

Oman to have first space rocket launch pad in Duqm

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman on Monday entered into an agreement with the National Aerospace Services Company (NASCOM) to use its space launch complex Etlaq for multiple rocket launches, utilising the latitude efficient location in the wilayat of Duqm.

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT), the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and NASCOM, signed the contract on Monday to use Etlaq for building a space rocket launch platform for amateurs and researchers in Oman.

Etlaq space launch complex is a project which NASCOM began last year as the company felt the need for having a facility for testing their prototype hybrid-solid rockets in a safe area that could be used for future launches.

The company's main focus is to boost the country's capacity in scientific research and promote global partnerships in the space sector. Etlaq will be offering space for assembling and labs for testing along with control rooms, and launch pads. 'The project will attract global companies to utilise the sultanate's ideal location and global standard facilities for space launch operations,' the company stated on its website.



H H Azzan al Said, founder, NASCOM, (left) and H E Dr Khalfan al Shuaili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, after signing an agreement

Symposium on Omani space sector

With an aim to develop and enable the space sector to contribute to social, scientific and economic development, MTCIT on Monday organised a symposium on the Omani space sector, titled 'Future Trends and Investment Opportunities'.

The symposium aimed to achieve the objectives of the Digital Economy Programme and Oman Vision 2040, and to raise awareness of the importance of the space sector and its technologies, in addition to identifying current and future opportunities for cooperation and partnerships in this sector.

During the symposium, two

agreements were signed. While the first one was for Etlaq's use for launches, the other one was for establishing a special corner for space science and technology in the Children's Museum in Muscat. This agreement was signed between MTCIT, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and Oman LNG.

The agreement aims to enhance effective community partnership, spread the culture of space science and technology among the new generation, besides creating a fertile environment for scientific tourism programmes and initiatives in the field of space science, in addition to promoting the use of virtual and augmented reality technologies in the space sector.

"The estimated economic contribution of space services and applications in the sultanate in 2021 did not exceed 0.03 per cent, and the number of workers in the sector remains around 150 at various professional and supervisory levels," said H E Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaidani, Undersecretary for Communications and Information Technology in MTCIT.

Shaidani affirmed that the ministry, through the various proposed initiatives and in cooperation with partners, will make the sultanate a regional gateway to space applications.

Sultanate's first satellite set for launch

Newquay, UK - The first Omani satellite, Aman, is ready and set to launch into low Earth orbit from Spaceport Cornwall, in the UK.

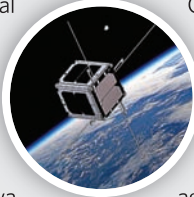
The window for mission is opening at 2:16am (Omani time) on Tuesday, with additional back-up dates in mid and late January.

The satellite will be set off for its historic mission aboard the LauncherOne rocket, a modified Virgin Boeing 747 jet.

Oman, represented by ETCO - an Oman-based emerging technology innovator - Virgin Orbit, SatRev and TUATARA have been working together to launch the first Omani nanosatellite.

SatRev is a Polish nanosatellite manufacturer and operator and TUATARA is a specialists in AI, data analytics and cognitive technology solutions.

"This is an extraordinary day not only for the Omani people, it is also a huge leap in the democratisation of the space. It is another step in building the modern, innovative, and knowledge-based society in the sultanate. I believe that with the data obtained from the analysis of satellite imagery, we will be able to provide vital scientific boost to the society and STEM industry in the whole GCC region," said Krzysztof Goworek, CEO of TUATARA.



HM's Accession Day to be celebrated tomorrow

Muscat - The Sultanate of Oman will mark the anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's Accession Day on January 11. His Majesty the Sultan's fervent determination, coupled with Omani people's support to the leader of Renewed Renaissance, played a positive role in overcoming the challenges and revitalising the march of nation building.

This was affirmed by His Majesty the Sultan when he delivered the Royal speech in 2022 in which he said, "We are confident that you all perceive the volume of challenges that we have been through, that we have tackled with tact and patience and then, with the Almighty's divine support, proceeded with the implementation of our social and economic plans and programmes, inspired by Oman Vision 2040. As a result, our economic and fiscal performance has improved."

Sayyid Theyazin to open environment conference

Muscat - H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, will preside over the inaugural ceremony of the first edition of Oman Conference on Environmental Sustainability on January 16.

The four-day conference will focus on air pollution, climate change and other issues.

The event will include the launch of the 'Green Branch Award' designed for contributors and supporters of environmental action. The prize, up for grabs by institutions and individuals, is aimed at encouraging outstanding contributions to environment sanitation and sustainability.

An environmental exhibition will be held on the sidelines of the conference. It will showcase the latest technologies, solutions and techniques in addressing common ecological challenges. It



H H Sayyid Theyazin

will also include specialised workshops focusing on green hydrogen energy and methane management, ONA reported.

The conference will promote the values of research, development and innovation through the establishment of a 'Youth Ecothon' within an initiative co-denamed 'Manafei' (benefits).



Pledging To Wise Leadership

Congratulations to
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on the
occasion of the anniversary of His Majesty's accession.
We renew our pledge of loyalty to work for growth and prosperity under his visionary leadership.

LEGACY OF SULTAN QABOOS LIVES ON

He established a deeply-rooted renaissance which channels the progress of Oman’s march

Shaddad al Musalmey
Muscat

The late Sultan Qaboos bin Said may be gone but has never been out of people’s minds. On January 10, 2020, hearts of millions broke - saddened deeply by his loss; but they found solace in the fact that their leader left the world giving life-long memories.

The late Sultan Qaboos, whose life has become a guiding light for his admirers, is considered the father figure in Oman. He taught people in the sultanate to love peace, to honour and respect themselves and others, to love their country and culture. He made sure that all felt secured in this beautiful country.

In his first speech on January 11, 2020, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik said, the late Sultan Qaboos set up a modern state from scratch, a country that is now recognised by all, far and near. “He established a deeply-rooted renaissance whose features have crystallised in a schema of laws and legislations that fortifies this country and channels the progress of its march towards the blossoming future that he wished,” he said.

Accordingly, the achievements made by the

late Sultan Qaboos are stark and manifest in every sphere of life. He sowed and cultivated true faith in the people. “The late Sultan Qaboos was not only a visionary but also a very kind-hearted man. He was far ahead of his time and invested all his thoughts and energies for the country’s modernisation, education and health of every Omani. He will forever live in our hearts,” Obaid al Khaldi, a senior citizen from Barka said.

Over the past years, the late Sultan Qaboos’ exceptional leadership abilities and planning transformed Oman drastically.

“Over the past five decades, the late Sultan Qaboos brought about a radical transformation in the country, in the life of each individual in Oman. The hardships, lack of basic needs and proper transportation and communication are now a thing of the past because of him,” Shamsa Hamad, an 80-year-old Omani woman said.

Same views were echoed by Chandrani, who was once in Muscat and is now settled in Canada. “An extraordinary leader with a vision for modernisation of the country. A neutral leader and a philanthropist, who placed Oman as one of the modern Arab countries on the global platform,” she said.

Under the late Sultan Qaboos, Oman wit-

nessed continuous developments in all spheres and energetic Omani youth moving forward to excel in various fields. Massive developments in roads, hospitals, schools, colleges and universities, among others. All these cater to the future of our youths.

In his first speech on July 23, 1970, the late Sultan Qaboos said, “My people, I will proceed as quickly as possible to transform your life into a prosperous one with a bright future. Yesterday it was complete darkness, and by the will of God, tomorrow will be a new dawn on Muscat, Oman and on its people.”

Over the last 50 years, the country spurred to the extremes of human achievements in every sector including the education. The educational institutions have also developed and showcased what science and technology can do for a society.

“We live in an age of science and education. Education and work are our only means of progress and development within the context of our Islamic civilisation. It is your duty to bear this in mind and to work whole-heartedly for your graduation so that you may serve Oman well, your mother land,” the late Sultan Qaboos said in 1986.



Oman, UAE discuss trade cooperation; bilateral trade exchange hits RO4.19bn

Muscat - H E Qais Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion received Dr Thani Ahmed al Zeyoudi, Minister of State for Foreign Trade of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), during the latter’s visit to Muscat on Monday.

The two sides discussed a range of topics of concern to the two countries. They also reviewed means of promoting the joint cooperation in the trade sector.

The two sides also exchanged expertise in organising commercial activities, limiting difficulties and increasing the trade exchanges between the Sultanate of Oman and the UAE.



The two sides also reviewed the features of trade strategies in the two countries and the data of commercial exchanges.

The volume of trade between the two countries hit about

RO4.19bn till the end of September 2022. The total Omani non-oil exports to the UAE stood at RO917.6mn whereas the volume of imports stood at about RO3.272bn.

Foreign Minister receives UAE minister

Earlier in the day, H E Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, received Dr Zeyoudi, in his office. The two sides reviewed aspects of bilateral cooperation in business, investment and economic diversification fields. They also affirmed the keenness of the leadership in two countries to advance the mutual relations in various spheres.

The meeting was attended by H E Dr Saleh Said Masan, Under-secretary for Industry and Investment Promotion in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and several other officials from both sides. ONA

Low pressure to bring isolated rains for three days starting from today

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Moderate to heavy rains will be hitting the sultanate from Tuesday, according to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

In a statement, CAA said, ‘Oman will be affected by a low pressure trough from Tuesday till Thursday.’

The governorates of Musandam, North Batinah, South Batinah, Dhakhliah, Muscat and South Sharqiyah will be affected by thunderstorms of varying intensity accompanied by active downwind, it added.

The expected impact of the low pressure could result in isolated rains - from 10 to 60mm -



on Tuesday and Wednesday, leading to flow of wadis. The weather disturbance will also cause fresh downward winds, with speeds ranging from 15 to 25 knots (28-45km per hour).

The condition of the sea will be moderate along most of the sultanate’s coasts with maxi-

mum wave height of 2m to 3m, while it will be rough during thundershowers along the coastal areas of Musandam and Sea of Oman coasts.

CAA advised all to be cautious during rains and near over flowing wadis, and to check the state of the sea before sailing.



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Indian Social Club book fair from Thursday

Our Correspondent Muscat

The third edition of the book fair by the Indian Social Club (ISC) under the aegis of the Indian Embassy will be held in Muscat from Thursday, said the organisers.

The four-day book fair, which is part of the celebration for India's 75th year of independence, will have over 50,000 books in English and Arabic in addition to 12 other languages.

Organised in association with Al Bhaj Books, a leading book distributor in Oman for more than 30 years, the book fest will feature the works of acclaimed Omani authors who will be feted during the festival.

The fair to be held at the multipurpose hall of the Indian Social Club Oman in Darsait will remain open from 10am to 10pm, the organisers informed.

Speaking about the event, ISC general secretary Babu Rajendran said, "Apart from having 50,000 books for sale, we will be hosting sessions on book recommendations, panel discussions and book launches of authors based in Oman. This will be done in coordination with the Oman Book Lovers Group."

P M Shoukath Ali, managing director of Al Bhaj books, added, "We have included latest books

Apart from having 50,000 books for sale, we will be hosting panel discussions and book launches of authors based in Oman

BABU RAJENDRAN

for all ages including fiction, non-fiction, children's activity and story books, books for academic references, study guides and grammar books, among others."

Among the many writers and guests who will be present during the opening session are Dr Said al Saqlawi, acclaimed poet and chairperson of the Oman Writer's Society; Dr Ali Mehdi, founder of Penned Thoughts; Nasra al Adawi, an award winning writer from Oman, Jassim Issa Obeid al Qartoubi, another renowned Omani poet. They will share the dais with Dr P Mohammed Ali, founder and former vice chairman and managing director of Galfar, and chairman of the Board of Directors of National University; and Dr Sivkumar Manickam, chairman, Board of Directors of Indian Schools in Oman.

Tourism facilities planned around Sur's suspension bridge



Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman's only suspension bridge, the 204m-long Khor Al Batah Bridge, is an iconic landmark in the wilayat of Sur providing picturesque view of the harbour and majestic dhows moored in the bay.

To exploit its tourism potential further, South Sharqiyah Governor's Office has invited bidders to establish integrated tourism facilities on the mountain overlooking the khor.

In addition, part of the tender calls for holding a summer forum in the niyabat of Al Ashkhara. The deadline for submitting

The initiative aims to support domestic tourism and create recreational places for families

AN OFFICIAL

bids is February 2.

"The initiative aims to support domestic tourism, create recreational places for families, and stimulate economic activity," said an official at the Governor's Office.

Based on a Royal Directive, each governorate has been allocated RO20mn under the Governorates Development Programme for the current Five-Year Plan (2021-25).

Sur is one of the oldest ports not just in Oman, but also in the entire Arabian Gulf.

Opened in 2009, the bridge cut down the journey from Sur to Ajyah from 20 to just three minutes by road.

MoHERI opens registration for 2nd round of Strategic Research Projects

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) has announced the opening of registration for the second round of the Strategic Research Projects Programme (SRPP), keeping the process open until February 28.

The programme focuses on the national priorities to find scientific and applied solutions through competitive research proposals; enhance constructive cooperation between the parties in the research system - governmental, academic and private sectors; and make recommendations to create or update policies, legislation and general procedures.

For this year, the Ministry of Health has identified the topics 'Cardiovascular Diseases' and 'Health Sector Leadership and Governance' as research



priorities.

Separately, the Ministry of Education has decided to focus on three areas of research, namely 'Health, psychological and social problems for school students at different levels of education'; 'Raising the level of academic achievement for students in Oman in the fields of science, mathematics, Arabic and English'; and 'Developing technical

programme for e-learning, raising the academic level, and developing future skills for students with disabilities'.

As for the research priorities of the Environment Authority and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources; they will soon be announced and will be followed by announcements of research priorities

ments of research priorities put forward by other participating government agencies.

MoHERI contributes maximum up to 50 per cent of the cost of a project, and not exceeding RO50,000 for each approved research project, while the other partners, who either manage or implement these research projects, cover the remaining cost of the project and provide necessary support.

The evaluation of a research proposal is based on the criteria of research excellence, the criteria for linking to institutional challenges, the impact of the research outputs and their applicability, with the priority given to research proposals and projects that serve a set of national priorities, said the ministry.

Interested applicants can submit their research proposals through the Research Information Management System at the Oman Research Portal.

Oman, Britain sign joint defence agreement

Muscat - An additional annex for the joint defence agreement between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom was signed at the Ministry of Defence in Muscat on Monday.

Signing the annex came within the framework of the Omani military relations with different countries in various military fields, particularly training areas.

The annex was signed from the Omani side by Dr Mohammed Nasser al Za'abi, Secretary General at the Ministry of Defence, and from the British side by James Goldman, charge d'affaires at the UK Embassy in Muscat.

ONA

Advertisement for Omani Oasis water, featuring a large water bottle and text: SUPERIOR QUALITY DESERVES PREMIUM, On time delivery, Over 25 years of trust, Purity in every drop.

CPA launches inspection drives in two governorates

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) on Monday launched inspection drives in the wilayat of Sohar in North Batinah and in Buraimi to ensure price stability in the market.



'Inspection drives targeted a number of commercial centres, complexes and establishments in the wilayats of Buraimi and Sohar', a statement issued by CPA said, adding that it intensified 'inspection visits to markets to ensure price stability and availability of goods in sufficient quantities'.

REGIONAL WEATHER

	Max	Min
Muscat	27	19
Abu Dhabi	29	19
Doha	21	13
Kuwait City	16	8
Manama	20	14
Riyadh	18	7

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	5.31am
Sunrise	6.51am
Duhr	12.19pm
Asr	3.22pm
Maghrib	5.42pm
Isha	6.57pm

Advertisement for mai alkaline water, featuring a person climbing a rock and text: mai alkaline, Alkaline Ionized Drinking Water, HYDRATE SMARTLY, Ultra-hydrating, Revitalizing, Energizing, pH 9.1 to 9.5.

MARKET WATCH

MSX30 4,847.66
Sensex 60,747.31

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

Indian	214.03
Pakistan	593.55
Bangladesh	272.24
Philippines	142.29
Sri Lanka	955.56

*Rates as on January 09
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

China's forex reserves rise to \$3.127tn

China's foreign exchange reserves rose to US\$3.127tn at the end of December 2022, up 0.33 per cent from a month earlier, data from the State Administration of Foreign Exchange showed Saturday, Chinese News Agency, Xinhua, reported.

The foreign exchange regulator attributed the increase in foreign exchange reserves to the combined impact of currency translation and asset price changes.

Affected by the monetary policy and expectations of major economies, and global macroeconomic data, the US dollar index fell, and the prices of global financial assets declined last month, the regulator said.

It added that China's foreign exchange reserves are expected to stay generally stable as the Chinese economy enjoys strong resilience, tremendous potential, and great vitality, and the fundamentals sustaining its long-term growth have remained strong.

Euro area unemployment drops in November 2022

The unemployment rate was down to 6 per cent in the EU and 6.5 per cent in the euro area last November on a yearly basis, the EU's statistical office said on Monday.

There are 12.95mn unemployed people in the EU, of whom 10.85mn was in the euro area, in November, according to Eurostat.

The unemployment rate was 6.4 per cent for women in the EU and 5.7 per cent for men, while they were 7 per cent and 6.1 per cent, respectively, in the euro area.

The youth unemployment rate was at 15.1 per cent in the EU and eurozone.

Among member states, highest unemployment rates were seen in Spain (12.4 per cent), Greece (11.4 per cent), and Italy (7.8 per cent) in November.

Germany's industrial output down 0.4% in November

Industrial production in Germany was down 0.4 per cent in November on a yearly basis, showed data released Monday by the country's federal statistical authority.

This came after a 0.2 per cent year-on-year decline in October, the figures from Destatis noted.

On a monthly basis, production was slightly up by 0.2 per cent in November, the agency added.

"Within industry, the production of intermediate goods went up by 1.1% and the production of capital goods by 0.7 per cent," it said.

The production of consumer goods, meanwhile, fell by 1.5 per cent.



GCC stock exchanges announce unified ESG metrics for listed firms

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The GCC Exchanges Committee, chaired by the Saudi Exchange, published a unified set of ESG Disclosure Metrics on Monday.

The environmental, social, and governance (ESG) metrics comprise 29 standards that are aligned with the World Federation of Exchanges and Sustainable Stock Exchanges Initiative, and include categories across greenhouse gas emissions, energy usage, water usage, gender pay, employee turnover, gender diversity, data privacy, ethics and more.

The GCC Exchanges Committee comprises Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange, Muscat

Metrics comprise 29 standards and include categories across carbon emissions, energy usage, water usage, gender pay, employee turnover, gender diversity, data privacy and ethics

Stock Exchange, Bahrain Bourse, Boursa Kuwait, Qatar Stock Exchange, Saudi Exchange and Dubai Financial Market. The committee aims to support the development of regional capital markets, create an advanced capital market ecosystem in the GCC region, and elevate their position on the global stage.

The GCC ESG Disclosure Metrics are an important step

towards standardizing ESG disclosure across the GCC region, due to differences in standards of reporting.

The metrics are voluntary and serve as a guideline for companies wishing to embark on their ESG disclosure journey. The metrics do not replace existing ESG disclosure guidelines for GCC stock exchanges.

In a press statement, Saeed

Hamad al Dhaheri, managing director and chief executive officer of Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange (ADX), said, "Exchanges play a pivotal role in enhancing governance and sustainability among the region's companies and ADX is proud to take part in creating unified disclosure metrics for GCC listed companies. In 2020, we issued ESG disclosure guidelines for our listed companies- which illustrates ADX's commitment to drive sustainability in financial markets. Our participation in the establishment of the GCC ESG Metrics reinforces our support for the adoption of the highest reporting and disclosure standards across GCC markets."

Strong economic growth in GCC fuels global real estate investments

Dubai, UAE - With economies in the GCC expected to be relative global outperformers in 2022 and 2023, regional investors' appetite for global real estate investment opportunities is likely to grow, according to JLL's latest 'The Resurgence of Outbound Real Estate Investment from the GCC' report.

The challenges posed by spiraling inflation, elevated energy costs, and hawkish monetary policy are impacting investor sentiment globally. This is not only triggering delayed decision-making but also weakening liquidity in international real estate markets, further painting an uncertain global outlook.

However, the Middle East, in particular the GCC, is bucking this trend, as the region's relatively robust economic conditions have helped strengthen market confidence as well as enhance appetite for discounted investment opportunities abroad.

In addition, the strong recovery in oil prices from mid-2020 has also served as an impetus for increased consumer confidence and buoyant investor sentiment in the region, leading to higher levels of capital being deployed into international real estate.

In a press release, Fadi Moussalli, executive director of Inter-



Fadi Moussalli

Target markets for GCC investors continues to be the US and Europe, particularly the UK, where investors have historically been most focused

national Capital Coverage (ICC), said, "While the healthy momentum of global real estate investment by GCC's state-owned entities and sovereign wealth funds will continue in the near-term, in all probability, they will proceed with caution and selectivity. Although oil prices have

seen a partial reversal in recent months, they remain elevated in comparison to recent history and are unlikely to significantly impact investor confidence in the region. Therefore, the willingness of investors to take advantage of discounted buying opportunities will continue to emerge in the face of the uncertain economic outlook in Europe and the U.S. and moderated competition in bidding."

Looking ahead, shifts to portfolio strategies in favor of new economic sectors are anticipated. While the office and hotel sectors have governed preferences in the past in cities such as London, Paris, and New York, there has been a shift to higher-growth sectors such as living and logistics. These, in aggregate, account for more than 40 per cent of global investments over the past two years.

Investors are also increasingly focused on alternative sectors such as data centers and healthcare assets, a sign of a departure from last-decade strategies. Recent efforts to diversify portfolios are in line with broader themes which were also amplified during the pandemic. As per the JLL report, GCC investors have significantly increased activity in the real estate sector since 2020.

Environmental Forum at SEZAD calls for reducing carbon emissions

Duqm - Coinciding with Oman's celebrations of the Omani Environment Day, the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) organised the Second Environmental Forum titled 'Together to Reduce Carbon Footprint in Duqm'.

A number of lecturers and specialists from government and private bodies, concerned with climate change affairs and reducing carbon emissions, took part in the Forum, according to a press release.

The Forum was presided over by HE Sheikh Bader bin Nasser al Farsi, the Wali of Duqm, with the presence of representatives of the municipal council, a number of officials in the SEZAD, specialists from the Environment Authority, Sultan Qaboos University, Duqm Refinery Company (OQ8) and representatives of companies operating in SEZAD.

The second edition of the Forum aimed to identify the potential environmental challenges resulting from the various construction and industrial activities and projects in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. Also, it touched on discussing appropriate solutions to environmental issues that require strengthening cooperation between the various concerned parties operating in the zone in aspects related to environmental and climatic affairs. The Forum urged joining efforts to develop plans to reduce carbon emissions in pursuit of zero neutrality in Duqm.

During the Forum, the importance of reducing carbon emissions, efficient use of natural resources and social inclusion was highlighted in the sessions. In addition, the event shed light to the significance of inventorying greenhouse gases and devel-



Ahmed bin Ali Akaak

oping solutions to reduce carbon emissions in order to reach zero emissions in Duqm.

On the other hand, innovations and updates in the field of preserving the environment, protecting environmental and biological diversity, and the main challenges facing climate change and sustainable development were discussed.

On this occasion, Eng Ahmed bin Ali Akaak, acting CEO of SEZAD, said, "As the Royal Directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik marked the year 2050 for achieving zero carbon neutrality in Oman, SEZAD supports the establishment of an effective, balanced and adaptable system to protect Oman's natural resources and sustain them to support the national economy. This is a significant and encouraging step towards reaching carbon neutrality, which will help achieving a balance between sustainable development and mitigating the effects of climate change."

"The Special Economic Zone at Duqm provided investment opportunities for clean energy projects. This has been witnessed in the high interest of international companies in the zone designated for clean energy projects, covering an area of 250sqkm," he added.

TENDER NOTICE

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Grand Hyatt, Muscat invites sealed tenders from established and reliable vendors for supply of the following Items on a rate contract for the period commencing from January 15, 2023 to December 31, 2023.

Category	DESCRIPTION
Food & Beverage	Lamb/Mutton; Buffalo Meat; Poultry; Fish/Seafood; Fresh fruits & Vegetables Local/ Imported; Frozen Food Products/ Frozen Coldcuts; Fresh Milk & Dairy Products; Ice Creams; Dry Provisions/Groceries Local&Imported Pastries Flour (Canned, Spices, Dry Fruits, Spices and Portion packs); Indian Sweets & Savoury; Assorted Breads; Indian Breads, Arabic Bread, Frozen bread, Arabic Sweet, Savoury & Snacks. Coffee/Tea; Beverages; Drinks; Sodas; Soft Drinks; Fruit Juices; Milk; Energy Drink. Soy-based Beverages;
General Items	Printing Press, Office & Computer Stationery; Cleaning Supplies; Fuel Gel& Charcoal; Flowers; Consumables & Swimming Pool Chemicals; F&B Supplies; Guest Supplies; Packaging Materials & Disposables.
Services	Freight & Courier Services (Domestic&International); Transport & Courier; Services (Staff, Cargo, Purchasing and Frozen Food Transport); Scrap Disposal; Contractors (Civil, Plumbing, Electrical, Painting, Polishing; Carpentry; Fabrication, Motor Rewinding; Decorators; Hiring of Furniture, Serial Lights, Generator Sets). Tailoring & Uniform Services.
Others	Electrical & Hardware Materials; Computer Peripherals & Printer Cartridges; Paints; Plumbing Materials; Construction Materials; Air Conditioning Spares; Refrigeration & Cooling Spares, Pool AMC cleaning

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- Rates must be inclusive of freight and any other charges.
- The detailed tender forms can be obtained from Finance department by paying OMR 20/- (non-refundable) at the hotel between 9:00 AM and 2:00PM

Sealed tender must be addressed to the attention of :

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Grand Hyatt Muscat
Shaa Al Qurum Diploma Re District
PO Box 951, Muscat 133, Sultanate of Oman
00 968 246 411 50 Telephone
adil.albalushi@hyatt.com

Director of Finance
Grand Hyatt Muscat
Shaa Al Qurum Diploma Re District
PO Box 951, Muscat 133, Sultanate of Oman
00968 246 411 32 TELEPHONE
suraj.gaunkar@hyatt.com

UN urges 'massive investments' for Pakistan flood recovery

According to Pakistan's so-called Resilient Recovery, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Framework, the country will need US\$16.3bn to recover from last year's devastating floods

Geneva, Switzerland - The UN chief called Monday for "massive investments" to help Pakistan recover from last year's devastating floods, saying it was "doubly victimised" by climate change and a "morally bankrupt global financial system".

"No country deserves to endure what happened to Pakistan," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told an international conference in Geneva, which is seeking billions of dollars to support recovery from the disaster.

Guterres opened the one-day event appealing to the world to help Pakistan bounce back from floods which submerged a third of the country, killing more than 1,700 people and affecting more than 33mn others.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, who attended with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, called the floods "a climate disaster of monumental scale".

Eight million people were displaced, millions of acres of agricultural land were ruined and around two million homes destroyed, while nine million more people were pushed to the brink of poverty.



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (left) speaks with Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif at the start of a Pakistan's Resilience to Climate Change conference in Geneva on Monday (AFP)

More than \$16bn

The UN chief hailed how Pakistan and its people had responded to "this epic tragedy with heroic humanity".

"We must match the heroic response of the people of Pakistan with our own efforts and massive investments to strengthen their communities for the future," he told the conference.

According to Pakistan's so-called Resilient Recovery, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Framework, which it will officially present during Monday's conference, it will need US\$16.3bn.

Pakistan's government has said the country should be able to cover half the cost, but is asking the international community to fund the rest.

"This is the greatest climate disaster in our country's history," Zardari told the conference, decrying a "colossal calamity".

"Pakistan will need considerable support over the next several years from our international partners to implement this comprehensive plan," he said.

The UN chief said the international community had a particular responsibility to help Pakistan, which has been "doubly victimised by climate chaos and a morally bankrupt global financial system."

He slammed a system that "routinely denies middle-income countries the debt relief and concessional financing needed to invest in resilience against natural disasters."

Around 450 participants from some 40 countries had registered for Monday's event.

French President Emmanuel Macron, his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan and European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen were also due to address the conference via video-link.

'Cataclysmic'

Ahead of the conference, Achim Steiner, head of the UN development agency, described the floods as a "cataclysmic event", and said Pakistan would face "an extraordinary amount of misery" if the world did not step up and help.

"The waters may have receded, but the impacts are still there," he told AFP. "There is a

massive reconstruction and rehabilitation effort that needs to be undertaken."

Millions of people remain displaced, and those who have been able to go back home are often returning to damaged or destroyed homes and mud-covered fields that cannot be planted.

Food prices have soared, and the number of people facing food insecurity has doubled to 14.6mn, according to UN figures.

The World Bank has estimated that up to nine million more people could be dragged into poverty as a result of the flooding.

Pakistan and the UN stress that Monday's event is broader than a traditional pledging conference, as it seeks to set up a long-term international partnership focused not only on recovery, but also on boosting Pakistan's climate resilience.

Pakistan, with the world's fifth-largest population, is responsible for less than one per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions but is one of the most vulnerable nations to extreme weather caused by global warming.

The country "is essentially a victim of a world that is not acting fast enough on the challenge of climate change", Steiner said.

AFP

'76% foreign firms still operating in Russia despite war'

Moscow, Russia - Nearly 76 per cent of foreign companies continue to operate in Russia, the head of the country's lower legislative chamber said on Monday.

Despite the exodus of dozens of foreign firms over the war in Ukraine, "75.9 per cent of foreign companies stayed in Russia, State Duma speaker Vyacheslav Volodin said on Telegram.

"This decision speaks volumes: They believe in good prospects for the development of our country's economy, they are satisfied with the business climate. Those who left suffer billions of dollars in costs," said Volodin.

The senior lawmaker added that Russian companies were replacing niches left open by foreign businesses that left after Russia started its "special military operation" in February last year.

The lawmaker urged businesses to be "nationally oriented," so their earnings are spent on the development of Russia, underlining that it was a priority of the State Duma to provide legal support for such purposes.

Anadolu Agency

Eurozone wages set to rise sharply, ECB predicts

Berlin, Germany - The eurozone will experience "very strong" growth in wages in the next months as salaries catch up with galloping inflation, the European Central Bank predicted on Monday.

"Wage growth over the next few quarters is expected to be very strong compared with historical patterns", the ECB wrote in its monthly bulletin.

The authors forecasted "some catch-up between wages and high rates of inflation" experienced since 2021, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Robust labour markets" alongside "increases in national minimum wages" and "trade unions demand(ing) higher wage increases" are also set to place upward pressure on wages.

In December, inflation in the eurozone dipped under the symbolic figure of 10 percent, after 18 months of uninterrupted increase.

However, the report explained that "real wages are substantially lower than before the pandemic"



in 2019 because inflation has eroded consumption power, with the annual wage growth rate for the second quarter of 2022 in the eurozone at -5.2 per cent.

The services sector, which is experiencing "serious labour shortages" has bucked this trend, with pay "above their pre-pandemic levels".

Trade unions are expected to push for salary increases "especially in sectors with lower wages".

In Germany, the Verdi trade union has demanded a 15 per cent increase in wages for the approximately 160,000 employees of the mail giant Deutsche Post, and 10.5 per cent for the 2.5mn federal, state and municipal employees.

The healthy job market looks set to guide further wage increases, despite a likely slowdown in economic growth.

In December, the ECB predicted wages would rise by 5.2 per cent in 2023 after having already grown 4.5 per cent in 2022.

ECB vice president Luis de Guindos forecasted wage increases would not lead to a "wage-price spiral".

AFP

Markets extend gains on Fed hopes

London, UK - Major stock markets mostly climbed Monday and oil prices rallied, building on optimism generated by China's Covid reopening and hopes the Federal Reserve will slow its pace of interest rate hikes.

A closely watched report on Friday showed a forecast-busting rise in new US jobs, along with a slowdown in wage growth.

That came as separate figures showed a shock contraction in the US services sector - the first since spring 2020, at the height of the Covid pandemic.

The readings, while suggesting the world's largest economy was showing signs of weakness, were seized on by traders hopeful that the Fed would begin to temper the pace of US interest rate increases.

"Expectations have risen that aggressive moves by the Federal Reserve are finally bruising the resilient labour market and wounding a wage spiral," said Susannah Streeter, senior investment and markets analyst at the brokerage firm Hargreaves Lansdown.

"However, policymakers are still likely to stay cautious, fearful



Expectations have risen that aggressive moves by the Fed are finally bruising the resilient labour market and wounding a wage spiral

SUSANNAH STREETER

that if they drop their guard, inflation may still come back to bite," she said.

Investors are betting on the US central bank to lift borrowing costs about 25 basis points at its next meeting at the end of the month.

Policymakers have warned that rates will continue to go up as they aim to bring decades-

high inflation under control, with some saying they will not likely be cut until 2024.

The eurozone will meanwhile experience "very strong" growth in wages in the coming months as salaries catch up with galloping inflation, the European Central Bank predicted Monday.

As the new trading week kicked off, the biggest stock mar-

ket gains came in Asia amid China's emergence from its strict zero-Covid policies of lockdowns and other restrictions, and the country's pledges to help its struggling economy, particularly the property sector.

The borders between Hong Kong, Macau and China were partially opened Sunday, providing a much-needed boost to Hong Kong. Stocks in Macau-based casinos surged on the move.

"The U-turn in China's Covid policy is consequential to growth and equity returns," said Stephen Innes, managing partner at SPI Asset Management.

"So with the lifting of border restrictions between China/Hong Kong/Macau and international travel reopening, local travellers are not only in a celebratory mood but also investors."

Oil prices jumped more than three percent Monday, having plunged around eight percent last week on weaker demand concerns caused by the spike in Covid infections in China as containment measures are lifted.

AFP

Lofty US housing prices persist despite interest rate increases

New York, US - Higher borrowing costs are leading to fewer US home sales, but prices are staying elevated in a holdover from the torrid peak-pandemic market.

In November, existing home sales were down more than a third from the January 2022 level, according to the National Association of Realtors (NAR).

That came shortly after the borrowing rate for a 30-year fixed mortgage - the reference lending product in US real estate - hit 7.16 per cent in late October, the highest level in 21 years.

Interest rates have retreated slightly since then, but stand well above their levels for most of the last decade and a half, a reflection

of the Federal Reserve's monetary policy pivot to counter inflation.

"The market has certainly shifted here in Denver," said David Schlichter, a real estate agent for Compass in Colorado, who called the peak pandemic of the recent past "the hottest market in history."

But today's batch of properties last longer on the market and are "selling for a price below the asking price," Schlichter said.

Drake, a home buyer who declined to give his last name, expects to soon close on a house in Austin, Texas at four per cent below the listing price.

"Now is the best time to buy in the last 1.5-two years if you're



reasonably secure in your job and have a decent down payment saved," he told AFP.

Notwithstanding these examples, real estate prices have remained relatively strong,

reflecting the limited stock of available homes, said industry insiders.

The median sales price in November was US\$370,700, according to NAR, down 11 per cent

from the June peak.

But that's still up 3.5 per cent from the year-ago period and some 30 per cent higher compared with May 2020 before the pandemic set the market ablaze.

In light of a slowing economy, CoreLogic has forecast that prices will fall 2.8 per cent by November in 2023 compared with the 2022 period.

But nothing like the 2008 subprime debacle is expected. Between June 2008 and January 2012, home prices slumped 27 per cent amid the Great Recession.

Few homes available

Lending practices in the US housing market have changed significantly from that period.

cantly from that period.

In 2006, nearly 35 per cent of mortgages were tied to an adjustable-rate in which lending fees rose when the Fed lifted interest rates.

Today, only about 10 per cent of mortgages do this, insulating most legacy mortgages from a hit from the Fed's pivot away from near-zero interest rates.

The limited volume of available housing stock is another big point of contrast with that period.

Real estate companies overbuilt during the last housing boom period during the first decade of the 21st Century, said Lawrence Yun, chief economist at NAR.

"The homebuilders have been

underproducing for this past decade," Yun said. "So if there's a mild recession again, I think the inventory increases should not be that great."

Slim pickings as far as available homes for sale translates to lofty home prices, a burden to first-time buyers.

"Housing affordability is definitely a concern," said Yun. "Many young people who want to be owners don't have the financial resources to become owners."

Housing insiders said the impact to home prices from the Fed's dramatic policy change has been less pronounced than expected

AFP



CEO of Queen Rania Academy visits Oman

H E Dr Madiha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniya, Minister of Education, received yesterday morning (Monday) in her office at the Ministry's General Diwan, Dr Osama Yousef Muhammad Obaidat, CEO of the Queen Rania Academy for Teacher Training in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, who is currently visiting the Sultanate of Oman, and in the presence of Dr Intisar bint Abdullah Ambosaidi, assistant director general for the Specialised Institute for Vocational Training for Teachers.

During the meeting, aspects of educational cooperation between the Ministry of Education

and the Queen Rania Academy for Teacher Training in were discussed, along with the challenges facing the education sector in general and the teaching profession in particular. Aspects of the continuous support provided by the Ministry to teachers, their development and qualification, and overcoming all challenges facing them to achieve the goals of the educational and learning process were also reviewed, in addition to the continuous support of the Specialised Institute for Vocational Training of Teachers, and to provide all privileges to achieve its desired goals, a press release said.

On the sidelines, H E Majid bin Saeed al Bahri, Undersecretary of the Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs, also received Dr Osama Obaidat in his office at the Ministry's General Diwan. The meeting discussed the professional development programmes for teachers and their qualification, the reality of private schools in the Sultanate of Oman, and the international ones, as well as the mechanisms for measuring the quality of education in public and private schools, and the challenges facing the administrative affairs sector in terms of transferring

teachers and appointing them in remote areas, the geographical distribution of schools and its challenges, and the tendency to partner with the private sector to operate the education sector. Dr Ali al Shukaili, director general of the Directorate General of Private Schools in the Ministry, also met with Dr Osama Obaidat in the presence of Khadija al Salami, assistant director general for Educational Affairs in the directorate, and Mahmoud al Hussein, assistant director general for Administrative and Financial Affairs, and directors of departments in the directorate, in the ministry's General Diwan.

Bank Nizwa offers competitive Islamic finance for home, auto

With the launch of a new campaign, Bank Nizwa, one of the leading Islamic banks in the sultanate, is now catering to customers seeking an affordable home, auto and personal financing option.

Under the campaign, customers can take advantage of flexible tenures and generous terms along with a special profit rate of 4.5 per cent.

This campaign offers attractive and feasible options for those looking to enhance their living standards. This promotion is designed to encourage citizens and residents alike to explore more convenient and accessible Islamic financing options, a press release said.

"Keeping our customers' financial goals in mind, we develop innovative offers and solutions to support them. As customers strive toward their goals, the new campaign comes at a time when convenient payment plans are much needed. Through this campaign, we aim to enhance our customers' financing journeys and ultimately, support the local economy," said Arif al Zaabi assistant general manager - Retail Banking.

"As part of Bank Nizwa's commitment to providing Shari'ah-compliant products and services, it walks that extra mile to fulfill its customers' aspirations of maintaining comfortable



lifestyles for themselves and their families. For customers seeking easy finance for big purchases, a competitive profit rate of 4.5 per cent is a major boost to acquire a house or car," he added.

Introducing innovative financial solutions is at the core of the bank's strategy and expansion plans. In addition to bridging the financing gap and attracting new clients, this campaign strives to raise awareness of the bank's competitive advantages. Banking Nizwa enables an individual's choice and helps in meeting their

aspirations by offering benchmark services that extend beyond financing. With Shari'ah-compliant banking, the Bank enables individuals to improve their lives as part of its consultation services.

With its affiliation with the Islamic Finance Initiation Network (IFIN), Bank Nizwa was the first in the country to offer on-the-spot approvals for car financing. Customers can complete car financing procedures at participating car dealers. Customers can obtain auto finance faster by using this service.

HUAWEI offers productivity apps

Recent years have seen some of the most momentous transformations in modern history and even the most skeptic businesses have eventually realized the advantages of remote and, consequently, hybrid working models. Today's workplace is, thus, defined by flexibility.

According to the latest Hybrid Work Report, a staggering number of employees are either working remotely or have adopted a hybrid working environment, while a large number believe they no longer need to be in the office to carry out their tasks. However, as businesses of all sizes move to cloud-centric infrastructure, apps, tools, and services that enable seamless collaboration and improve productivity are becoming vital.

Thankfully, HUAWEI AppGallery, the official app distribution platform for HUAWEI devices and one of the world's top 3 app marketplaces, has evolved into a productivity dreamland, bringing together the



most popular apps, tools, and collaboration platforms under one roof.

Employees can effortlessly edit documents, spreadsheets, and presentations on the move using Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint on their Huawei smartphones and tablets. PDF Reader reads every PDF files flawlessly, and scans documents is a breeze with apps like CamScanner - PDF Scanner App, when combined with the unrivaled cameras of Huawei's de-

vices. Huawei's AppGallery can also handle all of your business communication needs. Whether you use Outlook, Petal Mail as your email provider, AppGallery has an official app for you. You can also instantly join remote meetings on Microsoft Teams, as well as access files saved in major cloud storage providers. Students may also participate in digital classrooms, while remote desktop access is provided by some of the finest tools.

Oxy Oman sponsors EF Endurance Race

Oxy Oman representatives recently attended the 'Oxy Endurance Race', which was exclusively sponsored by the company; in cooperation of the Oman Equestrian Federation, and the Al Dhahirah Equestrian Committee. Under the sponsorship agreement, 3 vehicles were awarded by Oxy to the top three winners of the 100KM race.

The event was held at Wilayat Ibri, Al Dhahirah Governorate, under the auspices of H E Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Al Dhahirah. Nasser al Maskari, CSR Manager at Oxy Oman, and Sheikh Said bin Mohammed al Kalbani, vice president of Oman Equestrian Federation, attended on behalf of their organisations.

The sponsorship marks Oxy's continuous support of equestrian racing, after its long-term engagement with camel racing in the sultanate as a local support historically tied to the culture of local communities.

"This sponsorship reflects the company's long-standing strides



in support of historic cultural sports in the sultanate, and we are proud to engage with the regionally recognised and acclaimed sport of equestrian

racing," said Steven Lauver, president and general manager at Oxy Oman.

"Oxy is committed to supporting projects which directly

impact communities located within our concession areas, and to enhance social development through long-term projects in the region," he added.

Work-away holidays, a new trend in UAE this year

Travellers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia are planning to spend more on holidays in 2023, with most in both markets (93%) planning to go away, and more than two thirds in each market (66% in Saudi Arabia and 69% in the UAE planning more breaks than in 2022.

Luxury will also be a key theme, with around a quarter planning on staying in luxury accommodation whilst away, a press release said.

The increase in trips and spending is, in part, thanks to more confidence that 2023 holiday plans won't be impacted by COVID-19, and the fact that travel remains a priority for Middle Eastern consumers. Sustainability also plays an important role in 2023 travel plans, whilst



'having a break from it all' is key for holidaymakers.

These are the findings of Marriott Bonvoy's 2023 Travel Trends research, which analysed the 2023 travel plans of 14,000 travellers across Europe and the Middle East.

Wellbeing-led holidays that

allow people to get away from it all will be the predominant type of break those in the Middle East go on. More than six in ten from the UAE (61%) plan to, whilst the figure is even higher for Saudi Arabia (73%).

Authentic travel is also key, with many wanting to immerse

themselves in a complete change of culture, with over half in both markets (55% in the UAE and 56% in Saudi Arabia) wanting to explore new destinations and cultures. To truly soak up local culture, 30% of those from the UAE and 27% of those from Saudi Arabia plan on taking an 'extended holiday' of three weeks or more in one destination.

Of going on an extended holiday, 39% from Saudi Arabia and 37% from the UAE say that it is the first time they will do so.

Forty-eight percent of those from the UAE and 44% from Saudi Arabia going on extended holidays highlighted that being able to work remotely allows them to take a longer holiday without having to take annual leave for the whole break.

Wizz Air achieves lowest annual carbon intensity



Wizz Air, Europe's fastest growing and most environmentally sustainable airline globally, reports that its average carbon emissions for 2022 amounted to 55.2g per passenger/km, 15.4% lower compared to the year of 2021, and the lowest ever recorded by the airline in one calendar year.

Wizz Air operates the lowest carbon emissions per passenger/km amongst all competitor

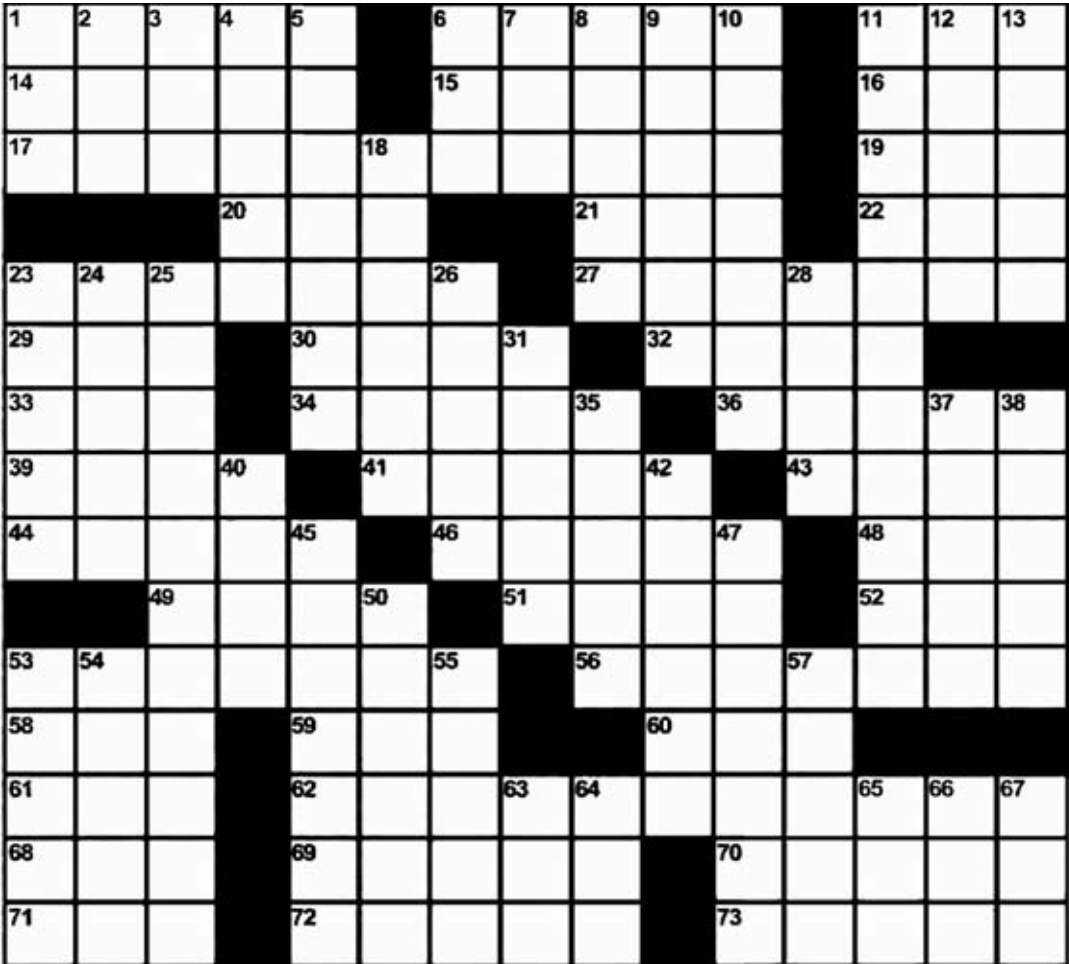
airlines and is committed to further reducing its carbon emissions intensity by 25% by 2030, a press release said.

An integral element of Wizz Air's sustainability strategy is the renewal of its fleet. The airline has been continuously adding new Airbus A321neo aircraft to its fleet and replacing older aircraft, with 34 Airbus A321neo added to the fleet in 2022. The share of new 'neo' technology

aircraft within Wizz Air's fleet is planned to surpass 50% by the end of the current financial year.

Currently, the airline operates a fleet of 177 Airbus aircraft with an average age of 4.6 years, which is well below the average fleet age of its major competitors of around 10 years. In 2022, over 90% of all Wizz Air flights operated from and to the UAE were performed with its most sustainable A321neo aircraft.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Knight wear
- 6) Place of pilgrimage
- 11) Scoutmaster, often
- 14) Puppeteer Lewis
- 15) Asian nurses
- 16) Samurai's sash
- 17) Formal greetings
- 19) Day break?
- 20) When the train may stop?
- 21) Before, to bards
- 22) Kitchen meas.
- 23) Hindu retreats
- 27) Type of operation
- 29) "So that's your game, huh?"
- 30) "Follow me!"
- 32) Stupefy
- 33) Not T-shirt weather
- 34) Mortise filler
- 36) Packs away
- 39) "What I have here"
- 41) Drying out program
- A SIMPLE QUESTION
- 43) Crushing blow
- 44) State in India
- 46) Bubbly drinks
- 48) Take off
- 49) Camera diaphragm

- 51) Like some loads
- 52) Eggs in a lab
- 53) Parts of the human population
- 56) Revived
- 58) " _ be an honor"
- 59) Utmost (Abbr.)
- 60) Government procure-ment org.
- 61) Farm sound
- 62) Enjoying Broadway, perhaps
- 68) Quaint place to stay
- 69) Say "nothin'," e.g.
- 70) _ -cotta
- 71) Start of a giggle
- 72) Church assembly
- 73) County by the Thames
- DOWN
- 1) Certain residue
- 2) Fraternity letter
- 3) Big mouth
- 4) Command
- 5) It may be read before a punishment
- 6) Long-time Chinese Chairman
- 7) Ostrich cousin
- 8) Citadel student

- 9) Line for a Broadway show?
- 10) States as true
- 11) Why people can't do some things
- 12) Ridicule
- 13) Likably silly
- 18) Talk incessantly
- 23) Major blood artery
- 24) Persian potentates
- 25) Question for a magi-cian
- 26) Loudness units
- 28) Bolt partners
- 31) "Absolutely not!"
- 35) Lowest point
- 37) Voluntarily forgo
- 38) Ending for "farm" or "home"
- 40) Wrapped garment
- 42) No-goodnik
- 45) Subtraction signs
- 47) Having feeling
- 50) To the exclusion of all else
- 53) End, as of one's pa-tience
- 54) Make reparations
- 55) Large beer mug
- 57) Goes effortlessly
- 63) Promising words
- 64) Nancy Drew's

- boyfriend
- 65) Brief time units

- 66) Bonanza find
- 67) Candle makeup

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Commerce is not an ideal thing to be involved in right now, especially if you're interested in selling some of your possessions. Your personal goods won't move as quickly as you think, so you might want to either consider giving them away to charity or holding on to them for a little bit longer. On the other side of the equation, as a buyer you're vulnerable to misleading statements. Don't assume that something is included in the purchase price unless you see it in writing!



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Red tape is sticky stuff, so if you're in the midst of dealing with any type of bureaucracy, beware: You could get stuck in the system. Diligence is your best bet, so keep calling the numbers you have, do whatever you can in person, and don't assume that things are getting taken care of just because that's what the person behind the counter is telling you. You have to rely on yourself if you want this issue or process to be dealt with effectively and accurately.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

If someone offers you their help today, it's not necessarily because they want to put themselves at your service. It's much more likely that they want to come to your aid only because they're expecting a big payoff in the end! Don't let them claim they're a generous person when they're merely being manipulative. Helping other people must be done for its own sake. Tell them thanks, but no thanks, and let them find someone else to use.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Using flattery in order to get what you want in life is a completely legitimate tactic, there's no doubt about it. But if you use it too often, it will lose its value, so consider yourself warned! Today, use flattery only as a last resort. The people you're with have become nearly immune to your flowery words and smiling eyes, so it will take every flattery arrow in your arsenal to get them to acquiesce. Why not try a simple "please"? It might work better.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Put your ambition on pause for a while. It's keeping you isolated. There are people you should be getting to know better. Today, focus on being more compatible with the people you're working with. Make a few compromises, hold your tongue here and there, and just try to play nicely with others. Having more harmony in your life will help even out the tumultuous energy that's been circling you for a few days. Aim for less tug-of-war and you'll have a lot less stress.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Your latest crush could be having more of an impact on your current thought process than you realize. In order to get more clarity today, you should try hard to stop thinking about them and get back on track with the work you need to take care of. A big deadline is looming! It represents the chance for an important opportunity, and it should be your top priority right now. Your love life can wait. Today, you've got to take care of your own best interests first.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

The recent developments in your romantic or private life will be right at the top of your mind today, which could negatively affect your ability to focus on the work at hand. Your concentration skills are in for quite a struggle! Try to put yourself in the middle of a group if at all possible. The energy of the people around you will help you stay on track and stop you from mentally wandering off into daydreams. Volunteer for anything you can do to keep your hands and brain busy.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

An exciting person could come back into your life today and have a special type of invitation for you. It involves an unusual cultural experience, and it's one you should accept if you can. And if you're not too excited about it at first, don't worry. Once you learn more details and the event gets nearer, you'll feel a lot of enthusiasm. You might even be excited! So don't jump to any conclusions. Let them know you're on board for this little expedition.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Patience doesn't always come easily for you, but if you put in a little bit more time waiting for something, you'll be much better off in the end. Don't throw a tantrum or push people to give you things you want before they're ready to give them to you. Learning takes time. You have to hear new things and experience new things over and over again before they sink in. You want to internalize this down to your core, then it can inform who you really are. Just keep waiting and working.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Your kookiest ideas are so crazy that they just might work today, so try not to edit yourself. Censoring what you contribute to the group at large might be your idea of protecting your reputation, but it's probably accomplishing just the opposite. It's all about quantity right now. Don't wait for an idea to be completely fleshed out before presenting it to everyone. Just spit it out! Think out loud and show people how your thought process works. You'll understand it better yourself.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

A challenge could handed to you today, perhaps in the form of a dare or contest. It's hard for you to pass up the opportunity to show other people how hard you rock, but you might want to abstain from the action. There are developing issues in one of your non-romantic relationships, and you need to focus your energies on them before you can go off and play. Show people that you know how to put things in the proper perspective. Priorities matter.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Beautiful words will hold extra entertainment value for you today, so do whatever you can to get into conversations with people who have wit and poetic abilities like actors, writers, teachers, or other charismatic folks. There's a playful aspect to everything you and your circle experiences today. This will keep you smiling and help take your mind off unpleasant or complicated issues that you have no control over.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Which family of 3 painters depicted the life of peasants, paintings in which devils and witches appear, and landscapes?

- A. Rembrandt
- B. Dali
- C. Brueghel
- D. Holbein

02. What expression that comes from angling means "everything"?

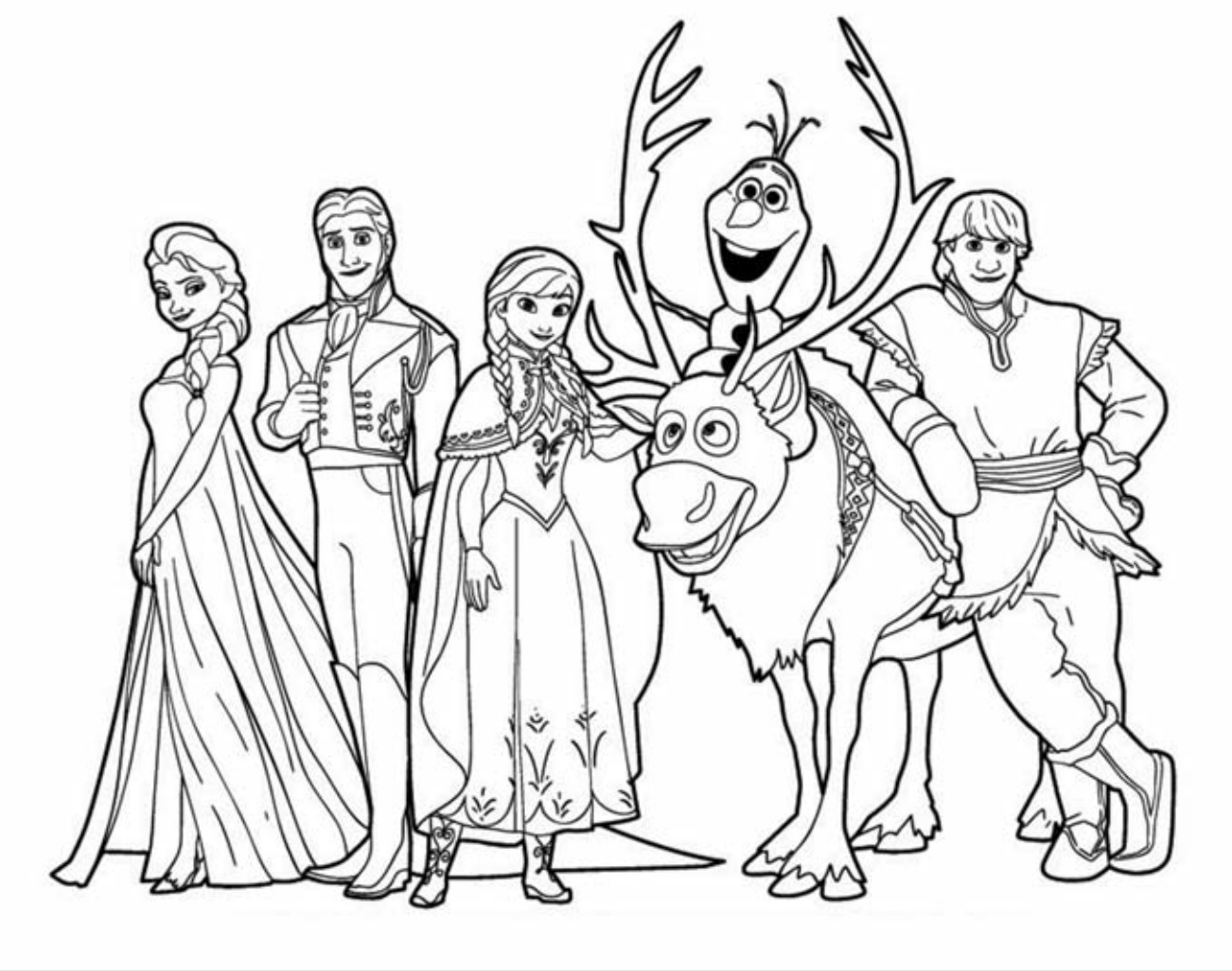
- A. Bell, book and candle
- B. Lock, stock and barrel
- C. Hook, line and sinker
- D. Blood, sweat and tears

03. In the film "Batman Forever", released in 1995, who played the villain called "The Riddler"?

- A. Jim Carrey
- B. Jack Nicholson
- C. Tommy Lee Jones
- D. Arnold Schwarzenegger

Answers: 1.C 2.C 3.A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

G	B	D	L
E	N	E	I
L	T	A	D
S	I	O	Qu

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

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

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

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

Iran sentences three more to death over Amini protests

Tehran, Iran - Iran has sentenced to death three more people, accused of killing three members of the security forces during the protests triggered by Mahsa Amini's death, the judiciary said on Monday.

The Islamic republic has been rocked by civil unrest since the September 16 death of Kurdish Iranian Amini, 22, following her arrest for allegedly violating Iran's strict dress code for women.

The latest sentences, which can still be appealed, bring to 17 the total number of people condemned to death in connection with the more than three months of protests.

Four of those convicted have been executed and two others are on death row after their sentences were upheld by the country's supreme court.

Saleh Mirhashemi, Majid Kazemi and Saeed Yaghoubi were sentenced to death on charges of 'moharebeh' - or waging 'war against God' - under Iran's Islamic sharia law, the judiciary's Mizan Online news website reported.

In addition, they were all found guilty of belonging to a 'criminal group with the intention of disrupting the security of the country', a charge that carries a 10-year jail term.

Two others were handed prison terms for the incident that led to the deaths of the three security force members in the central province of Isfahan on November 16, Mizan said.



A protestor holds portraits of Iranian Mohsen Shekari, Mohammad Mehdi Karami, Mohammad Hosseini and Majid Reza Rahnavard, protestors who were executed in Iran, during a rally in Lyon on Sunday against the Iranian regime (AFP)

The latest sentences bring to 17 the total number of people condemned to death in connection with Amini protests

One of them is professional footballer Amir Nasr-Azadani, 26, who received sentences to

talling 26 years in prison on three different charges including assisting in 'moharebeh'.

According to Iranian law, however, he should serve them concurrently, meaning he would be behind bars for 16 years, it said.

Nasr-Azadani's case and the risk of him being sentenced to death had raised alarm abroad, mainly by FIFPRO, the world union of professional footballers.

All the sentences announced can be appealed before the

country's supreme court, Mizan said. Videos of the court sessions were published by Mizan, along with CCTV images purportedly showing the crimes being committed, and the confessions of the accused.

Iranian authorities say hundreds of people, including members of the security forces, have been killed and thousands arrested during the protests which they have generally labelled 'riots'.

Tehran accuses hostile for-

eign countries and opposition groups of stoking the unrest.

On Saturday, Iran executed Mohammad Mehdi Karami and Seyed Mohammad Hosseini for killing a paramilitary force member in November, in Karaj west of Tehran.

Two other men, Mohsen Shekari and Majidreza Rahnavard, were put to death in December after being convicted of separate attacks on security forces.

AFP



A tugboat pulling the bulk carrier M/V Glory in the Suez Canal near al-Qantarah between Port Said and Ismailia on Monday (AFP)

Suez Canal traffic 'normal' after stuck vessel refloated

Ismailia, Egypt - Suez Canal maritime traffic was 'normal' Monday after a cargo vessel carrying Ukrainian grain ran aground but was then refloated and towed away, said the Egyptian authority running the vital waterway.

The incident involving the 225-metre-long Marshall Islands-registered M/V Glory had briefly sparked fears of a repeat of a major 2021 blockage when the giant container ship *Ever Given* became diagonally wedged in the canal.

That week-long closure of the man-made waterway linking Asia and Europe cost billions of dollars through shipping delays, and the life of an employee of the Suez Canal Authority in the operation to free the mega-ship.

SCA chief Osama Rabie gave the all-clear on Monday when he said 'traffic is moving normally on the Suez Canal' after the authority had 'mobilised four tugboats to tow the ship' allowing it to resume its passage through the canal. "The canal is on track to register 51 vessels passing in both directions Monday," he said in a statement.

Smooth traffic through the

Suez Canal is vitally important for Egypt, the Arab world's most populous country, which is currently battered by an economic crisis that has seen the currency lose 75 per cent in value in less than a year.

The waterway, used for about 10 per cent of the world's maritime trade, is one of Egypt's main sources of foreign currency revenue, bringing in more than US\$7bn a year.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi approved a project last year to widen and deepen the southern section of the canal where the *Ever Given* got stuck.

In 2021, the *Ever Given* became wedged diagonally across the canal when visibility was sharply reduced during a sandstorm, disrupting trade flows for nearly a week.

According to the SCA, Egypt lost between US\$12mn and US\$15mn every day of the closure, while insurers estimated that global maritime trade suffered billions in lost revenue per day. Fears of a costly new blockage were sparked on news of Monday's incident.

AFP

3 women activists win Swedish rights prize

Stockholm, Sweden - Three women from Ukraine, Iran and Turkey on Monday won Sweden's Olof Palme human rights prize for 2023 for championing women's rights and freedoms.

Marta Chumalo of Ukraine, Iran's Narges Mohammadi and Eren Keskin of Turkey were honoured for 'their efforts in the fight to secure women's freedom, in an age when human rights are threatened by war, violence and oppression', the Olof Palme Memorial Fund said in a statement. Chumalo, a psychologist and feminist, was highlighted for being one of the founders of 'Women's Perspectives', an NGO promoting women's rights and combating violence against women.

"Since 2014, and especially since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Marta Chumalo has been heavily involved in raising awareness about the effects of the war, and in addressing the needs of its victims," the fund said.

Journalist and human rights activist Mohammadi 'has been a central figure in the struggle for women's rights and freedom of speech in Iran', the jury said.

She was one of the founders of the Iranian National Peace Council. Her involvement in championing women's rights 'has led to her repeated arrest, and she has served several prison terms'.

AFP

Acclaimed US fiction writer Russell Banks dies aged 82

Washington, US - Russell Banks, a prolific American fiction writer whose work charted the interior lives of marginalised people at odds with social forces, has died at age 82.

Banks 'passed away peacefully last night in his home in upstate (New York)', fellow author Joyce Carol Oates said on Sunday on Twitter.

"I loved Russell & loved his tremendous talent & magnanimous heart," added Oates, who like Banks taught writing at Princeton University. "All his

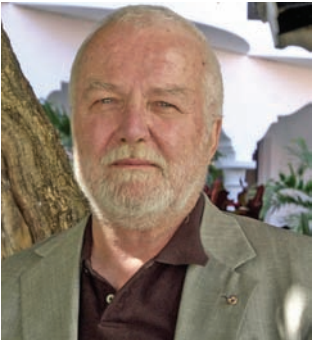
work is exceptional."

Banks's literary agent Ellen Levine said the cause of death was cancer, according to *The New York Times*.

His notable works include the novels *Affliction*, *The Sweet Hereafter*, *Cloudsplitter* and *Continental Drift* - the latter two of which were Pulitzer Prize finalists.

Banks in 1995 won the John Dos Passos Prize for Literature. He also served as president of the International Parliament of Writers.

His protagonists were often



US author Russell Banks (AFP)

blue collar, reflecting his own working-class upbringing as the son of an alcoholic plumber - a

man he later said he both hated and adored. His characters struggle with poverty, drug abuse, and class and racial issues.

He told a *Le Monde* interviewer in 2016 that he considered himself lucky as a writer but pessimistic as the citizen of a country where middle-class Americans no longer felt their children would enjoy better lives.

He claimed allegiance to an American literary tradition going back to Mark Twain 'whose work is generated by love of people

who are scorned and derided', he once told *The Guardian*. "I have an almost simple-minded affection for them."

Politically active, Banks staked out positions against the US military intervention in Iraq, and the intrusions of the post-9/11 Patriot Act.

Two of Banks's works were made into widely acclaimed films. *Affliction*, adapted to the cinema by Paul Schrader in 1997 and starring Nick Nolte and Sissy Spacek, was about a small-town cop who investigates a hunting

death.

And in *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997) Banks employed several voices to tell the wrenching story of a deadly school bus accident that lastingly traumatises a small town in upstate New York.

In 1998, Banks told the *Paris Review* that an early inspiration was his discovery in his teens of the American poet Walt Whitman. "It was the first time I had the sense that you could be a writer and it would be a lofty, noble position," he said.

AFP

Harry's racism 'olive branch' dismissed as book comes out

London, UK - Prince Harry's denial that he accused his family of racism was interpreted in the UK press on Monday as a bizarre peace offering, but commentators argued the damage had already been done as his unflinching memoir comes out.

The midnight release of *Spare* is being accompanied by four television interviews, with two more airing in the United States following the first pair on Sunday.

In the first to air, with Britain's ITV, the Duke of Sussex caused bafflement by insisting he and his mixed-race wife Meghan never accused the royal family of racism over the skin tone of their unborn son. "No I didn't. The British press said that," Harry said, adding that Meghan had also not called the royals 'racist'.

The allegation, made in a bombshell interview given by Harry and Meghan in March 2021 to US chat show host Oprah Winfrey, caused a transatlantic uproar.

Harry's elder brother and the heir to the British throne, Prince William, told reporters at the time that 'we are very much not a racist family', but Harry himself



A member of the public poses in his front room in Manchester, north-west England, watching a television interview broadcast on ITV, being given by Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex on Sunday (AFP)

stayed silent then.

The late Queen Elizabeth II, the mens' grandmother, said then that 'recollections may vary' about what was said - a line that was repeated ironically by UK commentators in response to Harry's interviews.

Several described his denial to ITV as an 'olive branch', but one that was contradicted by the Oprah interview and too little, too late, given the incendiary nature of his other allegations in the

book.

'Probably bigoted'

Accusing the press of effectively killing his mother Princess Diana, Harry also accuses his father King Charles III's second wife Camilla of waging a cunning but dangerous campaign to win over the press herself.

The book includes a claim that William physically attacked Harry as they rowed about Meghan.

It also gives an account of how he lost his virginity, an admission of teenage drug use and a claim he killed 25 people while serving in Afghanistan with the British military. To ITV, Harry also defended a long-serving royal courtier, Susan Hussey, after she grilled a black British guest at a palace reception about where the woman 'really' came from.

But in another interview with CBS, the prince also admitted to

being 'probably bigoted' before he met Meghan, and accused William and his wife Kate of never giving her a chance.

The *Sun* newspaper said Harry had 'astonished' viewers with his racism 'U-turn', and described the 38-year-old prince as a 'troubled, lonely man'.

"Nothing is Harry's fault and almost everything can be blamed on the press," the *Daily Telegraph* wrote.

"Some of it made no sense: Meghan and Harry are fans of Lady Hussey and think it was the press that accused her of being racist?"

"The press made up the accusations that the royal family was racist, when the couple were making a very different allegation about 'unconscious bias'?"

The left-leaning *Guardian* wrote: "If she had lived to see this, it wouldn't have killed the queen. But it might have made her a republican."

'Sacrifice'

The contents of Harry's ghost-written book have already been widely leaked after it went on sale early in Spain.

He insisted to ITV that he still wanted a rapprochement with his father and brother, but said the ball was in their court, refusing to confirm whether he will attend Charles's coronation in May. He also urged his family to respond. "Silence only allows the abuser to abuse, right? So I don't know how staying silent is ever gonna make things better," he added.

In the CBS interview, Harry said that he and William were not currently speaking and he had not talked to his father 'for quite a while'.

In *The Times*, political commentator Quentin Letts described writing a letter to his own elder brother as he was dying, to thank him for being 'my hero and protector'.

"It is hard to see how Prince Harry will ever be able to write such a letter. All the coronets of Christendom, all the lemons of southern California, could not expiate such a sacrifice," Letts wrote.

"For all the rage against William, the person most damaged may be Harry himself."

AFP

Brazil patrols government buildings retaken from Bolsonaro supporters

Brasilia, Brazil - Brazilian security forces locked down the area around Congress, the presidential palace and the Supreme Court on Monday, a day after supporters of ex-president Jair Bolsonaro stormed the seat of power in riots that triggered an international outcry.

In stunning scenes reminiscent of the January 6, 2021 invasion of the US Capitol building by supporters of then-president Donald Trump, backers of Bolsonaro broke through police cordons and overran the seats of power in Brasilia, smashing windows and doors and ransacking offices.

Initially overwhelmed security forces used tear gas, stun grenades and water cannon to fight back the rioters until they finally subdued them.

Newly inaugurated President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, the veteran leftist who narrowly won Brazil's bitter, divisive October elections, condemned the invasions as a 'fascist' attack.

The far-right Bolsonaro meanwhile condemned 'pillaging and invasions of public buildings' in a tweet. But the politician dubbed the 'Tropical Trump' rejected Lula's claim he incited the attacks, and defended the right to 'peaceful protests.'

Lula, who was in the southeastern city of Araraquara visiting a region hit by severe floods, signed a decree declaring a federal intervention in Brasilia, giving his government special powers over the local police force to restore law and order in



Supporters of Brazilian former President Jair Bolsonaro invaded the National Congress in Brasilia on Sunday (AFP)

These fascist fanatics have done something never before seen in this country's history. We will find out who these vandals are, and they will be brought down with the full force of the law

LULA INACIO LULA DA SILVA

the capital. "These fascist fanatics have done something never before seen in this country's history," said Lula, 77, who took office a week ago.

"We will find out who these vandals are, and they will be brought down with the full force of the law."

Lula returned to Brasilia and viewed the damage at the presidential palace and the Supreme

Court. He said he would work out of the palace on Monday despite all the destruction.

Federal District police said at least 300 people had been arrested in connection with the unrest. TV images showed police ushering Bolsonaro supporters in single file down the ramp from the Planalto presidential palace - the same ramp Lula climbed a week earlier at his inauguration.

The Senate security service said it had arrested 30 people in the chamber.

The attorney general's office, meanwhile, called for the immediate opening of investigations to ensure 'the accountability of those involved'.

Brasilia security chief sacked

The chaos came after a sea of protesters dressed in military-style camouflage and the green and yellow of the Brazilian flag flooded into Brasilia's Three Powers Square, invading the floor of Congress, trashing the Supreme Court building and climbing the ramp to the Planalto.

Social media footage showed

rioters breaking doors and windows to enter the Congress building, then streaming inside en masse, trashing lawmakers' offices and using the sloped speaker's dais on the Senate floor as a slide as they shouted insults directed at the absent lawmakers. Protesters damaged artworks, historic objects, furniture and decorations as they ran riot through the buildings, according to Brazilian media reports.

One video showed a crowd outside pulling a policeman from his horse and beating him to the ground. Police, who had established a security cordon around the square, fired tear gas in a bid to disperse the rioters - initially to no avail. A journalists' union

Japan PM on tour of Europe, N America

Tokyo, Japan - Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Monday left on a tour of Europe and North America with security-focused talks on the agenda after his nation's biggest defence policy overhaul in decades.

Japan holds the 2023 presidency of the G7, and Kishida will visit bloc members France, Italy, Britain and Canada starting on Monday. Kishida's final stop is the United States - his first visit to Washington as prime minister - where he will meet President Joe Biden on Friday.

The talks with Biden would reaffirm US-Japan cooperation and the 'realisation of a free and open Indo-Pacific', Kishida told reporters on Sunday, using another term for the Asia-Pacific region.

The two leaders are expected to discuss security challenges including Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

They are also expected to issue a joint statement that will include Taiwan and the denuclearisation of North Korea, the Japanese newspaper Yomiuri Shimbun reported, citing unnamed Japanese government sources.

Kishida has said he will discuss his nation's bolstered defence policy with Biden.

AFP



Indonesia's President Joko Widodo (right) with Malaysia's PM Anwar Ibrahim at the presidential palace in Bogor, West Java on Monday (AFP)

New Malaysia PM Anwar in Indonesia on first foreign trip

Bogor, Indonesia - Malaysia's new prime minister met with Indonesia's president on Monday on his first foreign trip after winning a confidence vote and cementing his mandate last month following an inconclusive election.

Anwar Ibrahim, a long-time opposition leader, was sworn in as the country's 10th prime minister on November 24 to head a unity government in a shaky alliance with the graft-tainted party of his former political rivals.

He met Indonesian President Joko Widodo for talks at a presidential palace in Bogor, south of capital Jakarta where he thanked his counterpart for his support after the election.

"This is a bit personal, Mr President. When I was in a difficult situation, living in uncertainty and suffering, Indonesia welcomed me as a true friend," he said after the meeting.

Widodo said the world's two biggest exporters of palm oil would boost cooperation on the commodity and work together to battle 'discrimination' against the sector, which environmentalists say is stoking deforestation in both countries.

The European Union last

month agreed on a new law preventing companies from selling products linked to deforestation.

"We have agreed to strengthen the cooperation through the Council of Palm Oil Producing Countries (CPOPC) to increase the palm oil market," he said.

The Indonesian leader also lauded the interest of Malaysian companies in investing in the country's new capital Nusantara, which is scheduled to open on the island of Borneo next year.

Ahead of the talks the Indonesian leader greeted Anwar before driving him around the palace's gardens in an electric buggy.

The pair then discussed issues including trade, border disputes and the situation in coup-hit Myanmar. It is customary that the first foreign visit of a new Malaysian premier takes place in neighbouring Indonesia, which counts Kuala Lumpur as its fifth biggest export market.

Indonesia, the world's third-largest democracy, this year takes the chairmanship of the ASEAN group of Southeast Asian nations and will host a leaders' summit in November.

AFP

Hun Sen warns rivals to face 'legal action or sticks'

Phnom Penh, Cambodia - Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen warned opponents on Monday they would face legal action or a beating with sticks if they accused his ruling party of vote theft in national polls later this year.

One of the world's longest-serving leaders, Hun Sen will mark 38 years in power this weekend and has vowed to run again when Cambodia holds elections in July.

Speaking at a ceremony in Kampong Cham province, he said political challengers would



Cambodian PM Hun Sen (AFP)

need to choose between the courts and violence if they criticised his ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP).

"There are only two options - one is using legal action, the other is using sticks... What do you want?" he said.

"Either you face legal action in court or I rally CPP people for a demonstration and beat you guys up."

He also instructed lawyers to monitor speeches by his rivals.

"We won't let you accuse us of being thieves all the time. The CPP cannot accept being called thieves who steal votes. We must sue whoever says that,"

Hun Sen added.

He later claimed he did not encourage violence.

Scores of opposition politicians, including long-time rival Sam Rainsy, have been convicted of crimes in absentia and remain in exile.

Critics and rights groups say Hun Sen has ruthlessly crushed dissent by jailing opponents and activists ahead of every election.

In the latest mass trial last month, 36 people including Rainsy were handed between five and seven years on charges of plotting against the govern-

ment. The prime minister has promised to crush Rainsy, who was sentenced to life imprisonment in October, and to squeeze his political allies.

The emerging opposition Candlelight Party took 18 per cent of the vote in last year's local polls.

Its deputy leader Son Chhay - a long-time Rainsy ally who holds Australian citizenship - was convicted of defamation in October and ordered to pay US\$750,000 in compensation to the ruling party for criticising the polls.

AFP

Biden in Mexico for talks on migrants, drugs

Mexico City, Mexico - A regional migration and drug smuggling crisis is expected to dominate talks between US President Joe Biden and his Mexican counterpart Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador on Monday.

Biden arrived in Mexico City late on Sunday after a politically charged stop at the southern US border - his first since taking office. He will meet on Monday and Tuesday with Lopez Obrador and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau one-on-one and also together in what is dubbed the 'Three Amigos' summit.

While trade and environmental issues are also on the table, Biden has put a surge in irregular migration and dangerous drug trafficking front at the centre of his trip, his first to Mexico as president.

"Our problems at the border didn't arise overnight," Biden tweeted after his arrival.

"And they won't be solved overnight. But, we can come together to fix this broken system. We can secure the border and fix



US President Joe Biden (left) is welcomed by his Mexican counterpart Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador in Mexico City on Sunday (AFP)

the immigration process to be orderly, fair, safe, and humane."

On his way to Mexico, Biden stopped for several hours in El Paso, Texas, a city at the heart of the troubled border.

He met with US officials at the

Bridge of the Americas crossing, watching a demonstration of the latest border enforcement technology, as well as a customs sniffer dog. He later got out of his motorcade to inspect a section of the tall fencing that snakes be-

tween El Paso and its twin city Juarez on the Mexican side.

"They need a lot of resources. We're going to get it for them," Biden told reporters after his visit to the customs post.

Asylum overhaul

Biden is under huge political pressure in the face of spiraling illegal border crossings and applications for asylum by people making perilous journeys from regional countries afflicted by repression, poverty or severe crime.

Adding to the crisis has been a surge in cross-border smuggling of the highly addictive and often deadly narcotic fentanyl.

Biden's visit sought to respond to Republican accusations that he has been ignoring the situation. But meeting Biden off Air Force One at El Paso's airport, Republican Texas Governor Greg Abbott handed him a letter blasting the visit as 'US\$20bn too little and two years too late'.

In his meetings with Lopez Obrador and Trudeau, Biden will address the regional scope of the

issue. "It's gripping the hemisphere, and a regional challenge requires a regional solution," US Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas told ABC News, noting that migrants were on the move from as far afield as Haiti, Venezuela and Nicaragua.

Biden on Thursday announced an expansion of powers to expel people showing up at the border without clearance.

At the same time, a legal, strictly enforced pathway will be created for up to 30,000 migrants a month from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

The quota will be restricted to those who already have a US sponsor, while anyone attempting to cross the border illegally will be expelled in coordination with Mexico.

Human rights groups harshly criticised this as closing the door on desperate people, but the Biden administration says its actions will essentially kill the market for human smuggling networks, while encouraging legitimate arrivals.

AFP

INDIA

'Indian diaspora are our ambassadors', says Modi

Indore, India - At the 17th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention at Indore on Monday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that the Indian diaspora are the brand ambassadors of India.

"I call all Indian diaspora as brand ambassadors of India. You all are 'Rashtradoots'. Your role as India's brand ambassador is diverse. You are a brand ambassador of Make in India, Yoga, handicraft industry, and at the same time of India's millets," PM Modi said. He further said that the spirit of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' is visible through the overseas Indians.

"Today, we see crores of overseas Indians on the global map... the spirit of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' is visible," PM said.

"India is being looked at with hope and curiosity. India's voice is being heard on the global stage. India is also the host of this year's G20. We do not want to make it only a diplomatic event, but an event of people's participation," the prime minister said. Modi further heaped praises on the youth of the country terming them as the 'skilled capital' for the country.

"India not only has the capability of becoming a knowledge centre but also a skilled capital.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi greets at the 17th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention, in Indore on Monday. Also seen are Guyana President Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali, Suriname President Chandrikapersad Santokhi and Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan (ANI)

Our youth has skills, values, honesty and determination toward work. Our skilled capital can become the world's growth engine," he said.

Talking about India's presidency of G20, Modi said that the government want to make the summit not only a diplomatic event but an event of people's participation.

"Today India is being looked at with hope and curiosity. India's voice is being heard on the global stage... India is also the host for this year's G20. We do not want to make it only a diplomatic event, but an event of people's participation," Modi said. He also said that the world is interested in India's speed and scale.

"The world is interested in India's speed and scale. They are interested in India's future. When it comes to a cashless economy, the world is surprised to see that 40 per cent of the world's Real-Time Digital transactions take place in India," PM Modi said.

Talking about the significance of the convention, Modi said: "This Pravasi Bharatiya Divas is special in so many ways, the nation has entered 'Amrit Kaal'. Our Pravasi Bharatiyas have a significant place in India's journey in the 'Amrit Kaal' and India's global order will be decided by you people."

Modi inaugurated the three-day 17th edition of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention in Madhya Pradesh's Indore city, which began on Sunday.

President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali is the chief guest and the Republic of Suriname President Chandrikapersad Santokhi is the special guest of honour.

The three-day conference is being held under the theme 'Diaspora: Reliable partners for India's progress in Amrit Kaal'. The conference will conclude on Tuesday and President Droupadi Murmu will preside over the valedictory session and present the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman.

ANI



Delhi Police van carrying the accused in the Kanjhawala death case leaves Rohini court, in New Delhi on Thursday (ANI)

Kanjhawala case: Accused were aware of Anjali under car

New Delhi, India - Rohini Court in the national capital on Monday granted 14 days of judicial custody of all the six accused in the Kanjhawala death case in which a 20-year-old woman was dragged to death by a car on January 1.

On Monday, in a significant revelation, Delhi Police sources said that the accused were aware of Anjali being trapped under their car within minutes after her scooter was hit by them.

"The accused in the car did not take Anjali out because they were afraid that if they got down from the car and took Anjali out, they might get into legal trouble if someone saw them," said the Delhi Police sources.

The accused told about their dilemma during their interrogation with the Delhi Police, however, the police say that there is a contradiction in their statements, so every angle is being investigated closely.

The police on Friday had arrested Ashutosh, the sixth suspect in connection with the incident.

In CCTV visuals, Ashutosh is seen talking to the accused two hours after the incident took place.

Ankush is the seventh accused arrested in the case. Delhi Police have alleged that he is the person who conspired with the other accused after the incident he helped the other accused flee by arranging an auto.

ANI

North India fogged out: Flight operations, rail traffic affected

New Delhi, India - As the mercury levels recorded a drop in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR), a thick layer of fog engulfed the national capital and adjoining areas leading to reduced visibility on Monday.

Visibility in the region dropped to less than 25m around 6am and the vehicles were seen with their headlights on during the morning hours. People were seen around gas stations and on street corners huddled around large bonfires to beat the cold.

"Visibility recorded at 5:30am today in Bhatinda-0 metres, Amritsar-25 and Ambala-25 metres each, Hissar-50 metres, Delhi (Safdarjung)-25 metres, Delhi



A passenger flight lands at Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan airport amid dense fog, in Patna on Monday (ANI)

(Palam)-50 metres; Uttar Pradesh: Agra-0 metre, Lucknow (Amausi)-0 metres, Varanasi (Babatpur)-25 metres, Bareilly-50 metres," according to the data from India Meteorological Department (IMD).

As per Satellite imagery and available visibility data from the IMD, the fog layer extended from Punjab and adjoining northwest Rajasthan to Bihar across Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi and Uttar Pradesh.

The dense fog that engulfed the national capital caused delays in flight operations at the Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA). Just past midnight, the IGIA issued a statement saying: "Low visibility

procedures are in progress at Delhi airport...Passengers are requested to contact the airline concerned for updated flight reactions." As many as 29 trains were running late in the Northern Railway region alone on Monday, due to fog, including the Rajdhani Express trains. Delayed due to fog and cold, passengers were seen facing a lot of problems. As per the data from Indian Railways: "Anvt Garib Rath is running 7 hours late, Sealdah Rajdhani Express 11:30 hours late, Howrah Rajdhani Express 10:30 hours late, Jainagar Garib Rath Express 10:30 hours late, New Delhi Bhuneshwar Rajdhani Express 09 hours late, Duranto Express 13:30 hours

late, among others."

The air quality was in the 'severe' category with an overall AQI of 422 in Delhi on Monday. A thick layer of fog also covered Noida and parts of Gurugram.

The Air Quality Index from 0 to 100 is considered as good, while from 100 to 200 it is moderate, from 200 to 300 it is poor, and from 300 to 400 it is said to be very poor and from 400 to 500 or above it is considered as severe. According to the System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR), Delhi's air quality was also recorded to be in the upper end of the 'very poor' category on Sunday.

ANI

Bangladesh top opposition leaders released on bail

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Two top leaders of Bangladesh's main opposition party were released from prison on Monday, officials said, a month after they were arrested during a massive crackdown on political activists.

Police said Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, secretary general of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and Mirza Abbas, a former minister and member of the party's top decision-making body, were freed from a jail outside the capital Dhaka. Hundreds of supporters greeted the pair after they arrived at BNP headquarters in central Dhaka where Alamgir spoke briefly, a party spokesman told AFP.

Alamgir and Abbas were arrested on December 9 a day before the BNP were set to hold their biggest political rally in over a decade.

The party said more than 2,000 of its activists were arrested, at least one was shot dead and thousands were charged as part of a police crackdown to deter people from attending the rally. Police said the pair had been arrested on charges of instigating violence and obstructing police work during clashes with officers on December 7 when police opened fire on hundreds of opposition activists.

Alamgir is currently the highest opposition official in Bangladesh since BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia began serving a 10-year prison term.

Zia's son and heir apparent is living in exile in London and has also been sentenced to life in prison. In recent years Alamgir has emerged as the nation's main opposition figure rallying a diverse group of centrist, right of centre and leftist parties as they staged a series of demonstrations across the country.

AFP

Greek mother accused of killing daughters on trial

Athens, Greece - A 34-year-old mother accused of killing her three daughters over three years went on trial on Monday in Athens, in a case that has sparked outrage in Greece.

Roula Pispirigou, who is being held in a high-security prison, is being tried for the 'attempted premeditated homicide' and 'premeditated homicide' of her eldest daughter. She has denied all charges.

She stands accused of poisoning nine-year-old Georgina in January 2022 by administering ketamine, an anaesthetic.

At the time of her death, Georgina was in hospital where she had been for several stays since first suffering convulsions in April 2021 which left her a quadriplegic.

Pispirigou was arrested in March 2022 and has maintained her innocence since.

Following her arrest, authorities began investigating the deaths of her two other daughters - Malena, aged three when she died in 2019, and Iris, six months old when she died in



Roula Pispirigou, a 34-year-old mother accused of killing her three daughters, is escorted by police officers to Athens courthouse prior to the opening hearing of her trial, in Athens, on Monday (AFP)

2021. Forensic examinations revealed that both girls died of asphyxiation and although that investigation is ongoing, in August Pispirigou was charged with those deaths as well.

Pispirigou arrived in court on Monday handcuffed, surrounded by police in balaclavas,

dressed in black and looking haggard. The judge rejected the request by her lawyer for all three cases to be merged, but agreed to adjourn the trial until Wednesday, after Pispirigou appears before a judge investigating the cases of the two younger girls.

'Modern-day Medea'

Greek media have nicknamed Pispirigou, a nurse by training, as a 'modern-day Medea', a figure in Greek mythology who murders her sons after their father leaves her for another woman.

The alleged triple infanticide

has received widespread media attention in Greece, where such crimes are relatively rare.

In April 2022, the government urged calm in the face of calls for Pispirigou to be killed.

When she appeared in court shortly after her arrest, she wore a bullet-proof vest and riot police were deployed to control a crowd shouting: "Murderess, confess your crime."

One person told Greek television she thought Pispirigou should be hanged, and the front of her house in Patras was daubed with the words 'Death to child killers'.

"People can't forgive the fact that she allegedly killed not one but three children and at different times," said Effi Lambropoulou, lecturer in criminology at the Athens Pantheon University.

Media 'focus above all on the emotions of viewers', Lambropoulou said. "This information is then exaggerated on social networks, where there is no control whatsoever."

AFP

GAME OVER?

Australian Open no-show fuels fears for Naomi Osaka's tennis future

Tokyo, Japan - Naomi Osaka has not played a tennis match since September and her withdrawal from next week's Australian Open has raised concerns that the former world number one may never appear on court again.

Osaka's social media accounts have stayed silent since Tennis Australia tweeted on Sunday that the two-time Melbourne champion would miss the first Grand Slam of the year, giving no reason for her absence.

Osaka's posts over the past few months have shown her travelling in Europe with her boyfriend, the rapper Cordae, and announcing that her sports management agency had signed up world number two Ons Jabeur.

But there has been little evidence of the Japanese player spending time practising on court, fuelling speculation that the four-time Grand Slam champion's tennis career could be over at the age of 25.

Tennis writer Ben Rothenberg, who has authored a biography of

Osaka due out later this year, believes she has already taken a "meaningful step back" from the sport and is deliberately keeping quiet.

"I think she might want to be opaque about it because she doesn't want to put a label on it necessarily," he told AFP.

"I don't think she would use the word 'retiring', but if she was stepping away from the sport for a while - and it could be for any length of time - I don't know that she would want to speak that out loud.

"I think she would sense that that would raise a lot of bells and whistles."

'More down than up'

Osaka has previously talked about struggling with her mental health and revealed that she suffered depression.

She spent all of 2022 outside the top 10, enduring first-round defeats at both the French and US Opens and withdrawing from Wimbledon with an Achilles' in-

jury.

She also split from long-time coach Wim Fissette last summer, replacing him with her father Leonard Francois.

Her last appearance was at

NAOMI OSAKA

Career High Ranking

1

Current Ranking

47

Singles Titles

7

PRIZE MONEY

\$21,177,252

GRAND SLAM WINS

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

2021
2019

US OPEN

2020
2018



continue as a professional tennis player.

"For her, the math is not adding up right now, for her to want to make the commitment," he said.

"She knows how much work it is and how all-encompassing and preoccupying it is to be an active full-time player with the standards that she has.

"She's won so much already, she's not going to be content just to be a top-20 player again."

Australia's Ashleigh Barty, then the world's undisputed number one, stunned the tennis world in March last year when she announced her retirement aged 25.

She explained that she was "spent physically" and no longer had the drive needed to continue.

Business interests

Osaka has several interests outside of playing tennis, including her sports management agency Evolve, which counts Jabeur and Australian tennis star Nick Kyrgios among its clients.

She has also invested in Pickleball, a tennis-like sport that is growing fast in the United States, and boasts numerous endorsements.

Her website describes herself as not only a tennis player but also "fashion nerd", "entrepreneur" and "social change advocate".

Osaka was named the world's top-earning woman athlete for 2022 by Forbes, with reported earnings of \$51.1 million, even as her tennis career continued to dive.

Rothenberg says there will be significant pressure from sponsors urging Osaka to "stay on the hamster wheel" of professional tennis.

AFP



Kvitova wins clash of Wimbledon champs

Adelaide, Australia - Petra Kvitova won the battle of Wimbledon champions on Monday in Adelaide as she outserted Elena Rybakina - who has now crashed out early in two tournaments leading into next week's Australian Open.

Two-time Wimbledon winner Kvitova beat the current All England Club champion 6-3, 7-5 in round one, exacting a measure of revenge.

The 23rd-ranked Russian-born Rybakina won their first head-to-head meeting last year in Ostrava.

World number 16 Kvitova never faced a break point in 86 minutes at Adelaide International II, while breaking Rybakina at the tailend of each set to move safely through.

"I tried to play faster than Elena," said Kvitova, who won Wimbledon in 2011 and 2014.

"She played really great (in Ostrava), it was a good match and I know that she's serving really well.

"I was focusing on my serve and I was trying to wait for some chances to break her."

There are two ATP-WTA Adelaide Internationals this month, with Novak Djokovic and Aryna Sabalenka winning the titles in week one.

Former world number one Garbine Muguruza fell at the first hurdle again on Monday, losing to Switzerland's Belinda Bencic 6-3, 6-4, after being beaten by 2019 US Open champion Bianca Andreescu in the opening Adelaide round last week.

Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, finalist at the 2021 French Open, also toppled out, falling 7-5, 6-4 to Swiss qualifier Jil Teichmann.

It was the Russian's first match in eight months after ending her 2022 season in May with a recurring knee injury.

After losing in round one of the Adelaide International last week, there was no repeat for American Danielle Collins, with the 2022 Australian Open finalist defeating Karolina Pliskova 6-2, 6-4.

In the men's draw, Britain's Jack Draper eased past Italy's Lorenzo Sonego in straight sets while American Mackenzie McDonald outlasted another Briton, Dan Evans, 7-5, 7-5.

AFP

Fifth seed Bublik exits Auckland Classic on opening day

Auckland, New Zealand - Fifth seed Alexander Bublik was a first-round casualty at the Auckland Classic on Monday, ousted in straight sets by David Goffin in a surprise one week out from the Australian Open.

Big-serving Kazakh Bublik was expected to go deep in a tournament that has attracted a relatively lightweight field to New Zealand.

However, the world number 36 was beaten 6-3, 6-4 by experienced Belgian Goffin, who adeptly handled a barrage of thunderbolt serves, breaking serve on six occasions.

"His first serve is just amazing - like 220 (kmh) all the time and close to the line, so it's not easy



to return," Goffin said.

"He started to hit the ball really well in the second set and

he's very dangerous when he's relaxed."

Goffin, 32, surprised himself

with the quality of his performance.

It came on the back of losses to Grigor Dimitrov and Stefanos Tsitsipas when Belgium bowed out early at the United Cup last week.

The evergreen Richard Gasquet won his Auckland opener in straight sets, along with French compatriot Constant Lestienne.

American Jensen Brooksby needed three sets to beat Italian Fabio Fognini.

Top seed Casper Ruud of Norway gets to skip the first round with a bye, along with Briton Cameron Norrie and Argentine pair Diego Schwartzman and Francisco Cerundolo.

AFP

Djokovic, Kyrgios to play Aus Open practice match

Melbourne, Australia - Novak Djokovic and Nick Kyrgios will deepen their blooming bromance with a practice match in front of paying spectators on Friday at Rod Laver Arena, the Australian Open said.

The first Grand Slam of 2023 begins next Monday and sees nine-time champion Djokovic return to the tournament following his ban a year ago.

The famously fiery Australian Kyrgios once labelled the Serbian "a tool" but publicly offered his support last year when Djokovic was deported over his Covid vaccination status.

"Get set for explosive action as tennis' most famous frenemies come together on RLA for an exciting practice match," the Australian Open tweeted on Monday.

Proceeds from the match will



go to charity and is a re-run of last year's Wimbledon final, when Djokovic beat Kyrgios in four sets. It will give Kyrgios a badly needed run-out ahead of his home Grand Slam, having been sidelined so far this year with an ankle injury.

Djokovic saved match point on Sunday before defeating Sebastian Korda to win the Adelaide International and reinforce his status as a heavy title favourite for Melbourne.

AFP

MAHREZ MASTERCLASS

Riyad Mahrez stars as Manchester City crush Chelsea in FA Cup, Villa upset by Stevenage

London, United Kingdom - Manchester City piled pressure on Chelsea boss Graham Potter as Riyad Mahrez inspired a 4-0 rout in the FA Cup third round, while Aston Villa crashed to a stunning 2-1 defeat against fourth tier Stevenage on Sunday.

After Premier League sides Newcastle, Nottingham Forest and Bournemouth were humiliated by lower-league opposition on Saturday, Villa were rocked by Stevenage's two-goal blast in the final minutes.

Premier League champions City rarely suffer such embarrassment and they made the strongest possible start by dismissing abject Chelsea with contemptuous ease at the Etihad Stadium.

Pep Guardiola made seven changes from the City side that won 1-0 at Chelsea in the Premier League on Thursday.

But City were still far too dynamic for struggling Chelsea as Mahrez struck with a brilliant free-kick and a late penalty, with Julian Alvarez and Phil Foden also scoring.

In the fourth round, City will host Premier League leaders Arsenal or third-tier Oxford, who meet on Monday.

City had already eliminated Chelsea from the League Cup this season and the west London club's first FA Cup third-round exit since 1998 was another blow



Manchester City's Riyad Mahrez scores from a freekick during their English FA Cup third-round match against Chelsea at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester on Sunday (AFP)

to a season in danger of spiralling out of control.

While it is probably too early for Potter to be fearing the sack, just four months after he arrived

from Brighton to replace the axed Thomas Tuchel, the 47-year-old might be having a few sleepless nights as he wrestles with his team's woeful form.

Chelsea have won just three of their last 12 games in all competitions and sit 10th in the Premier League, 10 points adrift of the top four place the club's

American owners would surely have expected Potter to deliver.

"The results in a small space of time are not positive. You can make excuses and look for rea-

sons or say it isn't good enough. Both of those answers are correct," Potter said.

"We have to keep improving and stick together because

clearly we are suffering as a football club and it's not nice at all."

Mahrez had scored the winner against Chelsea on Thursday and this time he bent a superb free-kick into the top corner in the 23rd minute.

City's second goal was a gift from Chelsea forward Kai Havertz, who punched the ball as he challenged Aymeric Laporte at a corner, with Alvarez converting the 30th minute penalty.

Chelsea were being torn apart

Pep Guardiola made seven changes from the City side that won 1-0 at Chelsea in the Premier League on Thursday

and Foden hit the third goal in the 38th minute, the England forward finishing off Kyle Walker's cross. Beaten in the last three FA Cup finals, Chelsea's misery was compounded in the 85th minute as Mahrez scored from the spot after Kalidou Koulibaly fouled Foden.

Villa had eight changes against Stevenage and the team currently second in League Two took full advantage.

AFP



Barcelona's Ousmane Dembele (C) celebrates with team-mates after scoring against Atletico Madrid in their Spanish League match on Sunday

Dembele goal gives Barca the edge in Spanish league title clash

Madrid, Spain - Ousmane Dembele's strike sent Barcelona three points clear at the top of La Liga with a tense 1-0 win over Atletico Madrid on Sunday.

Earlier David Silva produced a masterclass to help third place Real Sociedad beat Almeria 2-0, while Real Betis moved fourth with an entertaining 2-1 win at Rayo Vallecano.

Struggling Sevilla earned a crucial 2-1 win over Getafe to climb out of the relegation zone on goal difference.

Capitalising on champions Real Madrid's defeat by Villarreal, Barcelona set out to make a statement victory over Atletico at the Metropolitano.

Shorn of suspended top scorer Robert Lewandowski, Xavi selected Ansu Fati up front in his place, but it was Dembele who made the difference, finishing a slick move in the 22nd minute.

Atletico ramped up the pressure, with the superb Ronald Araujo clearing off the line from Antoine Griezmann at the death, but Diego Simeone's side could not find an equaliser.

Both teams finished with 10 men after Ferran Torres and Stefan Savic were sent off for brawling with each other on the floor as

temperors soured.

Barcelona have conceded just six goals in their first 16 La Liga matches but Griezmann twice came close to finding the equaliser Atletico craved. The Catalans only mustered two shots on target. Defeat means Atletico languish in fifth, 14 points behind leaders Barcelona.

Youngster Fati had an early effort brilliantly blocked by the sprawling Jose Gimenez, as Barcelona dominated the opening exchanges.

Xavi said on Saturday Atletico barely have any gaps in their defence but Pedri uncovered one to create the opening goal. The midfielder capitalised on space in front of the box, before feeding Gavi, who teed up Dembele to clinically slot home.

Marcos Llorente had Atletico's first decent opportunity after half an hour when Griezmann scooped a ball delicately over the defence to set him in, but Araujo deflected his effort wide.

The hosts wrestled back control and Marc-Andre ter Stegen made a superb save at full stretch to deny the pink-haired Griezmann, becoming increasingly influential against his former side.

AFP

Napoli ruin Sampdoria's Viali and Mihajlovic send-off to move seven clear

Milan, Italy - Napoli extended their lead at the top of Serie A to moved seven points on Sunday after they won 2-0 at grieving Sampdoria and AC Milan threw away a two-goal lead to draw 2-2 with Roma.

Victor Osimhen poked Napoli ahead in the 19th minute before Elif Elmas sealed the points with a perfectly-placed penalty with eight minutes remaining at Stadio Luigi Ferraris in Genoa.

The win means Napoli lead both second-placed Juventus, winners over Udinese on Saturday who travel to Naples on Friday, and Milan by the same margin after seeing their advantage cut to five on Wednesday.

After netting his league-leading 10th goal of the season Osimhen was also the victim of a brutal foul from Tomas Rincon, who was sent off in the 38th minute for chopping the 24-year-old down as he charged towards goal.



Napoli's Victor Osimhen celebrates after scoring against Sampdoria in their Italian Serie A match in Genoa on Sunday (AFP)

Luciano Spalletti's side bounced back from their defeat at Inter Milan on Wednesday and dampened an emotional evening for Sampdoria whose fans said goodbye to two of their most popular former players.

Gianluca Viali's death to pancreatic cancer on Friday at the age of 58 was particularly painful

for supporters as the former Italy forward is one of Sampdoria's all-time greats and a key figure in their only league title triumph in 1991. Sinisa Mihajlovic, who played for Sampdoria in the mid-1990s and later managed the club, succumbed to leukemia last month and Sunday's match was their first home fixture since he

passed away.

The Samp players warmed up for the match in shirts bearing Viali's number nine, while fans in the stands chanted both players' names as a wreath was laid in their honour by visibly moved coach Dejan Stankovic.

However, Serie A survival is beginning to look increasingly difficult as Sampdoria are 18th, six points behind Spezia who sit just outside the relegation zone and drew 0-0 with Lecce in similarly wet conditions.

Milan thought they were still on Napoli's heels after Pierre Kalulu's first-half header and a fine finish from Tommaso Pobega at the San Siro gave them a commanding lead with 13 minutes remaining. But Roger Ibanez's 87th-minute header gave Roma the chance to steal a point from an otherwise dreadful performance, and Tammy Abraham obliged in the second minute of stoppage time.

Messi and Ronaldo to meet in friendly

Paris, France - Lionel Messi and Paris Saint-Germain will play a friendly against a select side made up of players from Cristiano Ronaldo's new club Al Nassr and their Saudi rivals Al Hilal in Riyadh on January 19, the French champions announced on Monday.

Qatar-owned PSG will travel to Doha on January 17 before moving on to the Saudi capital for the match at the King Fahd Stadium which will see Messi and Ronaldo renew their rivalry.

Messi returned to training with PSG last week after being given a fortnight off following Argentina's World Cup triumph in Qatar in December.

AFP

French federation boss under fire for 'clumsy' Zidane comments

Paris, France - French Football Federation president Noel Le Graet came under fire on Monday as he was forced to apologise for what he dubbed his own "clumsy remarks" about Zinedine Zidane's potential interest in coaching the France national team.

Le Graet had quipped dismissively in an interview to French radio station RMC on Sunday that he "wouldn't even have taken his call on the phone" when asked whether Zidane had rung him to express an interest in taking over as coach from Didier Deschamps.

That drew criticism from France and Paris Saint-Germain star Kylian Mbappe, who said Le



French football federation president Noel Le Graet

Graet had shown "a lack of respect" with his comments.

Real Madrid, where Zidane enjoyed decorated spells as a

player and a coach, also hit out at Le Graet, while French Sports Minister Amelie Oudea-Castera waded in too, demanding an

apology.

The 81-year-old head of the FFF duly did apologise on Monday, Le Graet saying: "I would like to apologise for these remarks, which absolutely do not reflect my views, nor my consideration for the player he was and the coach he has become."

"I gave an interview to RMC that I should not have given because they were looking for controversy by opposing Didier and Zinedine Zidane, two greats of French football."

"I admit that I made some clumsy remarks which created a misunderstanding."

Deschamps' contract expired after the World Cup in Qatar, where reigning champions

France lost to Argentina in a penalty shoot-out after a thrilling final on December 18.

However, Deschamps - who took over in 2012 - on Saturday signed a new deal to stay in the job until the 2026 World Cup.

Asked in the RMC interview whether Zidane, who won the 1998 World Cup as a player alongside Deschamps and was a runner-up in 2006, had called him in recent days, Le Graet dismissed him as having been a potential candidate.

"I wouldn't even have taken his call," Le Graet said. "To tell him what? 'Hello sir. Don't worry. Look for another club. I just agreed a contract with Didier'."

AFP

OMAN EARN THRILLING WIN

Goalkeeper Ibrahim saves penalty in added time as Oman beat Yemen in Gulf Cup

Muscat - Goalkeeper Ibrahim al Mukhaini's penalty save in added time helped Oman beat Yemen in a Group A match in the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup at the Basra International Stadium on Monday.

In a pulsating match played in pouring rain, Oman took the lead in the second minute after Yemen goalie Ali Fadi Abbas Ahmed made a complete mess of a corner from Oman's Ali al Kaabi.

However, their lead did not last long as another defensive mistake, this time from Oman, resulted in the referee pointing towards the spot after Abdulwasam Abdullah was fouled inside the penalty box.

Abdulwasea al Matari made no mistake with his effort to bring Yemen right back into the game.

They came roaring back indeed on the half hour mark when Omar al Dahi's stunning long-



Oman's Issam al Sabhi (R) celebrates with team-mates after scoring against Yemen on Monday

ranger beat a diving Al Mukhaini.

But the fortunes swung in Oman's favour once again in the first half as seven minutes later Ali Fadi let slip an Arshad al Alawi shot through his hands.

Branko Ivankovic's Red Warriors soon had a chance to reclaim the lead when they were awarded a penalty after Mudir Abdurdu fouled Jameel Yahmadi inside the box, resulting in another penalty, the second of

the match.

However, Arshad al Alawi lost his footing in the wet and slippery conditions and only managed to blast the ball into the stands.

But Oman did not have the wait for long for their third goal and soon after the half-time break Issam al Subhi found the target with a diving header.

They thought they had all three points in the bag after managing to hold on until ref-

eree awarded Yemen another penalty.

But it also gave Al Mukhaini a chance to be a hero and he grabbed the opportunity to the delight of his team-members.

Oman now have four points from two matches and provisionally lead Group A standings. Saudi Arabia play hosts Iraq in the second match on Monday.

Oman take on Saudi Arabia in their last group game on Thursday.

Gareth Bale announces retirement from football

London, United Kingdom - Gareth Bale announced his retirement from club and international football at the age of 33 on Monday, bringing to an end one of the most decorated careers in British football history.

Bale, who made a record 111 appearances for Wales, led his country from the international football wilderness to two European Championships - reaching the semi-finals of Euro 2016 - and a first World Cup since 1958.

The Los Angeles FC forward, who previously played for Southampton, Tottenham and Real Madrid, made his final competitive appearance during Wales' World Cup group-stage fixture with England on November 29.

"After careful and thoughtful consideration, I announce my im-



Gareth Bale

mediate retirement from club and international football," Bale wrote on his social media accounts. "I feel incredibly fortunate to have realised my dream of playing the sport I love.

"It has truly given me some of the best moments of my life. The highest of highs over 17 seasons, that will be impossible to repli-

cate, no matter what the next chapter has in store for me."

Bale started his career at Southampton but made his name in the Premier League at Tottenham, before moving, for a then world record fee of £85 million (\$104 million), to Real Madrid, where he won five Champions League titles.

The forward joined Los Angeles FC in June 2022 and went on to win the MLS Cup in his short stint in the United States.

"From my very first touch at Southampton to my last with LAFC and everything in between, shaped a club career that I have an immense pride and gratitude for," he said. He added: "To show my gratitude to all of those that have played their part along this journey, feels like an impossibility."

Ronaldo to earn 400 million euros in Saudi: Club source

Nicosia, Cyprus - Footballer Cristiano Ronaldo will earn 200 million euros to promote Saudi Arabia's joint 2030 World Cup bid in addition to his club salary, a source close to his club told AFP Monday.

The Portuguese superstar, 37, unveiled to thousands of Al Nassr fans in Riyadh last week, is by far the most famous player to sign for a club any Gulf country.

The oil-rich kingdom, along with Egypt and Greece, is considering a bid to host world football's 2030 showpiece tournament,



Cristiano Ronaldo

and Ronaldo's ambassadorial role will bring his reported earnings in the country to over 400 million

euros (\$428 million).

"Ronaldo will be paid more than 200 million euros (\$214 million) for the deal," said the source, with knowledge of the deal but who requested anonymity.

"He will be an ambassador for the Saudi World Cup 2030 bid for another 200 million."

The arrival of the former Manchester United, Real Madrid and Juventus player came just weeks after neighbouring Qatar became the first Arab nation to host the World Cup.

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FOOD & MOOD



NUTRITION & YOU



VANDANA CHAWLA

Our mood is defined by how we feel at a particular time. Feelings of being happy, sad, lazy, low, tired, depressed, energetic, excited, all describe our mood. Is there any connection between what we eat and how we feel? This brings us into thinking...

Can food affect our mood?

Let's look at the key nutrients found in foods, that can affect our mood, indeed.

AMINO ACIDS, the building blocks of proteins, stimulate the synthesis of many neurotransmitters which, in turn, impact mood. Neurotransmitters like, adrenaline, dopamine, make us feel good and helps us to fight stress, while serotonin improves our mood.

It means, that if, for instance, serotonin is up, one may be happy, and if dopamine is down, one may feel unmotivated, stressed, or tired. Amino acids obtained from foods like milk, eggs, meat, and fish work great in enhancing mood.

VITAMINS AND MINERALS are the helpers for carbohydrates in giving energy to the body. Deficiency of certain minerals, like, iron, selenium, or B vitamins can cause lethargy, tiredness, depression, fatigue, and irritability. One can get these nutrients from foods like, eggs, poultry, fish, pulses, seeds, and whole grains.

CARBOHYDRATES, the brain fuel, or

the brain power. Both the quantity and the quality of carbs can have an impact on our mood. Brain uses 20 per cent of all the energy our body needs, and it needs only carbs as a source of energy.

Healthy carbs coming from whole grains, whole beans, lentils, nuts, seeds and raw veggies or fruits keep brain active and alert for long time. On the contrary, the junk

carbs coming from sugar loaded foods cause sugar blues, hyperactivity, or mood swings. Individuals with Type 2 diabetes or having irregular eating patterns usually ex-

perience these symptoms.

HEALTHY FATS OR OMEGA 3'S are the fats found in fish, flax seeds, walnuts play an important role in brain functioning. Research has indicated that diets containing omega-3 fats may help to reduce low mood states in adults.

There are, however, certain foods which lack in nutrients, but have an impact on our mood. These are:

CAFFEINE, which can boost alertness and negate the effect of tiredness and fatigue.

FOODS WITH CHEMICALS

in the form of artificial colours, flavours or preservatives are termed by some scientists as 'excitotoxins' - chemicals that can alter the brain chemistry. Mood swings, severe headaches are some of the symptoms noticed both, in adults and young children, on regular consumption of these foods. Hence, avoid such highly processed foods.

TIPS AND CAUTIONS

- Avoid long gaps between two meals, as low blood sugar can make one feel irritable, tired, weak, and fuzzy-minded.
 - Avoid taking medications to enhance your mood, instead change your diet.
 - Excessive use of caffeine to uplift mood can be harmful.
 - Going on diets like high protein/high fat and avoiding carbs can cause mood swings.
- In short, making your diet wholesome with plenty of whole grain foods, fruits, veggies, low-fat dairy, beans, lentils, eggs, nuts, oily fish, etc will support both, good health and good mood.

(Can food have an impact on IQ, check it out in the next article)

(Vandana Chawla is an Online Nutrition Expert and a Registered Nutritionist-UKVRN)



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Badr Al Samaa Medical Centre, Al Khuwayr

Never miss your NT Scan

Ultrasound is an excellent antenatal imaging tool to exclude major chromosomal and structural fetal abnormalities using NT and Anomaly scans respectively. NT scan is the first and earliest anomaly scan to rule out any major chromosomal abnormalities, number one being Down's Syndrome.

What is NT?

NT stands for Nuchal Translucency of the foetus. In simple words, the measurement of fluid filled subcutaneous space in back of foetal neck. There is a range of values in literature for Nuchal translucency which correlate with

risk of Aneuploidy. Normal value is less than 2mm.

Appropriate time for NT Scan

Gestational age should be between 11 weeks and three days to 13 weeks and six days. Crown rump length preferably ranging from 45-84mm.

Any preparations required for the scan?

No specific patient preparation is required. NT scan is done with foetus in midsagittal view. Sometimes for proper foetal view to measure NT patient may need to fill or empty bladder. In case of

retroverted uterus, transvaginal scan also helps.

What else does the NT scan show?

CRL - Crown Rump Length, BPD - Biparietal Diameter. Nasal Bone - using midsagittal and coronal views. Presence or absence of nasal bone is another important factor, since absence should concern for Down's Syndrome and further workup. Ductus venosus Doppler - 'A' wave.

Serum markers correlation

There are few serum markers which can be used to increase accuracy of an NT scan.

- Maternal Beta HCG
- Alpha fetoprotein
- Pregnancy associated plasma protein A

Abnormal NT and screening test

- Discuss with Gynaecologist.
- Patient counseling.
- Amniocentesis/ Chorionic villous sampling may be an option.

NT scan is an essential early anomaly scan which should not be missed and performed in the defined gestational age for better results and interpretation. Patient education is important in this regard and both, the gynaecologist and radiologist, have important roles in this regard.



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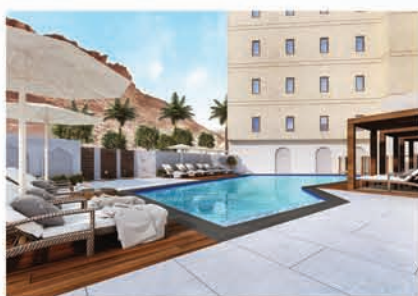


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