

52 Green Schools to boost circular economy: MoE

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Education (MoE) is set to launch the second phase of a national project called Green Schools to ensure sustainability of the environment by harnessing the power of students' minds.

H E Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambosaidi, Undersecretary for Education in MoE and Chairman of the Main Committee of Schools Project, highlighted the project's mission to promote environmental awareness among educational workers and students, contributing to the nation's sustainable development goals and achieving the objectives outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

MoE is collaborating with various stakeholders, including students' parents, government departments and private sector institutions, to nurture a generation capable of addressing environmental challenges at local and global levels and supporting the growth of the green economy.

H E Ambosaidi informed that the Green Schools project encompasses three main areas - 'knowledge field', which covers environmental information, sustainability concepts, circular economy and green economy; 'skill field' focusing on cognitive and manual skills; and 'developing positive trends towards the environment', emphasising values and trends related to the environment.



The project's mission is to promote environmental awareness among educational workers and students

H E DR ABDULLAH AMBOSAIDI

The project's first phase was successfully implemented in 12 schools during academic year 2022/2023, involving the participation of 685 teachers and 135 institutions, to conduct programmes and workshops and provide technical support to participating schools.

The second phase of the project will target students of Grades 7 to 10 in 52 schools in the 2023/2024 academic year across the sultanate. Funding for the project - scheduled to begin in September 2023 and to continue until April 2024 - will be

provided by be'ah, Nama Group, Daleel Petroleum Company, Vodafone and Oman LNG.

The project will focus on two key topics. The first, known as 'Sustainability Approach', consists of two guides - one for students and another for teachers - addressing the crucial environmental topics of waste management, climate change, renewable energy, afforestation, water consumption and zero carbon neutrality. These topics will be taught during activity classes every Tuesday.

The second topic - 'School Project' - involves each participating school conducting a project on school premises on one of the six environmental topics outlined in the guide to foster a circular economy.

By aligning with global trends, the Green Schools project aims to mitigate environmental risks and threats, address undesirable behaviour among young students, and cultivate a sense of responsibility towards their community.



OMANI PILGRIMS BEGIN LEAVING HOLY LANDS

Convoys of Omani pilgrims began the trip back home from the Holy Lands after performing the farewell circumambulation 'tawaf al wadaa'. Sultan bin Saeed al Hinai, Head of Oman Hajj Mission, said that the mission is scheduled to leave Mecca on July 4 and that it would continue offering services to pilgrims until the time it packs up (AFP)

► NEWS BRIEF

FRANCE PROTESTS: OMAN EMBASSY CAUTIONS CITIZENS

Muscat - The Sultanate of Oman's Embassy in Paris has urged Omani citizens in France to stay away from protest sites.

In a statement, the Embassy of Oman in Paris said, 'The Embassy calls on citizens to take care and stay away from protest sites in France and fully comply with the instructions of the French authorities related to this matter.'

For enquiries and assistance, Omani citizens in France can contact the following helpline numbers: 0033610197495, 0033630685911 and 0033609681232.

Twitter restricts number of posts users can read

New York, US - Elon Musk announced on Saturday that Twitter would temporarily restrict how many tweets users could read per day, in a move meant to tamp down on the use of the site's data by artificial intelligence companies.

The platform is limiting verified accounts to reading 10,000 tweets a day. Non-verified users - the free accounts that make up the majority of users - are limited to reading 1,000 tweets per day.

New unverified accounts would be limited to 500 tweets.

The decision was made "to address extreme levels of data scraping" and "system manipulation" by third-party platforms, Musk said in a tweet on Saturday afternoon, as some users quickly hit their limits.

"Goodbye Twitter" was a trending topic in the US following Musk's announcement.

Twitter's billionaire owner did not give a timeline for how long the measures would be in place.

The day before, Musk had announced that it would no longer be possible to read tweets on the site without an account.

Much of the data scraping was coming from firms using it to build their AI models, Musk said, to the point that it was causing traffic issues with the site.

To create AI that can respond in a human-like capacity, many companies feed the programs



examples of real-life conversations from social media sites.

"Several hundred organisations (maybe more) were scraping Twitter data extremely aggressively, to the point where it was affecting the real user experience," Musk said. "Almost every company doing AI, from startups to some of the biggest corporations on Earth, was scraping vast amounts of data."

"It is rather galling to have to bring large numbers of servers online on an emergency basis just to facilitate some AI startup's outrageous valuation."

Twitter is not the only social media giant to have to wrangle with the rapid acceleration of the AI sector.

In mid-June, Reddit raised prices on third-party developers that were using its data and sweeping up conversations posted on its forums.

It proved a controversial move, as many regular users also accessed the site via third-party platforms.

AFP

OIC calls to prevent Quran burnings

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia - The Saudi-based Organisation of Islamic Cooperation on Sunday called for collective measures to avoid future Quran burnings, days after a copy was torched outside a Stockholm mosque.

The 57-member body met at its Jeddah headquarters to respond to Wednesday's incident in which an Iraqi citizen living in Sweden, Salwan Momika, 37, stomped on the Islamic holy book and set several pages alight.

It coincided with the start of the Eid al Adha holiday and the end of the annual hajj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia, sparking anger across the Muslim world.

On Sunday, OIC urged member states to "take unified and collective measures to prevent the recurrence of incidents of desecration of copies of the Quran", according to a statement released after the "extraordinary" meeting.

The body's secretary general Hissein Ibrahim Taha "stressed the need to send a clear mes-



A demonstrator holds a copy of the Quran during a rally in Jakarta on Sunday, as they protest against the burning of the Islamic holy book outside a Stockholm mosque that outraged Muslims around the world

sage that acts of desecration" of the Quran are "not mere ordinary Islamophobia incidents", the statement said.

"We must send constant reminders to the international community regarding the urgent application of international law, which clearly prohibits any advocacy of religious hatred."

Taha condemned Momika's Quran burning as "a despicable act", echoing widespread denunciations that have included

demonstrations near the Swedish embassy in Iraq's capital. Countries including Iraq, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Morocco have summoned Swedish ambassadors in protest.

Swedish police had granted Momika a permit in line with free speech protections, but authorities later said they had opened an investigation over "agitation".

AFP

Omani pilgrim dies in Mecca

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A 79-year-old Omani pilgrim Said bin Abdullah al Rahbi died after performing the farewell circumambulation of Kaaba in Mecca on Sunday, according to Oman Hajj Mission.

Sultan bin Saeed al Hinai, Director General of Administrative and Financial Affairs in the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs and head of Oman Hajj Mission for 1444 AH, said, "The mission, in cooperation with concerned authorities in Saudi Arabia, is taking the necessary steps to complete the necessary procedures in the presence of relatives of the deceased citizen who are currently in the Holy Land."

Oman's quota for hajj this year was 14,000 pilgrims - 13,500 citizens, 250 Arab residents and 250 non-Arab residents.



Maqbool al Saleh passes away



SAFE OR RISKY RIDE?

Electric scooters – the new mode of transport in the city – are gaining popularity owing to affordability and convenience. But these can also be a safety hazard for both motorists and scooter riders themselves when the latter fail to follow road rules or don't use safety gear. Are e-scooters a safe mode of transport? How can authorities prevent accidents involving e-scooters? Here's what *Muscat Daily* readers said -

Jayento Sarkkar
Contracts manager

E-scooters can be a safe mode of transport if proper regulations and safety measures are in place. Authorities can prevent accidents involving e-scooters by strict enforcement of traffic laws, promoting rider education and training, creating designated lanes, enforcing speed limits, and ensuring regular maintenance and inspection of scooters. And finally, helmets must be made mandatory.

Jayattee Choudhury
Student

E-scooters are not safe. To prevent accidents there should be separate lanes for these scooters. Road safety classes should be held for scooter riders. Precautionary measures, including indicators, should be provided in the scooters.

Sanarab Kazi
Housewife

It is crucial to provide dedicated lanes for two-wheelers and designated areas for parking. Additionally, scooter riders must



prioritise their safety by wearing appropriate protective gear before embarking on their journey. To ensure compliance, authorities should issue clear instructions and impose fines on those who fail to adhere to safety regulations.

Mike Kosie
Businessman

To prevent accidents, e-scooters should be designated to separate lanes, especially in densely populated areas. However, they should not be allowed on expressways or superhighways. Riders should be strictly required to wear appropriate safety gear to minimise the risk of injury in the event of a fall. E-scooters can provide an enjoyable riding experience, particularly in the pleasant evening hours. By implementing appropriate laws and ensuring safety measures, they can serve as an additional mode of transport.

Hafsa Nayebali
High school student

Scooters have consistently proven to be a secure mode of transport, leaving no doubt about their safety. Utilising an e-

scooter engages the core muscles and legs, offering numerous positive effects on physical health. These include enhancing core strength, promoting proper posture, avoiding a sedentary lifestyle, burning calories, improving balance, and more. To prevent accidents, it is crucial to prioritise safety by wearing a helmet, and knee and elbow pads can provide further protection against injuries resulting from falls and collisions. Alternatively, establishing dedicated lanes specifically designed for e-scooters, similar to the existing bicycle lanes, can also contribute to accident prevention.

Mohamed Asiq
HSE engineer

E-scooters can be a safe mode of transport when used responsibly and with appropriate safety measures. There are inherent risks associated with any form of transportation, including e-scooters. To ensure safe e-scooter usage, riders should wear helmets, follow traffic rules, ride responsibly, be aware of surroundings, and park properly. Authorities should invest in dedicated lanes, enforce regulations and licensing, and conduct public awareness campaigns.

Sahaya Vijaya Kumar
Quality control engineer

E-scooters have emerged as a convenient and affordable mode of transport. It is advisable to allocate dedicated lanes for their usage, along with promoting the use of reflective jackets while riding. Overtaking larger vehicles should be discouraged, and an age limit could be imposed for riders. Strict penalties should be enforced for those who violate traffic regulations.

Mohammed Asif
Accountant

Implementing dedicated lanes for two-wheelers and mandating the use of headlights and indicators would be beneficial.

Anand Paralikar
Treasury manager

E-scooters can be a safe mode of transport when used responsibly and within the guidelines set by the authorities. However, there are certain risks associated with these scooters, such as collision with pedestrians, other vehicles or stationary objects. Authorities can take measures such as creating dedicated bike or scooter lanes which e-scooters can safely use without interfering with pedestrians or other vehicles; implementing speed limits for e-scooters, especially in areas with high pedestrian traffic; and making helmets and other protective gear mandatory for all e-scooter riders. Additionally, authorities can ensure safety by enforcing strict rules and regulations for e-scooter rental companies, including proper maintenance and safety inspection of their fleets; and increasing public awareness campaigns to educate riders on safe riding practices and the potential risks associated with e-scooter use.

Value of real estate deals up 37.8%: NCSI



Muscat - The total value of real estate deals in the sultanate this year till the end of May was RO1,220.6mn compared to RO885.6mn during the same period in 2022 - up 37.8% - according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

According to the data, the total fees collected for transactions amounted to RO28.9mn - an increase of 17.5% compared to the same period in 2022.

The traded value of sales con-

tracts increased 6.4% to RO468mn. The number of sales contracts dropped 4.1%.

Further, the data indicates a 70.3% increase in the traded value of mortgage contracts to RO748.4mn (10,110 contracts). The number of swap contracts was 620 valued at RO4.2mn.

The number of title deeds issued this year till the end of May increased 7.6% to 99,893. The number of title deeds issued to GCC citizens increased 68.1% to 516.

MoH launches '1,000 Paramedics' in Amerat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has started a campaign called '1,000 Paramedics' to raise health awareness in communities. Through the campaign, the Directorate General of Health Services in Muscat Governorate aims to conduct training workshops from July 2 to 13 in various locations across Amerat.

The training workshops will take place at Nujum al Amerat Mall, Amerat Sports and Cultural Club, Al Wafa Rehabilitation Centre for People with Disabilities, Omani Women's Association, and Office of the Wali of Amerat.

The primary objective of the campaign is to educate community members about first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) to equip them with life-saving skills.

The campaign targets multiple groups within communities, including mothers, children, teachers, workers, students and the Scouts. By imparting essential first aid and CPR knowledge, the campaign will empower community members to respond effectively in critical situations.

The campaign is a crucial step in spreading health awareness and building communities that are well prepared to handle emergencies.

? NEXT ON YOUR SAY

What measures can be adopted to reduce electricity consumption during summers?

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

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

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

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SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH



ANNOUNCEMENT

The Directorate General of Khoula Hospital invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 09:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/DGKH-25/2438/2023	Repairing/Replacement of Chillers (Reciprocating Type) for Operation Theater Block at Khoula Hospital	12/July/2023	09/August/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in Excellent Grade	R.O 25,000

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

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	41	27
Doha	44	29
Kuwait City	42	30
Manama	38	31
Muscat	33	27
Riyadh	43	27

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	3.57am
Sunrise	5.24am
Duhr	12.16pm
Asr	3.34pm
Maghrib	7.03pm
Isha	8.25pm

NDC's annual 'Decision Making-10' meet begins

Muscat - Activities of the annual strategic exercise 'Decision Making-10' commenced on Sunday at National Defence College (NDC).

The exercise is carried out by NDC's tenth batch serving in various military, security and civil units. It aims to enhance participants' abilities to take strategic decisions and analyse topics of national, regional and international significance.

Decision Making-10 also aims to help strike a balance in utilising the country's resources to achieve national interests, establishing harmony in utilising tools of global powers and developing strategic thinking.

Unlicensed hotels booked for violations: MHT

Muscat - The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) has registered violations of an establishment for operating illegal hotels in South Sharqiyah.

'The ministry has registered violations against an establishment for running hotels without obtaining tourist licences in South Sharqiyah governorate during the Eid al Adha holiday,' a statement said.

MHT called on all unlicensed businesses to stop their activities and obtain necessary approvals.

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Ministry of Tourism to open representative office in China

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) is inviting international companies to establish a tourism representative office in China to attract Chinese travellers to the sultanate.

The move is part of the ministry's comprehensive efforts to develop and revamp marketing plans and programmes aimed at promoting Oman's tourism attractions through its global offices.

The primary goal of opening the office is to strengthen relations between local partners, including tourism companies and hotels, and their counterparts in the Chinese market, as highlighted by MHT. Interested parties have until August 1, 2023, to submit bids for consideration.

Recognising the resurgence of Chinese outbound tourism after a three-year hiatus caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Oman is proactively preparing to capitalise on the opportunity and cater to the needs of Chinese travellers. Chinese tourists curtailed international travel during



Oman has witnessed the number of Chinese tourists increase 141% from 44,580 in 2018 to 107,446 in 2019

MHT

the pandemic due to restrictions on their return home.

To equip partners in the Omani tourism sector to effectively engage with Chinese visitors and meet their specific requirements, MHT organised a workshop called 'China Ready' in September 2022. Emphasising the significance of the Chinese market, the ministry highlighted the growth in Chinese outbound

travellers, which increased from approximately 57mn passengers in 2010 to 155mn in 2019.

'Oman has witnessed remarkable growth in the number of Chinese tourists with a 141% increase from 44,580 in 2018 to 107,446 in 2019, making it the strongest growth of its kind,' a statement said.

In May 2022, Visit Oman, the national travel and tourism oper-

ator, signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Beijing Spring Travel Services, a leading Chinese travel and tourism operator. The MoU focuses on promoting Oman in the Chinese travel and tourism market, connecting service providers and customers through the Visit Oman platform to provide valuable services and invigorate the sector.

Oman's tourism sector received a significant boost during the 2022/23 winter season with a notable increase in tourist numbers. In February, tourist arrivals reached 321,031, marking a 156.7% surge compared to the same period in 2022. The United Arab Emirates emerged as the largest source market of tourists to Oman in February with 36,896 visitors, followed by India (16,211), Germany (5,406), France (5,206), the UK (4,989), Yemen (4,958), China (1,412), and Italy (1,051).

MHT remains optimistic about the recovery of Oman's tourism sector; various indicators signal positive growth in the country's travel and tourism industry.



Maqbool al Saleh passes away

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Maqbool Hameed al Saleh, founder and Chairman of OHI Group, passed away on Saturday.

Before establishing the OHI Group in 1976, Maqbool served in the Sultan's Armed Forces, where he was appointed an apprentice to a British Officer in FEME in 1959.

After a decade in the Ministry of Palace Affairs (Diwan), he was subsequently transferred to the then Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, where he served until 1982.

Having worked tirelessly to achieve his ambitions, Maqbool earned his place as one of the most prominent corporate leaders in the sultanate and became an icon of Oman's transformation.

He was an inspiration to every generation to build an even better future for the next - a future based on hard work, perseverance and excellence.

"I want to influence the progress of my motherland to-

wards greater achievements and enduring success. Young people should work hard and then harder. There are no miracles," he was quoted as saying to *Those Who Inspire* magazine.

Maqbool published his autobiography - *A Long Walk - Memories of Life* in 2020, presenting a personal account of his inspiring journey from humble beginnings to success, recounting a multitude of interesting experiences and defining moments that shaped his life.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily* about his memoirs, Maqbool said that it was the title that occurred to him first. Besides being synonymous with his journey, it also reflected his early life when he had to walk long distances from Muttrah to Ruwi for his job in the army. "As I write about my journey, from childhood to now, it feels as if I have walked a long path. I know, when my road eventually ends, as all roads do, I would not want my story and my memories to end with me."

SalamAir launches twice weekly direct flights to Almaty

Our Correspondent
Muscat

SalamAir has launched twice weekly direct flights to Almaty, Kazakhstan, using its latest Airbus aircraft.

A statement issued by the



budget airline said, 'SalamAir launched its first direct flight on Saturday to Almaty. The flights will operate on Wednesdays and Saturdays.'

Capt Mohamed Ahmed, CEO of SalamAir, informed that this destination will be a perma-

nent one throughout the year and is expected to attract many tourists and residents of both countries.

He added that the airline expects to increase the number of flights from the current two in a week in the next stage.

CONDOLENCES

AL ANSARI GROUP OF COMPANIES
express their heartfelt condolences on the sad demise of



MAQBOOL HAMEED AL SALEH
Founder & Chairman of OHI Group

We pray to God Almighty to rest his departed soul in eternal peace and give strength to the bereaved family members to bear this irreparable loss.



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RAKEZ fuels economic growth by adding 1,500 new companies in Q2, 2023

Ras al Khaimah, UAE - Ras Al Khaimah Economic Zone (RAKEZ) has announced the addition of over 1,500 new companies in the second quarter of 2023.

This robust growth represents a remarkable 132% increase compared to the same period in 2022, further cementing RAKEZ's role as an accelerator for business growth, and fostering an investment-friendly climate.

Speaking on the achievement, RAKEZ Group CEO Ramy Jallad said, "Our strong performance in Q2 2023, with over 1,500 new companies joining us, is a result of our progressive approach, industry-leading business solutions, and unwavering commitment to nurturing businesses of diverse scales.

"The growth across various sectors, from general trading and e-commerce to media, services and manufacturing, reaffirms our vision of creating an inclusive and sustainable economic landscape for global entrepreneurs."

RAKEZ continues to pull in new investors from around the world to Ras al Khaimah. The majority of these investors are from countries such as India, Pakistan, the UK, Egypt and Russia, highlighting the global appeal of the emirate's conducive business environment.



Our strong performance with over 1,500 new companies joining us, is a result of our progressive approach, and industry-leading business solutions

RAMY JALLAD

General trading and commercial sectors emerged at the forefront with around 650 new companies.

This surge in trade and commerce-centric businesses positions RAKEZ as a bustling hub for traders, with its recently launched Traders District playing a crucial role in catalysing this growth.

Additionally, the economic zone witnessed an impressive in-

crease in other sectors, such as services with over 600 companies, e-commerce with over 170 companies, and media with over 100 companies.

As RAKEZ steps into the second half of 2023, it remains dedicated to providing an adaptive and supportive ecosystem for investors looking to expand their horizons and grow in a dynamic business environment.

WAM



OFID and partners support Tanzania's renewable energy ambitions with \$60mn loan

Vienna, Austria - A new US\$60mn loan by the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) and partners is expected to significantly strengthen energy security in northwest Tanzania.

The project will include constructing a 166km overhead transmission line connecting the Kagera region to the national grid, replacing the current energy supply from Uganda with local hydropower resources.

Tanzania has enormous potential in the field of renewable energy. As one of the countries bordering Lake Victoria, fed by the Kagera River, Tanzania is investing heavily in expanding its hydropower capacity with plants under development at Rusumo and

Kakono in its northwestern region.

The two new hydropower plants are expected to be operational in 2024 and 2030 with a nominal capacity of 80MW and 87MW, respectively.

The construction of the new transmission line will allow Tanzania to reduce its dependence on energy imports. This diversification will enhance energy security and save costs by eliminating the need to pay for imports in foreign currency.

Furthermore, the expansion of hydropower generation will allow the country to shut down expensive and polluting backup thermal power plants, leading to a cleaner and cheaper energy sector in

Tanzania.

Northwest Tanzania's Kagera region is one of the country's poorest, with average income less than half the national average, according to the National Bureau of Statistics. With the regional economy dominated by agriculture, the improved power supply will allow other sectors to establish themselves in the region and help to fulfil its potential.

The OPEC Fund signed its first engagement in Tanzania in 1977 and to date has approved more than US\$400mn for investment in all major sectors of the economy.

In particular, recent loans have supported water, road and infrastructure projects.

WAM

Inflation eases sharply in bankrupt Sri Lanka

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka's inflation eased to 12% in June, official data showed on Saturday, the lowest figures since the island nation careened into an unprecedented economic crisis last year.

Sri Lanka defaulted on its US\$46bn foreign debt in April 2022 and the public endured months of food, fuel and medicine shortages.

The crisis has eased since, with the government securing a US\$2.9bn bailout from the International Monetary Fund in March.

June inflation was the lowest since the 9.9% figure recorded in November 2021. It is down from 25.2% in May and a peak of 69.8% in September.

'Inflation is expected to reach single-digit levels by early third quarter 2023,' the Central Bank of Sri Lanka said.

This week, the government unveiled a debt restructuring plan which offers a 30% haircut for international sovereign bondholders, who account for more than a quarter of Sri Lanka's outstanding foreign obligations.

Last year's economic crisis sparked months of civil unrest which eventually toppled then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

His successor Ranil Wickremesinghe took major steps to shore up state revenue.

US intelligence warns firms over new Chinese 'counter-espionage' law

Washington, US - US intelligence warned companies operating in China on Friday over the impact of Beijing's new counter-espionage law coming into force on July 1.

The National Counterintelligence and Security Center (NCSC) said the law, which aims to protect China's national security secrets, gives Beijing "expanded legal grounds for accessing and controlling data held by US firms in China".

The NCSC said the new law is ambiguous on what fits into the definition of national security secrets, but believes Beijing is taking an expansive view that could include information companies use as a normal part of their business.

US companies and individuals could 'face penalties for traditional business activities' if Chinese authorities label them



espionage or says they are assisting foreign sanctions on China, the NCSC said in an advisory notice.

'The laws may also compel locally-employed PRC nationals of US firms to assist in PRC intelligence efforts,' it said, referring to the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The new law expands on previous laws governing national secrets, and comes as relations between Beijing and Washington are deeply strained over mil-

itary tensions and deep economic competition.

NCSC said the law expands China's definition of espionage from covering state secrets to any documents or data that the government says could be labelled national security-related 'due to ambiguities in the law'.

The law could 'create legal risks or uncertainty for foreign companies, journalists, academics and researchers', it said.

The law comes amid more pressure from Beijing on foreign

advisory firms operating in the country. In March police closed the Beijing office of US due-diligence firm Mintz Group and arrested five local staff members.

The following month, US consulting giant Bain & Company said employees at its Shanghai office had been questioned.

The new law has spooked foreign and domestic firms as they try to decipher authorities' intentions - and crucially, pinpoint what is off-limits.

"Companies are scrambling to figure out protocols to protect their staff. But the definitions are so vague," an employee of a major international auditing firm told AFP in May.

"No one knows whether they have crossed a line or not, or where the red line is."

AFP



Dubai Financial Market adds 26,953 new investor accounts in first half of 2023

Dubai, UAE - Brokerage companies at the Dubai Financial Market added 26,953 new investor accounts in the first half of 2023.

The market reportedly witnessed significant momentum since the announced listing of ten governmental and semi-governmental companies, including the Dubai Electricity and Water Company (DEWA), the TECOM Group, and Union Coop, Salik, and Al Ansari, among others.

The number of new investor accounts at DFM grew significantly by over 48% during the first five months of this year, compared to 18,204 new accounts in the same period in 2022.

According to DFM-released data, 4,246 new accounts were added in June; 5,349 added in May; 4,246 in April; 6,591 in March; 3,436 in February; and 3,082 in January.

WAM

Labour dispute shuts down Canada's west coast ports

Montreal, Canada - Workers at Canada's busiest port in Vancouver and at harbors up and down the nation's west coast stopped work on Saturday in a labour dispute that is likely to disrupt global freight transport.

After months of failed talks, more than 7,000 terminal cargo loaders and 49 waterfront employers in 30 ports went on strike.

Port automation, the rising cost of living and outsourcing are key issues behind the collective action led by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union.

Union leadership "has not taken this decision lightly, but for the future of our workforce we



had to take this step", Rob Ashton, president of the union's Canadian branch, said in a state-

ment.

He remained positive, however, about reaching a "collec-

tive agreement for the rights of (the) Working Class!"

The union's last contract ex-

pired on March 31.

For its part, the BC Maritime Employers Association said it has "made repeated efforts to be flexible and find compromise on key priorities" without success.

"We appreciate the assistance of federal mediators in supporting the parties and we remain open to any solutions that bring about a balanced agreement," said the trade group, which represents ship and port owners and terminal operators.

On Friday, the association had indicated that a possible strike would not affect cruise ships docking in Vancouver, Prince Rupert and on Vancouver

Island.

Members of the BC Maritime Employers Association transport goods across Canada and to the United States, including automobiles, coal, grain and containers.

A strike would have repercussions in US and other markets that receive goods through Canada.

The Port of Vancouver alone handles some CAN\$305bn worth of goods annually, and contributes CAN\$11.9bn to the nation's annual output.

All the west coast ports combined handled 16% of Canada's total traded goods in the year 2020, the port companies said.

AFP

Americans decry ‘unjust’ student debt

Washington, US - If the US Supreme Court had not over-ruled President Joe Biden’s programme to cancel billions of dollars in student debt, Satra D Taylor, who borrowed US\$40,000 to complete her studies, could have seen that amount reduced by half.

Now the 27-year-old - who used the loan to study at the University of Michigan, supplementing a scholarship and other financial aid - is back on the hook for the whole sum.

“We created this unjust, inequitable, expensive, higher education system and so we need to redress it,” she told AFP, standing before the high court.

Biden’s forgiveness programme was meant to lift more than US\$400bn in student debt weighing down the lives of millions of lower and middle-income Americans.

Certain borrowers would have been eligible to receive US\$20,000 in cancellations, while the vast majority were eligible for US\$10,000.

But the court overruled the program Friday, stating that



Supporters of student debt relief demonstrate outside the US Supreme Court, in Washington, DC, on Friday (AFP)

given the large sum, the president had overstepped his powers.

“Any American who wants to pursue higher education should be able to do so,” Taylor said.

“We have students now who have not acquired the genera-

works for youth advocacy group Young Invincibles.

Taylor said she was not surprised given the Supreme Court’s conservative majority, which on Thursday banned the use of affirmative action in university admission policies.

Taylor, who is African American, said the loan forgiveness decision was a setback for Black and Latino students who “would have disproportionately benefitted from this relief”.

“This is absolutely not only a social justice issue, but also a racial equity issue.”

‘Future generations’

Mina Schultz (37), who borrowed approximately US\$65,000 for her studies, emphasised the impact student debt has on the entire economy.

When the pandemic hit and student loan repayments were frozen, it was ‘a blessing’, she told AFP from outside the Supreme Court.

People were “able to contribute more to the economy” by spending money elsewhere, whether on food as prices

surged due to inflation or on things like rent, the George Washington University graduate said.

Schultz would have benefited from US\$10,000 in debt cancellation, which “would have been really helpful”.

That sort of money “is a huge deal to a lot of people”, said Schultz, who will be forking over some US\$340 per month when payments resume in several months.

Enjoying a seemingly debt-free life during the repayment pause, she was able to move out of her studio apartment and into a one-bedroom unit.

Nearby, Shanna Hayes (34) could not contain her emotion as she spoke before several cameras: Her debt, originally US\$130,000, now exceeds US\$150,000 due to compounding interest that has accrued over the past 11 years.

“I ask you to remember that the student debt crisis impacts our grandparents, parents... children and future generations,” she told the reporters.

AFP



Kuwaiti FM, OPEC chief discuss oil market

Vienna, Austria - Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Abdullah al Jaber al Sabah, now on a visit to Austria, met on Friday with OPEC Secretary-General Haitham al Ghais to discuss cooperation be-

tween Kuwait and the organisation.

They reviewed the latest regional and international geopolitical developments and their impact on the global oil market as well as the challenges re-

lated to climate change.

Sheikh Salem highlighted the significance of the OPEC members’ keeping constant coordination of their energy policies to ensure stable supplies to the global market.

On his part, Ghais briefed the Kuwaiti minister on the organisation’s efforts to maintain the balance of the oil market and the stability of the energy industry.

KUNA

China’s Qu Dongyu re-elected unopposed as head of UN food agency

Rome, Italy - The head of the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization, Qu Dongyu, was re-elected Sunday for a second term as head of the UN agency.

He was the only candidate standing for the role of FAO Director-General, and received 168 out of 182 votes in a ballot in Rome on Sunday.

Qu, a former Chinese government minister who was nominated for the post by Beijing, will serve a new four-year term from August 1.

His appointment is seen as a part of a drive by Beijing to get more Chinese figures into sen-



UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization chief Qu Dongyu

ior jobs at international bodies.

Qu, a biologist by training, was vice-minister of agriculture before taking over as head of the UN agency in 2019.

FAO directors can hold the role for a maximum of two consecutive terms.

The vote came during the FAO Conference, which runs until July 7.

AFP



Neutral Austria ready to join Germany’s Euro air defence project

Vienna, Austria - Austria, a neutral country, announced on Saturday its intention to join the European Sky Shield initiative, launched in 2022 by Germany against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine.

“We must and will take precautions to protect our country against the risk of drone or missile attacks,” Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer said in a press release, citing “a threat that has considerably worsened”.

He stressed that the decision did not call into question the neutrality of Austria, which has been a member of the European Union (EU) since 1995.

“No European state can effectively defend its airspace against new dangers on its own,” Nehammer insisted.

Defence Minister Klaudia Tanner hailed “an important step in the history” of the country.

European defence ministries sharply reduced spending on anti-aircraft equipment following the end of the Cold War, but have revised their positions since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine last year.

Led by Germany, 17 European nations - including the UK, Belgium, Finland, Hungary, the Netherlands and Sweden - have banded together on air defence under the European Sky Shield project.

The Sky Shield system would involve joint procurement for short-, medium- and long-range systems, including the German-made Iris-T, the American Patriot and the US-Israeli Arrow-3.

However France, Italy and Poland have not signed up to the scheme, Paris arguing in favour of a sovereign air defence system using European equipment.

AFP

Nestlé steps up reforestation project in Ivory Coast

Vevey, Switzerland - Nestlé is stepping up its project to combat deforestation in Ivory Coast caused by the growth of cocoa farming, bringing cocoa trading companies directly on board.

Ivory Coast is the world’s largest cocoa producer, at 40% of the global market.

The west African country had 16mn hectares of forest in the 1960s - a figure which is now down to less than three million, mainly due to cocoa plantations.

Nestlé, the Swiss food giant behind chocolate brands like KitKat and Smarties, launched a project in 2020 aimed at restoring and protecting the Cavally Forest in southwest Ivory Coast.

One of the last remaining dense forests in the country, Cavally is a biodiversity reserve covering more than 67,000 hectares, but is threatened by deforestation linked to the cocoa industry and illegal gold panning.

The Nestlé project was a partnership with the Ivorian government and the Earthworm Foundation, an NGO that led the project’s implementation.

At a media briefing this week at its headquarters in Vevey on Lake Geneva, Nestlé said the first phase had led to “a significant reduction in deforestation”, with the natural regeneration of 7,000 hectares and the reforestation of almost 1,500



hectares.

Plenty at stake

For its second three-year phase, the Swiss trading company Co-coasource and the French firm Touton, which work directly with cocoa and rubber cooperatives in the area affected, have been brought on board.

The project has a budget of 4mn Swiss francs (US\$4.45mn approx).

It aims to strengthen the resilience of the communities on the edge of the forest, and improve the transparency and traceability of the cocoa and rubber supply chain.

Touton, which specialises in trading cocoa, coffee, vanilla and spices, wanted to join the project

“because the first phase worked”, deputy managing director Joseph Larrose told AFP.

“Collective effort makes it possible to protect the forest.”

Restoring the Cavally Forest is in the cocoa industry’s interests, he said.

“The very heart of our business is at stake. If tomorrow we no longer have an ecosystem favourable to the raw material we’re trading, we no longer have access to this resource.”

Julian Oram, the senior director for Africa at the NGO Mighty Earth, said the Nestlé initiative was a valuable way of addressing deforestation.

However, “it’s important that companies such as Nestlé don’t use agroforestry... as a way of

avoiding changes to their core business practices: which is how they buy cocoa, including the prices they offer,” he told AFP.

“Sustainability programmes are no substitute for fair cocoa purchasing practices.”

‘Imported deforestation’

Global conservationist group WWF is a sharp critic of what it calls ‘imported deforestation’.

It says that Swiss consumption of eight major raw materials - including cocoa, coconuts, coffee and palm oil - occupies more than twice the area of Switzerland’s own forests.

The NGO says 54% of Switzerland’s cocoa imports come from countries where the

risk of deforestation is either high or very high.

In mid-April, the European Parliament adopted a regulation banning the import of products such as cocoa, coffee, palm oil or rubber if they came from land deforested after December 2020.

The objective is to curb deforestation outside the European Union, with the EU, according to the WWF, the second-biggest destroyer of tropical forests, after China. The NGO says the EU is responsible for 16 percent of global deforestation.

Besides commodity traders, the Swiss economy ministry has joined the Cavally project.

Monica Rubiolo, head of trade promotion at the ministry, told the media briefing that Switzerland wanted to contribute to improving supply chains as the wealthy Alpine nation is ‘an important country’ for trading and processing cocoa.

Nestlé achieved a turnover of 8.1bn Swiss francs in confectionery alone in 2022.

Switzerland has yet to follow its EU neighbours in terms of its legislation, lamented Romain Devezze, raw materials expert for the Swiss WWF.

“It would be good if we didn’t have to wait ten years for Switzerland to align itself with European regulations,” he told.

AFP

Al Mouj Muscat community nurtures new urban farm

An urban farm at Al Mouj Muscat is a first for Oman and the latest initiative from the premier lifestyle destination to demonstrate an ongoing commitment to environmental sustainability, whilst encouraging a strong sense of community among its 8,000 residents.

Located at Linear Park within the oceanfront integrated tourism complex, the Urban Farm provides a richly fertile space where residents can come together to grow their own produce and learn about sustainable agriculture.

The 250sqm farm is proving extremely popular with people of all ages and so far, more than 30 volunteers have embraced the opportunity to garden outdoors and collectively plant, grow and harvest a variety of vegetables, fruit and herbs.

The hands-on, eco-friendly concept is both sociable and educational as it provides an environment where people can connect over a mutual appreciation and love of nature whilst sharing their skills and knowledge. The produce is enjoyed by the volunteers who have the pleasure of taking home nutritious produce, promoting good health and well-being.



“The addition of the urban farm is a wholesome addition to our community, and we are grateful for the tremendous support we have received from all of our volunteers,” said Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat.

“By engaging our residents and fostering a sense of ownership and pride, it helps to create a stronger, healthier, and more connected community, values which sit at the core of Al Mouj.

“What is also central to our guiding principles and philosophy

is the importance of environmental stewardship. By providing opportunities to incorporate nature into daily life, we are supporting our aims of pioneering sustainability.”

Currently the urban farm is growing a variety of produce including tomatoes, potatoes, spinach, eggplants, sweet potatoes, aubergines and herbs and over the winter months when stronger harvests are likely, any surplus will be given away freely to the wider Al Mouj community.

Al Mouj Muscat was the Sultanate’s first Integrated Tourism Complex (ITC), a joint venture between Majid Al Futtaim Properties, Omran and Tanmia that today people from 85 nationalities call home.

In addition to its world-class oceanfront retail and dining experiences, visitors are attracted to a 400-berth marina from which sea tour operators run leisure trips off the coast of Oman, an award-winning World 100 championship golf course and luxury hotels.

‘Socially responsible’ OETC employees visit SQUH



Muscat - Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), a member of Nama Group (NG), organised a voluntary initiative to visit the children at the Sultan Qaboos University Hospital (SQUH).

The initiative targeted 100 children from different sections at SQUH with the participation of a few of the company’s employees from various departments. It translates the social responsibility commitment and achieves the social sustainability goals of NG.

Besides, it aims to involve and encourage the employees to participate in various social initiatives and activities, as well as empower the community service and volunteerism values in them and enhance their engagement with the local community.

OETC organises and participates in different voluntary and social initiatives and activities in response to the local and international communities’ needs in various areas.

Such activities and initiatives include blood donation campaigns, and environmental campaigns and initiatives including beach cleaning, tree planting, participating in the World Earth Hour, and reducing the usage of one-time plastic products to name a few.

Communication and Sustainability Department Manager at OETC, Samira Salim al Mughairi, affirmed the continuous efforts and plan placed by the company for sustainability and social responsibility purposes.

Furthermore, she emphasised the company’s ongoing efforts

and solutions provided for the society which aim to develop the local community.

“There are different current plans undertaken by the company in the areas of sustainability and social responsibility.

Additionally, there are various projects which were done previously along with other futuristic projects which will be announced later,” she added.

It is worth mentioning that OETC is the only company responsible for the transmission and control of electricity in the Sultanate of Oman’s network, where electricity is transferred from production stations to distributed load centers in all governorates. The transmission network operates at a voltage of 132kV and above, to cover most of the governorates in Oman.

Oman Arab Bank celebrates Eid with Al Rahma Association



Oman Arab Bank (OAB) helped to lift the spirits of more than 400 children thanks to its participation in Eid celebrations organised by Al Rahma Association for Motherhood & Child Welfare.

As part of its unwavering commitment to making a positive difference across the Sultanate, the bank organised a

heartwarming event that created a memorable experience for the children.

The event was part of OAB’s ongoing year-long programme of community-based events to foster a sense of togetherness, exemplifying the bank’s core values of responsibility and social impact.

Earlier this month, OAB collaborated with the Ministry of Health to promote awareness of the early detection and prevention of breast cancer, following on from a month of Ramadan events across Oman that benefited the elderly, children, cancer patients and several non-profit organisations.

Al Maha announces 116 prizes in Salalah promotional campaign ‘With You in Khareef’

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company announced promotional offers for Khareef Salalah, which have been opened on Saturday and will continue till August 31.

For participation and entry in the draw, customers must fill up fuel worth RO5 at any Al Maha petrol station. The prizes include MG RX5 and MG5 cars, four round trips from Muscat to Salalah for a family of 4 with airline tickets, 5-star hotel accommodation and 3-day car rental. In addition, 10 Samsung phones and 100 free fuel cards worth 25 riyals each are up for grabs.

All a customer has to do is scan the QR code available at Al-Maha fuel stations, and enter the required details; phone number and the tax invoice number mentioned on the fuel receipt.

Each RO5 purchase counts as one chance to enter the draw. The flights raffle draw will be held on August 5, and the draws



for other prizes will be held on September 10 this year.

The Khareef season is an ideal destination for family holidays, and with the offers presented by

Al Maha Petroleum Products, we are happy to share these festivities with everyone and win great prizes. Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company owns

more than 240 fuel stations spread throughout Oman. They provide the latest car maintenance services, convenience stores and so much more.

Citibank honours Bank Muscat for excellence in US dollar transfers

In continuation of its excellence in banking services, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the sultanate, won recently the Straight-through-processing (STP) award from the New York headquartered multinational banking giant, Citibank, for its outstanding performance in US dollar-denominated fund transfers in both Commercial payments and Treasury payments.

The award was based on evaluation of the quality and accuracy of SWIFT payment messages routed through Citibank, which was above 97%.

This prestigious award is given to leading financial institutions around the world that apply the highest levels of efficiency in executing money transfers and financial transactions with minimal manual intervention, which reflects on enhancing efficiency and avoiding any delay in executing payments. Bank Muscat has been



continuously winning this kind of accolades from various global financial institutions.

Speaking on the occasion, Zuwaina Abdullah al Sharji, as-

sistant general manager - Central Operations & Change Management, Bank Muscat, said, “It is a matter of pride to win this award once again. The award

highlights the bank’s commitment to the highest standards of quality in meeting the stringent criteria for fund transfer.

“The bank’s exceptional qual-

ity in the delivery of commercial payments and transfers, facilitated by a state-of-the-art in-house payment architecture, which helps to consistently

maintain high SWIFT standards for automated processing throughout the payment chain, was also acknowledged.”

Citibank representatives

commended the operational teams involved in processing dollar payments at Bank Muscat for the error-free rate, which was maintained consistently throughout the year.

The bank is focused on maintaining its leadership in offering cutting-edge products and services, including electronic payment and online services with emphasis on introducing multiple channels and new products that cater to different sectors.

Bank Muscat’s performance has been consistently lauded by the international financial and banking community for decades, with the bank winning similar awards from Wells Fargo, Standard Chartered and JP Morgan in the past.

It has also won a number of awards from prestigious international publications like Global Finance, Euromoney, The Banker and EMEA Finance for its different lines of business in the recent past.

Arab youth vote UAE as most-liked nation

For the 12th consecutive year since they were asked to name the countries they consider ‘model nations’, Arab youth have said the United Arab Emirates is the country they would most like to live in and the one they would most want their own to emulate. The United States and Canada were ranked second and third, respectively, for the third year running.

Significantly, three GCC nations, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, appear in Arab youth’s top-five list of model nations for the first time in nine years.

Young Arab men and women now say they would rather live in Qatar than the United Kingdom, while Saudi Arabia ranks joint-fifth with the UK in their list of countries they most want their own to emulate.

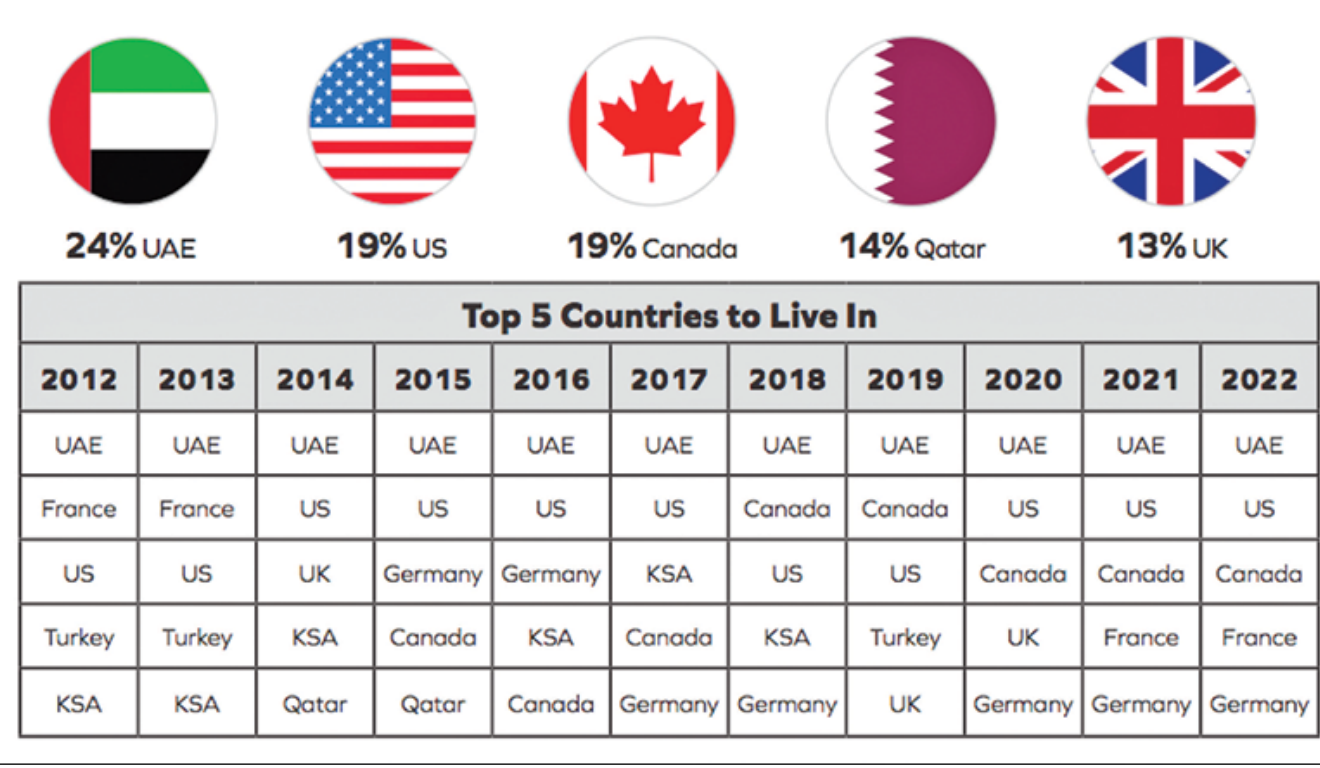
These findings on model nations make up some of the key insights of the landmark 15th annual ASDA’A BCW Arab Youth Survey, unveiled by ASDA’A BCW, the Middle East & North Africa’s leading communications consultancy, under the theme ‘Living a New Reality’.

The annual survey is the largest study of its kind of the Arab world’s largest demographic, its over 200mn youth.

ASDA’A BCW commissioned SixthFactor Consulting, a leading research company, to conduct

Arab youth name the UAE as the country they would most like to live in for the 12th consecutive year

Which country in the world, if any, would you like to live in?
(Showing percentage from among all the top five countries)



face-to-face interviews with 3,600 Arab citizens aged 18 to 24 in their home nations from March 27 to April 12 this year.

The largest sample in the survey’s history was equally divided between men and women in 53 cities across a total of 18 Arab

states, including for the first time South Sudan. The interviews were deliberately conducted face to face rather than online to max-

imise their accuracy and to reflect the nuances of Arab youth opinion across the region as much as possible.

Nearly one in four Arab youth (24%) named the UAE as the country they would most like to live in, followed by the US (19%), Canada (19%), Qatar (14%) and the United Kingdom (13%). Qatar appears among the top-five model nations for the first time in eight years, reflecting the feel-good factor around the FIFA World Cup 2022.

The UAE was also named the country most Arab youth want their own to emulate, again for the 12th straight year. The UAE was identified by 22% of young Arab men and women overall, ahead of the US (19%), Canada (16%), Qatar (15%) and Saudi Arabia and the UK in joint fifth place (11%). This is the first time Saudi Arabia has been chosen as a country to emulate since 2017.

As in previous surveys, a variety of factors account for the UAE’s favoured-nation status. According to Arab youth in the 18 states surveyed this year, its top-five attributes are its safety and security (41%), growing economy (28%), effective and ‘visionary’ leadership (24%), clean environment (22%), and ease of starting a business (20%).

The UAE was also widely praised as a good place to raise a family (19%), for its plentiful job opportunities (17%), the quality of its schools (16%), its strong

cultural identity and heritage (16%), and generous salaries (13%). The ease of obtaining a UAE residency visa was another plus point for 12% respondents.

Sunil John, president, MENA, BCW and founder of ASDA’A BCW, said, “The UAE continues to be a lodestar for Arab youth seeking jobs, opportunity and the freedom to realise their full potential. The uncertainty elsewhere in the global economy only serves to underline the nation’s winning attributes and the sound vision of its leadership.”

“Today, GCC economies are increasingly investing in world-class infrastructure as they become dynamic hubs for trade, finance, tourism, education and healthcare,” added John.

“Young Arabs see these countries as model nations because they appreciate the opportunities for jobs and prosperity being created and the potential to realise a better, more fulfilling life for themselves.”

“The rise of Qatar to be amongst the top-five nations to live in and to emulate is particularly noteworthy,” said John. “This reflects the hugely positive impact of the FIFA World Cup 2022 last November and December; without question, the tournament had a galvanising effect on both the regional economy and Arab pride.”

Ooredoo lays out new tourist plans to celebrate Khareef

Ooredoo has announced new plans for tourists visiting Dhofar governorate during the Khareef season, a release said.

‘Hala bil Khareef in Dhofar! Welcome to a blissful rainy summer,’ the company stated, while announcing the new offers as laid out in its ‘new tourist plans’.

‘This season, Ooredoo’s New Tourist plans offer even more value to anyone from Oman or overseas planning to enjoy the cool weather in Salalah or elsewhere in Dhofar,’ the company said.

The promotion, which started on Sunday, offers customers ‘savings, more high-speed data, with local

and international calling minutes’.

The ‘new tourist plans’ are available in all Ooredoo stores including at Muscat and Salalah International Airports and give customers up to 25 GB data, unlimited local calls, plus international calls and SMS to 90 different destinations worldwide with a welcome gift of 1 GB and unlimited On-Net minutes.

‘No hassle, hidden extras, or unpleasant surprises! Moreover, as the plans go hand in hand with Ooredoo’s recent 5G coverage network boost, customers will remain connected and experience an upgrade like never before’, Ooredoo informed.

Bank Nizwa joins MoSD’s ‘Be with Us for Them’

Bank Nizwa, the leading Islamic bank in the sultanate, was honoured at a prestigious ceremony commending participants of the ‘Be with Us for Them’ initiative, organised by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), as part of its commitment to social responsibilities.

The initiative, with a primary focus on training and employing those who possess mental, visual and mild to moderate hearing disabilities offers diverse job opportunities tailored to their unique capabilities.

By contributing to this initiative, Bank Nizwa exemplifies its dedication to aligning with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and empowering individuals from all walks of life.

“Bank Nizwa stands as a firm believer in the power of inclusivity. With a strong commitment to embracing diversity, the bank strives to create an environment where everyone feels valued and included,” said Haifa al Lawati,



assistant general manager of Human Resources at Bank Nizwa. “Bank Nizwa actively promotes equal opportunities for individuals, including those with special needs. The bank focuses on investing in skilled individuals to showcase their unique capabilities and contribute meaningfully to the workforce. Through its dedication to inclusivity, Bank

Nizwa paves the way for a more equitable society, where every individual has the opportunity to thrive and succeed.”

This participation illustrates Bank Nizwa’s commitment to fostering the potential of individuals from all segments of society, including those with special needs, whilst also embracing sustainability and self-reliance in

the economy.

This initiative not only strengthens the Omani economy but also nurtures an environment that encourages innovative ideas and aligns with the evolving demands of the local market. Bank Nizwa drives positive transformation and establishes a flourishing ecosystem that benefits all stakeholders through its priorit-

sation of inclusivity, sustainability and economic autonomy.

Furthermore, Bank Nizwa has fostered a work environment that is meticulously tailored to cater to everyone’s unique requirements. This progressive stride stands as a testament to Bank Nizwa’s ongoing efforts to provide comprehensive care for individuals with special needs. This can be witnessed at the Bank Nizwa branch in Mawaleh which is thoughtfully designed to ensure a seamless banking experience, enabling them to navigate their transactions with utmost ease and overcome any challenges they may face.

Renowned as the most reliable Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, Bank Nizwa remains resolute in its dedication to fulfilling its responsibilities towards the communities it serves.

Firmly rooted in its commitment to empowering individuals, the bank diligently works towards enhancing their capabilities.

Wizz Air welcomes Eid with flash sale on ultra-low fare tickets

Wizz Air Abu Dhabi, the ultra-low-fare national airline of the UAE, has announced an exciting promotion with 20% off selected flights from and to Abu Dhabi.

The promotion applies for bookings made on June 26 and for travel dates until September 30, providing customers affordable, hassle-free travel opportunities this Eid.

The second largest airline in Abu Dhabi by seat capacity aims to capitalise on the increasing demand for travel during Eid, allowing adventurous travellers to book reduced ultra-low-fare tickets, with must-see destinations including vibrant cities and natural paradises.

Wizz Air Abu Dhabi recently announced the addition of its 10th aircraft to the fleet and added some marvellous destinations to its ever-expanding network, including the popular route to Cairo (Egypt), making travel more accessible with incredible value for money for adventurous travellers.



Fantastic reduced fares for a well-deserved vacation throughout the Middle East, Africa, Europe and Central Asia are already on sale on wizzair.com and the WIZZ mobile app, available in the Arabic language, with fares starting as low as AED179. Johan Eidhagen, Officer and Managing Director of Wizz Air Abu Dhabi, said, “Wizz Air is

committed to carrying the flag of ultra-low-cost travel in the region, creating exciting and affordable opportunities for everyone to explore a plethora of must-see culturally rich destinations. We welcome the Eid holiday with 20% off our already ultra-low-fare fares, and travellers can make this Eid memorable by treating themselves to

incredible leisure, historic and cultural experiences. We look forward to sharing our love of adventure and seeing you on board our aircraft over the summer period and beyond.”

Passengers can book tickets with confidence, thanks to WIZZ Flex. With WIZZ Flex, passengers can cancel their flight up to three hours before

departure without any fee and receive 100% of the fare immediately reimbursed in airline credit.

Strategically located in the UAE, Wizz Air Abu Dhabi provides cost-effective and efficient travel options to Alexandria (Egypt), Almaty (Kazakhstan), Amman (Jordan), Ankara (Turkey), Aqaba (Jordan),

Athens (Greece), Baku (Azerbaijan), Belgrade (Serbia), Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), Cairo (Egypt) and Dammam (Saudi Arabia). As well as routes to Kuwait City (Kuwait), Kutaisi (Georgia), Larnaca (Cyprus), Manama (Bahrain), Male (Maldives), Madinah (Saudi Arabia), Muscat (Oman), Nur Sultan (Kazakhstan), Salalah (Oman), Santorini (Greece), Samarkand (Uzbekistan), Sarajevo (Bosnia), Sohag (Egypt), Tashkent (Uzbekistan), Tel-Aviv (Israel), Tirana (Albania) and Yerevan (Armenia) among others.

Wizz Air Abu Dhabi is a joint venture by ADQ, one of the region’s largest holding companies with a broad portfolio of major enterprises spanning key sectors of Abu Dhabi’s diversified economy, and Wizz Air Holdings Plc, the fastest growing European ultra-low-cost airline, operating a fleet of 181 Airbus A320 and A321 aircraft. A team of dedicated aviation professionals delivers superior service and very low fares, making Wizz Air the

preferred choice of 27.1mn passengers in the Financial Year F22 ending March 31, 2022.

Wizz Air is listed on the London Stock Exchange under the ticker WIZZ. The company was recently named one of the world’s top ten safest airlines by airlineratings.com, the world’s only safety and product rating agency, and Airline of the Year by Air Transport World (ATW) in 2020 and named Airline of the Year by Air Transport Awards in 2019 and in 2023, the most coveted honour an airline or individual can receive, recognising individuals and organisations that have distinguished themselves through outstanding performance, innovation, and superior service.

Wizz Air has also been recognised as the ‘Most Sustainable Low-Cost Airline’ within the World Finance Sustainability Awards 2022 and the ‘Global Environmental Sustainability Airline Group of the Year’ by the CAPA-Centre for Aviation Awards for Excellence 2022.

Mexican mayor weds a reptile - and couldn't be happier!

San Pedro Huamelula, Mexico - As onlookers clapped and danced, a mayor of a small southern Mexico town entered into holy matrimony with a female reptile in a traditional rite to bring good fortune to his people.

Victor Hugo Sosa, mayor of San Pedro Huamelula, a town of Indigenous Chontal people in the Tehuantepec isthmus of Mexico, took as his betrothed a reptile named Alicia Adriana, re-enacting an ancestral ritual.

The reptile is a caiman, an alligator-like marsh dweller endemic to Mexico and Central America.

Sosa swore to be true to what local lore calls 'the princess girl'. "I accept responsibility because we love each other. That is what is important. You can't have a marriage without love... I yield to marriage with the princess girl," Sosa said during the ritual.

Marriage between a man and a female caiman has happened here for 230 years to commemorate the day when two Indigenous groups came to peace - with a marriage.



Victor Hugo Sosa holds a spectacled caiman before marrying her in San Pedro Huamelula, Oaxaca state, Mexico on Friday (AFP)

Tradition has it that frictions were overcome when a Chontal king, embodied these days by the mayor, wedded a princess girl of the Huave Indigenous group, represented by the female alligator.

The Huave live along coastal Oaxaca state, not far from this inland town.

The wedding allows the sides to 'link with what is the emblem of Mother Earth, asking the all-powerful for rain, the germination of the seed, all those things that are peace and harmony for the Chontal man', explains

Jaime Zarate, chronicler of San Pedro Huamelula.

Before the wedding ceremony, the reptile is taken house to house so that inhabitants can take her in their arms and dance. The alligator wears a green skirt, a colorful hand-embroidered tunic and a headdress of ribbons and sequins.

The creature's snout is bound shut to avoid any premarital mishaps.

Later, she is put in a white bride's costume and taken to town hall for the blessed event.

As part of the ritual, Joel

Vasquez, a local fisherman, tosses his net and intones the town's hopes that the marriage may bring 'good fishing, so that there is prosperity, equilibrium and ways to live in peace'.

After the wedding, the mayor dances with his bride to the sounds of traditional music.

"We are happy because we celebrate the union of two cultures. People are content," Sosa told AFP.

As the dance winds down, the king plants a kiss on the snout of the 'princess girl'.

AFP

UN chief calls on world to make violence-hit Haiti 'top priority'

Port-Au-Prince, Haiti - On a visit to spotlight violence and chaos in Haiti, the UN secretary-general on Saturday called for a robust international effort to help the country's beleaguered police in fighting rampant criminal gangs.

For months, Antonio Guterres has raised the alarm bell about the situation in the Western Hemisphere's poorest country, which has been wracked by spiralling violence, a worsening public health situation and political instability.

But he traveled to Port-au-Prince - his first visit to Haiti as head of the United Nations - to make his point on the ground.

"We must put Haiti on the international political map, and make the tragedy of the Haitian people the international community's top priority," Guterres told a press conference.

"I met Haitians, and I felt the exhaustion of a population that has been facing a cascade of crises and unbearable living conditions for too long," he said.

"This is not the time to forget about Haiti," Guterres said after meeting with Prime Minister Ariel Henry, and other political and civil society leaders.

Guterres urged the UN Security Council, which is due to discuss the Haiti situation later this month, 'to authorise the immediate deployment of a robust international security force.'

In October, he relayed Henry's request for a non-UN force to support the overwhelmed national police force.

But the call has gone unheeded. A few countries have indicated their willingness to participate, but none has volunteered to lead an operation in a



Haiti's FM Jean Victor Geneux looks on as UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres speaks during a press conference in Port-au-Prince on Saturday (AFP)

country where multiple past foreign interventions have become mired. "I call on those states that have the capacity to provide a robust security force to stop hesitating and be ready to follow a

erations of Haitians."

'Widespread sexual violence'

UN officials in recent months have offered increasingly grim

We must put Haiti on the international political map, and make the tragedy of the Haitian people the international community's top priority

ANTONIO GUTERRES

Security Council decision," Guterres said.

"Every day counts. If we don't act now, instability and violence will have a lasting impact on gen-

assessments of the impact of gang shootings, kidnappings and rapes on the Haitian population.

"Port-au-Prince is surrounded by armed gangs blocking the

main roads leading to the northern and southern departments, controlling access to water, food and health care," Guterres said on Saturday.

He condemned 'in the strongest possible terms the widespread sexual violence used by armed gangs as a weapon to instill fear'.

Earlier in the week, UNICEF executive director Catherine Russell said after a trip to Port-au-Prince that the world was 'failing the Haitian people'.

She recounted the horrific story of an 11-year-old girl who was kidnapped by five men - and raped by three of them.

"She was eight months pregnant when we spoke and gave

birth just a few days later," Russell said, recalling that armed gangs control more than 60 per cent of the capital and large swathes of the countryside.

Almost half the population, or 5.2mn people, are in need of humanitarian assistance, including almost three million children.

No elections have been held since 2016, and Henry, appointed prime minister just days before the assassination of president Jovenel Moise in July 2021, faces questions about his legitimacy.

Guterres said he had 'frank exchanges' with Henry and others about the 'need for a political agreement to put an end to the crisis', without offering specifics.

AFP



US President Joe Biden and Sweden's PM Ulf Kristersson (AFP)

Joe Biden to host Swedish PM for talks on NATO, Ukraine

Washington, US - US President Joe Biden will host Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson this week to talk about transatlantic security cooperation and the war in Ukraine, the White House said on Saturday.

The two leaders 'will review our growing security cooperation and reaffirm their view that Sweden should join NATO as soon as possible', the White House said in a statement about the Wednesday meeting.

Sweden asked to join NATO in May 2022, three months after Russia invaded Ukraine, but its membership bid, which must be ratified by all 31 member states, has been blocked by Turkey and Hungary. Western officials had hoped to formally welcome Sweden into the bloc by the time a NATO summit is held in Lithuania on July 11-12.

But earlier this week, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan denounced Sweden for allowing a protest during which a man burned pages from Quran, further clouding the Nordic nation's chances of quickly joining the military alliance. "I am delighted that President Biden is inviting us to a meeting next week, before

the NATO summit in Vilnius the following week," Kristersson said in a statement. "The focus of the visit will be on Sweden's NATO accession."

The White House said Biden and Kristersson will also 'discuss our shared commitment to supporting Ukraine in the face of Russia's brutal war of aggression'. They will additionally talk about transatlantic coordination on China, climate change and emerging technologies.

Western officials had hoped Erdogan would soften his position on Sweden's bid to join NATO after he secured a hard-fought reelection in May.

Western allies and Stockholm have insisted that Sweden has met the terms of a deal agreed with Ankara last year.

That accord includes a commitment to crack down on opposition Kurdish movements, such as the Kurdistan Workers' Party PKK, blacklisted by Ankara which considers them 'terrorist' groups.

Top diplomats from Turkey and Sweden will meet on Thursday, the day after Kristersson's White House visit, at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

AFP

FIRST ERRUPTION OF THE YEAR



This aerial photograph taken on Sunday shows a view of the eruption of the Piton de la Fournaise volcano on the La Reunion island. The volcano started its first eruption of the year on the east flank, as seismic activity has been recorded by the Volcanologic Observatory of the Piton de la Fournaise. (AFP)

Neglected elephant touches down in Thai homeland

Bangkok, Thailand - A Thai elephant gifted to Sri Lanka two decades ago arrived back in its birth country on Sunday, following a diplomatic spat over the animal's alleged mistreatment.

Thai authorities had gifted the 29-year-old Muthu Raja - also known back in its birthplace as Sak Surin - to Sri Lanka in 2001.

But they demanded the elephant back last year after allegations that it was tortured and neglected while kept at a Buddhist temple. The 4,000kg (8,800-pound) mammal arrived in Thailand just after 2pm (0800 GMT), having been transported inside a specially constructed giant steel crate onboard an Ilyushin Il-76 cargo plane.

"He arrived in Chiang Mai perfectly," said Thai environment minister Varawut Silpa-archa, speaking from the airport. "He travelled five hours and nothing is wrong, his condition is normal."

"If everything goes well, we



Sri Lankan keepers lead elephant Muthu Raja inside a cage before departure from the Dehiwala Zoo in Colombo on Saturday (AFP)

will move him," he added, referring to plans to quarantine the elephant at a nearby nature reserve. The elephant was moved from its temporary home at a zoo in Sri Lanka's capital Colombo before dawn, accompanied by four Thai handlers and a Sri Lankan keeper, with two CCTV cameras monitoring its health in transit.

It left Colombo at 7:40am (0210 GMT) on a commercial repatriation flight that Thai officials said cost US\$700,000.

Muthu Raja was in pain and covered in abscesses when it was rescued from the Buddhist temple last year, the zoo's chief veterinarian, Madusha Perera, told AFP. Animal welfare groups said the elephant had been forced to

work with a logging crew and that its wounds - some allegedly inflicted by its handler - had been neglected.

The elephant will undergo hydrotherapy in Thailand to treat a remaining injury on its front left leg, Perera said.

Elephants are considered sacred in Sri Lanka and are protected by law.

The organisation Rally for Animal Rights and Environment (RARE), which led a campaign to rescue Muthu Raja from the temple, expressed its unhappiness over the animal's departure.

RARE organised a Buddhist blessing for the elephant on Friday ahead of its journey, and has petitioned authorities to prosecute those it says are responsible for neglecting the animal.

Sri Lanka's wildlife minister Pavithra Wanniarachchi said Thailand was "adamant" in its demands for the elephant's return.

AFP

FRENCH RIOTS

Hundreds more arrested in fifth night of rioting

Paris, France - The French government said on Sunday that hundreds more had been arrested in a fifth night of rioting sparked by the police killing of a 17-year-old, as police deployed reinforcements to flashpoint cities around the country.

Protesters, mostly minors, have torched cars, damaged infrastructure and clashed with police in an outpouring of rage since an officer shot Nahel M point blank as he attempted to flee a traffic stop on Tuesday.

The killing was captured on video, which spread on social media and fueled anger over police violence against minorities, exposing severe racial tensions in France.

A day after Nahel was laid to rest in his home town near Paris, the interior ministry said police had made 719 arrests overnight - still a provisional tally - after around 1,300 the previous night.

Some 45 police officers or gendarmes were injured, 577 vehicles torched, 74 buildings set on fire and 871 fires set in streets and other public spaces, it said.

More than 20 police stations or gendarmerie barracks were also attacked, the ministry said.

While nationwide numbers suggested an overall decline in tension across the country, police still recorded a number of incidents.

‘Horror and disgrace’

The mayor of a town south of



Protestors flee from an exploding firework on a street in Nice, south-eastern France early on Sunday (AFP)

Protesters, mostly minors, have torched cars, damaged infrastructure and clashed with police in an outpouring of rage

Paris said rioters had rammed a car into his home, injuring his wife and one of his children, and started a fire. “Last night the horror and disgrace reached a new level,” said the mayor, Vincent Jeanbrun.

Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne called the attack ‘intolerable’, while prosecutors said

they were treating it as attempted murder.

Some 45,000 police have been deployed across France, the same number as the night before, and backup was dispatched to the previous days’ flashpoints, including Lyon, Grenoble and Marseille.

Of the total, 7,000 were concentrated on Paris and its suburbs, including along tourist hotspot the Champs Elysees avenue in central Paris following calls on social media to take rioting to the heart of the capital.

The massive police presence had helped keep the violence in check, said Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin.

“A calmer night thanks to the resolute action of the security forces,” he tweeted early on Sunday.

In Marseille, which has seen intense clashes and looting, police dispersed groups of youths on Saturday evening at Canebriere, the main avenue running through the centre of the city, AFP journalists said.

“They came specifically to do damage, loot and leave,” said Youcef Bettahar, a shopkeeper at the Merlan shopping mall in Marseille. “We’re really disgusted by what’s happening.”

A number of towns have declared overnight curfews.

‘Reflection’

Nahel’s funeral ceremony was held on Saturday in Nanterre, where he lived, with hundreds gathering peacefully along with his mother and grandmother.

The event was marked by ‘reflection’ and went off ‘without incidents’, a witness told AFP.

In a bid to limit the ongoing violence, buses and trams in France have stopped running after 9pm and the sale of large fireworks and inflammable liquids has been banned.

Marseille has stopped all urban transport from 6pm.

President Emmanuel Macron has urged parents to take responsibility for underage rioters, one-third of whom were ‘young or very young’.

Justice Minister Eric Dupond-Moretti said on Saturday that 30 per cent of those arrested were minors, while Darmanin said the average age of those arrested was just 17.

The unrest has raised concerns abroad, with France hosting the Rugby World Cup in the autumn and the Paris Olympic Games in the summer of 2024.

Britain and other European countries updated their travel advice to warn tourists to stay away from areas affected by the rioting.

Iran on Sunday called on France to ‘end the violent treatment of its people’, and urged its own citizens to avoid non-essential travel to France.

China’s consulate in Marseille similarly warned its citizens to ‘be vigilant and exercise caution’ after state-run media reported the pelting with stones of a bus carrying Chinese tourists in the southern city.

AFP



Emmanuel Macron (AFP)

tendance at an EU summit in Brussels this week, rushing back to Paris to chair a crisis meeting without giving a press conference.

After a first term that became dominated by combating the anti-government Yellow Vests protests and then the COVID-19 pandemic, the centrist’s second term again risks being marked by troubleshooting rather than implementing policy.

The rioting ‘is very bad news for the president’, who had been hoping for a smooth ride into the summer capped by a cabinet reshuffle to re-energise the government and move on from the pensions crisis, said Bruno Cautres, researcher at the Political Research Centre of Sciences Po university.

“People are amazed to see how our country is confronted by tensions, violence and crises, one after the other,” he added.

AFP

Israeli air strikes hit targets in Syria

Damascus, Syria - Israel carried out air strikes in Syria near the government-held city of Homs, Syrian state media reported on Sunday, and the Israeli army later said it struck an anti-aircraft battery after rocket fire.

A war monitor said the Homs-area strikes killed a member of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

During more than a decade of war in Syria, Israel has launched hundreds of air raids on Syrian territory, primarily targeting Iran-backed forces and Lebanese Hezbollah fighters as well as Syrian army positions.

“The Israeli enemy carried out air strikes coming from the northeast of Beirut, targeting some points in the vicinity of the city of Homs,” which is about 20km (12 miles) from Lebanon, Syrian state-run news agency SANA said, quoting a military source.

SANA reported that Syrian air defences intercepted some missiles, and that there had been some ‘material’ losses.

In a brief statement early on Sunday that did not mention the air strikes, Israel’s army said a Syrian anti-aircraft rocket ‘appears to have exploded in the air over Israeli territory’.

Several hours later the military said it had targeted ‘an anti-aircraft battery in Syria, as a response to the launch of

an anti-aircraft rocket from Syria into Israeli territory’.

It added that Israeli jets had also ‘struck additional targets in the area’, and that no injuries were reported from the Syrian missile.

Israeli media showed pictures purportedly from a piece of the missile about 1.5 metres in length which landed in Rahat, southern Israel.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor said the strikes targeted ‘Hezbollah sites and ammunition depots’ on the northeastern outskirts of Homs, killing one member of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and wounding four others.

AFP

Protesters keep pressure on Israel PM

Tel Aviv, Israel - Israelis protested again on Saturday against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s proposed judicial reform plans, days after he said he had dropped a key provision in the controversial project.

The demonstrators have kept up the pressure with weekly rallies against Netanyahu, who returned to power last December at the head of a coalition with ultra-Orthodox Jewish and extreme-right parties.

As they have done every Saturday for months, protesters thronged the heart of Israel’s commercial capital Tel Aviv to demonstrate against the government’s judicial overhaul proposals. Opponents of the plan believe it could open the way to more authoritarian government.

In March, as the mass



Israeli demonstrators raising banners and waving flags during a rally in Tel Aviv on Saturday (AFP)

protests were backed by sweeping industrial action, Netanyahu announced a ‘pause’ to allow for talks on the reforms, which were moving through parliament and split the nation.

Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara had accused him of

acting ‘illegally’ in championing the reforms, citing potential conflict of interests due to his long-running corruption trial in which he is accused of fraud and breach of trust. The prime minister denies any wrongdoing.

In an interview with the *Wall*

Street Journal published on Thursday, Netanyahu said he intends to press ahead with the reforms, but without a clause that aimed to curb the supreme court’s powers and give politicians a greater say in the selection of judges.

AFP

Iran snooker passion grows as fans take cue from ‘Persian Prince’

Tehran, Iran - A passion for snooker has swept Iran in recent years, a trend fans attribute largely to the country’s first internationally renowned star Hossein Vafaei, known as the ‘Persian Prince’.

Ever more enthusiasts in the Islamic republic have taken to the cue sport played on a billiards table, and Tehran last week hosted an Asian regional tournament. “In the past, Iran did not have much of a place in the Asian and world championships in billiards and snooker,” said referee Mohammad Afghil Morshedi, 34, of Iran’s Bowling, Billiard and Boules Federation.

But in recent years, said Morshedi, the sport - invented by British officers in colonial-era

India - ‘has gained many enthusiasts... and now we are among the top three teams in Asia in winning titles and medals’.

Much of this is due to one man, he said: “Mr Vafaei is the brand of this sport in Iran.

“Whenever the name of Iran is brought up in snooker, his name will come up too. He’s the flag-bearer of this sport in Iran.”

Vafaei, 28, is Iran’s first professional snooker player, and the first to win a world ranking title, in 2022 in the English city of Leicester.

“I’m happy to make history for my country, that was a very good moment for me and snooker,” he said at the time.

Vafaei, who hails from Abadan in the southwestern



A man plays snooker at a club in Tehran on June 26 (AFP)

province of Khuzestan bordering Iraq, said Iran has ‘very little snooker history’, speaking last week with state news agency IRNA.

He lamented that so far he had received little official support in his home country, complaining that ‘no one has done anything for me and I have not received any money or reward’.

On the subject of still lacking Iranian sponsors, Vafaei said that ‘it is not only about me, as most of our athletes have the same problem’.

Nonetheless, he has received huge gratitude from Iran’s snooker and billiards enthusiasts, including at the tournament that brought teams from the Gulf, South Asia and as far as

Malaysia and Hong Kong.

“Reaching the position that Vafaei has attained is the ultimate goal of almost all Iranian snooker players,” said Shirin Zarrin, 38, an employee at the Iran billiards federation.

“He has been very impactful,” she said. “If you ask any Iranian snooker player, they will cite Vafaei as their role model.”

She voiced hope that Iranian women, too, would gain more prominence in the sport in future in the conservative Shiite Muslim country.

“If women can have more access to billiards clubs, more presence in this sport and the chance to practise better, they can progress significantly,” she said.

AFP

INDIA

Maharashtra: Ajit Pawar joins NDA

The NCP leader took oath as the second deputy CM of the state

Mumbai, Maharashtra - Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) senior leader Ajit Pawar on Sunday joined Eknath Shinde-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in Maharashtra and took oath as the deputy chief minister of the state.

In a dramatic turn of events, Pawar, along with eight MLAs, reached Raj Bhawan to meet Governor Ramesh Bais. According to sources, MLAs accompanying Ajit Pawar to Raj Bhawan were upset with NCP supremo Sharad Pawar's 'unilateral' decision to share the stage and ally with Rahul Gandhi at the opposition unity meet in Bihar's Patna last month.

Pawar was later administered oath as the second deputy chief minister of Maharashtra. "The year-long Eknath Shinde-



Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Ajit Pawar takes oath as the second deputy CM of Maharashtra during the swearing-in ceremony, at Raj Bhavan, in Mumbai on Sunday (ANI)

Devendra Fadnavis cabinet was expanded with the induction of nine ministers. State Governor Ramesh Bais administered the oath to NCP leader Ajit Pawar as the second deputy chief minister," an official statement issued by the state governor's office said on Sunday.

The Governor also administered oath to Chhagan Bhujbal, Dilip Walse-Patil, Hasan Mushrif, Dhananjay Munde, Dharmarao Baba Atram, Aditi Tatkar, Sanjay Bansode and Anil Patil.

Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, who was also present on the occasion, later told media that 'the double-engine government in the state has now become triple-engine and it will run like a bullet train'.

Shinde said: "Now we have

one chief minister and two deputy chief ministers. For the development of Maharashtra, I welcome Ajit Pawar and his leaders. Ajit Pawar's experience will help strengthen Maharashtra." About further seat-sharing in the cabinet, Shinde said that there is enough time to discuss about it.

"We have come together to develop Maharashtra. They

(the opposition) got 4-5 seats in Lok Sabha elections, this time they will not manage to get even those number of seats", Shinde said.

Ajit Pawar has the backing of more than 40 MLAs in the State Legislative Assembly (Vidhan Sabha) and more than six MLCs in the Legislative Council (Vidhan Parishad), party sources said.

"Today, we have decided to support the Maharashtra government and took oath as ministers. There will be a discussion on the portfolios later. Considering all aspects at the national level, we thought that we should support development," Pawar said. "The country is progressing under the leadership of PM Modi," he said.

ANI

Atiq Ahmed killing: UP files status report in SC

New Delhi - The Uttar Pradesh government filed a status report in the Supreme Court in connection with Atiq Ahmed's death case and apprised the top court that police reforms and modernisation measures are underway and handcuffing instructions issued to prevent the easy escape of hardened criminals.

The modernisation measures include the acquisition of medium-sized prison vans, drones, body-worn cameras, post-mortem kits, full-body protectors for women, radio equipment, security equipment, ATS-related equipment, and various vehicles. These acquisitions have been made possible through grants approved by both the Government of India and the UP government. The State informed that a chargesheet has been filed in connection with the matter concerned.

ANI

Manipur: Congress demands CM Biren Singh's resignation

New Delhi - Congress demanded the resignation of Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh over the law and order situation in the conflict-ridden state and questioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi's silence over the situation.

"From the Congress party, we demand that the resignation of the CM of Manipur should be taken as soon as possible," Jairam Ramesh, a senior party leader, told reporters on Saturday. He said that Home Minister Amit Shah also visited strife-torn Manipur, but, 'no positive effect was seen from it'.

"The prime minister is silent for the last sixty days and we are repeatedly demanding that he should break his silence..." Ramesh said.

The CM has come under repeated attack from the opposition, particularly the Congress since violence broke out on May 3 in the BJP-ruled state.



The PM is silent for the last sixty days and we are demanding that he should break his silence

JAIRAM RAMESH

Manipur has witnessed ethnic violence for nearly two months.

Singh on Friday said he will not resign from his post 'at this crucial juncture' amid the growing calls for his resignation.

Amit Shah's four-day visit to the state was followed by an all-party meeting chaired by him in June to restore peace in the state.

Ethnic clashes had erupted during a rally organised by the All Tribal Students Union (ATSU) to protest against the demand for the inclusion of Meiteis in the list of Scheduled Tribes (STs).

On the Uniform Civil Code (UCC), the Congress leader said, the party had already made its stand clear on June 15. He said: "Since nothing new had come during the last 15 days on the matter, the party had nothing to add to it as of now."

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice has called a meeting on the UCC on Monday during which it said it will hear views of stakeholders.

ANI

RAINY DAYS AHEAD



Cars drive through the Bandra-Worli sealink against the backdrop of rain clouds in Mumbai on Sunday (AFP)

Euclid to shed light on universe's mysteries

Washington, US - Europe's Euclid space telescope blasted off on Saturday, kicking off a first-ever mission to shed light on two of the universe's greatest mysteries: dark energy and dark matter.

"I can tell you, I'm so thrilled, I'm so excited to see this mission up in space," European Space Agency (ESA) Director General Josef Aschbacher said after the launch. The telescope successfully took off from Cape Canaveral, Florida, at 11:12am local time (1512 GMT) on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket.

Shortly after, once separated from the rocket, it emitted its first signal, as scheduled.

The ESA was forced to turn to billionaire Elon Musk's firm to launch the mission after Russia pulled its Soyuz rockets in response to sanctions over the war in Ukraine. "The launch was perfect," said Carole Mundell, ESA's science director. "Now begins that journey."

After a month-long trip



The ESA's Euclid space telescope launches on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida on Saturday (AFP)

through space, Euclid will join the James Webb telescope at a stable hovering spot around 1.5mn kilometres (more than 930,000 miles) from Earth called the second Lagrange Point.

From there, Euclid will chart the largest-ever map of the universe, encompassing up to two billion galaxies across more than a third of the sky.

By capturing light that has taken 10bn years to reach Earth's vicinity, the map will also offer a new view of the 13.8bn-year-old universe's history. "We will unravel the mysteries of the Dark Universe," Mundell said.

'Cosmic embarrassment'

Scientists hope to use information gathered by Euclid to address what project manager Giuseppe Racca calls a 'cosmic embarrassment': that 95 per cent of the universe remains unknown to humanity.

Around 70 per cent is thought to be made of dark energy, the name given to the unknown force that is causing the universe to expand at an accelerated rate.

And 25 per cent is dark matter, thought to bind the universe

together and make up around 80 per cent of its mass.

"Ever since we could see stars we've wondered, is the universe infinite? What is it made out of? How does it work?" NASA Euclid project scientist Michael Seiffert told AFP.

"It's just absolutely amazing that we can take data and actually start to make even a little bit of progress on some of these questions."

Euclid consortium member Guadalupe Canas told a press conference ahead of the launch that the space telescope was a 'dark detective' which can reveal more about both elements.

Euclid, which is 4.7 metres (15 feet) tall and 3.5 metres wide, will use two scientific instruments to map the sky. Its visible light camera will let it measure the shape of galaxies, while its near-infrared spectrometer and photometer will allow it to measure how far away they are.

AFP

Two killed, dozens wounded in Baltimore mass shooting: Police

Washington, US - At least 20 people were killed and 28 wounded in a mass shooting at a street party early on Sunday in the US city of Baltimore, police said.

Police received multiple calls about a shooting in the city's Brooklyn neighbourhood just after 12:30am on Sunday (0430 GMT), Acting Police Commissioner Rich Worley told a press conference.

"Upon officers' arrival we located multiple victims suffering from gunshot wounds," Worley said.

One 18-year-old woman was found dead at the scene in the East Coast port city, and a 20-year-old man died after being taken to hospital, a police statement said.

The wounded were being treated at area hospitals, he added, with three of them in critical condition.

Worley said authorities were working to identify a suspect and determine a motive for the shooting. "This is an extensive crime scene, our detectives are going to be here quite a while," he said.

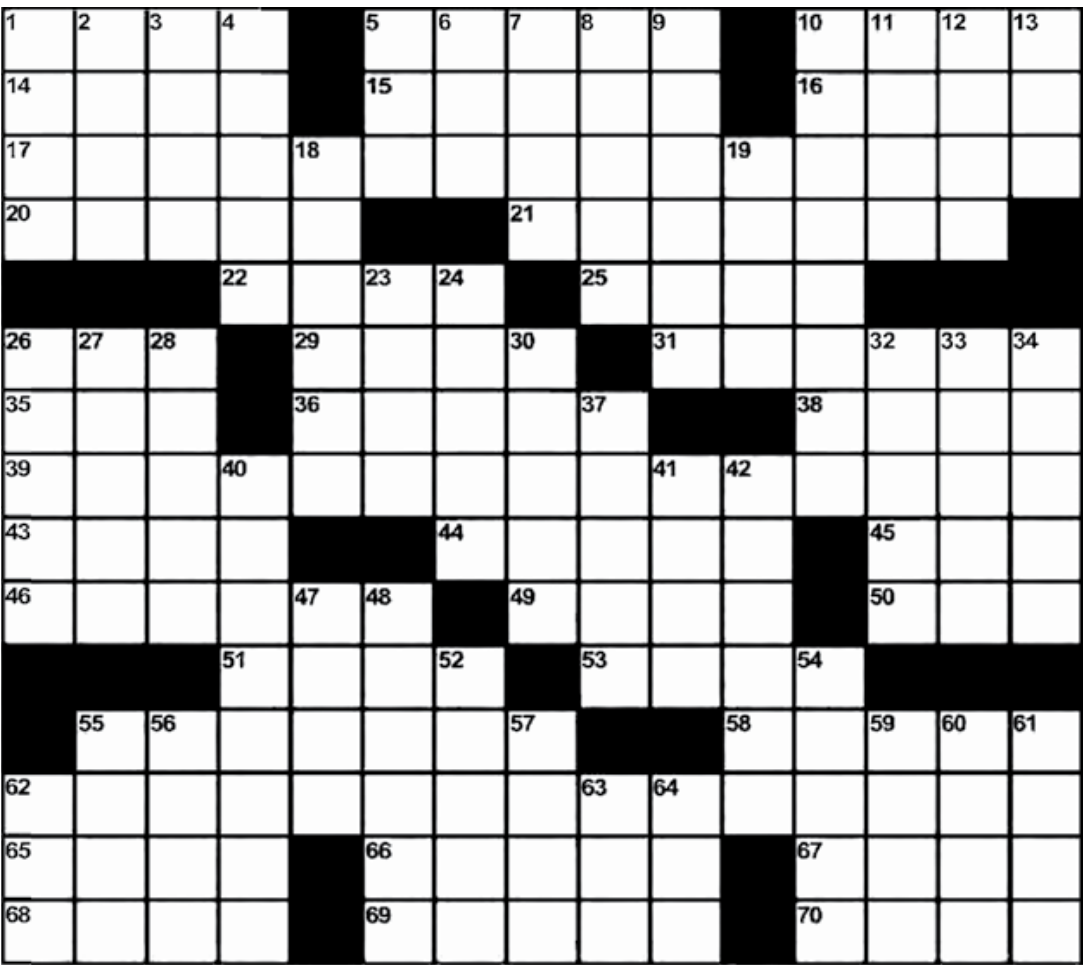
Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott, speaking to reporters at the crime scene, condemned the shooting.

"This is an absolute tragedy that did not have to happen," he said.

"It again highlights the impacts and the need to deal with the over-proliferation of illegal guns on our streets and the ability for those who should not have them to get their hands on them," Scott said. "We will not stop until we find those cowards who decided to just shoot dozens of people, causing two people to lose their lives," he said.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Indisputable thing
- 5) Absolute requirements
- 10) Dressy junction
- 14) Continental currency
- 15) " ... _live nephew of my Uncle Sam"
- 16) It's involved in armtwisting
- 17) Three things started by fire
- 20) Spread seeds
- 21) She saves the day
- 22) Fit together, as gears
- 25) Light-footed for one's age
- 26) _-flung
- 29) Exclamation of regret
- 31) Involuntary muscle movements
- 35) It may be put out to pasture
- 36) Lefts and rights
- 38) Roundhouse result, sometimes
- 39) Three things started by fire
- 43) "... go brag!"
- 44) Heat in Florida?
- 45) Long-armed primate
- 46) Second-grader's time

out?

- 49) Tree projection
- 50) "...just one of the guys"
- 51) Baseball Hall of Famer
- Slaughter
- 53) Half a tetrad
- 55) Vamp's victim
- 58) Tibetan holy men
- 62) Three things started by fire
- 65) Seagirt land
- 66) Texas A and M athlete
- 67) Charlie the pitch fish
- 68) Crack and roughen, as lips
- 69) City of northern England
- 70) Coal furnace waste

DOWN

- 1) Admit guilt (with "up")
- 2) Garage dweller
- 3) Pouch in some birds
- 4) Tribal pole
- 5) Chairman of China, once
- 6) Caterer's coffee dispenser
- 7) One of Abel's brothers
- 8) Shipping container weights
- 9) Drinks rudely
- 10) Japanese entree
- 11) Great style

- 12) Ill-fated Boleyn
- 13) It's often the first to welcome you
- 18) Engage in brainstorming
- 19) Business abbr.
- 23) Utter indistinctly
- 24) Sultan's assemblage
- 26) Decreasing numbers of
- 27) Cognizant
- 28) Museum item
- 30) Slow gastropod
- 32) Abraham's wife
- 33) Shortsighted one
- 34) Loudness measures
- 3 7) Prim and proper
- 40) Very much involved
- 41) Award for TV programming
- 42) Crude and vulgar
- 47) Refuse to acknowledge
- 48) Kind of security or studies
- 52) Material that's worsted for wear?
- 54) Pub game
- 55) Accessory for Miss America
- 56) Legendary Fitzgerald
- 57) Sharp side of a knife
- 59) Hefty hammer
- 60) "The King and I" lady

- 61) Males-only party
- 62) Attack command to a dog
- 63) Ducked the seeker, in a game
- 64) Word of acceptance

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You might get a bit bored with your routine today, but be careful about creating conflict just for the sake of entertainment. Any spats that get going now definitely won't be fun, so be grateful for the fact that while no great excitement is going on in your life, no hairy drama is spinning out of control either. Roll with the punches and try to be satisfied with what you have in your life. It's so much better than what it could be. Appreciation is a wonderful skill to cultivate.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Your attitude about yourself is going through some changes right now, and it's almost like you're getting to know yourself all over again. This process of getting comfortable with new aspects of your personality isn't always the greatest experience, but it's necessary for improving your confidence. One thing that might help you adjust is to avoid folks who are always telling you what to do with your life. You don't need that kind of advice right now.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Like a baby who can stare at jingling keys for hours, you might be easily distracted by shiny things today, which could cause you some difficulty with authority. But as long as you make sure you get everything done in a timely manner, you'll be fine. Give yourself little deadlines all day and you'll not only make your boss happy, you'll give yourself a great sense of accomplishment too. Don't scold yourself for having scattered thoughts. It's only to be expected right now.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. A two decade long relationship was broken in August 2021 between what celebrated sportsman and the club he had played with all his sporting career?

- A. Lionel Messi
- B. Neymar
- C. Kylian Mbappé
- D. Sergio Ramos

02. The Russian choreographer and dancer Mikhail Fokin created which of these?

- A. La Boutique Fantasque (1919)
- B. Giselle (1841)
- C. Les Saisons (1900)
- D. Chopiniana (1907)

03. Under what name was the country of Umbuso eSwatini, or eSwatini, known internationally until 2018?

- A. Lesotho
- B. Swaziland
- C. Senegal
- D. Côte d'Ivoire

Answers: 1. A 2. D 3. B



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

One of your best qualities is that you know how to thank people who have done good things for you, and your role in a work group is about to grow bigger because of it. The higher-ups know that you always give credit where credit is due, which is key in a good leader. So if you're ready for your career to blossom, you need to take on the challenging opportunity that's about you be given to you. And don't forget to thank them for it!



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Be careful not to push yourself too hard today. Why pressure yourself into taking on a bigger workload when you don't really need to? Sure, you may crave the challenge, but at what cost? There are too many small details in the stuff you've currently got on your plate, and you simply can't afford to add more to them. Before you accept any new assignments, focus on one single project and finish it up. Make room for more by completing what you have.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Today might not be an easy day for communication. There will be a lot of unpredictability in terms of people's motives and energy levels, and people might not realize what they're saying. Just be ready to change things on the fly. This is a day to utilize all your flexibility and patience. When someone in power says they want something done a certain way, you can expect them to change their mind before long. If you are expecting it, it won't bother you so much.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Get ready to get involved in some in-depth conversations today, because people will be much chattier with you than usual. It's just something about the vibe you're giving off right now. People want to know you better, and they're curious about what you think regarding some plans they have brewing. Be diplomatic with your feedback, because you're probably not going to be too impressed by what they have to say. Your opinion means a lot to them, so be gentle.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Are your friends getting too involved in your plans for the day? If you let everyone put in their two cents about everything, you'll never get anywhere! It's time to stop being such a good listener and start being more independent in how you go about things. Instead of getting everyone's input on what the right plan is, just go off and do what you think will work best. If you're wrong, who cares? You'll learn something and show folks that you can think for yourself.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Your ability to see the bright side of things has always helped you, and today it can help someone you care about. Your fresh outlook could give a blue friend hope that things can (and will) get better for them. Make some time for this discussion. Go off together on a walk, take them out to dinner, or just ask them if they'd like to grab a cup of coffee somewhere. Ask them to tell you everything so you can cover the details point by point and help them relax.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Be extremely wary of an extravagant gesture from a person who's usually frugal and unassuming. Unless they've recently won the lottery, they might be trying to overcompensate for guilt or some other negative feeling. Get some time with them today to find out what really motivated their generosity. Dig deep until they come up with the real reason. They have assumptions about you that need to be corrected, and you're the only person who can do it.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

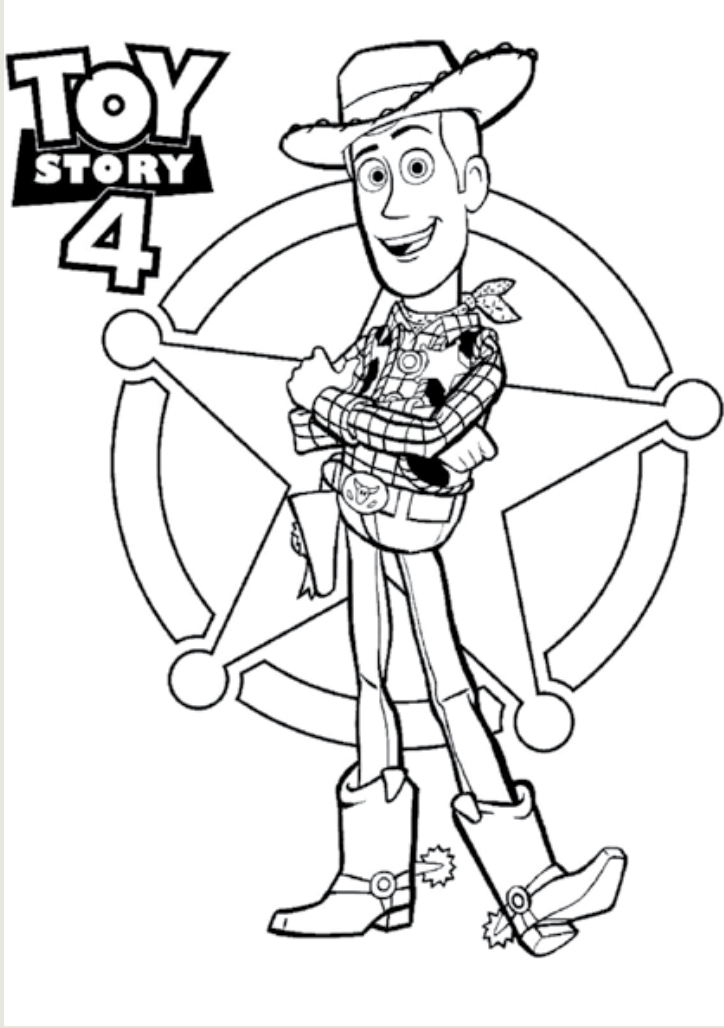
Now and then, the Universe gives you a run of good luck, and one is starting now! Since it's your turn, don't waste any time, even if you overdid it a bit recently and sleeping all day sounds awesome. It should be a great stretch (exciting, intense, busy), so get ready! Think about how others see you. Give yourself until late morning and then get things moving for real.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Today, there is a lot of unpredictability in the air. Something you assumed was going to happen looks like it's off the agenda. You don't have to try to hide your disappointment, but it probably won't last long anyway. As the afternoon approaches, a new person will arrive on the scene whose antics will put a smile on your face. This isn't a day to count on having your normal routine. This is a day to enjoy whatever comes your way. It's going to be fun.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

E	T	E	T
A	Y	D	R
W	M	H	I
B	A	I	E

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Green grass, blue skies

Novak Djokovic fired up for more Grand Slam glory at Wimbledon

London, United Kingdom - Novak Djokovic says he is still “hungry” for Grand Slam glory as Wimbledon rivals queue up to hail him as the “greatest” and his achievements as “phenomenal”.

Having wrapped up a men’s record 23rd Grand Slam title at the French Open, Djokovic now targets an eighth Wimbledon title to equal Roger Federer’s mark.

The 36-year-old Serb has won the title at the All England Club on the last four occasions.

A fifth successive victory in two weeks’ time will take him level with Margaret Court’s all-time record of 24 Slams.

He is also bidding to become just the fourth player in history to win eight or more Wimbledon titles after Martina Navratilova (nine), Federer and Helen Wills Moody (eight).

“I still feel hungry for success, for more Grand Slams, more achievements in tennis,” said Djokovic.

“As long as there’s that drive, I know that I’m able to compete at the highest level.

He added: “A few days after Roland Garros, I was already thinking about preparation for grass and what needs to be done.”

Worryingly for his rivals, Djokovic, one of the most polar-



Novak Djokovic

I still feel hungry for success, for more Grand Slams, more achievements in tennis. As long as there’s that drive, I know that I’m able to compete at the highest level

NOVAK DJOKOVIC

ising figures in sport, shows no sign of slowing down.

Eleven of his 23 majors have come since he turned 30.

Victory in what would be his 35th Grand Slam final on July 16 would crown him as the tournament’s oldest champion in the

next task.”

Djokovic’s career-long rival Murray said winning 23 majors was “phenomenal”.

Murray, a former world number one, was the last man to defeat Djokovic on Centre Court when he won the first of his two Wimbledon titles in 2013.

“What he’s gone on to achieve in the latter stages of his career, it’s been incredible. Also doesn’t look like he’s slowing down,” said Murray who practised with Djokovic at the tournament on Saturday.

“What he did at the French Open, it was phenomenal.”

At the end of 2010, Djokovic’s Grand Slam tally consisted solely of the 2008 Australian Open title. By comparison, Federer had already won 16 of his 20 career majors while Nadal had racked up nine of his 22. Nine more of Nadal’s Slam trophies came in Paris.

Djokovic’s third win at Roland Garros last month made him the first man to win all four majors on at least three occasions.

“I don’t know how is it possible. He doesn’t have bad days?” asked world number three Daniil Medvedev. “Actually, he does, like everybody but even on these bad days, he manages to beat the opponent. I don’t know how he’s doing it.

“That’s why he’s for me the greatest in the history of tennis.”

Should Djokovic successfully defend his Wimbledon title, he will just need to pocket the US Open in September to become the first man since 1969 to claim a calendar Grand Slam.

AFP

Djokovic wants ‘integrity, tradition’ protected in Saudi deal

London, United Kingdom - Novak Djokovic warned on Saturday that the “integrity and tradition” of tennis must be preserved should the sport strike a tournament deal with Saudi Arabia.

Both the ATP and WTA, which run the money-spinning men’s and women’s tours, have been targeted by the Saudis..

The country has been signing up veteran football stars such as Cristiano Ronaldo and Karim Benzema to play in their domestic league and are bankrolling English club Newcastle.

Saudi Arabia also caused shockwaves in golf with its financing of the rebel LIV series and already hosts a Formula One Grand Prix.

“I think that we as individual sport on a global level are probably closest to golf in terms of how we see sports,” 23-time major winner Djokovic said at Wimbledon.

“I think from that exam-

It’s a very challenging topic that is being measured by many groups right now

STEVE SIMON

Nick Kyrgios says absence was ‘brutal’ but didn’t ‘miss tennis’

London, United Kingdom - Australian whirlwind Nick Kyrgios will blow back into Wimbledon where he made a storming run to the final in 2022, admitting his injury-enforced absence from tennis has been “brutal”.

The 28-year-old firebrand has only played one match in 2023 - in Stuttgart last month - after undergoing knee surgery.

It was the worst possible preparation for a return to the All England Club 12 months after losing the final to Novak Djokovic. “It’s been brutal, it’s been hard,” Kyrgios said Sunday.

However, he added: “I didn’t miss the sport. I was almost dreading coming back a little bit, but it’s my job.”

At Wimbledon in 2022, the Australian dominated most of the headlines.

His high-octane, flamboyant shot-making was accompanied by signature clashes with rivals and officialdom.

He was fined \$10,000 for spitting and \$4,000 for shouting



Australia’s Nick Kyrgios speaks during a press conference ahead of the Wimbledon Championships on Sunday (AFP)

obscurities - one of which sent the British tabloids into meltdown as it was within earshot of eight-year-old Prince George.

Kyrgios also fought out an explosive third-round clash with Stefanos Tsitsipas with the Greek even describing him as “evil” and a “bully”.

In the final against Djokovic,

he demanded a woman be ejected from the crowd for consuming “700 drinks, bro”.

“In a way, it was good to be home. Obviously heartbreaking as well,” said Kyrgios as he reflected on his time out of the sport.

“Last year I felt like everything kind of came together for me. Fi-

nals of Wimbledon. Barely lost a match. Had the third-best season on tour.

“Obviously my body was just crying out for some sort of rest.”

For Kyrgios, being away from the tennis courts didn’t mean an absence from the public view.

Social media ‘rabbit hole’

In May, his car was stolen from his mother at gunpoint from outside the family home in Canberra. Before that incident, Kyrgios pleaded guilty in February to assaulting a former girlfriend.

He avoided a conviction for what the magistrate called a “single act of stupidity”.

Kyrgios has also been the headliner in the Netflix series “Break Point” where he spoke candidly about his mental health.

He admitted he had considered suicide and ended up in a psychiatric ward in 2019.

“It took me seven, eight years to be able to just open up about that,” he explained on Sunday.

AFP



Katerina Siniakova

Siniakova warms up for Wimbledon with Bad Homburg triumph

Berlin, Germany - Katerina Siniakova won the Bad Homburg Open on Saturday, defeating Lucia Bronzetti 6-2, 7-6 (7/5) in the final of the Wimbledon warm-up tournament.

Siniakova claimed her fourth WTA singles title and first on grass but was made to sit through a four-hour rain delay after winning the first set.

The Czech 27-year-old, ranked 52 in singles and the world number one in doubles, broke Bronzetti twice in the

opening set before play was interrupted.

Siniakova, the 2021 runner-up at the tournament just north of Frankfurt, led 5-2 in the second set but Bronzetti battled back to force a tie-break.

The Czech raced out in front though and converted her fourth match point to lift the trophy.

Clay court specialist Bronzetti, ranked 65th, made the final after world number one Iga Swiatek pulled out of their semi-final clash due to illness.

ple we can probably learn a lot, some positives, some negatives, and try to structure a deal - if it’s going in that direction - that it is going to protect the integrity and tradition and history of this sport, but still be able to grow it in such way that it will be appropriate.”

WTA chief executive Steve Simon said Friday that his organisation is evaluating the “challenging topic” of taking the sport to Saudi Arabia. The country has been linked with hosting the flagship end-of-season WTA Championships.

“It’s a very difficult and challenging topic that is being measured by many groups right now,” Simon said. “In February I went to Saudi Arabia to see it for myself. We took a couple of players and some reps as well. We wanted to see what the change was.”

ATP chairman Andrea Gaudenzi has said the men’s tour has had “positive” discussions with Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund about a potential deal.

AFP



Adam Yates in overall leader’s yellow jersey and his brother Simon Yates wearing the best sprinter’s green jersey await the start of the second stage of the Tour de France on Sunday (AFP)

Adam Yates wins Tour de France opener ahead of twin brother

Bilbao, Spain - Adam Yates of Team UAE won the opening stage of the Tour de France in Bilbao on Saturday outsprinting his twin brother Simon Yates of Jayco.

The British twins had broken free at the top of the final climb and it soon became clear there was little will from those behind to chase over the final couple of kilometres.

Two-time Tour winner Tadej Pogacar, also of UAE came, in third, 12 seconds adrift at the end

of 182km circuit starting and ending in the Basque city.

Pogacar raised his arms in triumph crossing the line, after seeing his newly-recruited teammate take the win.

“It was as if I had won the stage myself or in fact even better. It’s a dream to see the team developing like this,” said Pogacar, the 2021 and 2022 champion.

Yates took both the first yellow jersey for the overall lead, and

the first green jersey for sprint points. It was not the first 1-2 for cycling brothers as Andy Schleck beat his brother Frank on stage 18 of the 2011 Tour de France.

“Our parents are here too,” Adam said after the stage. “I haven’t seen them yet, they’re somewhere along the coast in a campervan.”

The younger by a few minutes, Adam led an elite clique up the Sondika hill through a narrow passage formed by enthusiastic

flag-waving fans before allowing Simon to do the work most of the way to the line.

“He understood. I’m sure he’ll get his chance to be a pain in the ass along the road somewhere,” said the winner. “He asked me this morning what our plans were but I couldn’t tell him.”

Simon Yates, long considered the better of the identical twins, is second in the overall standings, at eight seconds, but appeared deflated after the finale.

BEN TON NOT ENOUGH

Australia win fractious second Ashes Test despite stunning Stokes century

London, United Kingdom - Australia won a rancorous second Ashes Test at Lord's on Sunday by 43 runs despite a stunning century from England captain Ben Stokes that was supercharged by the controversial dismissal of Jonny Bairstow.

Stokes made a remarkable 155 before he was dismissed with England 70 runs shy of a steep target of 371.

England were eventually dismissed for 327 as holders Australia, bidding for a first away Ashes series win in 22 years, went 2-0 up in the five-match campaign.

But it was the dismissal of Bairstow shortly before lunch on the last day that lit the blue-touch paper on this match and incited the fury of the usually sedate Lord's crowd.

Bairstow, the last of England's specialist batsmen, fell in bizarre fashion for 10 when he wandered out of his ground after ducking a Cameron Green bouncer and quick-thinking wicketkeeper Alex Carey under-armed the ball onto the stumps.

Bairstow thought he had secured his ground by tapping his



Australia's Josh Hazlewood celebrates after taking the wicket of England captain Ben Stokes at Lord's on Sunday (AFP)

bat behind the crease. Australia captain Pat Cummins could have withdrawn the appeal but the decision was referred to third umpire Marais Erasmus, who ruled Bairstow had been stumped, with England now 193-6.

Spectators at the 'Home of Cricket' reacted in fury with a chant of "Same old Aussies, al-

ways cheating" in a reference to a 2018 ball-tampering scandal in South Africa that led to year-long bans for Australia stars Steve Smith and David Warner.

Incoming batsman Stuart Broad told Carey "you'll be forever remembered for that".

But a spokesman for Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) the

owners of Lord's and the guardians of cricket' Laws, later told AFP Bairstow had been given out correctly.

An Australia team spokesman later alleged players had been "verbally abused" and "physically contacted" by irate MCC members in the Lord's Pavilion during the lunch break.

An angry Stokes, then on 62, hit out and on 77 he slammed a fierce pull back at Cummins which the fast bowler dropped.

Stokes then hooked Green for three sixes off successive deliveries - the second dropped over the boundary by Mitchell Starc - to compete a stunning 142-ball hundred. At lunch, England were

243-6, with Stokes a remarkable 128 not out.

Jeers turn to cheers

Australia were booed again as they took the field after the interval.

But the jeers turned to cheers when, off just the second ball of the session, Stokes lofted Josh

Hazlewood for a brilliant straight six. Two balls later, however, he was dropped at deep backward square when Smith grassed a routine chance before he was again missed on 114 by a diving Carey.

Left-handed batsman Stokes struck two more sixes off Hazlewood, the second a remarkable one-handed hit.

Australia were without Nathan Lyon after the off-spinner, who had limped out to bat at No 11 on Saturday, was off the field with the severe calf tear he had suffered while fielding Thursday.

Stokes, however, was unable to repeat his heroics of 2019 when the all-rounder's astounding unbeaten century secured a thrilling one-wicket win in an Ashes Test at Headingley, with England reaching a total of 359 - their highest fourth-innings winning chase against Australia.

He fell when he skyed Hazle-

An Australia team spokesman later alleged players had been "verbally abused" and "physically contacted" by irate MCC members in the Lord's Pavilion during the lunch break.

wood to Carey to end a 214-ball innings including nine fours and nine sixes. Stokes walked off to a standing ovation but at 301-7 the game was all but up for England.

Ollie Robinson and Broad, who had helped Stokes add 108, fell in quick succession to leave England on the brink of defeat.

AFP



Dominik Szoboszlai

Szoboszlai joins Liverpool in 70-million-euro deal

Liverpool, United Kingdom - Liverpool confirmed the signing of Dominik Szoboszlai from RB Leipzig on Sunday after paying the Hungarian's 70-million-euro (\$76 million) release clause.

The 22-year-old will further bolster the Reds' midfield options after the arrival of Argentine World Cup winner Alexis Mac Allister last month.

Szoboszlai scored 20 goals and provided 22 assists in 91 games for Leipzig as he helped them to win the German Cup and finish in the top four of the Bundesliga for the past two sea-

sons. "The last three or four days went really long; it was not that easy. But at the end I'm here, I'm happy and I can't wait to get started," Szoboszlai said.

"A really historic club, really good players, good coach, everything is good. For me it was perfect to make the next step in a club like this. The fans, the stadium, everything is really good."

Liverpool were in the market to refresh their midfield after a fifth-place finish in the Premier League last season saw them miss out on Champions League qualification.

Bairstow's controversial dismissal sends Lord's crowd into revolt

London, United Kingdom - Jonny Bairstow's controversial dismissal in the second Ashes Test sent the Lord's crowd into an unprecedented rage as Australia players were abused by spectators in the famous Pavilion Long Room.

Bairstow was given out when Australia wicketkeeper Alex Carey threw the ball at the stumps after the England batsman walked out of his crease after ducking under a Cameron Green bouncer.

There was confusion in the middle, Bairstow seemingly believing the ball was dead at the end of the over but Australia were happy to proceed with a deeply divisive appeal. The umpires sent the decision upstairs for review by TV umpire Marais Erasmus, who had no option but to confirm Bairstow's stumping dismissal.

Bairstow was livid and the usually sedate Lord's crowd responded by chanting "Same old Aussies always cheating" while booing rang around the famous old arena for several minutes.

England's Stuart Broad, the batsman who came in after



Australia's Pat Cummins (R) and Alex Carey celebrate the wicket of England's Jonny Bairstow (AFP)

Bairstow's exit, immediately let his frustrations show as the stump microphone caught him telling Carey: "That's all you'll ever be remembered for that."

Broad also shouted at Australia captain Pat Cummins, ranting: "That's the worst thing I've ever seen in cricket".

The England pace bowler kept up his barrage as he exchanged angry words with Australian fielders and mockingly tapped his bat in his crease after each delivery to ensure he didn't depart the same way as Bairstow.

A bitter row about the 'spirit of cricket' was underway, with furi-

ous fans chanting "cheats" and England's players clearly angry Australia did not withdraw their appeal on grounds of fair play.

Members in the Lord's Pavilion confronted the Australia team as they walked through the historic Long Room to get to their dressing room at lunch.



Rickie Fowler

Fowler grabs PGA lead at storm-hit Detroit

Washington, United States - Rickie Fowler, trying to snap a four-year victory drought, birdied six of the last eight holes for a one-stroke lead after Saturday's third round of the PGA Tour Rocket Mortgage Classic.

The 34-year-old American, who last won at the 2019 Phoenix Open, sizzled down the back nine to fire an eight-under par 64 and stand on 20-under 196 after 54 holes at Detroit Golf Club.

"Just felt good," Fowler said. "Swing felt nice. I wanted to keep giving myself as many looks as I could. Good swings and made some putts."

Canadian Adam Hadwin matched the course record with a bogey-free 63 to finish one back of Fowler on 197 with countryman Taylor Pendrith third on 198 after taking his first bogeys of the week at the par-3 15th and 18.

AFP

Verstappen wins Austrian Grand Prix, extends series lead

Spielberg Bei Knittelfeld, Austria - Defending champion Max Verstappen continued his relentless charge towards a third world title on Sunday when he claimed a record fourth Austrian Grand Prix victory in emphatic style on Sunday.

The 25-year-old Dutchman finished 5.155 seconds clear of a revived Charles Leclerc of Ferrari, in second, with Red Bull teammate Sergio Perez, showing revitalised form, taking a battling third after starting 15th on the

grid. In a race of attrition, punctuated by Safety Cars and influenced by a high number of drivers' receiving penalties for exceeding track limits, Verstappen's unbroken run of laps led ended on 249, when he pitted.

But it was only a pause in his serene progress to a fifth consecutive victory, seventh in nine races this year and 42nd of his career, extending his lead ahead of Perez in the title race to 81 points.

It followed the Dutchman's



Red Bull Racing's Max Verstappen celebrates after winning the Austrian Grand Prix in Spielberg on Sunday (AFP)

success in Saturday's sprint and with the fastest lap gave him a maximum points haul from the weekend. "That is the full sweep, class Max, very very class," said Red Bull boss Christian Horner over the team radio. "The car was on fire!" replied Verstappen after his 42nd career win.

Despite a third title being his to lose Verstappen said he preferred to take it one race at a time. "I don't like to think about that yet," he said.

"I am just enjoying driving this

car and racing for this team. The sprint weekend can be very stressful so I'm just glad it all went to plan."

His win total lifted him to fifth in the all-time list of winners and clear of Ayrton Senna, with whom he had shared 41 victories since winning in Canada.

Including a triumph in the 2022 Styrian Grand Prix, run during the Covid pandemic, this was Verstappen's fifth win at the Red Bull Ring circuit overall.

AFP

SRI LANKA BOOK WORLD CUP SPOT

Nissanka, Theekshana shine for former world champions

Harare, Zimbabwe - Pathum Nissanka's sublime unbeaten 101 propelled Sri Lanka to a place in this year's Cricket World Cup in India as the 1996 winners trounced hosts Zimbabwe by nine wickets on Sunday.

Sri Lanka had bowled out Zimbabwe for a modest 165 inside 33 overs and Nissanka never gave the hosts a hope of victory with his superb innings lifting Sri Lanka to 169 for one in their Super Six stage match.

Zimbabwe can still qualify if they beat Scotland on Tuesday.

Sri Lanka's bowlers had performed admirably in skittling the hosts out - man of the match Maheesh Theekshana taking 4-25.

Sri Lankan captain Dasun Shanaka said it was crucial for them to be at the sport's quadrennial showpiece - another former winner West Indies are missing out for the first time after losing to Scotland on Saturday.

"It was a much-needed thing

for Sri Lanka to play on that big stage," said Shanaka.

"See coming for the qualifiers. It's always tough but still, if you go through the process...and we knew with the team we've got, we were going to qualify for the World Cup."

The Zimbabweans had been up against it from the start after being put into bat by Shanaka and were left tottering on 30-3 due to a stunning opening spell by Dilshan Madushanka.

The hosts had prided themselves on getting through the first 10 overs in the previous matches in the tournament virtually unscathed - they had lost just the



Pathum Nissanka celebrates after scoring a century against Zimbabwe (ICC/ Getty Images)

one wicket.

However, a fired-up Madushanka gave them a rude awakening reducing them to 8-2 beginning by dismissing Joylord Gumbie for a duck and then Wesley Madhevere for one.

He snapped up the key wicket of captain Craig Ervine for just 14, the 37-year-old with over 100 ODI appearances for the hosts nicking the ball to wicketkeeper Kusal Mendis.

Sean Williams and Sikandar Raza steadied the ship - only after the former had escaped when Matheesha Pathirana dropped a simple chance off Madushanka prompting a withering look from

Sri Lankan coach Chris Silverwood. They put on a fluent partnership of 68 but just as they were hitting their boot straps Raza on 31 holed out to Madushanka off the bowling of Shanaka to leave the hosts 98-4.

They recovered briefly thanks to 19 - including three sixes - coming off a Dhananjaya over.

Williams brought up his half century with a beautifully executed four in Shanaka's next over.

But Shanaka made an inspired bowling change bringing on Theekshana for his second spell in place of the expensive Dhananjaya and with just his fifth ball bowled Williams for 56.

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WASTEWATER USE

EVERY DROP COUNTS

Responsible for exploitation at Edar water treatment company, Carlos Lardin monitors a sewage basin, in Torres de Cotillas near Murcia, southern Spain



In a context of global climate change leading to severe limitations of freshwater resources for agriculture, irrigation with unconventional water sources such as treated wastewater (TWW) represents a key factor for sustaining agricultural production in arid and semi-arid regions. And farmers in Spain have been the first to turn to recycled wastewater as a major source of irrigation.

Carlos Lardin, operations manager at Esamur, the public body overseeing wastewater management in the Murcia region, disclosed that scarce rainfall are no more a challenge as crops in Spain have alternate sources of water for irrigation via treatment plants that have the ability to convert wastewater into bacteria-free water that's hygienic for irrigating crops.

At his feet, brownish water bubbled in a de-silting tank, the first step before being sifted, filtered and then biologically treated to give it 'a second life', explained the 45-year-old engineer.

Some 23 years ago, Murcia - an arid region with chronic water shortages that claims to be the EU's leading producer of fruit and vegetables - set itself a huge challenge of reusing wastewater to irrigate its crops.

To that end, the region built a network of 100 treatment plants that process and disinfect water from the sewage system so it can be reused on the fields. This treatment, which involves sand filters and ultra-

violet rays, ensures that the water is not contaminated and doesn't transfer bacteria, such as e.coli, to the fruit and vegetables, Lardin said.

An important resource

As a result, some 98% of the region's wastewater is reused today, compared with an average of nine percent across Spain and five percent across the EU, government figures show.

It is an important contribution given that the central government has recently restricted Murcia's huge water transfers from the Tagus River, whose levels have been dropping dangerously.

According to Esamur, 15% of the region's irrigation needs are met by recycled wastewater. It's not enough to cover the need, but it's still important, said Feliciano Guillen, head of the Ceuti irrigation organisation which allocates water resources among farmers in northeastern Murcia.

Farmer Jose Penalver, who owns 10 hectares of land in the hills above Campos del Rio, agreed.

"Whatever (water) can be collected is good wherever it comes from as long as it's put to good use," said the 52-year-old apricot grower. In his fields, an automated drip-irrigation system lets him limit water use to what is strictly necessary, in this case, two hours per day.

"Without this (recycled) water, everything here would dry up," he said. "Every drop counts."

Budgetary allocation

To protect its agriculture from the threat of global warming, the Spanish government in May pledged to increase the national rate of wastewater usage, releasing €1.4bn (US\$1.5bn) to build the necessary infrastructure.

"Water is a precious resource which can also be recycled..."

SPAIN'S CROPS THRIVE ON RECYCLED WASTEWATER

...it's worth the effort," said Ecology Minister Teresa Ribera earlier this month, flagging the importance of working with small towns and villages who find it difficult to make such an investment.

According to the Spanish Association for Desalination and Water Reuse (AEDyR), 27% of its 2,000 wastewater treatment plans can purify water to a level that can be used for agriculture. And that figure could easily be increased with greater investment.

Cheaper than desalinating seawater, recycling wastewater has sparked interest abroad, with France's President Emmanuel Macron saying in March he wanted to increase water reuse along the same lines as Spain.

Evidence of this growing interest has been seen in Murcia, where in recent months, "many foreign delegations have come to see our facilities", said Esamur's Lardin, pointing to visitors from as far afield as Argentina and Bolivia.

"This water doesn't depend on the weather, and at very least, it guarantees a stable quantity of water for irrigation," he said.

AFP



A view of a plant of EDAR company, recycling water for agriculture, in Torres de Cotillas



“Whatever (water) can be collected is good wherever it comes from as long as it's put to good use. Without this (recycled) water, everything here would dry up

JOSE PENALVER

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CANTON OF VAUD

The canton of Vaud, the summer playground in Switzerland, lures GCC travellers with a mix of cultural charms, culinary delights, and revitalising adventures amid nature



Switzerland in Summer

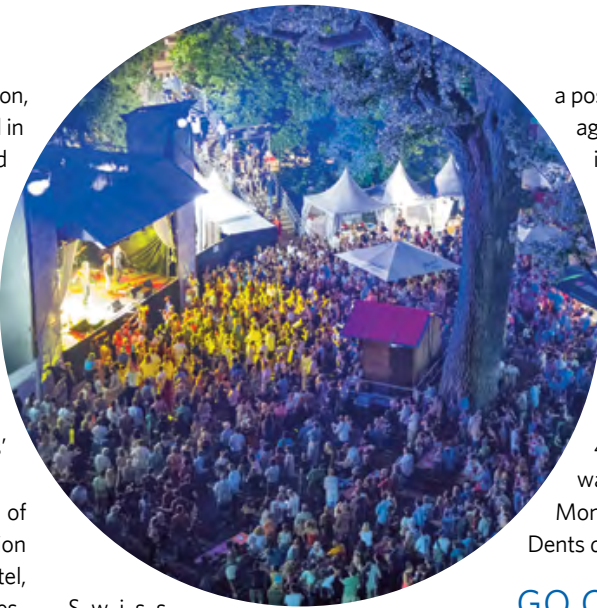
A vibrant summer destination, the idyllic canton of Vaud in southwestern Switzerland is easily accessible from the GCC, thanks to regular flights into Geneva. Home to the culture-rich cities of Lausanne and Montreux Riviera, endless expanses of verdant fields, glassy lakes and cycling trails, Vaud offers a box-ticking blend of activities for all ages, backdropped by some of the Alps' most dramatic peaks.

Located in the southwestern part of Switzerland in its French-speaking region between Lake Geneva and Lake Neuchatel, the region of Vaud is a dream vacation destination. The region is served by Geneva international airport, which is a short 40-minute train ride away from Lausanne.

The region boasts a strong infrastructure including luxurious and affordable accommodation and a well-connected transportation system. It features beautiful towns such as Lausanne, the Olympic Capital and Montreux Riviera, all steeped in centuries of history and culture.

PEDAL ACROSS PRISTINE LANDSCAPES

Whether you're an experienced cyclist or someone who prefers a gentle pedal, the



Swiss canton of Vaud is a cycling haven just waiting to be explored. With a choice of terrain spanning flat rural roads that are perfect for families, and hilly climbs through spectacular wine regions, see the best of the region on two wheels. Cycle along the northern shores of Lake Geneva on the 106km Vineyard Route or explore the safe cycling paths and farm roads of the picturesque Chablais Region, perfect for families.

HIKE TO GREAT HEIGHTS

With emerald-green country scenes that look like they've been plucked straight from

a postcard, the region of Vaud encourages you to slow down and soak it all in. And what better way to embrace the trend for 'slow travel' than by exploring on foot. This serene region is crisscrossed by 4,000km of marked hiking trails, from strolls through fields carpeted in wild flowers to pulse-racing hikes to Le Tour des Muverans, scaling an elevation of 4,337 metres - the effort will be rewarded with breath-taking views of Mont Blanc, Pennine Alps and the Dents du Midi.

GO CHASING WATERFALLS

Summer is the perfect season to seek out Vaud's captivating collection of waterfalls. Follow the rapids of the Arnon river to spectacular Covatannaz Gorge, visit the 19m Dard waterfall in Croy-Romainmotier or cool off at the gorgeous staircase waterfall of Saut du Day in Vallorbe Region, an idyllic setting with its own natural beach.

ENJOY THRILLING WATERSPORTS

Vaud's iconic waterways come to life in summer. Try your hand at wakeboarding or wakesurfing at the Osmosis Wake Club in Lutry, or visit Lake Joux for thrilling aquatic activities including windsurfing, stand-up paddling, water skiing, pedal boating, canoeing, kayaking or kite surfing. Learn how to sail on Lake Geneva, one of Europe's largest lakes, or for something a little more sedate, take a dip at one of 116 beaches on the lake's sun-kissed shores.

CULTURE FIX AT PLATEFORME 10

For your culture fix in the Swiss city of Lausanne, visit Plateforme 10, a dynamic art and culture hub on the shores of Lake

Geneva. Summer highlights include a spotlight on Lebanese art with Beirut. Les temps du design, plus guided tours, family workshops and exclusive exhibitions throughout the season.

MONTREUX JAZZ FESTIVAL

An annual star on Vaud's cultural calendar, the Montreux Jazz Festival returns to the shores of Lake Geneva for two weeks, starting 30 June 2023. The second-largest jazz festival in the world, it attracts jazz virtuosos, pop stars and legendary rock groups for an impressive line-up that is immortalised on film - the concerts comprise a unique musical archive protected by UNESCO.

CHAPLIN'S WORLD

Film fans can walk in the steps of Holly-

wood's legendary Charlie Chaplin, immerse in the studio to experience the silent world of film or roam the sprawling ten-acre estate the star once walked tracing the steps of the cinematic hero. The last 25 years of his extraordinary life were spent in Switzerland as he enjoyed the peace and privacy it provided, with views of Lake Geneva and the Alps. Now, the museum in his honour invites the world to celebrate the life of this much-loved man.

FRESH CUISINE AND SUNDOWNERS

Work up an appetite on the hike up to Casba Chalet, set to open on 1st July 2023, and is about an hour-long walk from the Sainte-Croix train station. Immersed in a majestic forest setting, this bucolic restaurant serves Swiss specialties such as rosti galettes, mountain cheeses, fresh organic salads, and local game meats in season. For something less challenging, join the local Lausanne city dwellers as they gather on the shores of Lake Geneva for a relaxed round of sundowners. An ideal option is La Jetée de la Compagnie, a temporary terrace on the shores of Lake Geneva, in Lausanne-Ouchy, which is a great spot for sunbathing after a dip.



Chaplin's World



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