشركة: محافظة مسقط - الموالج رقم السكّة ٢١٥٣ - مبنى رقم ٤٢٣٠ تفاصيل التواصل: ٩٣٥١٥١٩٨
البريد الإلكتروني	tenders@omangrid.com
الموقع الإلكتروني	www.omangrid.com link of E-Tendering System https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx



رؤية عمان
2040

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الهاتف : ٩١٨٢٤٢٣٠٠٠ / الفاكس : ٩١٨٢٢٣٠٩٠٤٦
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Omantel, BankDhofar sign pact for 'cloudification'

Omantel and BankDhofar have recently inked a five-year contract to provide the bank with a bespoke hybrid solution and wide suite of data centre offerings from co-location and connectivity solutions into disaster recovery, followed by stepping stones for workload migration into cloudification.

The long-term strategic partnership was signed at Omantel's headquarters by Baha al Lawati, VP of Enterprise Business Unit at Omantel, and Dr Tariq Taha, Chief Information Officer at BankDhofar, stated a release.

As resistance to cloud migration is dissolving globally, cloud technology is playing a pivotal role in reshaping the banking industry.

Once considered unlikely, core computing in the cloud is now seen as a game-changer and a necessity to be secure, scalable, and agile in an ever-changing marketplace.

Through its subsidiary company Oman Data Park, Omantel continues to enable large corporates and enterprises to migrate to cloud and stay competitive in dynamic markets by designing cost-effective solutions that streamline the customers' operations and achieve the desired growth without compromising on data security.

"We are thrilled to sign a strategic partnership with BankDhofar and be part of their successful journey into cloudification. With our hybrid solution delivered through Omantel's Data Centre and hosting arm Oman Data Park, we will be moving the workload and operations of BankDhofar into our data centre as a part of their journey towards digital transformation



and cloud adoption," said Baha al Lawati.

"This strategic move will optimise their operation, increase agility in product offering, and improve the customer experience. By leveraging the power of cloud technology, we are confident that this move will not only enhance the scalability and reliability of their operations but also enable them to stay ahead of the curve in a rapidly evolving industry," Lawati explained.

"Enterprises are constantly evolving, and their success is strongly linked with their ability to adopt new technologies and serve their customers with unique offerings to elevate their experiences," he further said, assuring "we are committed to delivering a seamless transition and ensuring that our clients' needs and expectations are met with the highest level of excellence".

Dr Tariq Taha of BankDhofar

said, "Core computing in the cloud has become a reality and it is reshaping the banking industry. At BankDhofar, we are keen on embracing the future as we are always looking for ways to stay ahead of the curve.

"Therefore, adopting state-of-the-art solutions provided by our partner, Omantel, is key towards streamlining our operations and be more agile in a dynamic market while at the same time ensure maximum data security," he pointed out. "I am confident that this partnership will bear fruit and it will foster cloudification among large entities."

Hassan Abdul Ali, General Manager of Business Development at Oman Data Park, said that his company is excited to have been given the opportunity to shift BankDhofar's data centre to the cloud.

According to him, this is a major step forward for streamlin-

ing the bank's operations, enabling it to focus on strategic initiatives while reducing operational expenses and avoiding capacity constraints.

"Not only shifting to the cloud eliminates the costs of operating and maintaining an on-premises data center, but it also elevates data security levels and ensures speedy data recovery in emergencies. We have empowered BankDhofar with disaster recovery capabilities across Tier III data centers and cloud, and this is a game-changer as it will automate the disaster recovery procedures, significantly reduce data recovery time, and enable BCP operation anytime, anywhere.

"Moreover, the bank will have the agility and flexibility that is needed to stay competitive. It can handle peak loads with ease and without any service disruptions, thanks to the elasticity of the cloud," he added.



BankDhofar officially opens Al Araqi branch

BankDhofar has recently announced the official opening of Al Araqi branch, as it continues to expand its branches network across the sultanate.

The opening ceremony was held under the patronage of Hilal Hamoud al Maamari, in the presence of a number of prominent members of the society, and BankDhofar executive management team.

Amjad Iqbal al Lawati, Chief Retail Banking Officer at BankDhofar, stressed that the opening of Al Araqi Branch would enrich the presence of BankDhofar in Dhahira governorate by being closer to the customers of that region, and providing valuable banking experience to them.

"The new branch provides

unparalleled banking experience to our customers. At BankDhofar, we will continue our efforts to expand our branch network across the Sultanate to make our services easily accessible to customers."

In addition to Al Araqi branch, the Bank has a nationwide network of 77 branches of which 66 are of BankDhofar and 11 are of Maisarah. Additionally, it has one Corporate Centre, the bank stated.

With its prime location, which is easily accessible, the branch offers a wide range of services to its customers except for cash services. The new branch is designed to provide a convenient banking experience to its customers.

BankDhofar customers may access financial services through its branches network across the sultanate, in addition to a wide network of ATMs, CDMs & FFM around the sultanate that work round-the-clock with high efficiency.

For added customer convenience, the Bank offers smart banking at the fingertips through its mobile banking app. Customers may conduct a wide range of instant mobile banking services through the award winning app. The services include instant transfer 24/7 to any local bank account, cardless cash, Instant International money transfer service with Western Union, among other services.



OCEC hosts largest iftar with 7,000 participating

The Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) turned to be the venue for the largest iftar reception last week when it hosted a gathering of nearly 7,000 people from various walks of life.

Organised by Nada Happiness, a popular name in wholesale trading, several Ministerial representatives, a number of executives, stakeholders, and their employees took part in the iftar that went through suhoor.

Several halls of the iconic exhibition centre were joined to-

gether to host such an enormous number of people.

Vehicles were controlled by volunteers and visitors were given directions in order to make the event a flawless and complaint-free one

Abdul Salam, chairman; Abdul Asif, MD, and CEOs Abdul Saleem and Ameer Ahmed said that it was the first time for such a whopping number of people to break fast together in the recent past. "We have conducted iftar gatherings in the past too. But this is the first time that an iftar

of this stature is conducted and many of the Omani as well as expatriate workforce being honoured," they said.

As may as 72 employees who have been working for over five years and for more than a decade were honoured with mementos and tokens of appreciation. An array of sumptuous iftar delicacies was arranged for the believers to break their fast and the iftar gathering, as any community iftar does, provided with networking opportunities for the guests.

'Beat the Heat' with Mercedes-Benz Oman's AC summer check offer

Mercedes-Benz Oman has announced air conditioning summer check offer until May 30, in which customers can get their entire AC system checked with 55 per cent discounts on parts.

The 'AC Summer Check' offer includes a complete AC dust filter change (excluding the particulate filter), AC cleaning, AC gas top-up, a 10-point health check, and a wash and vacuum, the company stated.

"Our customers can always count on a high-quality and impeccable after-sales service. With summer approaching, our team of certified technicians



will guarantee impeccable service for our customers when they take their vehicles to one of the Mercedes-Benz Oman

service centres in Muscat, Salalah or Suhar," said Graeme McGraith, Head of Customer Services, Mercedes-Benz

Oman.

The vehicle health check is recorded using the StarView solution from Mercedes-Benz Oman - and a personalised film, along with an estimate, is shared with customers via email and SMS.

The AC Summer Check offer extends across all Mercedes-Benz models registered before January 1, 2020.

The offer excludes the Mercedes-Maybach, Mercedes-AMG GT, Mercedes-AMG G-Class, Mercedes-Benz SLR, and the Mercedes-Benz Viano, the company confirmed.

ahlibank launches Souq initiative to support SMEs

ahlibank, has launched its first Souq initiative aimed at supporting the growth and development of local SMEs. The initiative, which is the first of its kind in the bank's history, is part of the bank's commitment to aiding the overall socio-economic development in the region and is in line with Oman's Vision 2040, the bank stated in a release.

The ahlibank Souq, part of the bank's Ramadan CSR programmes, providing a platform for 40 SMEs from different sectors to showcase their products and services, supporting the local community's development, youth projects, and female entrepreneurs.

This comes as part of the bank's commitment to support SMEs and facilitate their growth

and expansion by providing them with the necessary exposure to a wider audience; contributing towards a brighter future for Oman's economy.

Commenting on this initiative, Jumana Aflah al Hashmi, Head of Marketing and Corporate Communications of ahlibank, said, "The ahlibank Souq marks a significant milestone in our commitment to supporting the growth and development of the Sultanate's economy and community. By empowering local SMEs, we are not only contributing to achieving the Vision 2040 plan, but we are also investing in the future of our nation. We remain dedicated to driving positive change and building a brighter future for the sultanate and are proud to take this step forward in



our impactful community engagement roadmap."

Supporting SMEs is not just a corporate social responsibility for ahlibank, but it is also considered as a duty being a leading bank in the Sultanate which contributes towards building a sustainable economy. SMEs are the backbone of any economy, and they play a vital role in creating job opportunities, driving innovation, and stimulating economic growth. therefore, we are committed to supporting the development of SMEs by providing them with the necessary financial and non-financial support.

ahlibank has been steadfast in its commitment to providing a conducive business environment for SMEs to thrive and grow. The bank has been providing various

financial solutions, including loans and credit facilities, to SMEs across a range of sectors.

This support has been critical in empowering entrepreneurs to pursue their business aspirations and contribute to the overall economic development of the community.

In addition to its focus on SME growth, ahlibank is also deeply committed to making a positive impact on the community. The bank has been supporting various community development projects and initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life of the people in the communities it serves. This includes sponsoring and supporting educational, cultural, and environmental initiatives that promote sustainable development.

OOC begins second chapter of sports diploma programme

Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), represented by the Oman Olympic Academy (OOA), has launched the second chapter of the Advanced Sports Management Diploma Program 2023 for sports institutions on Sunday morning.

The three-day programme, which is being held in cooperation with International Olympic Solidarity, will be conducted by lecturer Hisham bin Salem al Adwani, the accredited director of the Advanced Sports Management Diploma Program from International Olympic Committee (IOC), said a press release.

More than 20 students from various sports bodies and institutions are taking part in the programme titled 'Strategic Management in the Work of the Olympic Sports Institution through the preparation, implementation and evaluation of a good strategic plan'.

In addition to developing and implementing plans to achieve strategic objectives, and assisting the Board of Directors in evaluating their impacts, the



programme aims to provide the highest level of development for participants who work in the sports and Olympic administrative fields in general, and to highlight the basic dimensions that serve these bodies, organisations and committees to raise and develop the administrative level.

It is worth mentioning that the Advanced Sports Management Diploma Program is held in the form of workshops for three days per month in seven chapters, so that these workshops cover the six chapters of the book Management of Olympic Sports Organisations, which is the latest book in the field of sports presented by International Olympic Solidarity.

The 7th chapter is devoted to presenting the final studies and projects of the participants and the evaluation of the general outcome of this programme.

IOC grants a diploma in the Advanced Sports Management Program after the study submitted by each student fulfills the conditions for submission and evaluation by the programme director.

ahli islamic announces 15% cash reward on salary transfer

Adhering to its commitment to enhance the spirit of Ramadan with valuable and relevant rewards for customers, ahli islamic offers a one-time cash reward on salary transfers.

Customers get 15 per cent of the monthly pay, when transferring their salaries to the Bank with a cap of RO500.

Designed to help patrons realise their dreams and to exceed their expectations with enriching experiences, the cash reward offer of the Bank, which will run all until the end of the holy month of Ramadan, will provide a maximum amount that will not exceed RO500.

It will be offered in accordance with the Bank's terms and conditions.

Highlighting the features of instant cash reward, Yousuf bin Salim al Rawahi, Deputy General Manager and Head of ahli islamic said, "The blessed month of Ramadan reflects the spirit of generosity and kindness, which is what we want to spread through our offer. With this offer during this auspicious occasion we want to demonstrate our keenness to provide innovative banking solutions that suit the changing needs of our customers."

"We believe in providing initiatives that add value to our customers' banking experiences, and, towards this end, we have amplified the offer of cash reward when transferring salary."

"We expect this special offer to strengthen and support our relationship with existing customers, and help us forge stronger bonds with new customers. Our mission to provide exclusive and diverse promotions that support our customers' lifestyles - while helping them keep pace with global trends - is ongoing."

As per the reward scheme, the ahli islamic will offer both Omani and expatriate salary transfer customers the opportunity to enjoy gainful benefits. It will be available for all customers who transfer their monthly salaries - minimum RO1,000 - to the bank.

Pointing out that the new offer is a strategic move to foster savings culture among customers, Rawahi added, "We want to encourage our customers to adopt best practices, which have a long-term impact on their lives."

"Accordingly, our cash reward offer is structured to instill a sense of security among our customers."

Geely unveils all-new Azkarra in Oman with 'Season to Explore' benefits

Geely, a leading automobile manufacturer, is thrilled to announce its latest offering in Oman - 'Season to Explore' with a range of exciting benefits. This offer is the perfect opportunity for car enthusiasts in Oman to become proud owners of Geely's newest car model - the all-new Azkarra.

This season, customers can unlock unbelievable prices with Geely's latest 'Season to Explore' benefits that include a generous cash gift of RO2,701, free 3 years of AAA roadside assistance, and a manufacturer's warranty for five years or 150,000km - whichever comes first.

Towell Auto Centre, which brings Geely to Oman, stated that the benefits may vary based on model variants, model year, and manufacturing year. One may visit its showroom for details, the company added.

Geely has earned a reputation worldwide for producing outstanding vehicles. Now, even the people of Oman can indulge in the same extraordinary driving experience with the launch of the all-new Azkarra. Visit our showrooms to book a test drive for



this amazing car.

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ROHM to end season with Mozart's Così Fan Tutte opera

The Royal Opera House Muscat is delighted to present Mozart's stunning opera *Così Fan Tutte* as the final opera of the 2022-23 Season at the opera house.

Audiences are invited to celebrate opera with a production which promises to do justice to the work of arguably the best-loved composer of the opera genre, ROHM stated.

Acclaimed young composer Leonardo Sini, a rising star in the world of music, will conduct the Luigi Cherubini Youth Orchestra in Ettore Scuola's direction of *Così Fan Tutte*.

The 1685 Choir of the Giuseppe Verdi Conservatory of Ravenna will perform alongside star soloists including Martina Russomanno, Serena Malfi, German Olvera, Alasdair Kent, Lavinia Bini and Ferruccio Furlanetto.

The plot takes place in the



Bay of Naples in the 18th century. Deeply convinced of women's infidelity, the cynical Don Alfonso provokes his young friends Ferrando and Guglielmo by impugning the constancy of their fiancées, sisters Dorabella and Fiordiligi.

To prove his assertion, Alfonso proposes the following plan to them: That they tell their fiancées they are leaving for war, and then return dressed as Albanian soldiers, ready to do anything to seduce the lonely fiancées.

With their 'real' lovers gone, Fiordiligi and Dorabella appear outraged when their servant Despina (Don Alfonso's accomplice) introduces into their home the two Albanians, who quickly prove very enterprising.

The two sisters at first reject them virtuously but soon allow themselves to be charmed by these new suitors who, under a false identity, gradually become disillusioned as they see their mistresses betraying them.

"They all do that!" (*Così fan tutte*) Don Alfonso concludes, delighted to have proved his theory.

When the deception is revealed, the two couples reunite despite it all, with no great illusion about their happiness.

The opera is rich with fabulous costumes and elegant staging, making it the perfect evening out and a feast for opera lovers and culture enthusiasts.

The ROHM is urging people not to miss the chance to catch this wonderful performance in Muscat.

Così Fan Tutte will take place over two nights on May 4 and 6, at 7.30pm at the Royal Opera House Muscat.

Prisoner exchange completed in Yemen

Huthis and government forces freed scores of prisoners on the last of a 3-day exchange of detainees

Sanaa, Yemen - Huthis and government forces freed scores of prisoners on Sunday on the last of a three-day exchange of nearly 900 detainees, boosting hopes of ending their protracted war.

Planes carrying detainees took off at the same time from the Huthi-held capital of Sanaa and the government-controlled northern city of Marib, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said.

Some were taken to the Red Cross planes in wheelchairs. All released prisoners were given plastic bags with food to eat when the daily Ramadan fast was over.

At the airport in Sanaa, Huthi fighters staged a ceremonial dance with swords to greet their comrades.

"Forty-eight former detainees were on board the Marib-Sanaa flight, and 42 on the Sanaa-Marib flight," ICRC media adviser Jessica Moussan told AFP.

Three other flights during the day were to complete the deal reached in Switzerland last month to exchange 181 government forces for 706 rebels, just before the major Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr.

Four journalists sentenced to death by the Iranian-backed Huthis are part of the exchange,



Men dressed in traditional Yemeni outfits raise their daggers upon the landing of an ICRC aircraft carrying Huthi former prisoners at Sanaa airport, on Sunday (AFP)

Planes carrying detainees took off at the same time from the Huthi-held capital of Sanaa and the government-controlled northern city of Marib, the ICRC said

said government negotiator Majed Fadail.

Rebel political chief, Mahdi al-

Mashat, said the next round of talks with Saudi Arabia, which leads the military coalition

against the Huthis, would start after Eid al-Fitr expected on April 21, Yemen's Saba news agency reported.

The last talks ended hours before 318 prisoners were transported on four flights on Friday between Sanaa and government-controlled Aden, reuniting detainees with their families.

On Saturday, 357 detainees took flights between the Saudi city of Abha and Sanaa. Saudis

were among the prisoners freed.

It is not known how many prisoners each side still has.

'Torn apart'

The Huthis seized Sanaa in 2014, prompting the Saudi-led intervention the following year. Hundreds of thousands have died in the conflict which triggered a major humanitarian crisis.

A UN-brokered ceasefire that started in April 2022 has sharply

reduced casualties. The truce expired in October, but fighting has largely remained on hold.

Marib governorate, an oil-rich region, saw some of the most bitter fighting in the last two years.

The city of Marib is the last northern bastion of the government, which is now based in the southern city of Aden.

The prisoner exchange is a confidence-building measure coinciding with an intense diplo-

matic push to end the war, as it nears its nine-year mark.

"Let us not forget the real purpose of these releases: reuniting loved ones," said the ICRC's Moussan.

"These past three days have brought back joy to so many shattered families who have been torn apart by conflict. We only hope more of these releases will happen in the near future."

Analysts say Saudi Arabia now accepts that its prolonged military campaign in support of the government will not defeat the Huthis.

The exchange and the truce negotiations come a month after Gulf heavyweights Saudi Arabia and Iran agreed to re-establish diplomatic ties, sparking a wave of rapprochement across the troubled region.

A Saudi delegation has travelled to Sanaa to push for a more durable ceasefire, even as the Huthis generally object to Saudis mediation, insisting the neighbouring kingdom has played a central role in the conflict.

The delegation left on Thursday without a finalised truce but with plans for more talks that the Saudi foreign ministry said on Saturday would take place 'as soon as possible'.

AFP

Japan copter crash search: 5 bodies, wreckage found

Tokyo, Japan - Japan's army found wreckage and five bodies on Sunday during a deep-sea search for crew on board a helicopter that disappeared from radar earlier this month, an army spokesman said.

The aircraft with 10 people on board had been on a reconnaissance mission when it went missing on April 6, in what the Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) described as an 'aerial accident'.

Two pilots, two mechanics and six crew members were on board the UH-60JA, including a GSDF general from the 8th division. The newly found wreckage appeared to be from the missing helicopter, but there were no details yet on the identities of the bodies retrieved, the army spokesman said.

"There are still five left undiscovered, so search and rescue operations are underway simul-



Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force vessels search the waters off Miyakojima, Okinawa prefecture on Sunday (AFP)

taneously," the spokesman told AFP. Coastguard rescuers had already discovered several pieces of debris that appeared to be from the helicopter, including a door, a snapped blade and a yellow life raft that was still packed inside a bag.

There has been no indication of what caused the apparent accident. Japan's military, which is limited to ostensibly defensive activity by the country's post-

war constitution, has seen occasional accidents. In January 2022, a Japanese fighter jet crashed in waters off central Ishikawa region, killing two pilots on board. And in 2019, an F-35A stealth jet crashed into the sea, after taking off from northeastern Japan on a training mission. The accident sparked a scramble to recover the pilot and secrets on board.

AFP

South Korea's military fires warning shots after North's boat incursion

Seoul, South Korea - South Korea's military fired warning shots to turn back a patrol boat from the North that had crossed the countries' de facto maritime border, Seoul said on Sunday.

The boat breached the Northern Limit Line on Saturday morning near South Korea's Baekryeong Island, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

"Our Navy's high-speed boat sent warning messages and conducted warning shots and immediately warded it off," it said.

"Our military is prepared against various provocations and keeping a decisive combat posture while closely monitoring the enemy's movements," the statement added.

During the operation, some South Korean crew members were being treated for injuries sustained when their vessel col-



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un attending the Central Military Commission meeting in Pyongyang last week (AFP)

lided with a Chinese fishing boat.

The de facto maritime border - which was never officially recognised by the North - has long been a flashpoint between the two Koreas, which remain technically at war after the 1950-53 Korean War ended with an armistice rather than a peace

treaty.

Last year the nuclear-armed North fired a ballistic missile across the maritime border, prompting Seoul to fire three missiles of its own in response, while also suspending flight routes and warning island residents in the area to shelter in

bunkers.

Relations between the two Koreas are at one of their lowest points in years after Pyongyang declared itself an 'irreversible' nuclear power last year, effectively ending the possibility of denuclearisation talks.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has doubled down on weapons testing, with Pyongyang firing several of its most powerful intercontinental ballistic missiles this year.

Washington and Seoul have ramped up defence cooperation in response, staging joint military exercises with advanced stealth jets and high-profile US strategic assets.

North Korea views such exercises as rehearsals for invasion and described them on Tuesday as 'frantic' drills 'simulating an all-out war against' Pyongyang.

AFP

Japan PM urges better security after bomb attack

Tokyo, Japan - Japan needs to increase security as Group of Seven officials visit, the country's prime minister said on Sunday, a day after an explosive was thrown at him during a campaign event.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida escaped unharmed after the device, reportedly a pipe bomb, was thrown towards him as he campaigned in the western city of Wakayama on Saturday.

A 24-year-old man was arrested, but has so far revealed nothing about his motives in the attack, which came as Japan hosts two G7 ministerial meetings. "At a time when high-ranking officials from all over the world are visiting... Japan as a whole needs to maximise its efforts to ensure security and safety," Kishida told reporters on Sunday.

"It's unforgivable such a violent act was committed during an election campaign," he added.

He said he expected police to step up security measures in the wake of the incident, which came



Japan's PM Fumio Kishida (AFP)

less than a year after Japan's former prime minister Shinzo Abe was assassinated by a gunman in the western city of Nara.

His killing sent shockwaves through the country, and prompted an overhaul of security around public officials.

Kishida was about to deliver a speech at a fishing port in Wakayama when Saturday's incident occurred.

At a time when officials from all over the world are visiting... Japan as a whole needs to maximise its efforts to ensure security and safety. It's unforgivable such a violent act was committed

FUMIO KISHIDA

Footage from the scene showed a metal canister being thrown from within a small crowd behind him, and the prime minister turning before being surrounded and led away by security.

Security officials and civilians at the scene quickly detained a man, whom local media have named as 24-year-old Ryuji Kimura from Hyogo region, also

in western Japan.

As Kimura was detained, a large blast sounded and white smoke filled the air, with people in the crowd screaming and running away.

A local fisherman who helped detain Kimura said he picked up a pipe-shaped object at the scene.

"I picked up this metal thing and wanted to hand it to a police officer. But he told me, 'Just put it down! Leave it there,'" he told national broadcaster NHK.

Abe killing

Local media reports said Kimura, who was arrested on suspicion of obstruction of business, has so far refused to speak to investigators.

Kishida resumed campaigning not long after the incident and insisted the lower house by-elections, scheduled for April 23, would not be affected.

Security at local campaign events can be relatively relaxed in Japan, a country with little violent crime and strict gun laws.

But the country bolstered security around politicians after the assassination of Abe, who was shot and killed while speaking at a campaign event in July 2022.

His alleged assassin, Tetsuya Yamagami, reportedly targeted him over his links to the Unification Church, and the incident sparked revelations about the connection between the sect and political figures in Japan.

Yamagami was said to have been angry over large donations his mother made to the group, which left the family bankrupt.

The head of Japan's National Police Agency, and the local police chief, resigned in the wake of Abe's assassination after an investigation confirmed 'shortcomings' in security for the former leader.

The attack against Kishida comes as G7 climate and energy ministers meet in the northern city of Sapporo and the bloc's foreign ministers gather in the resort town of Karuizawa, west of Tokyo.

AFP

Gunmen kill 7 at water park in central Mexico

Celaya, Mexico - Gunmen stormed a water park in central Mexico on Saturday and killed six adults and a child, unleashing panic among those present, local authorities said.

Police 'arrived at the scene where they found... three dead women, three men and a seven-year-old minor, in addition to one person seriously wounded', said a statement from City Hall in Cortazar, the municipality where the attack took place.

The surrounding state of Guanajuato in central Mexico has seen a surge in drug-related violence in recent years.

The gunmen arrived at the La Palma swimming resort at 4:30pm local time (2230 GMT) 'to perpetrate the attack', the statement said.

Attackers went directly toward a group of people and opened fire, then yanked out security cameras from the site

before retreating, authorities said. According to a video posted on local news site Debate Noticias, which was taken by an eye-witness at the scene, the victims had collapsed on the floor or on the chairs where they were sitting amid thick clouds of smoke - apparently from the gunshots.

The footage also shows people running for cover from the gunfire.

The website of TV Azteca, one of Mexico's main television networks, had a video from the scene showing panic-stricken adults and children still in swimwear - including pool floats - on the scene after the shooting.

The attack occurred on the last day of the spring school vacation period. The resort, abutting a university campus, was swarmed by military and state police after the attack.

AFP

Brazil's Lula raises Russia war mediation with China and UAE

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Brazil's president on Sunday said he had discussed joint mediation for Russia's war in Ukraine with China and the United Arab Emirates, accusing the United States and Europe of prolonging the conflict.

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who was wrapping up an official visit to China and the UAE after returning for a third term in office, said the two countries and others should join a 'political G20' to try to end the war.

The veteran leftist, who has faced accusations of being overly cosy with Russian President Vladimir Putin, also remarked that the war was caused 'by decisions made by two countries'.

"President Putin doesn't take any initiatives to stop the war. (President Volodymyr) Zelensky from Ukraine doesn't take any initiatives to stop the war," Lula, speaking through an official translator, told reporters in Abu Dhabi.

"Europe and the US continue to give their way of contribution to continue the war. So they have to sit around the table and say, 'That's enough'."

While in China, Lula accused Washington of 'encouraging' the



UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan welcoming Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva at Qasr al-Watan in Abu Dhabi on Saturday (AFP)

We're meeting a set of people that prefer to talk about peace than war... we're going to have success

LULA DA SILVA

war by supplying weapons to Ukraine.

He also lashed out at the dollar's dominance in global trade, calling for a new currency for transactions between the BRICS countries - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

Biofuel deal

The 77-year-old said he spoke

to UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and Chinese President Xi Jinping, about forming a group of countries to mediate, styled after the G20 group of advanced economies.

"The G20 was formed to bail out the (world) economy that was in crisis," Lula said.

"Now it's important to create

another kind of G20 to end this war and establish peace. This is my intent and I think that we'll manage to have great success.

"Yesterday I talked to the sheikh about the war. I talked to Xi Jinping about the war. And I think that we're meeting a set of people that prefer to talk about peace than war. And so I think we're going to have success."

Lula said he had already discussed his initiative with US President Joe Biden, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, French President Emmanuel Macron and the leaders of some South American countries.

Despite his comments about the US, the 77-year-old, who returned to power in January after serving two terms from 2003 to 2010, is also seeking closer ties with Washington.

His visit to China and the UAE, postponed by a bout of pneumonia, came after a meeting with US President Joe Biden in February.

Unlike Western powers, neither China nor Brazil has imposed sanctions against Moscow over Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. The UAE has maintained a neutral stance in the conflict.

Lula, who was due to fly back to Brazil early on Sunday, said his delegation had signed deals worth US\$10bn in China.

Earlier, Brazil and the UAE announced a series of deals, including an investment of up to US\$2.5bn for a biodiesel project by the UAE-controlled Mataripe refinery in Brazil.

AFP

Two killed in strikes in Iraqi Kurdistan

Sulaimaniyah, Iraq - At least two people have been killed and two others wounded in northern Iraq's Kurdistan region, officials said on Sunday, blaming a drone strike carried out by neighbouring Turkey.

The strikes late on Saturday near the town of Penjwen, close to the Iranian border, targeted a vehicle carrying Turkish Kurdish fighters from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), one official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the subject.

The PKK, which Ankara and its Western allies classify as a 'terrorist' organisation, operates rear bases in Iraq's north.

Haval Abubaker, regional governor of Sulaimaniyah, expressed his 'concern' about the 'attacks' in a telephone call with Masrour Barzani, prime minister of Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan.

"According to preliminary elements of the investigation, two people were killed and two others injured by these attacks," Abubaker said in a statement.

Since 1984 the PKK has waged an insurgency in Turkey that has claimed tens of thousands of lives.

AFP

Israeli judicial protest movement again crowds streets of Tel Aviv

Tel Aviv, Israel - Thousands of Israelis again took to the streets of Tel Aviv late on Saturday to protest government judicial reforms they view as an attack on democracy.

The 15th consecutive week of protest came after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on March 27 announced a 'pause' to allow for dialogue on the reforms which were moving through parliament and split the nation.

'Let's save democracy' read signs in a sea of Israeli flags waved by demonstrators. AFP journalists also reported smoke bombs and flares being set off.

Smaller protests also took place in the northern port of Haifa and outside the home of Justice Minister Yariv Levin in Modiin.

Israeli media reported tens of thousands had turned out, as occurred in some previous demonstrations. "We are fighting for our democracy. We have no other country," one demonstrator, Nadav Tamir, 61, told AFP.

Karen Baron, a 45-year-old Tel



Israeli police surround protesters during a demonstration in Tel Aviv on Saturday (AFP)

Aviv psychiatrist, said: "I didn't want to come today but my sister told me, 'We have no choice', and it's true. We have no choice - we can't lower our guard. We have to defend our country."

The proposals would curtail the authority of the Supreme Court and give politicians greater powers over the selection of judges. Netanyahu's government, a coalition between his Likud party and extreme-right and

ultra-Orthodox Jewish allies, argues the changes are needed to rebalance powers.

Saturday's demonstration came a day after US rating agency Moody's announced it was lowering Israel's outlook from 'positive' to 'stable'.

It said the change 'reflects a deterioration of Israel's governance, as illustrated by the recent events around the government's proposal for overhauling the

country's judiciary.

"While mass protests have led the government to pause the legislation and seek dialogue with the opposition, the manner in which the government has attempted to implement a wide-ranging reform without seeking broad consensus points to a weakening of institutional strength and policy predictability," Moody's noted.

AFP

UK nurses prepared to strike until Christmas, says union leader

London, UK - Nurses in Britain are prepared to strike until Christmas if they cannot reach a deal with the government on pay, the leader of the country's main nursing union said on Sunday.

Members of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) would strike at the end of April and the beginning of May before holding a ballot on continuing the strike to the end of the year, union leader Pat Cullen said. "If that ballot is successful it will mean further strike action right up until Christmas," Cullen told the BBC's Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg programme.

Members of the union rejected a government pay offer on Friday and immediately announced an escalation in strike action.

Hopes had been high that nurses in England would accept the five per cent pay offer brokered by the RCN and the government in March.

But after putting the offer to its members, the RCN said 54 per cent turned it down.

RCN members will walk out for 48 hours from 8pm (1900

ments cancelled.

Members of the union rejected a government pay offer on Friday and immediately announced an escalation in strike action

GMT) on April 30, with the action extended to staff in emergency departments, intensive care and cancer care units for the first time. The refusal is a setback for the government, which had hoped for an end to the crippling health sector strike that has seen thousands of operations and appoint-

'Hugely disappointing'

Hospital doctors below consultant level have this week been on a four-day strike demanding better pay and conditions. Cullen said she had received a letter from Health Secretary Steve Barclay on Sunday morning after requesting talks with him about the pay offer last week.

RCN members walked out for the first time in the union's 108-year history late last year, joining a wave of public and private sector workers calling for pay rises as inflation soared.

The government said the RCN rejection of the pay offer was 'hugely disappointing' and said it was 'fair and generous'.

As well as a five per cent pay increase in the next financial year, the offer included a one-off bonus worth at least £1,250 (US\$1,510) per person.

AFP

Iraq's ancient treasures blasted by sandstorms linked to climate change

Umm Al-Aqarib, Iraq - Iraqi archaeological marvels that have survived millennia and the ravages of war now face a modern threat: being blasted and slowly buried by sandstorms linked to climate change.

Ancient Babylonian treasures, painstakingly unearthed, are slowly disappearing again under wind-blown sand in a land parched by rising heat and prolonged droughts.

Iraq, one of the countries worst-hit by climate change, endured a dozen major sandstorms last year that turned the sky orange, brought daily life to a halt and left its people gasping for air.

When the storms clear, layers of fine sand cover everything - including the Sumerian ruins of Umm Al-Aqarib, 'the Mother of Scorpions', in the southern desert province of Dhi Qar.

Sandstorms have slowly

begun to reverse years of work there to unearth the temples' terracotta facades and many priceless artifacts, said archaeologist Aqeel al-Mansrawi.

Archaeologists in Iraq have always had to shovel sand, but now the volumes are growing.

After a decade of worsening storms, sand at Umm al-Aqarib now 'covers a good part of the site', that dates back to around 2350 BC and spans more than five square kilometres, he said.

In the past, the biggest threat was looting of antiquities at the ruins, where pottery fragments and clay tablets bearing ancient cuneiform script have been discovered. Now the changing weather and its impact on the land, especially creeping desertification, spell an additional threat to ancient sites all across southern Iraq, said Mansrawi.

"In the next 10 years," he said,



A view of the masonry of an old structure at the Umm Al-Aqarib archaeological site in the district of al-Rifai in Iraq (AFP)

"it is estimated that sand could have covered 80 to 90 per cent of the archaeological sites."

'Weathering and disintegration'

The fabled land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers

hosted some of the world's earliest civilisations, the remains of which are under threat in modern-day Iraq.

The oil-rich country is still recovering from decades of dictatorship, war and insurgency and remains plagued by misrule, cor-

ruption and widespread poverty.

Compounding its woes, Iraq is also one of the five countries most impacted by some effects of climate change, including drought, says the United Nations.

Upstream dams in Turkey and Iraq have reduced the flow of its big rivers, and more water is wasted by Iraq's ancient irrigation system and outdated farming practices. Summer temperatures topping 50 degrees Celsius (122 degrees Fahrenheit) now often batter Iraq where droughts have parched agricultural areas, driving farmers and pastoralists into crowded cities.

"The sandstorms became more frequent, the wind became dustier and the temperatures increase," said Jaafar al-Jotheri, professor of archaeology at Iraq's Al Qadisiyah University.

"The soil has become more fragile and fragmented because

of the lack of vegetation and roots," he explained.

As more farmers flee the countryside, 'their land is left behind and abandoned and its soil becomes more exposed to the wind'. Winds pick up 'more sediment fragments that reach the archaeological sites', Jotheri said, adding that the 'sand and silt cause physical weathering and disintegration of buildings'.

'Containing the sand dunes'

The problem is compounded by salinisation, said Mark Altaaweel, professor of Near East Archaeology at University College London.

During extreme heat, he explained, water on the land surface evaporates so quickly that the soil does not reabsorb the crystals, which are left behind as a crust.

"When it's hyper dry, the water quickly evaporates and that

leaves that salt residue," he said, adding 'you can see it on the bricks'. Jotheri said that salt in the earth carried by sandstorms causes 'chemical weathering for archaeological buildings'.

Iraqi authorities insist they are tackling the complex and multi-layered problem.

The government 'is working to contain the sand dunes', said Chamel Ibrahim, director of antiquities of Dhi Qar province.

He pointed to a plan to plant a 'green belt' of trees at a cost of about US\$3.8mn.

But Jotheri voiced doubt, saying that to keep the vegetation alive, 'you need a lot of water'.

When it comes to climate change, he said, 'we are the country facing the most and acting the least. We are at the bottom of the list in terms of acting against climate change.'

AFP

Sudanese seek shelter as rival forces fight

As fighting raged, Khartoum residents cautiously ventured out to buy supplies

Khartoum, Sudan - After a sleepless night as fighting raged, Khartoum residents are cautiously venturing out to buy supplies fearing a prolonged fight between Sudan's regular army and paramilitaries.

"We have been living in terror since yesterday," said 43-year-old Sanaa Mohamed, outside a bakery in a northern Khartoum suburb.

"The explosions terrified my children," added Mohamed, who hurried back to her family immediately after buying bread.

Like many in Sudan, Mohamed was shaken awake on Saturday by the outbreak of deadly fighting between Sudan's army and the powerful paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Families spent the day sheltered in place too scared to move, but on Sunday, with the fighting showing no signs of abating, some have crept out onto the dangerous streets seeking food.

Much of the city is without power in searing temperatures, with people readying for one of the last days of fasting for the holy month of Ramadan.



People carrying their belongings walk along a street in Khartoum on Sunday, as fighting between the forces of two rival generals continues (AFP)

Much of the city is without power in searing temperatures, with people readying for one of the last days of fasting for the holy month of Ramadan

The violence erupted after weeks of bitter arguments between army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who

commands the heavily-armed RSF. Their disagreements centred around the integration of the RSF into the regular army - a key condition for a final deal

aimed at ending a crisis since 2021 military coup that they orchestrated together.

'Shooting never stopped'

By Saturday morning, the dispute escalated into an all-out conflict with heavy weaponry firing and fighter jets launching airstrikes in Khartoum, and conflict raging in several other cities. In Khartoum, men in mil-

itary fatigues on pick-up trucks with mounted machine guns roamed the streets.

Explosions rattled windows - and the nerves of many Sudanese trying to stay safe.

At least 56 civilians have been killed, according to a toll early on Sunday by a group of pro-democracy medics, as well as some 600 others wounded.

The two sides have traded blame and accusations over

who started the fighting.

Each have claimed the upper hand by declaring control of key sites, including the airport and the presidential palace. None of their claims could be independently verified.

"The shooting never stopped," said Saad Ahmed, 55, from northern Khartoum. At times, 'the shelling was as close as 10 metres' from his home, he said.

On social media, Sudanese have shared images of bullet holes in the walls of their homes, warning others to stay away from windows and doors.

The capital has ground to a near halt since the outbreak of clashes, with streets around Khartoum blocked and major bridges sealed off.

Both the army and the RSF have urged people to remain indoors while they fight out their disagreements.

'Very worrying'

Despite the risk, Farouq Hassan insisted on opening his bakery.

"We are trying to work and make ends meet despite the power and water outages," he told AFP.

Protracted fighting, he fears, would plunge Sudan - already grappling with a spiralling economic crisis - into deeper chaos.

"If I cannot find a way to restock the flour, my supply will run out in 48 hours," said Hassan. The international community and civilian leaders in Sudan have appealed for an immediate ceasefire, but the two generals have yet to heed the calls.

Daglo slammed Burhan as a 'criminal' and 'liar' on Al Jazeera TV, while the army declared Daglo a 'wanted criminal' and the RSF a 'rebel militia'.

Burhan said there 'will be no negotiations or talks until the dissolution' of the group.

"It's very worrying," said Ahmed Seif, who lives in east Khartoum. "It doesn't seem like it will end anytime soon."

AFP



Police and media persons are seen at the site where Atiq Ahmed and his brother Ashraf were shot dead, in Prayagraj on Saturday (ANI)

Indian former politician, brother shot dead live on TV

Prayagraj, India - Gunmen seemingly posing as journalists shot dead a former Indian member of parliament and his brother live on TV as they were being taken in handcuffs to hospital by police, authorities said.

Atiq Ahmed, 61, who had been jailed since 2019 and was convicted of kidnapping, was answering reporters' questions late on Saturday when he and his brother Ashraf were shot at close range, the television images showed.

"According to preliminary information, three persons posing as journalists approached them and opened fire... The attackers have been held and are being questioned," police official Prashant Kumar said.

The TV clip in the northern city of Prayagraj shows the assailants shouting Hindu slogans after the brazen attack.

The two victims were from India's Muslim minority but police did not say whether they were investigating a possible sectarian motive in the killings.

The brothers were deeply involved in India's criminal underworld - the ex-MP was reportedly facing more than 100 different cases - and press reports said the attackers were

petty criminals.

The pair were being taken to hospital for medical examinations and were surrounded by police officers at the time.

Local media reports said one of the gunmen was even carrying a television camera and another a microphone with the logo of a television channel.

Several days earlier police in the same state of Uttar Pradesh said they had shot dead Ahmed's 19-year-old son and his accomplice in a shootout. Both were wanted in a case of murder.

Scores of people facing charges have been killed in the state in recent years in similar so-called 'police encounters', which rights groups say are often extra-judicial executions.

Ahmed, who had been facing charges of murder and assault, last month had claimed in a petition to India's top court that his life was under threat from the police.

Following his shooting, gatherings of more than four people were banned on Sunday across the crime-rife northern state of 200mn people that is ruled by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party.

AFP

At least 12 inmates killed in Ecuador prison

Guayaquil, Ecuador - At least 12 inmates were killed in clashes that broke out in a prison in the Ecuadorian port of Guayaquil, the prosecutor's office said on Saturday, the latest deadly violence to rock the city's penitentiary system.

The dozen inmate deaths occurred after a bloody confrontation erupted on Friday - part of a spate of brutality that began when six detainees were found hanged in the same prison and three female guards were killed earlier in the week.

Ecuadoran prisons are the scene of recurrent massacres between prisoners, against a backdrop of rivalry between criminal groups fighting for control of lucrative drug trafficking.

"An investigation has been opened to identify those responsible for the death of 12 inmates from the Litoral Penitentiary," which is also known as Guayas 1, the prosecutor's office said, adding that the bodies had bullet wounds.

The country's main port on



Relatives of inmates wait for information outside Medicina Legal in Guayaquil, Ecuador, on Saturday (AFP)

the Pacific coast, Guayaquil has in recent years become the epicenter of drug trafficking in Ecuador, located between Colombia and Peru - the world's main cocaine producers.

Since February 2021, eight massacres have been recorded in these prisons, with more than 400 prisoners killed, most of them dismembered and burned.

After the six hanged inmates were found on Wednesday,

three female guards were shot dead on Thursday by hired killers at a restaurant outside the prison complex.

On Friday, AFP correspondents could hear gunfire from within the prison and were able to record aerial images in which five bodies could be seen lying on the ground.

"We do not deny the reality and the fact that we are in the worst moment of violence in the

country," Ecuadorian Defense Minister Juan Zapata said on Friday, when the clashes began.

Overnight Friday to Saturday, the police and the army regained control of the prison, which houses around 6,800 inmates and is part of a large prison complex. Drug traffickers use prisons as centers of operation, leading to deadly clashes at regular intervals.

AFP

IS attack on Syria truffle hunters kills 26

Beirut, Lebanon - Suspected Islamic State group fighters killed at least 26 people on Sunday in Syria, a war monitor said, the latest in a spate of attacks targeting people foraging for desert truffles in the impoverished war-ravaged country. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said 'civilians and at least 10 pro-regime fighters' were among 'the 26 people killed in an attack by IS fighters while they were collecting truffles in the desert'.

Syria's desert truffles fetch high prices in a country battered by 12 years of war and a crushing economic crisis.

AFP

G7 top diplomats in Japan to talk on Ukraine, China

Karuizawa, Japan - The G7's top diplomats arrived in the Japanese resort town of Karuizawa on Sunday for talks set to be dominated by twin crises: China's growing pressure on Taiwan, and Russia's war in Ukraine.

The foreign ministers arrived by special bullet train for discussions that will set the stage for a leaders' summit in Hiroshima next month.

There is no shortage of challenges to discuss, but recent regional events are likely to sharpen the focus on Asia.

The meeting comes days after China concluded major military drills around self-ruled Taiwan, and after North Korea launched what it said was a new solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile.



(L to R) German FM Annalena Baerbock, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and Japan's FM Yoshimasa Hayashi at Karuizawa Station (AFP)

Host Japan is keen to ensure regional challenges top the agenda, and will emphasise its belief that Russia's invasion of Ukraine heightens the need for vigilance in Asia.

"Japan's basic position... on Ukraine is that the security of Europe and that of the Indo-Pacific cannot be discussed separately," a Japanese government official said ahead of the talks.

"They are intertwined with each other."

The G7 has regularly warned China against attempts to seize Taiwan, and individual members have sounded the alarm in recent days.

"A military escalation in the Taiwan Strait... would be a horror scenario for the entire world," German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said on Friday in Beijing. But there will be renewed focus on the grouping's language after recent comments by French President Emmanuel Macron.

His insistence, after a trip to Beijing, that Europe should avoid 'crises that aren't ours' has raised eyebrows and ire among Paris's allies, while delighting Chinese officials.

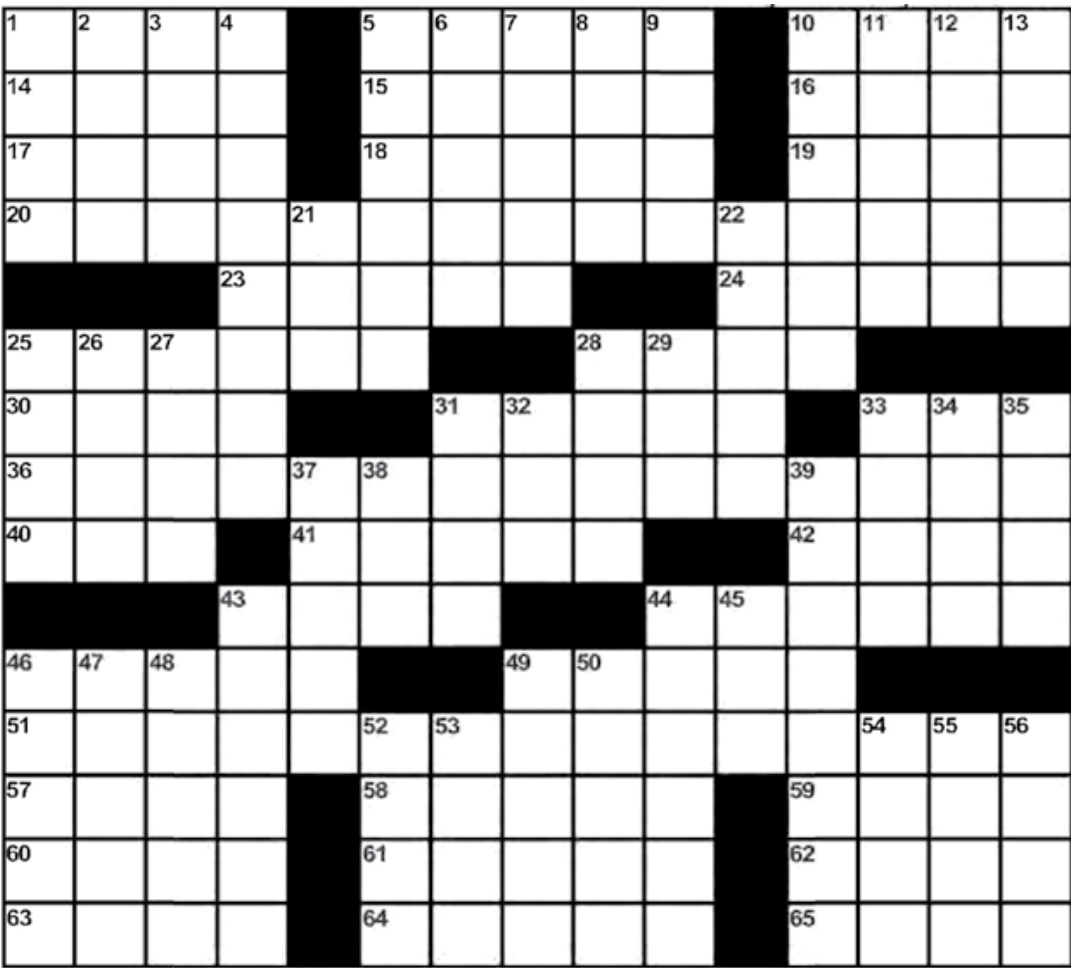
Paris has worked to temper the reaction, insisting France's views have not changed, and most observers expect the group to reiterate previous positions warning China against 'changing the status quo by force'.

Still, Macron's comments reflect the reality that members of the bloc - which groups Japan, the United States, Britain, Canada, France, Italy, Germany and the European Union - want room to manoeuvre on China policy, experts say.

And that means leaving the door open for cooperation, said European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, who is attending remotely after testing positive for COVID.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Stock reducer
- 5) Political plot
- 10) Pork serving
- 14) Long, extended film
- 15) Sorrowful song
- 16) Greek liqueur
- 17) Fishing pole attachment
- 18) Metric liquid measure
- 19) German wife
- 20) It produces poor results
- 23) State flower of Indiana
- 24) Chain units
- 25) Heavy burdens
- 28) _ Mawr College
- 30) It usually smells
- 31) Song of joy
- 33) Fish for fish sticks
- 36) What workout fanatics
- 40) Wee toymaker
- 41) Two sizes too small
- 42) Undercooked, as steak
- 43) Females of the species
- 44) Mirror reflections
- 46) Main blood vessel
- 49) Actor's memorizations
- 51) Airborne bit of gossip?
- 57) Historic Icelandic writ-

ings

- 58) Backwoods weapon
- 59) Extra layer in winter?
- 60) " ... and_ the twain shall meet"
- 61) Two quartets
- 62) Barely gets by, with "out"
- 63) Quick gait
- 64) Kitchen ants and gnats
- 65) On its way, as an email
- DOWN
- 1) Peasant
- 2) Imitative one
- 3) In_ of (instead of)
- 4) Lunar and solar events
- 5) Instruments in string quartets
- 6) Sci-fi visitor
- 7) Flagmaker Ross
- 8) Consent and Reason, for two
- 9) Old stringed instrument
- 10) Dracula's resting place
- 11) One of the Great Lakes
- 12) _ Mountains (Arkansas range)
- 13) Looks sullen

- 21) Simple shirt
- 22) Swashbuckler Errol of old Hollywood
- 25) At an earlier date
- 26) Christmas song
- 27) American mil. branch
- 28) Oscar title starter
- 29) Charlotte of sitcom TV
- 31) Guitar string tighteners
- 32) Barbecue leftover
- 33) Ragged part of a mountain
- 34) Beast of fairy tales
- 35) Changes color, in a way
- 37) "... Frome"
- 38) More than an exaggeration
- 39) Evidence of changes
- 43) "Little" literary mouse
- 44) Atlas features
- 45) French "sea"
- 46) Hollywood rep
- 47) Community of nuns
- 48) Calf-catching contest
- 49) Some boxing blows
- 50) Spot of land
- 52) Bit of blood

- 53) Some parasites
- 54) Studio singer's need
- 55) Bad sign
- 56) Relax

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Every step you take today could be leading you toward a major turning point, but only if you're ready for it will you see it. Having too much comfort and ease in your life is nice every now and then, but it's not the recipe for real growth. That's why you need to accept the changes that are happening in your daily landscape today. They might not feel comfortable at first, but they will ultimately create a new experience that changes your attitude for the better.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Prepare yourself for an indecisive phase. A lesser mortal would let such confusion shake their confidence, but you should see it as an opportunity to appreciate how difficult everyday choices can be. Instead of fighting your tendency to look at all aspects of a problem, just go with it. Enjoy how different things can look from different perspectives, and indulge in the luxury of being able to process many options before committing to one single solution.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Pay very close attention to your dreams right now, both the variety of images that your subconscious cooks up while you sleep and the ones your conscious mind creates during the day. They may seem like fanciful ideas that don't relate very much to your real life goals, but that isn't necessarily the case. Look closer and you'll see that they're a sort of roadmap to get you from where you are now to where you want to be. The signs are there. You just need to slow down to see them.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- 1. What city is the subject of "The Book of the City of Ladies" (finished 1405)?
A. The perfect city between the clouds in "The Birds" by Aristophanes
B. The city formed by the book itself
C. Cockayne
D. The Garden of the Hesperides

- 2. Someone is unsuccessfully trying to look well-dressed is said to be "dressed up like a" what?
A. Budgie's dessert
B. Elephant's breakfast
C. Dog's dinner
D. Gerbil's lunch

- 3. In 1577, Francis Drake embarked on a voyage around the world with 5 ships. After 3 years, which was the only one to return to England?
A. The Endeavour
B. Santa Maria
C. The Golden Hind
D. The Discovery

Answers: 1. B 2. C 3. C



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You might assume that someone's angry outburst would shock you, but today it will inspire you. Their passionate defense of (or argument for) what they strongly believe is something you can learn from. What do you feel passionately about? Whether it's a certain political position, type of music, charity, or hobby, you should get more involved with it today. Join a society, pledge a donation, or do something else that helps you put your energy where your interests are.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

A short, casual conversation with someone you don't know very well could evolve into a lengthy discussion today, and your intellectually curious mind will love every single minute of it! No two people experience the same reality, and you're extremely interested in hearing how other people explain their take on life. You're hungry for opinions that differ from yours, so ask for them! Listen with your ears wide open and you just might hear something that blows your mind.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Do a little personal inventory of your life today, and try to be objective about it. Sort through your friends, family, romance, and work goals to see what (or who) really needs your attention. It's very important to remove your emotions from the evaluation. Don't think about what you wish could be working well; look at what is actually working well. And then look objectively at what is genuinely not working. Start to make that a bigger priority. You'll figure out how to make it better!



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Everyone makes mistakes, and you should remember that today when someone who once hurt you comes back into your life. Will you choose to hold on to your anger or let go of the past and give them one more chance? Do for them what you'd want them to do for you if the roles were reversed. Listen to what they say and give them the benefit of the doubt. The stars say that forgiveness is a wise course now. Remember that forgiving isn't the same as forgetting. It's better.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Skipping around from one new social circle to another is fun. It's also necessary. After all, it's good to explore new activities and interesting new venues. But just make sure you don't lose sight of your tried and true friendships in the process. After all, you don't want to seem like you're being faithless or eager to replace old friendships with new ones. Being acquisitive about material goods is one thing; being acquisitive when it comes to friends is quite another.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Your deep feelings about a controversial issue might make it a very important topic of conversation for you, but not everyone you're with today is going to be open to talking to you about it. Resist the urge to preach or try to convince them to join you in your opinions. Not only could it potentially alienate people who really like you, but it could also do your cause more harm than good. Separate your passion and personal beliefs from social conversation today.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Your focus and retention are extremely unpredictable right now, so don't commit yourself to anything significant today. It really isn't an ideal day for exams, interviews, or big parties where you'll be meeting a lot of people whose names you need to remember. And if you're going to be signing any legal documents, be very careful. Get someone else to read them over. Make sure you aren't committing to something you aren't ready to do.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

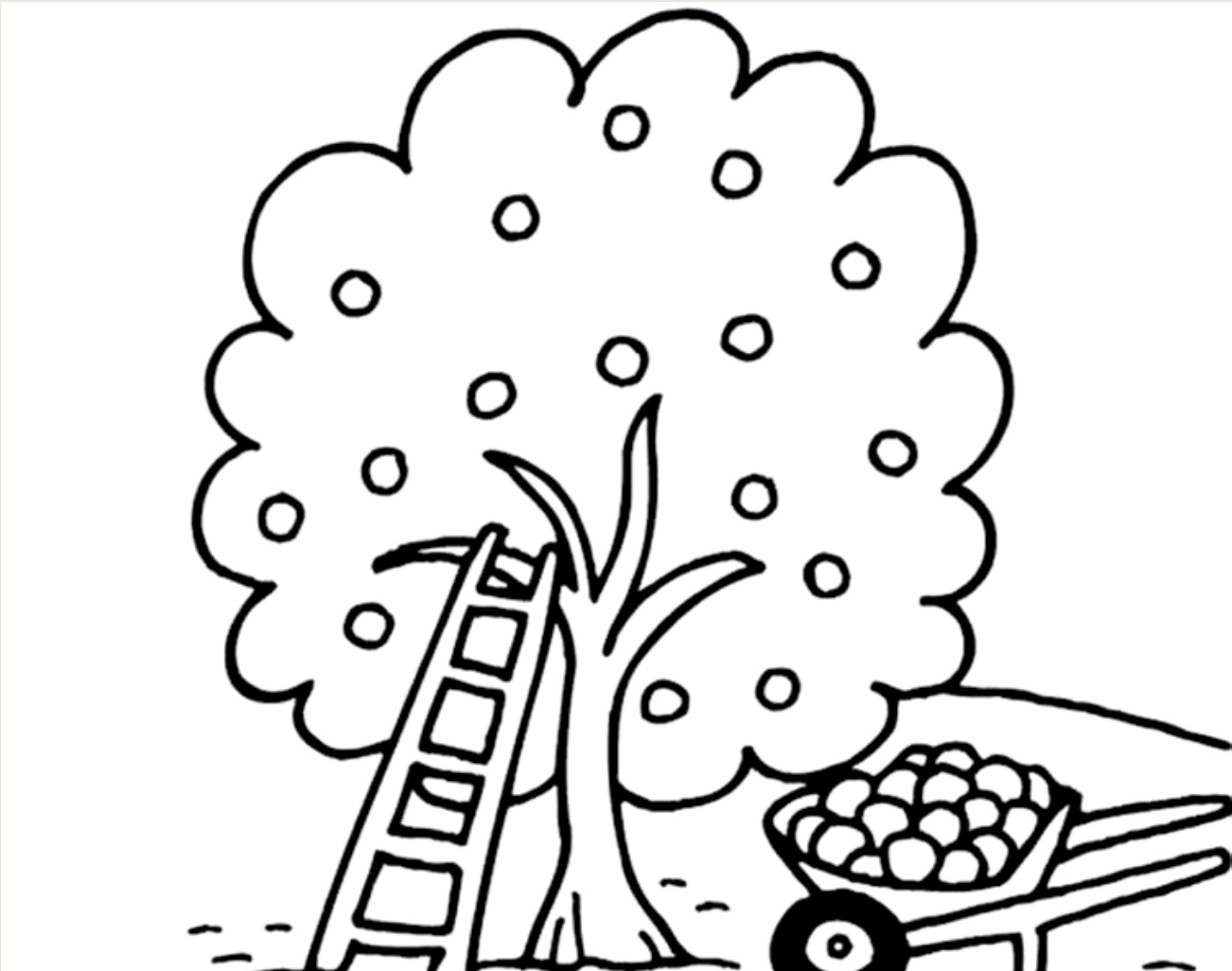
Your eyes might have good vision right now, but what about your heart? There is more to vision than just the optic nerve, you know. Sight is as much a question of perspective as anything else. What visions have you created lately that can stoke your ambition and feed your heart? Take some time today to think about what you want in your love life, your career, or your personal development.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You have a very good grasp on the emotional upheaval in your life right now, so don't worry about what's going to happen. Things might feel a bit dramatic now, but give them time. Soon enough you'll see a way out of it. There's a good way to get through whatever issues you and your circle are facing. Your panicking will only get everyone else stirred up, which in turn will only exponentially increase the stress level. Relax. Have faith that things will work out. They will.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

I	S	S	A
A	L	S	O
U	R	S	I
E	B	L	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

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

WORD BUILDER



You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

MASTERCLASS

Messi scores stunner as PSG beat title rivals Lens

Messi goal helped Paris Saint-Germain to a 3-1 home win over Lens on Saturday to surely end any doubt about the outcome of this season's Ligue 1 title race, after an early sending-off left the visitors with a mountain to climb.

Lens, who began the day six points behind league leaders PSG in second place, looked the better team until Ghana midfielder Salis Abdul Samed was dismissed for a dangerous challenge on Achraf Hakimi in the 19th minute.

striker's backheel return before slotting beyond goalkeeper Brice Samba and into the far corner.

The result leaves the reigning champions nine points ahead with seven games left, meaning it is surely just a matter of time until PSG secure a French record 11th league title.

"We must not think that it's done and dusted," said coach Christophe Galtier.

"We will need to remain serious and determined to maintain our lead and not give any hope to

We must not think that it's done and dusted. We will need to remain serious and determined to maintain our lead and not give any hope to the teams chasing us

CHRISTOPHE GALTIER

That changed everything, and by half-time the hosts were out of sight thanks to three goals in the space of 10 minutes from Kylian Mbappe, Vitinha and then Messi, with Przemyslaw Frankowski pulling one back for Lens from a penalty.

Mbappe opened the scoring and Vitinha's long-ranger doubled PSG's lead in the 37th minute.

Both goals were good but Messi's that made it 3-0 was stunning, the Argentine finding a pocket out of space outside the area, feeding a pass to Mbappe and then receiving the France

the teams chasing us."

The win comes at the end of a week overshadowed by allegations of racism against Galtier, who had already been under pressure since PSG's elimination from the Champions League last month.

Galtier said on Friday that he was 'deeply shocked' by accusations that he made racist and Islamophobic remarks about Nice players when he was in charge there last season.

The allegations surfaced in an email apparently sent by former Nice sporting director Julien Fournier and which have been re-



Paris Saint-Germain's Lionel Messi escapes the attention of Lens players during their French L1 football match at the Parc des Princes in Paris on Saturday (AFP)

ported by various French media. AFP has not been able to verify the message.

The affair looks set to hang over the coach and the club in the coming weeks.

"I was very determined and

focused on the match, like my players," Galtier said of trying to stay concentrated on the game.

"It was obviously an important match, if not decisive, and so it was important to get the result and enjoy it."

Mbappe on target

Lens were hoping to take advantage of the leaders' problems and extend a four-match winning run that had got the northern club's supporters dreaming of a first league title since 1998.

They triumphed 3-1 when the teams last met in Lens on January 1 and they started the better of the two sides at the Parc des Princes. Yet their enterprising opening did not bring a goal and they were severely handicapped

when Abdul Samed saw red for catching Hakimi with his studs above the ankle. They were then torn apart with Mbappe firing in off the post on the turn from Vitinha's pass for his 20th league goal this season.

Haaland equals Premier League goals record as Man City close on Arsenal

Manchester, UK - Erling Haaland equalled the Premier League record for goals in a 38-game season on Saturday as Manchester City closed the gap on leaders Arsenal to just three points after a day of drama in the top-four race.

The Norway forward netted twice in the first half of City's 3-1 win over relegation-threatened Leicester to reach 32 goals - the same as Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah's tally in 2017/18.

John Stones opened the scoring at the Etihad Stadium before a goal from the penalty spot and a clever dinked finish from Haaland.

Pep Guardiola substituted the 22-year-old at half-time, denying him the chance to hunt down the overall single-season record of 34 goals in the Premier League era - set in the days of 42 games per side.

Leicester, with Dean Smith in charge for the first time, pulled a goal back in the second half through Kelsechi Iheanacho but they slumped to a fourth straight defeat and remain second from bottom of the table.

City, chasing a fifth Premier



Manchester City's Erling Haaland has had plenty to celebrate this season (AFP)

League title in six years, are on 70 points, three behind Arsenal with eight games to go.

The two teams meet at the Etihad on April 26 in a potential title-decider - City's next league fixture.

"Like I said lately, it is win, win and win," said Guardiola, whose side have now won ten consecutive games in all competitions.

"They have had an incredible

run this season and I don't think they are going to drop many points, so what we have to do is be there. It was important for us to win today to arrive for the 'final' we have against them in the next Premier League game."

Aston Villa put themselves in the mix for a top-four finish by beating Newcastle 3-0 for a fifth straight league win as Tottenham also lost.

Tottenham had the chance to move into the top four but blew it as Bournemouth took a potentially decisive step towards survival with a 3-2 win.

Brighton boosted their chances of European football with a 2-1 win at Chelsea to prolong Frank Lampard's wait for a first victory since returning to Stamford Bridge as interim manager.

Madrid waltz past Cadiz ahead of Chelsea clash

Barcelona, Spain - Real Madrid were made to wait, but eventually conjured a stylish 2-0 victory at Cadiz on Saturday in La Liga, ahead of their Champions League trip to face Chelsea.

Nacho Fernandez and Marco Asensio struck to help champions Madrid cut Barcelona's lead at the top of the table to 10 points, before the Catalans visit Getafe on Sunday.

Both sides hit the woodwork in the first half but Madrid overran their opponents, with only Cadiz goalkeeper David Gil keeping them at bay.

Eventually, when it seemed they had tried everything, Nacho broke the deadlock in the 72nd minute with a drive from distance, with Asensio adding another four minutes later.

"Good attitude, good commitment, good combinations, the team played very well," said Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti.

"It was a game that could have been a trap - the players were concentrating well, and we played well."

Ancelotti rang the changes at the Nuevo Mirandilla to rest players for the visit to Stamford



Real Madrid's Nacho Fernandez celebrates after scoring against Cadiz during their Spanish league match on Saturday (AFP)

Bridge for the quarter-final second leg, including veteran midfielders Toni Kroos and Luka Modric and winger Vinicius Junior.

Madrid suffered a 3-2 home defeat by Villarreal last weekend before the 2-0 first leg win over Chelsea, and Ancelotti admitted his team were not motivated enough.

On this occasion they arrived with the right mindset and on another day would have ended the first half several goals in front.

Gil made stunning saves to deny Karim Benzema, Rodrygo and Asensio.

Madrid were racking up the shots and, finally, their 26th effort of the night went in.

AFP

Napoli, Milan, Inter stall ahead of league deciders

Milan, Italy - Napoli and AC Milan both dropped points ahead of the Serie A sides' Champions League showdown following respective draws with Verona and Bologna on Saturday, while Inter Milan were beaten 1-0 by Monza with Benfica looming.

Italy's champions-elect Napoli have had their imposing league lead cut to 14 points after a second-string XI could only manage a goalless stalemate with Verona and second-placed Lazio won at

Spezia on Friday.

As it stands Luciano Spalletti's side still need 11 points from their final eight matches to seal their first league title since 1990, but all eyes are now on Tuesday's second leg of their quarter-final clash with Milan in Naples in which they have to overturn a 1-0 deficit.

Not even the second-half introduction of returning star striker Victor Osimhen - who smashed a volley off the bar in

All eyes are now on Tuesday's second leg of Napoli's quarter-final clash with AC Milan

the 82nd minute - and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia could force a breakthrough at a loud Stadio

Maradona.

Spalletti said that Serie A's top scorer Osimhen will start on Tuesday, adding, "He is a hero for these fans, there is always so much enthusiasm around him".

Hardcore supporters got behind the team after a truce in their feud with owner Aurelio De Laurentiis, which had made the atmosphere at Napoli's recent home matches toxic and threatened to take the shine off the colourful title festivities already

getting into gear in Naples.

On Saturday film mogul De Laurentiis posted on Twitter a photo with a number of the club's 'ultras' with the message 'We are Napoli. Fans and president together for victory!'

The ultras had ostensibly been protesting about being prevented from bringing drums, flags and banners to the stadium to create an atmosphere worthy of a remarkable season.

AFP



Hellas Verona's Kevin Lasagna pulls back Napoli's Mathias Olivera's jersey during their Italian Serie A match in Naples on Saturday

Ahmad al Harthy qualifies, stays positive for World Endurance Championship

Muscat - Ahmad al Harthy mounted a strong challenge for the GTE Am pole position during qualifying for round two of the FIA World Endurance Championship at Portimao in Portugal on Saturday, but had to settle for the fifth place due to yellow flags while on his quickest lap.

Ultimately ending up just half a second shy of pole, and only 0.3 seconds away from the front row of the grid, the Oman Racing's Ahmad al Harthy in action in the qualifying race for round two of the FIA World Endurance Championship at Portimao

ing with TF Sport driver was very happy with his performance and confident the team has a strong car for this afternoon's race at the Autodromo Internacional do Algarve.

Producing a best lap time of 1m49.904 seconds, the Aston Martin Vantage racer had posted the best sectors in the first and second portions of the lap and was on course for more. Due to the yellow flags though, the result of a stricken car, the

Omani missed out on a front-row starting slot.

Before the all-important qualifying run, Ahmad and teammates Michael Dinan and Charlie Eastwood had made good progress with the No.25 car across the three free practice sessions - two on Friday and one on Saturday.

Improving by almost 1.5 seconds between FP1 and FP3, the Oman Racing with TF Sport squad delivered a competitive



Oman Racing's Ahmad al Harthy in action in the qualifying race for round two of the FIA World Endurance Championship at Portimao

car for qualifying and Ahmad - who is supported by prestigious partners Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS - is sure the same will be true for the 6 Hours of Portimao.

Going into his second race in the FIA World Endurance Championship, Ahmad and the Oman Racing squad hold ninth in the driver and team standings following a ninth-place finish during the season-opening

event last month at Sebring in the USA.

"We gave it all we had in qualifying. I had a very quick lap, I did my best sectors in sector one and sector two, but then there was a yellow flag so I had to back off. It's when the tyres were at their best as well, so it was unfortunate, but we still start a respectable P5 for the race. I'm looking forward to a good, clean six hours of racing," said Ahmad.

CAPTAIN'S KNOCK

Azam, who fell for just nine in his 100th T20I on Friday, compensated with a brisk 58-ball 101 not out

Lahore, Pakistan - Skipper Babar Azam smashed a magnificent century while pace bowler Haris Rauf took four wickets as Pakistan beat New Zealand by 38 runs in the second T20 international in Lahore on Saturday.

Azam, who fell for just nine in his 100th T20I on Friday, compensated with a brisk 58-ball 101 not out to lift Pakistan to a solid 192-4 in their 20 overs.

Rauf, who took a career best 4-18 in Pakistan's 88-run win in the series opener, finished with 4-27 to restrict New Zealand to 154-7.

Pakistan now lead the five-match series 2-0 with the last three matches to be played in Lahore on Monday, and in Rawalpindi on April 20 and 24.

"I am very happy to perform in this match," said Azam, who is now the joint most successful T20I captain with 42 wins, alongside England's Eoin Morgan and Afghanistan's Asghar Afghan.

"I had two good partnerships and then our bowling was once again excellent. We have got experienced and exciting young bowlers who gave us back-to-back wins."

Mark Chapman scored a battling 65 not out for New Zealand featuring four fours and as many sixes, but lost partners at regular intervals after the tourists made a decent start.

Chad Bowes (26) and skipper Tom Latham (19) put on 44 for the first wicket in 6.2 overs, but as the asking rate soared New Zealand's chase lost steam.

"We have been there or thereabouts but weren't able to finish the innings off, both with the ball



Pakistan captain Babar Azam celebrates his century during their second Twenty20 match against New Zealand, in Lahore on Saturday (AFP)

and bat," said Latham.

"When Babar plays like that, you tip your hat off."

Azam was the mainstay of the Pakistan innings after he won the toss and chose to bat.

He smashed a six and two fours in the last over to reach his third T20I century, becoming only the sixth batter to do so in the shortest format at international level.

Azam put on 99 for the opening wicket with Mohammad Rizwan, who scored 50 off 34 balls. Azam, whose knock included 11 fours and three sixes, then added 87 for the fifth wicket

I am very happy to perform in this match. I had two good partnerships and then our bowling was once again excellent... Young bowlers gave us back-to-back wins

BABAR AZAM

with Iftikhar Ahmed, who finished 33 not out.

After removing Rizwan in the 11th over, New Zealand slowed Pakistan's charge as Matt Henry then dismissed Fakhar Zaman for a duck and finished with 2-29.

Saim Ayub also fell without scoring and Imad Wasim was out for two as Pakistan lost four wickets for just six runs in the space of 14 balls.

Azam started the 20th over on 84 and looked like he would end short of a century, but he took the attack to James Neesham - dispatching the last ball over cover for a four to reach his ninth hundred in all T20 cricket.

Rune fights back to set up Monte Carlo Masters final against Rublev

Monte Carlo, Monaco - Danish teenager Holger Rune edged a thrilling clash with fellow rising star Jannik Sinner on Saturday to set up a Monte Carlo Masters final against Andrey Rublev.

The 19-year-old claimed a 1-6, 7-5, 7-5 win under floodlights after a rain-affected day in the principality.

Russian fifth seed Rublev saw off Taylor Fritz 5-7, 6-1, 6-3 in the first semi-final.

Rune continued his meteoric rise in the sport with another statement victory, having climbed into the world's top 10 this season after a breakthrough 2022 which he capped off with the Paris Masters title, beating Novak Djokovic in the final.

"It was quite unbelievable," Rune said. "Jannik started firing, hitting a lot of winners and he has been in good form the past few months. I had to dig deep and find solutions, which I did well. It was fun to play like this."



Denmark's Holger Rune celebrates a point during his Monte-Carlo ATP Masters semi-final against Italy's Jannik Sinner on Saturday (AFP)

Sinner dominated the opening set but was 3-0 down in the second when the players were forced off by the inclement weather.

Rune lost that advantage after the resumption but continued to put pressure on the Sinner serve

and levelled the match in the 12th game on his fourth set point.

World number nine Rune saw five break points come and go in the third set as it stayed on serve for 11 games.

But he made the decisive move and secured a place in his

second Masters final on his first match point as Sinner dumped a forehand into the net.

Earlier, Rublev also battled back from a set down to beat big-serving American Fritz and reach his second Monte Carlo final.

The 25-year-old is bidding to go one better than in 2021 when he lost the final to Stefanos Tsitsipas.

"It was really tough, especially against Taylor," Rublev said after his first win in his last four meetings with Fritz.

"It was tough mentally to play against him because I was thinking if I would have chances. I started really well and then I was up a break and then he broke me back, but I knew I would have chances."

"In the end we had a great match and I am pleased with the win."

Fritz is still waiting to reach a maiden ATP final on clay despite an excellent week.

AFP

Bagnaia dominates Grand Prix of Americas MotoGP sprint

Austin, US - World champion Francesco Bagnaia breezed to a comfortable win in the Grand Prix of the Americas MotoGP sprint on Saturday.

The Ducati rider started from pole at Austin and dominated the 10-lap dash to bounce back from his fall last time out in Argentina.

Alex Rins on the Honda-LCR took second with Jorge Martin on another Ducati in third.

Marco Bezzecchi came in sixth for the VR46 Ducati team owned by motorcycling legend Valentino Rossi to retain his lead in the world championship but only by one point now from Bagnaia. This was the perfect pick-me-up for 'Pecco' who had begun the defence of his world title in impeccable form in Portugal, winning both the sprint and grand prix.

But Bezzecchi arrived in Texas with a nine-point championship lead after Bagnaia finished only sixth in the sprint in Argentina, and a lowly 16th in the grand prix itself. He showed he meant busi-



Francesco Bagnaia (AFP)

ness this weekend when nailing pole with a lap record, and built on that to cross the line over two and a half seconds in front of Rins in the third sprint of the season.

"I had more trouble in Argentina," the 26-year-old smiled. "I started well, and tried to push,

do my pace, to build up a gap. Now I've got to focus on tomorrow, that's going to be harder."

MotoGP introduced the Formula One-style sprint format this year, with the first two editions fast and furious affairs.

AFP



TODAYS MATCH

MATCH 24

6 PM

ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE

CHENNAI SUPER KINGS

Raza, Shahrukh help Punjab edge Lucknow

Lucknow, India - Zimbabwe all-rounder Sikandar Raza's half-century and some late boundaries from Shahrukh Khan led Punjab Kings to a two-wicket win over Lucknow Super Giants in the IPL on Saturday.

Raza made 57 in Punjab's chase of 160 before departing in the 18th over, but Shahrukh hit an unbeaten 23 off 10 balls to steer the team home with three balls to spare.

Raza started slowly but soon found his groove as he smashed four fours and three sixes in his 41-ball knock before falling to Ravi Bishnoi's leg-spin on a tough pitch. Shahrukh top-edged a six off Mark Wood in the penultimate over and hit the winning boundary off Bishnoi as Punjab moved 4th in the 10-team table.

Sam Curran set up Punjab's win with bowling figures of 3-31 as he stood in as captain following an injury to regular skipper



M Shahrukh Khan (left) and Kagiso Rabada of Punjab Kings celebrate after winning against Lucknow Super Giants

Shikhar Dhawan.

Curran and South Africa's Kagiso Rabada shared five wickets between them to limit Lucknow to 159-8.

Lucknow skipper K L Rahul made 74 - his first half-century of the season - and took a stunning diving catch wide of mid-off but his efforts failed to inspire the Super Giants, who slipped to their second loss in five matches.

HETMYER, SAMSON SPARKLE AS RAJASTHAN BEAT GUJARAT

MATCH 23

Rajasthan Royals' Shimron Hetmyer plays a shot during their Indian Premier League match against Gujarat Titans at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Sunday. Hetmyer made 56 off 26 balls to steer Rajasthan to a thrilling three wicket victory against the defending champions. Sanju Samson, with a blazing 60 off 32 balls, started the fightback for Rajasthan who consolidated their position at the top of the table.

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TON IN VAIN

Iyer's century fails to help Kolkata win against Mumbai

Mumbai, India - Indian batsman Venkatesh Iyer struck his maiden T20 century on Sunday, but it was not enough to stop Kolkata Knight Riders losing to IPL heavyweights Mumbai Indians by five wickets.

Iyer's 104 off 51 balls helped Kolkata to 185-6, a total five-time winners and hosts Mumbai overhauled with 14 balls to spare at the Wankhede Stadium.

Opener Ishan Kishan blasted 58 off 25 balls but it was T20 sensation Suryakumar Yadav's quickfire 43 that brought the home crowd to life, as he looked like returning to form after a rough patch.

The left-handed Kishan gave Mumbai a flying start in a 65-run



Venkatesh Iyer of Kolkata Knight Riders plays a shot during their match against Mumbai Indians on Sunday (AFP)

opening stand with Rohit Sharma, who made 20 off 13 balls after coming in as an impact sub.

Kishan was bowled by leg spinner Varun Chakravarthy but Suryakumar, who got a first-ball duck in the previous match, soon took charge to smash three sixes in his 25-ball blitz.

Shardul Thakur denied Suryakumar his fifty, before Tim David steered the chase with an unbeaten 24.

Mumbai started by handing

debut caps to Arjun Tendulkar, son of cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar, and South Africa fast bowler Duan Jansen, twin brother of Sunrisers Hyderabad's Marco Jansen.

Earlier the left-handed Iyer struck the second hundred of this IPL season, after Hyderabad's England import Harry Brook hit a match-winning unbeaten 100 last week.

Iyer's knock was the first ton for two-time champions Kolkata since former New Zealand captain Brendon McCullum smashed 158 runs in the first ever IPL match in 2008.

Iyer got little support from the other end, but took on the opposition attack with six fours and nine sixes before departing in the 18th over.

Kolkata's new hero Rinku Singh failed to fire in his 18-ball 18, but West Indies big-hitter Andre Russell hit an unbeaten 11-ball 21 to boost the team's total.

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CANNES FESTIVAL



Italian film director, editor and screenwriter Alice Rohrwacher



French actress and filmmaker Maïwenn Le Besco



Austrian film director and screenwriter Jessica Hausner

WOMEN'S Palme d'Or

A record six women directors will compete for the Palme d'Or at Cannes in May, organisers announced last week, with the film festival promising a who's who of Hollywood A-listers and award-winning filmmakers.

The world's top cinema shindig had already secured some glitzy Hollywood premieres, including the new Indiana Jones and Martin Scorsese movies, as well as Johnny Depp's comeback film.

Among the 19 films competing for the top prize Palme d'Or from May 16 to 27 is Wes Anderson's 'Asteroid City', which alone will bring a cavalcade of stars to the red carpet, including Tom Hanks, Margot Robbie and Scarlett Johansson.

The presence of six women directors, including Italy's Alice Rohrwacher and Austria's Jessica Hausner, beats last year's record of five.

Natalie Portman and Julianne Moore are expected for May December from director Todd Haynes, who wowed Cannes with drama Carol in 2015 starring Cate Blanchett and Rooney Mara, the latter winning the best actress award.

A fiery start is guaranteed thanks to opening night film Jeanne du Barry, which sees Depp play French king Louis XV in his first role since an explosive defama-

Cannes set for record number of women directors



French director of the Cannes Film Festival, Iris Knobloch, and General Delegate of the Cannes Film Festival, Thierry Fremaux, at a press conference in Paris on April 13

tion trial against ex-wife Amber Heard involving bitter allegations of domestic abuse.

Depp will be joined by his daughter, Lily Rose Depp, who stars in The Idol, a TV series playing out of competition,

produced by musician Abel 'The Weeknd' Tesfaye. It has had a tumultuous production with reports of major rewrites and re-shoots.

As if that was not enough to inflame social media, the star and director of Jeanne du Barry, Maïwenn, had a criminal complaint lodged against her last week for allegedly assaulting a journalist by yanking his head back and spitting in his face in a Paris restaurant.

Star of the moment, and so-called Internet Daddy, Pedro Pascal is also expected alongside Ethan Hawke for a 'queer Western' short film by Spain's Pedro Almodovar.

Palme laureates

The competition is packed with previous award-winners, including two-time Palme laureate Ken Loach, and other past winners such as Nanni Moretti, Wim Wenders and Hirokazu Kore-eda.

Critics have been gushing, with The Hollywood Reporter calling it 'an all-killer,

no-filler programme'. Scorsese's Killers of the Flower Moon, starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Robert De Niro, currently has an out-of-competition slot but may end up in the contest, festival director Thierry Fremaux said.

Also playing out of competition is a documentary about wartime Amsterdam, Occupied City, by celebrated British director Steve McQueen (12 Years a Slave), which Fremaux described as 'a very radical film'.

Arthouse fans are particularly excited about the return of British director Jonathan Glazer (Under the Skin) with a Holocaust-set romance, The Zone of Interest, based on a novel by Martin Amis.

Victory in Cannes can give a major boost to arthouse cinema, such as last year's winner Triangle of Sadness, which went on to pick up several Oscar nominations.

Its director, Sweden's Ruben Ostlund, heads this year's jury.

Hollywood loves the French Riviera as a launchpad for its glossier fare, with Top Gun: Maverick and Elvis getting their world premieres at the festival last year.

This year will see 'Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny', with Harrison Ford as guest of honour for his fifth and final appearance as the iconic adventuring archaeologist, alongside Phoebe Waller-Bridge and Antonio Banderas. AFP

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COACHELLA VALLEY FESTIVAL

BAD BUNNY MAKES HISTORY

THE MEGASTAR WAS THE FIRST SPANISH-LANGUAGE AND FIRST LATIN AMERICAN ACT TO HEADLINE THE FESTIVAL

Bad Bunny was among Coachella's most hotly anticipated acts and the Puerto Rican reggaeton giant delivered late on Friday, performing two hours of his numerous hits set against an homage to trailblazing Latino artists. The megastar was the first Spanish-language and first Latin American act to headline the major festival, which takes place over two three-day weekends and traditionally kicks off the summer touring circuit. It's but another notch on the belt of the artist born Benito Martinez Ocasio, the 29-year-old who is by most measures the biggest pop star in the world. With tracks from *Vete* to *Titi Me Pregunto* to *Yo Perreo Sola*, the artist shut down the main stage of the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in front of thousands of screaming fans, with trippy visuals and fireworks and flames bursting behind him. The show also featured documentary-style footage with voiceovers contextualising the history of the Latin American, and more specifically Caribbean, music that features heavily in his work. He also included extended dance breaks to classics including Ismael Rivera's *Las Tumbas* and El Gran Combo's *Brujeria*. Like many artists at Coachella, Bad Bunny brought on fa-



There's never been someone like me before

BAD BUNNY

mous guests including Post Malone, who - despite technical difficulties that rendered the artists at times inaudible - performed an acoustic version of *La Cancion* to the crowd's delight. Early in the set, Bad Bunny asked the crowd if they preferred he speak English or Spanish, and the response was a resounding vote for the latter. Though he's already one of the world's top contemporary acts and played Coachella as a solo artist in 2019, he acknowledged the boundary that was broken Friday night as the night's top-billed performer: "There's never been someone like me before," he said in Spanish. **Blink and Blondie** Hours before the groundbreaking set, fans witnessed the festival revive its turn-of-the-millennium rock roots, as Blink-182 gave a surprise show announced just one day prior. The nostalgic headbanging moment was the pop-punk group's first performance with their original lineup in nearly a decade, and had

droves of 30-somethings reliving the soundtrack to their youths. Band members Travis Barker, Mark Hoppus and Tom DeLonge - who are now all pushing or past 50 - delivered the hits of middle school dances yore, including *The Rock Show* and *What's My Age Again*. By the set's close, the band had thousands of people belting out a moody *I Miss You* before a mass singalong of *All The Small Things*. After the set, many rushed to a neighbouring tent to catch a blockbuster show from Blondie, who also delivered hits including *Heart of Glass* and *Call Me*, and invited guest Nile Rodgers onstage.

Globalised lineup But neither rock nor legacy acts dominated Friday's slate, which featured main stage shows from rappers Pusha T and DoeChii, a performance from Nigeria's Burna Boy and DJ sets from the likes of Nora en Pure and Idris Elba. (Yes, that Idris Elba.) Belgium's pop star Angele made her Coachella debut in a coveted nighttime slot, donning a disco ball of an outfit to perform her brand of jazz-inflected electro-pop alongside tightly choreographed dancers and occasional French subtitles on display behind her. Los Angeles native Becky G donned a bright blue bikini and baggy JNCO jeans for her highly

anticipated performance, which featured a smattering of her hits and some regional Mexican guest appearances paying homage to her Mexican-American roots. "A lot of Latin artists are breaking a lot of barriers," fan Katherine Narvaez told AFP ahead of Becky G's show. "It's amazing to see her grow as an artist and kill it at the show," the 28 year old said.

Along with Bad Bunny and Becky G, the strong showing from Latinos this year includes rapper Eladio Carrion, Argentina's Los Fabulosos Cadillacs, and the Grammy-winning Kali Uchis. This year is the first time Coachella hasn't booked a white headliner: Following Bad Bunny, K-pop superstars Blackpink and the influential but reclusive R&B artist Frank Ocean top the bill at Coachella. And the weekend hosted perhaps the most international lineup Coachella has ever booked, including Spanish phenomenon Rosalia and Iceland's Bjork. The elusive electronic producer Jai Paul played his first public performance ever, while Diljit Dosanjh becomes the first Punjabi singer to perform at Coachella. Others are American indie rock supergroup boygenius - which includes Phoebe Bridgers, Lucy Dacus and Julien Baker - and Charli XCX.

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