

Decks cleared for alternate access road to Jabal Akhdar

- DISCUSSION ON TO MAKE NEW JABAL AKHDAR ROAD AN INVESTMENT OR DEVELOPMENT PROJECT
- PLANS AFOOT TO LAY A 32KM ROAD TO JABAL SHAMS
- STUDY COMPLETE FOR ALTERNATIVE ROAD CONNECTING MABELA TO DAKHLIYAH
- MABELA ROAD TO AID TRUCK TRAFFIC TO DAKHLIYAH, N SHARQIYAH, S SHARQIYAH



Our Correspondent
Muscat

A preliminary feasibility study for an alternative route from South Batinah to Jabal Akhdar has been completed. Additionally, plans are underway to lay a 32km road to Jabal Shams to improve tourism in this popular hill station. These announcements were made during a meeting at the Dakhliyah Governor's Office, which focused on land trans-

portation projects in the region.

Sheikh Hilal Said al Hajri, Governor of Dakhliyah, presided over the meeting, which was attended by H E Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamakhi, Undersecretary for Transport in the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT).

Sheikh Hajri highlighted the investment projects in the governorate, specifically mentioning the alternative road project that will link South Batinah to Jabal

Akhdar. "This project aims to facilitate easier access to Jabal Akhdar without four-wheel drive vehicles, ultimately enhancing tourist traffic to the scenic green mountains."

He noted that the preliminary feasibility study for the road has been completed in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning. "The study has identified two route options, and further analysis is being done to determine whether it will be implemented as an investment or

development project."

The meeting also addressed an alternative road project to connect Mabela to Dakhliyah. This road will support heavy vehicles and trucks travelling to Dakhliyah, North Sharqiyah and South Sharqiyah. Preliminary feasibility studies for the project have been carried out by a consultant commissioned by the Ministry of Finance, and the proposed road routes are currently under review, according to the governor.

Rania Masoud al Moqbalia, Head of MTCIT's Road Construction Department, informed that as of June-end, 66.64% of the Rusayl-Bidbid road was complete.

During the meeting, H E Shamakhi affirmed the ministry's commitment to implementing the Jabal Shams road project, a key component of the tourism link initiative. "Tender documents for the 32km road project have been finalised for submission to the Tender Board."

Russia eyes Oman for production of fertilisers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Russian investors are eyeing an opportunity to produce fertilisers in Oman, with specific focus on exporting to Asia and Africa.

This announcement was made by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov during a press conference held after a meeting with his Omani counterpart H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi on Tuesday.

Lavrov highlighted the interest of Russian investors in developing fertiliser production projects in Oman.

"Literally before the end of our talks we mentioned the interest of some Russian investors in developing the production of fertilisers on the territory of Oman, participating in the implementation of projects connected with water consumption," the Russian news agency TASS quoted him as saying.

Lavrov emphasised that Russian companies are keen on manufacturing chemicals and fertilisers not only to meet the demands of the Omani market but also to cater to South Asian, Southeast Asian and African countries.

"These plans are under consideration of the Omani friends. Today we confirmed readiness

to implement them," Lavrov said.

He stated that the potential for economic cooperation between Russia and Oman goes beyond the current figures, which already amount to more than half a billion dollars. "There is more to come; the potential is much wider. We strongly encourage countries interested in the region to work in Oman," he pointed out.

Russian companies are keen on manufacturing chemicals and fertilisers not only to meet the demands of the Omani market but also to export to other countries

SERGEY LAVROV

In a parallel effort to enhance collaboration, Oman and Russia are actively working towards an agreement on mutual encouragement and protection of investments, H E Sayyid Badr said during the joint press conference with Lavrov.

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Work starts on first RO60mn vaccine factory in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a significant development for Oman's nascent pharmaceutical industry, Opal Bio Pharma (OBP) organised a groundbreaking ceremony for the first life-saving medicines and vaccine factory in the sultanate on Wednesday.

Held under the auspices of H E Dr Hilal Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, the ceremony marked the beginning of the second phase of the project. The factory, spread over 37,000sqm in Khazaen Economic City, will be constructed at a cost of approximately RO60mn, with an estimated completion time of 24 months.

The first phase of the project, focused on medicine repackaging facilities, is scheduled for completion before the end of 2023.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has emphasised the project's



alignment with the government's vision of economic diversification and the nation's commitment to achieving pharmaceutical self-sufficiency, a vital pillar of national security.

'By establishing a vaccine industry, Oman aims to secure a prominent position in the global market for vital and complex medicine production,' MoH stated in a press release.

Access to life-saving medications remains a challenge worldwide, with issues such as drug scarcity, quality and safety stan-

dards, and escalating procurement costs. 'Therefore, a domestic pharmaceutical industry is crucial to ensuring local pharmaceutical security. Moreover, the medical industry presents promising opportunities to reduce import bills while facilitating exports to neighbouring countries.'

Sa'ad Moosa al Junaibi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of OBP, highlighted the fact that the manufacturing plant is the first of its kind in Oman and the region.

Continued on Page 03

G7 UNVEILS LONG-TERM SECURITY PLEDGE FOR UKRAINE



US President Joe Biden (L) speaks at an event with G7 leaders next to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to announce a Joint Declaration of Support for Ukraine during the NATO Summit in Vilnius, Lithuania on Wednesday (AFP)

See also from Page 09



France-Oman ties boosted by political, security cooperation



Abandoned cars make for dirty picture in Muscat

World hunger stops rising but remains elevated: UN

Paris, France - World hunger stopped rising in 2022 after growing for seven years but remains above pre-pandemic levels and far off track to be eradicated by 2030, UN agencies said on Wednesday.

Between 691mn and 783mn people faced hunger last year, with a midrange of 735mn, the five agencies said in a report.

The proportion of people facing chronic hunger rose from 7.9% of the world population in 2019 - before the pandemic - to 9.2% in 2022.

The annual rise 'has stalled', however, with the total falling by about 3.8mn people between 2021 and 2022, according to the



State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report.

'There is no room for complacency though, as hunger is still on the rise throughout Africa, Western Asia and the Caribbean,' they warned. The report is 'a snapshot of the world still recovering from a global pandemic and now grappling with the consequences of the war in Ukraine, which has fur-

There are rays of hope, some regions are on track to achieve some 2030 nutrition targets. But overall, we need an intense and immediate global effort to rescue the Sustainable Development Goals

ANTONIO GUTERRES

ther rattled food and energy markets'.

Since 2019, those crises have plunged an additional 122mn people into hunger, according to the UN, with women and those living in rural areas hit hard.

The post-pandemic economic recovery helped improve the situation, 'but there is no doubt that the modest progress has been

undermined by rising food and energy prices magnified by the war in Ukraine', the report said.

The report was prepared by the UN Food and Agricultural Organization, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, UNICEF, the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization.

The estimates indicate that

hunger 'is no longer on the rise at the global level' but it remains 'far above pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels and far off track to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 2' of a world free of hunger.

The UN agencies warned that if the world fails to redouble and better target its efforts, the 'goal of ending hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms by 2030 will remain out of reach'.

New normal

"There are rays of hope, some regions are on track to achieve some 2030 nutrition targets," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a statement. "But overall, we need an intense and

immediate global effort to rescue the Sustainable Development Goals."

Formulated in 2015 by the UN General Assembly, the Sustainable Development Goals include 17 interlinked objectives including ending hunger and poverty.

If the pace of progress does not pick up, nearly 600mn people could still suffer from hunger in 2030, mostly in Africa.

The UN agencies warned that the major drivers of food insecurity and malnutrition - conflicts, economic shocks and natural catastrophes - as well as glaring inequality seem to become the 'new normal'.

AFP

Our Correspondent
Muscat

On the occasion of Bastille Day (July 14), H E Véronique Aulagnon, Ambassador of France to Oman, spoke with *Muscat Daily* on various issues ranging from business, education to football and food. Excerpts:

What is your immediate focus as Ambassador of France to Oman?

My immediate focus is business, though the backbone of our relationship is our political and security cooperation. Business is booming and the Gulf region is a priority for French companies. They are extremely active to win contracts and invest - not only in oil and gas or security and defence, where we have a widely recognised expertise, but also in public infrastructure and transport, water and waste management, logistics, renewables, nuclear energy and green hydrogen, health and food security, hospitality, luxury and services.

In Oman, France has a strong business presence, with at least 40 companies established in the sultanate and many more working in the Omani market from abroad. French companies are leading in some key sectors such as water and waste management and electricity production. They have significant market share in oil and gas, defence and security, and services.

The French Government is also active and successful in attracting investment from the major sovereign funds of the region, not only in real estate and sports, but also in R&D in technologies of mutual interest.

But the backbone of our relationship remains political and security cooperation.

My team and I also actively engage with the Omani Government on political and security matters, as France is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and Oman plays an important role to the peace efforts in Yemen, besides engaging with Iran on its nuclear programme and the release of Western hostages. We also rely on Oman to help our Navy and our aircraft circulate through the Gulf region, as we have a strong presence in the Indo-Pacific region to secure our national interests, cooperate with our partners and contribute to international security.

How many visas were issued to Omanis travelling to France last year? What are the main purposes of these visits?

We issued close to 4,000 visas in Oman in 2022 compared to 7,500 in 2018, 60% of which were for Omani nationals. The main purpose of travel is tourism (65%), as one would expect, France being the No 1 destination in the world with over 90mn foreign visitors every year. The approval rate is 90% and close to 100% for Omani nationals.

France strongly supports the request by the Omani government for a Schengen visa waiver for its nationals. Meanwhile, the EU has introduced a more favourable system for Omani nationals in 2023, whereby first-time applicants are entitled to a two-year multi-entry visa and then longer periods of time. However, I would like to encourage *Muscat Daily* readers to hasten their visa requests, especially for summer holidays. We are only able to accommodate late requests for emergencies and official visits.



(Photo: V K Shafeer)

France-Oman ties boosted by political, security cooperation

The French Omani Friendship Association has been quite active. How do you plan to engage more community members in it?

The French Omani Friendship Association is indeed one of the most active bilateral associations in the country. We owe this success to a very committed board, remarkably chaired by Sulaiman al Harthy, President of Oman Arab Bank, and to an amazing coordinator, Marie El-icagaray, who just returned to France after six years having built a strong legacy.

Our main focus is to support business opportunities between our two countries. The association organises monthly events, each focused on one sector, which are very well attended, including on the part of the Omani government.

We recently had conferences on the fisheries industry, startups and innovation policies, training and leadership programmes, and renewable energy. The association is also very active in supporting women empowerment, a priority that I, of course, strongly support as a female ambassador. In terms of memberships, our main targets are Omani companies who are seeking partnerships with France, Francophone Omanis many raised in East Africa who enjoy attending Francophone cultural events, and alumni of French universities.

France has a strong business presence, with at least 40 companies established in the sultanate and many more working in the Omani market from abroad

H E VÉRONIQUE AULAGNON

Any plans to have another French school in Muscat considering the growing French speaking population?

Not for the time being. The International French School of Muscat still has the capacity to welcome additional students. It does attract more and more families looking for an internationally recognised curriculum, with a strong commitment to the well being of the children and to a multilingual system, including a very strong level of Arabic for native speakers. I would just hope that Omani nationals would get waivers more easily, as international schools should not only serve expatriates, but also build lasting people-to-people relations within the host country.

Having said that, we do encourage and support international, as well as Omani private and public schools, to teach French and consider ac-

ademic opportunities in France. We provide training and networking opportunities to their staff and to their students through the Centre Franco Omanais. Currently, the French language is taught as an elective in four post basic schools in Oman in Grade 11 and 12. We are ready to support the Omani government expand this programme.

What are the new investments in the country and in which sectors?

Over the last year, we have seen new investments and contracts for French companies, and I expect more in the coming months. In oil and gas, Total Energies signed the first LNG export contract and is working on further investments. In the field of renewable energies and green hydrogen, I am delighted with the recent signing of two major new projects - in June 2023, French energy company Engie, which has been present in Oman for 40 years, won a tender with Korean and Thai partners to produce green ammonia in Duqm.

Three months earlier, the major French group EDF Renewables, also in partnership with a Korean company, won a tender to build and operate the Manah 1 solar power plant, and is actively seeking investment opportunities in the country.

In the fisheries sector, a French-Omani consortium was designated a few years ago to build

and operate the new fishery port of Duqm. The project is well on track, already providing basic services.

Our companies are actively exploring new opportunities for infrastructure projects, including roads, train and tramway, as well as mining or hospitality.

The Omani government has taken positive steps to attract more investors and enhance its international financing rating. Further improvements of the business environment, in particular a more business friendly labour law, as well as increased government backed outreach in Europe, would also help.

Where does people-to-people relationship stand between the two countries in the 3Fs - food, football and films?

Building more people-to-people relations between France and Oman is also a key priority for me. Within our toolkit, I believe that academic exchanges and visit programmes have the strongest leverage. There is great potential for improvement there, building on some successful programmes such as the one for medical studies. We currently have around 80 Omanis studying in France each year and a few academic partnerships with French universities.

We just launched our alumni network and will organise a French Academic Day and a promotion campaign in November. We are working on a new joint scholarship programme. Let me also flag the recent call for proposals for an incubation programme targeting female entrepreneurs.

Food, football and films are indeed key elements of the French soft power abroad, which we showcase in Oman with, I believe, some success, especially during the French Weeks in Oman in March. You could also add fashion and many others areas without an 'F' where we also have been active in 2022 and 2023: Perfumes, Architecture, Photography and Music.

In the year to come, we want to reach out more to young people, because they are the future of this country.

Food: Every year, we organise a highly expected French Food Festival, together with hotels and restaurants, to promote French gastronomy and support the hospitality sector. For the next edition, we will also focus on training opportunities in partnership with France.

Football: The last World Cup gave us the opportunity to organise events in Muscat around games where les Bleus represented France in the best way possible: diversity, team spirit, fair play. Now, Paris will host the World Rugby Cup starting in September, and then the Summer Olympics in 2024. Those are unique opportunities to promote sports in Oman and partnerships between our two countries to train young Omani athletes.

Films: Movies are indeed a great way to share different visions of the world. France is a major player in this field. Unfortunately, there are very few French movies screened in Oman. We are working to have more French movies screened at film festivals organised in Oman and to organise workshops for professionals. I would love to see an outdoor French or European film festival open to everyone organised in partnership with the Muscat Municipality. Meanwhile, I invite *Muscat Daily* readers to visit the Franco Omani Centre, which regularly screens French movies, with a special emphasis on children.



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Integrated early childhood development project launched

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) launched a project focusing on integrated early childhood development centres on Wednesday.

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

MoSD will oversee the project in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, Sultan Qaboos University, and Unicef in Oman.

The project's main objective is to provide rehabilitation and early detection services for individuals with disabilities and ensure comprehensive monitoring for children aged three months to six years.

The project aims to deliver childcare services that adhere to international standards while considering national privacy regulations. Its core focus is on fostering socialisation for affected children, monitoring their growth and development stages, and in-



(Supplied photo)

85% of brain development occurs before the age of five, underlining the importance of centres that provide effective tools for children's development

LIBAN HUSSEIN TAHER

creasing public awareness regarding health standards, proper nutrition, and early detection mechanisms for childhood issues.

Maani bint Abdullah bin Hamad al Busaidi, Director General of Family Growth Department at MoSD, emphasised the ethical and national significance of investing in early childhood. She highlighted the project's role in shedding light on educational and health services for individuals with disabilities, as well as re-

viewing Arab and international experiences to shape the future of integrated early childhood development.

According to Liban Hussein Taher, Director of Unicef in Oman, the project will establish a clear development plan for integrated early childhood development centres. "These will cater to various categories of children, offering comprehensive services during their early years. Research indicates that 85% of brain de-

velopment occurs before the age of five, underlining the importance of planning and implementing integrated centres that provide effective tools for children's development and encourage active learning, critical thinking and creativity."

Taher stressed Unicef's commitment to being a key partner in planning and designing the project, aligning it with relevant international experiences and national priorities.



(Supplied photo)

9 pacts worth RO4mn signed for Dhahirah development

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Governorate of Dhahirah has signed multiple agreements to initiate various service and development projects in its wilayats. The total cost of these projects exceeds RO4mn.

The agreements were signed by Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Dhahirah, with companies' representative on Wednesday.

The agreements are for nine projects, including dualisation and improvement of the 4.5km road in the commercial area of the wilayat of Dhank, which will be carried out in multiple phases.

Three agreements were signed to provide consultation

services and final designs for the development of Itlalah tourism projects in Ibri, Yanqul and Dhank. Agreements for maintenance work on internal roads in the wilayats of Ibri, Yanqul and Dhank were also inked.

Consultancy services for designing internal roads in different wilayats also come under the purview of the agreements - a 60km road network for Ibri, and 20km internal roads for Yanqul and Dhank.

These agreements reflect the governorate's commitment to its development programmes and infrastructure enhancement. These are part of the comprehensive plan for projects in Dhahirah in 2023-2024.

Work starts on first RO60mn vaccine factory in Oman

Continued from Page 01

"It will serve as a distinguished hub for pharmaceutical research and development. The facility will also generate employment opportunities for young Omanis across various academic fields while reducing dependence on imports, especially during medical crises and disasters," Junaibi said.

Pharmacist Khaled Kassir, a member of OBP's advisory board, emphasised the significance of the project's first phase, which involves repackaging medicines. "This step will accelerate the completion of the second and final phase, encompassing full-scale pharmaceutical manufacturing by the end of 2024."

The factory will produce vital medicines for cancer treatment, immunity improvement and genetic therapies, besides vaccines.

"Vaccines are in high demand from governments and interna-

tional organisations such as the World Health Organization, particularly during health crises and disasters."

Kassar stressed that the manufacturing process will adhere to international specifications and standards, enabling the company to export its products worldwide.

On the occasion, Salim al Dhahli, CEO of Khazaen Economic City, said that this vital medicines and vaccines factory marks the beginning of pharmaceutical projects in the Khazaen Pharmaceutical City. "This project will serve local and foreign markets and is part of a larger plan that includes four projects within the city."

The pharma city in Khazaen will encompass localised industries for insulin production, vital human vaccines, veterinary medicines and vaccines, and manufacture of medical supplies and dental implants.

Russia eyes Oman for fertiliser production

Continued from Page 01

"We signed an agreement on avoidance of double taxation not long ago, and we are currently working on an agreement on mutual encouragement of investment," H E Sayyid Badr said. "These two agreements are an important basis for developing cooperation aimed at attracting investment into the countries."

Oman is committed to attracting Russian investments and

has been collaborating with the private sector towards this goal, the minister said.

"We hope that the boost we gave to Russian-Omani relations will facilitate the strengthening of investment cooperation," H E Sayyid Badr added.

On June 8, Oman and Russia inked an agreement aimed at preventing double taxation on profit tax and avoiding tax evasion.

Dhofar Municipality sets guidelines for caravans

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dhofar Municipality has introduced guidelines for caravan owners to ensure the preservation of natural sites in the governorate during the khareef season.

The municipality emphasised the importance of adhering to

these guidelines in a statement.

Caravan owners are required to restrict movement to designated areas, obtain necessary permits and maintain cleanliness at all times.

Furthermore, owners must equip their caravans with security and safety equipment and refrain from using loudspeakers or lasers.

They should not erect fences of any kind around the designated sites for caravans, not use mobile toilets unless approved, and not transfer the permit to others.

A weekly fee of RO30 must be paid and compliance with public morals is mandatory. Violators will face a fine of RO100 and repeated violations will result in

cancellation of licence.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), Omanis constituted the majority of visitors during the khareef season in 2022, accounting for 69% of the total number of tourists. There were 562,995 Omani visitors, while the total number was 813,000, up 6% from the pre-

pandemic count of 767,000 in 2019.

NCSI statistics also reveal a 6% increase in the number of visitors arriving by road in 2022 to 647,301 compared to 610,491 in 2019.

These figures highlight the enduring popularity of Dhofar as a destination for tourists during khareef.



Oman, UAE explore areas of cooperation in auditing

Muscat - Sheikh Ghuson Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of State Audit Institution (SAI), received Humaid Obaid Abushibs, President of Supreme Audit Institution of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), on Wednesday.

The visit came within the framework of promoting cooperation and exchanging experiences between Oman and the UAE in areas of auditing, promotion of integrity, and building capacities in order to achieve common interests between the two countries.

Alawi underscored the deep relations between the two countries and highlighted SAI's keenness to cooperate and integrate with its counterpart in

the UAE.

SAI, he added, also aims to enhance joint activities with committees concerned with auditing, accountability and combating corruption in GCC countries, as well as actively participate with the international community.

On his turn, Abushibs appreciated SAI's development in the legislative and regulatory fields. He also highlighted the importance of cooperation and exchange of experiences in strengthening the roles assigned to audit institutions and raising their efficiency to achieve sustainable development.

On the sidelines of the visit, several presentations were made

to highlight the role and tasks of SAI, the laws regulating its work, its work mechanism in implementing its various responsibilities, and its efforts in promoting integrity and combating corruption. The presentations also shed light on SAI's efforts in the field of training.

The visiting delegation also made a presentation that included a brief overview of the UAE Supreme Audit Institution and its objectives, in addition to aspects related to information technology that are used in its training and development system.

H E Mohammed Nakhira al Dhaheeri, UAE's Ambassador to Oman, attended the meeting.

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China Telecom Global, Zain Omantel International tie up for global expansion

Our Correspondent
Muscat

China Telecom Global Limited (CTG) has signed a strategic subsea capacity and connectivity agreement with Zain Omantel International (ZOI) to facilitate global expansion of both parties' market presence in the Middle East and Asia Pacific regions.

While CTG is the world-leading provider of integrated telecommunication services, ZOI is the Middle East's premier global wholesale powerhouse.

Leveraging ZOI and CTG's exceptional expertise and network capabilities, this partnership allows the parties to take their service offerings to new heights, delivering high-capacity, low-latency data connectivity across China, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Jordan, Iraq, Sudan, and South Sudan.

Paving the way for a seamless and reliable communication network, the partnership marks a significant milestone in the telecommunication industry and is poised to bring about a new era of global connectivity and enhanced customer experiences, promoting economic growth, fostering innovation, and bringing people closer together.



Speaking on the agreement, Faming Lu, Vice President at CTG, said, "Aligned with our worldwide strategy to enhance CTG's foothold in the Middle East, we look forward to collaborating with ZOI to reinforce network assistance for clients and enable enterprises to venture into global markets and stay competitive."

"Especially for those aiming to expand into the Asia Pacific region, this partnership presents a valuable opportunity to benefit from rapid and dependable connectivity that effectively fuels

their business growth. Furthermore, it will serve as a digital gateway for Chinese businesses seeking to establish their operations in the Middle East market, unlocking the vast potential for mutual success."

Zain Omantel CEO Sohail Qadir said, "As the gateway from the Middle East to the world, ZOI is proud to be CTG's partner of choice in the Middle East for international capacity and subsea streams."

The company believes that this partnership would strengthen its position as the global

wholesale powerhouse connecting all Middle Eastern countries to an extensive international network. "It also enables us to deliver unrivaled connectivity solutions and wholesale services to businesses across the region," Qadir added.

The strategic partnership between CTG and ZOI marks a significant milestone in the collaboration between the parties. It will revolutionize the way global connectivity is offered and pave the way to offer more innovative and advanced international telecom solutions.

ZOI, the pan-regional network connecting all Middle Eastern countries to a vast international network, is set to be a game-changer in the telecommunications wholesale industry, offering a diverse portfolio of services and solutions to meet the increasing demands of wholesale customers.

It will cater to the end-to-end telecommunications needs of telecom operators, as well as international carriers, data centers, hyperscalers, content, and cloud providers seeking services within the region and beyond.



Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Secretary-General Mathias Cormann (centre) in Paris (AFP)

OECD hints progress on sharing tax revenue from MNCs

Paris, France - Nearly 140 countries have taken a first step towards reaching agreement on a fairer distribution of tax revenues from multinational firms, the OECD said on Wednesday.

Some 138 countries, which account for over 90% of global economic output, agreed on a first draft of multilateral convention on how to tax these companies which have operations throughout the world following two days of talks hosted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in Paris.

Multinationals, especially tech firms, are currently able to easily shift profits to countries with low tax rates even though they carry out only a small part of their activities there. In 2021, in talks led by the OECD agreement was reached on a minimum tax rate of 15% on multinationals and to develop rules on how to tax multinationals so countries don't lose out by profit shifting.

But the talks on arriving at a formula on taxing multinationals

moved forward slowly.

But the OECD said the progress made this week permits moving forward with the 'historic, major reform of the international tax system'.

Countries also pledged to hold off on imposing newly enacted digital services or similar taxes before December 2024 or the entry into force of the new multilateral convention, provided there is sufficient cooperation towards its signature.

According to OECD estimates, the introduction of a minimum tax rate on multinationals should generate an additional US\$220bn in revenues. The rules on taxing multinationals should bring between US\$13bn and US\$36bn.

OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann said the reforms "will provide stability for the international tax system, making it fairer and work better in an increasingly digitalised and globalised world".

AFP

OPAZ chairman leads delegation to Ireland, meets with minister

Dublin, Ireland - Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, the Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic and Free Zones (OPAZ), met with Dara Calleary TD, the Irish Minister of State for Trade Promotion Digital and Company Regulation, during the former's visit to Ireland.

The OPAZ chairman is leading a delegation to Ireland, with officials from the authority, the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, and the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), as part of OPAZ's institutional



transformation plan.

The meeting with Calleary assumes significance as this Irish minister is responsible for regulating economic zones, issu-

ing laws and regulations related to investment, and developing supportive electronic systems.

Since the beginning of this

year, OPAZ started a transformation programme in association with International Development Ireland, benefiting from the Irish expertise in man-

aging and developing economic zones.

'The cooperation aims to enhance the authority's ability to attract strategic industrial proj-

ects and to link supply chains between local and international manufacturers and to empower small and medium size enterprises, and to promote the use of digital platforms and applications,' OPAZ stated.

During the visit, the delegation also met with the CEO of the Irish Investment Promotion Agency 'IDA Ireland', the CEO of Enterprise Ireland and the Chair of the National Competitiveness and Productivity Council in Ireland.

The delegation also visited several economic zones, manu-

facturers and the Centre for Bio-processing and Training, and discussed the methods of harmonization between different industrial zones, enhancing productivity, and increasing integration between them.

It also explored existing programmes to enhance job opportunities and raise worker efficiency, and skills development, and professional competence and discussed possibilities of collaboration in developing industrial clusters in the various zones in Oman.

Tender Board awards projects worth RO68mn



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Tender Board on Wednesday held its 4th meeting of the year and awarded two dozen of projects valued at over RO68mn.

The meeting - held under the chairmanship of H E Dr Said Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy and al the Chairman of the Tender Board - cleared projects and additional tasks related to development to the tune of more

than RO68.8mn, a report stated.

The awarded tasks included 24 projects, most important among them are: the implementation and management of Oman Government Network (RO38,558,520); nutrition services and accompanying tasks for students of Sultan Qaboos University (RO10,385,104); and the replacement of old air-conditioners at schools of the Ministry of Education (RO5,400,337).

EU clears US chipmaker Broadcom's \$61bn planned VMware takeover

Brussels, Belgium - The European Commission approved US chipmaker Broadcom's planned US\$61bn takeover of cloud computing firm VMware on Wednesday after the company offered remedies to ease competition concerns.

The massive deal raised fears that it would stifle competition following its announcement in May 2022, prompting probes by antitrust watchdogs in the European Union and Britain.

The European Commission said its in-depth investigation found that the transaction, as originally proposed, "would harm competition in the worldwide market for the supply" of Fibre Channel Host-Bus Adapters (FC HBAs).

Part of the worries was that rivals would not be able to build components compatible with those made by VMware.

As a remedy, Broadcom offered interoperability commitments to ensure that VMware software would work with that



made by rival Marvell and other potential competitors, the EU's executive arm said.

The company also guaranteed access to the source code for all of its current and future FC HBA drivers through an irrevocable open source licence.

The commission concluded that "the proposed acquisition, as modified by the commit-

ments, would no longer raise competition concerns".

'Enhance competition'

Britain's Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) decided in March to deepen its probe into the mega-merger.

Broadcom is seeking to expand into the software market

to boost its server business and has already acquired two complementary firms, CA Technology and Symantec.

VMware, a leader in cloud computing and virtualisation technology, was spun out of Dell Technologies in 2021.

Broadcom said that while it believes the deal 'will only increase competition and inno-

vation in cloud computing', it provided a remedy 'that preserves interoperability, a core principle that would not have changed as a result of this transaction'.

The California-based company said in a statement that it expects the transaction to close in its 2023 fiscal year.

'Broadcom looks forward to continuing to work constructively with regulators around the world,' it said.

The company said it has received merger clearance in Australia, Brazil, Canada, South Africa and Taiwan.

'Broadcom is confident that when regulators conclude their review, they too will see that the combination of Broadcom and VMware will enhance competition in the cloud,' it said.

It will also 'benefit enterprise customers by giving them more choice and control over where they locate their workloads'.

AFP

Iraq to pay for Iranian gas imports with oil: PM

Baghdad, Iraq - Iraq will start paying for its Iranian gas imports with oil, to circumvent the complicated mechanism agreed with Washington in order not to contravene US sanctions, the Prime Minister said on Tuesday.

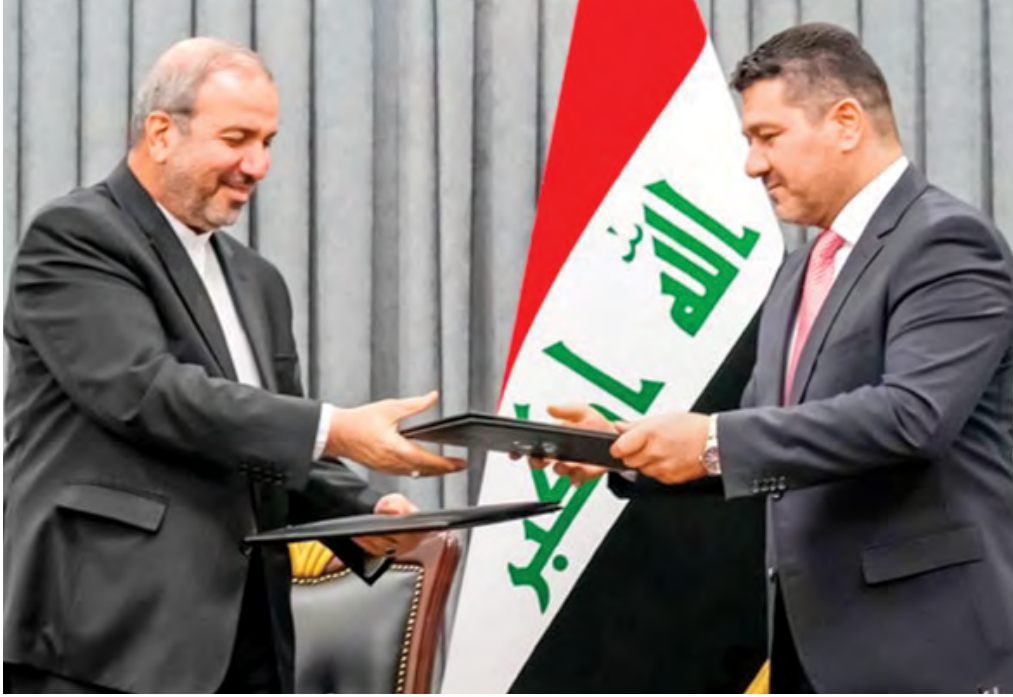
Iranian gas is crucial for Iraq's electricity generation, but US sanctions on Iranian oil and gas impose restrictions on how Baghdad can pay for the imports. Iraq cannot directly hand over cash to Iran, but payments must be held in a bank account and be used by Tehran to fund imports of food and medicines.

The payment system has left Iraq in heavy arrears and prompted Iran to respond by periodically switching off the taps.

Ravaged by decades of conflict and international sanctions, oil-rich Iraq relies on Iranian gas imports for a third of its energy needs. It is also beset by rampant corruption, and suffers from dilapidated infrastructure.

Ten days ago Iran halved its supply of gas to Iraq because of unpaid bills of more than US\$12bn, deposited in an Iraqi bank account but which Tehran cannot use, Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani said in a televised address.

His office said in a statement that Baghdad and Tehran had signed an agreement on Tuesday



after several days of talks for "the import of Iranian gas to fuel Iraqi power plants, in exchange for Iraqi crude oil".

"The agreement aims to address the gas supply crisis for power plants, while tackling payment issues and complications arising from US sanctions," the statement said.

Recent gas supply stoppages have only worsened the frequent power outages much of Iraq sees during the hot summer months, when temperatures regularly reach 50°C.

In his televised address, Sudani said, "As the American side did not give the necessary permission for the transfer of funds... the supply of Iranian gas was stopped.

"Because of the transfer mechanism and its complexity, we were unable to obtain authorisation to transfer these outstanding payments so our Iranian neighbour could continue to supply us" with gas, he said.

Sudani called the payment mechanism "complex due to the severity of the sanctions and the

complicated procedures of the US Treasury", but added that a recent payment to Iran of around US\$1.9bn had been made.

Tuesday's agreement with Iran meant "we will be able to guarantee that the gas will continue to flow", Sudani said.

To reduce its dependence on Iranian gas, Baghdad has been exploring several possibilities including imports from Gulf countries such as Qatar, as well as recovering flared gas from oil-fields.

AFP



Saudi extends \$20mn soft loan for electricity project in Rwanda

Kigali, Rwanda - Saudi Arabia has decided to extend US\$20mn soft loan to Rwanda for the improvement of the power sector in the central African country.

Sultan bin Abdulrahman al Marshad, the CEO of the Saudi Fund for Development (SFD), signed the agreement on Tuesday with Ndagijimana Uzziel, the Minister of Finance and Economic Planning of Rwanda, a report said.

The SFD-funded project aims to build an power supply network of medium- and low-voltage lines and power distribution transformers to connect to homes and governmental and social services in Rwanda's Kamonia region.

The project is part of the com-

prehensive programme to provide and upgrade the quality of electric services at the lowest costs in the republic's underprivileged areas, benefiting more than 60,000 people.

The project also seeks to enhance economic, industrial, and agricultural growth by providing direct and indirect job opportunities and enhancing the living standards and development in the Republic of Rwanda.

During the signing ceremony, Marshad underscored the project's contributions to improving the electric power infrastructure and enhancing sustainable social and economic development in the country. He also commended the 47-year SFD-Rwanda relationship.

Uzziel explained that the project will contribute to enhancing the percentage of electricity coverage in the Kamunia region, which currently stands at 58.9%, and will increase access to electricity by 6.8%, consequently enhancing economic and social development. He said the project falls within the government's efforts to reach 100% electricity coverage by 2024.

Marshad also visited the 200-bed King Faisal Hospital in Kigali, which was funded by the SFD in 1986 and started operating in 1993. Saudi Arabia pays special attention to supporting development in Rwanda, and since 1976 it has extended 11 developmental loans to the country at a total value of US\$121mn.



Saudi Arabia participates in ITU Council 2023

Geneva, Switzerland - The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is participating in the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Council 2023 currently being held in Geneva.

The event is being attended by a delegation headed by the Governor of the Communications, Space and Technology Commission Dr Mohammed al Tamimi, and in the presence of the Permanent Representative

A Saudi delegation under Dr Mohammed al Tamimi is attending the event in Geneva

of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations in Geneva Abdulmohsen Majed bin Khothaila.

The ITU Council 2023 session is the first for the member states elected at the Plenipotentiary Conference at the end of 2022. This session is scheduled to run until July 21.

The international community commends the great role that the kingdom plays in the union as a member, which has been re-nominated in all electoral cycles since 1965.

SPA

Britain's top lenders can withstand major shock: BoE

London, UK - Britain's top lenders have passed stress tests to show they can withstand a major economic shock, even as rising interest rates pressure the financial system, the Bank of England said on Wednesday.

The British central bank revealed the outcome of its annual assessment alongside its report on financial stability.

"We recently tested the major UK banks using a severe stress scenario that is much worse than the economic outlook we expect," the BoE said in a statement.

"The results of this stress test showed that the UK banking system would continue to be resilient, and be able to support households and businesses, even if economic conditions turned out to be much worse than we expect."

Doomsday scenario

The doomsday scenario included UK inflation striking 17%, the unemployment rate hitting 8.5%, house prices collapsing by almost a third and the world plunging into a deep recession.



The eight biggest UK banks - Barclays, HSBC, Lloyds, Nationwide, NatWest, Santander UK, Standard Chartered and Virgin Money - would survive such an economic storm without triggering another global financial crisis, according to the assessment.

The BoE has ramped up interest rates 13 times in a row to the current level of 5% in an attempt to dampen stubbornly-high inflation. The move has sparked mortgage turmoil as commercial lenders lift their own rates on home loans, worsening a cost-of-living crisis.

Households are likely to face further difficulty this year as the debt burden increases.

'Consequences'

BoE Governor Andrew Bailey, speaking at a press conference, warned that there 'will be consequences' of higher interest rates on borrowers.

Almost one million households will see their monthly mortgage payments rise by at least £500 (US\$646 approx) per month by 2026, according to the bank's report.

'Higher interest payments on

loans mean some borrowers may struggle with their repayments, which increases the risks faced by banks,' it noted.

'But UK banks are resilient and are strong enough to support their customers.'

Despite aggressive rate hikes since late 2021, UK inflation stands close to 9% - which is far above the BoE's official two-percent target.

The central bank added that 'significantly' higher interest rates and recent markets volatility had 'created stress in the financial system'.

High-profile failures of three mid-sized US banks, as well as global titan Credit Suisse, had 'caused a material rise' in risk and volatility - but with 'limited' UK fallout.

'Nonetheless, elements of the global banking system and financial markets remain vulnerable to stress from increased interest rates, and remain subject to significant uncertainty, reflecting risks to the outlook for growth and inflation, and from geopolitical tensions,' the BoE added.

AFP

World stock markets advance as US inflation data looms

London, UK - World stock markets mostly rose Wednesday as investors jockeyed for position before key US inflation data.

London equities climbed after the Bank of England announced that all major UK retail lenders passed stress tests to assess their resilience to economic shocks.

Frankfurt and Paris also advanced before the week's main event, the US consumer price index, which forecasts suggest will show a further softening.

That will be followed by US producer prices on Thursday, paving the way for the Federal Reserve's next policy meeting in

two weeks.

"US inflation figures are at the top of the agenda for investors," said Danni Hewson, head of financial analysis at stockbroker AJ Bell.

"Equity and bond markets are heavily tuned into inflation data as it is crucial to central bank decisions on interest rates."

Fed policymakers are expected to hike rates this month but there is hope that the slowdown in inflation and figures pointing to a softening in the economy could mean that is the last.

The dollar has weakened against its peers in recent weeks



on bets the Fed is nearing its endgame, with sterling among the best performers as sticky UK inflation means the Bank of England has to keep lifting.

The pound held above US\$1.29 on Wednesday, one day after breaching the barrier for the first time in 15 months.

The euro was trading at its highest dollar level since the start of May.

Asian equities have meanwhile enjoyed a broadly positive week so far after China signalled a long-running crackdown on the tech sector was nearing an end while officials also pledged help for ailing real estate devel-

opers.

That was followed by reports that further growth-boosting measures and data showing new loans in China had picked up in June thanks to a central bank interest rate cut.

Optimism is now building for more announcements aimed at kickstarting the world's number two economy as its post-COVID recovery sputters.

Hong Kong was again the stand-out performer thanks to gains in tech stocks, while Sydney, Singapore, Seoul, Taipei, Manila, Bangkok and Jakarta were also up.

AFP

Enterprise car rental includes Haval SUVs

Great Wall Motor's flagship SUV brand Haval, which forayed into the Oman market early this year, found a new fleet partner, globally most popular car rental company, Enterprise Rent A Car, which bolstered its fleet with a bulk deal, by adding Haval's largest selling models, the H6 and H9 series.

The deal represented another high point in Haval's rapid growth since its debut in Oman. An icon of China's automotive industry and the third largest selling SUV globally, Haval has been driving GWM's growth trajectory with its differentiated product line that caters to different market segments.

GWM has partnered with Oman's automotive conglomerate the OTE Group to introduce their globally acclaimed SUVs along with the pick-up range through their exclusive showroom in Wattyah, Muscat and the soon to be opened outlets in Sohar, Salalah and Ibra.



With over five million units sold worldwide, Haval has gained unmatched popularity as

a top SUV brand globally, earning it the coveted accolade as a 'Global SUV specialist'.

Powering the brand's impressive success is a combination of stylish design elements, cutting-

edge technology, superior components, and uncompromising safety features. In addition to its

cost-competitive market positioning, the brand delivers value and satisfaction throughout the customer's lifecycle.

Reflecting its superior status among GWM's varied portfolio, Haval displayed its latest models notably, the stylish Jolion best known for its bold architecture and modern engineering; the Haval H6 - medium size SUV inspired by Asian and European design features combined with its superior technology and outstanding safety features; the Haval H9 with its muscular design, superior off-roading capabilities and luxury features; and the Dargo - a mid-size SUV for those with a large appetite for adventure.

Adding to the top-notch value that comes with Haval vehicle ownership is the robust after-sales infrastructure which spreads across all the regions of Oman. The state-of-the-art Parts Distribution Center (PDC) at JAFZA, Dubai, augments the ef-

forts of the local distributor to ensure quick and responsive after-sales support to the customers.

Customer centricity is one of the primary objectives of Enterprise Rent A Car, therefore, this value proposition associated with Haval's build quality and futuristic design, was the primary reason for the car rental to choose the Haval range for its fleet expansion. This was affirmed by the company when it stated thus: "At Enterprise, our main focus is around customer satisfaction and offering the best value to all our customers. We have been very impressed with the overall build quality and design of the Haval vehicles which has led us to include these vehicles in our current fleet."

As an exclusive dealer of GWM in Oman, OTE Group offers excellent sales and after-sales service support, underpinned by a nationwide service network.

Bank Muscat opens new Asalah Centre in Izki

In line with its commitment to provide financial facilities and services to enhance its customers' experience, Bank Muscat, Oman's leading financial service provider, celebrated the opening of its latest Asalah Centre in its branch in the wilayat of Izki, Dhakhliyah governorate under the patronage of Sheikh Younis bin Ali al Manthari, a Shoura member, and in presence of members of the bank's executive management and customers.

The new centre will be a special addition to the existing 41 Asalah Centres across Oman. It is featured with new design and modern technology to provide better services to customers with the help of experienced Omani cadres, who are ready to enhance their banking experience. Bank Muscat avails of its deep understanding of customer needs in its strategy of constant innovation for the best customer experience.

"We are keen in the bank to prioritise the needs of our customers and offer them the best services which they can access easily. We are proud today to



add this centre in Izki to the existing Asalah Centers across Oman and we hope that it would be an added value to our customers," said Abdulnasir N al Raisi, General Manager - Personal Banking, Bank Muscat.

"The bank will continue its plan to enhance the role of these centers. We extend our sincere appreciation to Bank Muscat's customers for their continuous trust in its services and facilities."

Asalah Visa Signature credit cardholders can enjoy airport lounge access at more than 1,000 lounges worldwide, up to 12 times a year, and a 24/7 global concierge service. Also available are exciting airport experience and dining offers across the world courtesy the free DragonPass.

Asalah customers also enjoy access to a team of dedicated relationship managers and 41 Asalah Centres across Oman.

Delta Coatings to strengthen in Oman

Leading Dubai-based waterproofing specialist and protective coatings system house, Delta Coatings International, has announced its ambitious three-year strategic growth plan for the Middle East.

The expansion will include opening a new facility in Saudi Arabia and strengthening representation in Oman and Egypt in addition to launching an innovative, new range of self-applied products together with a major scaling up of its turnkey project delivery services covering waterproofing and asset protection solutions for mega and giga-projects.

For over a decade, Delta Coatings has provided world-class polyurea, polyurethane and polyspartic-based solutions to clients across the MENA region. The organisation specialises in delivering superior waterproofing and protective coating solutions for lagoons and water parks, residential and commercial projects, and large-scale desalination, water reservoir and wastewater treatment plants.

Delta also manufactures and supplies customised solutions for corrosion, abrasion, and im-



Belvin Marx

pact protection.

Growing from a midstream coatings system house to a full-service operator servicing both midstream and downstream market sectors, Delta Coatings' multifaceted growth strategy focuses on strengthening its current offering by expanding its turnkey waterproofing project delivery services into Oman, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, while leveraging its revolutionary single supplier advantage as both manufacturer and applicator.

Delta has developed an innovative roll-on, polyurea-based waterproofing membrane specifically to meet demand in the growing ready-to-use, SME ap-

plicator market segment where the product will have the same advantages as a hot spray polyurea coating without the need for a significant investment in expensive, plural component spray equipment.

This new product, DELTAShield PROSeal, is a hand-applied, cold-cured UV-stable polyurea waterproofing membrane with very rapid cure times and excellent elongation - without the need for reinforcing mesh or other secondary strengthening products - providing the benefit of decreased application times.

The resulting reduced labour costs and significantly diminished risk of potential damage from inclement weather further streamlines project management processes for follow-on trades.

Belvin Marx, Delta Coatings' general manager, commented, "Responding to an increased number of tender enquiries mostly from Oman and Saudi Arabia, we are excited to extend our revolutionary turnkey waterproofing project delivery services into the Kingdom and beyond to meet this growing demand."

"We offer the unique benefits of our single supplier advantage

and turnkey model, where Delta Coatings completes all stages of major waterproofing projects. This means Delta Coatings is responsible for the supply, planning, management, and execution phases of all coating and lining projects without the involvement of third-party vendors or applicators.

"This single point-of-contact concept streamlines project delivery, reducing risks for asset owners while providing a more cost-effective option. Major benefits include one single comprehensive warranty covering the entire 'supply and apply' execution works. This single supplier model protects asset owners by eliminating the ever-present risk that neither applicator nor manufacturer will take full responsibility for any remedial work should this be required during the warranty period."

Large-scale Delta Coatings' projects successfully carried out in this manner include Jebel Ali Sewage Treatment Plant, Meydan Crystal Lagoons, Tilal Al Ghaf Crystal Lagoons, Mohammed Bin Rashid City phases I, II and III, and Emaar Beachfront District Cooling Plant.

Isuzu truck owners toast iconic brand's continuing success

Trucking operators and retail distributors, united by their long-standing affinity with Isuzu trucks, attended a celebratory get-together hosted by OTE Group, exclusive distributors of the globally iconic truck brand in the Sultanate of Oman.

Gathering on the lawns of Crowne Plaza Muscat Hotel recently, the guests toasted their ongoing association with an automotive brand that remains a cornerstone of their operational success and business growth.

As owners and operators of goods transportation and retail distribution companies, they have come to rely on their Isuzu trucks, universally acclaimed for their dependability, versatility and fuel efficiency, to meet demanding delivery and distribution schedules on behalf of their clients

The outdoor venue, adorned with the striking brand colours of the Isuzu label, made for a perfect setting as the roughly 100-plus patrons shared their personal experiences about the distinctive value that ownership of Isuzu trucks brings to their respective businesses. They also engaged with members of OTE Group's executive team who



were in attendance as well.

Earlier, the formal part of the event began with brief welcome remarks by Satyen Salkar, Assistant GM, and Nasser al Saidi, Assistant GM.

They were followed by Girish Bhide, General Manager - Isuzu, who underscored in his address the fruitful and rewarding relationship upon which the Isuzu brand continues to thrive in Oman.

Further details about Isuzu's evolution as the commercial trucking solution of choice in Oman and the brand's current product-line were shared by Sreejith Sreekumar, Manager -

Sales.

'Unquestionably, the world's Number One commercial truck brand, Isuzu trucks continue to dominate Oman's consumer goods distribution space,' the company stated. Preferred by the majority of cargo distribution companies, Isuzu trucks are known for providing efficient, dependable and cost-competitive transport solutions, it added.

Available in a range of models and sizes, the Isuzu line-up comes with various engines, transmissions and wheelbases to suit all kinds of applications. Isuzu's N Series trucks in particular come with an impressive

combination of clean yet powerful and fuel efficient engines, outstanding safety features and intelligent design all delivered in an inspired package.

With an unequalled number of variants available including crew cabs, tippers and 4x4s, the N-Series represents the smart choice in light trucks.

Another key hallmark of the Isuzu brand's overall durability is its outstanding axle capacity with high tensile steel frame.

Additionally, the highly rigid cab with reinforced cabin doors and ELR-3-point system seatbelts enhance driver safety. Anti-lock brake systems (ABS)

account for active safety, while multi-reflector halogen headlamps enhance the motoring experience for drivers.

Showcased at the venue of the Isuzu Truck Customer Meet was the chassis of Isuzu's NPR 81H, a relatively new bestselling model that bristles with features and capabilities emblematic of the brand's enduring appeal.

The NPR 81H, with a gross vehicle weight (GVW) of 6.5 tonnes, comes with a powerful turbocharged 4778cc engine capable of delivering 130 hp power and 38 kgm of torque.

OTE Group is the official distributor of Isuzu Trucks in Oman.

BRING YOUR KIDS TO WORK



Children learn about AI, banking in OAB initiative

Over 200 children of Oman Arab Bank (OAB) staff from across the sultanate enjoyed a unique opportunity to join their parents at work during their summer break.

Giving them a glimpse into the world of banking and beyond, the Bring Your Kids to Work initiative is a diverse programme of workshops and experiences tailored to different age groups and interests, such as arts, photography, technology and banking.

Leen al Atassi, Head of Corporate Communications at Oman Arab Bank, said, "At OAB, we are dedicated to nurturing a supportive and engaging work environment. This extends to the personal growth and development of our employees' children.

"With Bring Your Kids to Work, we wanted to give the participating children enriching opportunities for skill-building and exposure to new experiences, as well as helping to foster a sense of community throughout the bank."

She added, "The thoughtfully designed programme captivated children and helped them gain a better understanding of banking and their parent's workplace, enabling them to connect what they are learning in school to the work environment."

For an entire week, OAB hosted a series of workshops packed with interactive sessions, hands-on activities and competitions for those children.

Leaders of Iran and Kenya pledge to strengthen relations

Nairobi, Kenya - The leaders of Iran and Kenya pledged to strengthen ties as their governments signed a raft of trade agreements on Wednesday during Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's maiden visit to the East African nation.

The visit comes as the Islamic republic tries to shore up diplomatic support to ease its international isolation, with Raisi also due to travel to Uganda and Zimbabwe this week on the first Africa tour by an Iranian leader in 11 years.

In addition to meeting Kenyan President William Ruto, Raisi will head to Uganda later on Wednesday for talks with his Ugandan counterpart Yoweri Museveni and see Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa on Thursday.

Africa has emerged as a diplomatic battleground in recent months, with Russia and the West also trying to court support over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, which has had a devastating economic impact on the continent, sending food prices soaring.

Western powers have also sought to deepen trade ties with the continent, along with India and China, which has been on an infrastructure spending spree in Africa.

Raisi described his visit to Kenya as 'a turning point in the development of relations between (the) two countries'.

He said his talks with Ruto



Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi shakes hands with Kenyan President William Ruto after a press conference Nairobi on Wednesday (AFP)

reflected 'the determination and resolve of both countries for expansion of economic and trade cooperation, political cooperation, cultural cooperation'.

Ruto described Iran as 'a critical strategic partner for Kenya' and said the two governments

had signed five MoUs (memoranda of understanding) focusing on areas including information technology, investment promotion and fisheries.

"These memoranda will enhance and further deepen our bilateral relations for sustainable growth and development between our two countries."

Ruto told reporters that Raisi had also shared plans for Iran to set up a plant in the port city of Mombasa 'to manufacture an indigenous Iranian vehicle that has now been given the Kiswahili name, 'Kifarur', meaning rhino'.

'Common political views'

According to Iran's official IRNA

news agency, Raisi is heading a delegation that includes the foreign minister as well as senior businesspeople.

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani earlier expressed optimism that the three-day trip could help bolster economic and trade ties with African nations. He also said on Monday that Tehran and the African continent share 'common political views', without elaborating further.

Iran has stepped up its diplomacy in recent months to reduce its isolation and offset the impact of crippling sanctions reimposed since the 2018 withdrawal of the United States from a painstakingly negotiated nuclear deal.

On Saturday, Raisi welcomed Algerian Foreign Minister Ahmed Attaf in a bid to boost ties with Algiers.

Last week, Iran became a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which includes Russia, China and India.

In March, Tehran agreed to restore ties with regional rival Saudi Arabia under a China-mediated deal. It has since been looking to re-establish relations with other countries in the region including Egypt and Morocco. In June, the Iranian president undertook a Latin American tour that included Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba before a trip to Indonesia.

AFP

Abbas vows to rebuild Jenin camp after deadly Israeli raid

Jenin, Palestinian Territories - Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas vowed on Wednesday to rebuild the Jenin refugee camp during a rare visit that came a week after a deadly Israeli raid left much of it destroyed.

Abbas described the camp as an 'icon of struggle' during his first visit in over a decade to the camp in the northern West Bank city.

Twelve Palestinians and one Israeli soldier were killed last week in the two-day raid on Jenin, the largest in years by Israeli forces.

The raid on the camp employed hundreds of troops as well as drone strikes and army bulldozers that tore up streets and damaged scores of houses.

Several top officials of Abbas's Fatah party, including deputy chairman Mahmoud Aloul, had visited the camp soon after the raid, only to be heckled by crowds of angry residents.

On Wednesday, Abbas expressed determination to back Jenin's reconstruction and security. He described the camp as an 'icon of steadfastness and struggle', in a short address as crowds of supporters cheered.

"We have come to say that we are one authority, one state, one law," he said, warning against anyone who 'tamper with the unity and security of our



Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas recites a prayer as he lays a wreath of flowers by the graves of Palestinians killed in Israeli military raids on the Jenin camp for Palestinian refugees in the occupied West Bank on Wednesday (AFP)

Twelve Palestinians and one Israeli soldier were killed last week in the two-day raid

people'.

He further vowed to oversee the reconstruction of the camp and the city to restore it 'to what it was or even better'.

As he concluded his visit,

Abbas laid a wreath on the graves of Palestinians who lost their lives in recent Israeli raids.

A number of Arab countries have announced aid for the camp after last week's offensive.

Ahead of Abbas's arrival, hundreds of soldiers from the presidential guard were seen patrolling the streets of the camp, an AFP journalist said, adding that snipers had also taken positions on rooftops.

His visit 'is a strong and important message... that he stands

with the Palestinian people in their resistance to the occupation', Atta Abu Rumaila, Fatah's secretary-general in the camp, told AFP.

But Abdullah, a resident of the camp who gave only his first name, appeared to cast doubt over the purpose of the visit.

"What is more important is what happens after he leaves, and whether they (the Palestinian Authority) continue caring about the camp," he told AFP.

Prior to his arrival, a group of

children were chanting 'Katiba, Katiba, Katiba' at the camp in support of local armed group the Jenin Brigade.

The Jenin camp was established in 1953 to house some of those among the 760,000 Palestinians who fled or were expelled from their homes in 1948 when Israel was created, an event Palestinians call the 'Nakba' or 'catastrophe'.

Over time, the camp's original tents have been replaced by concrete, and it now resembles something closer to a neighbourhood. The camp, which houses some 18,000 people, was also a hotbed of activity during the second 'intifada' or uprising of the early 2000s.

Over the past 18 months, the security situation in the camp has deteriorated, with the Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority having little real presence there. Abbas, 87, last visited Jenin in 2012 but had not toured the camp at the time.

While the PA remains somewhat present in the city, it has largely abandoned the camp to groups such as the Jenin Brigade, which Israel alleges is backed by Iran. Abbas had previously visited the camp itself in 2004 while running for the Palestinian presidential election after the death of leader Yasser Arafat.

AFP



German farmers supporting the EU's Green Deal proposed bill demonstrate in front of the European Parliament, in Strasbourg, France, on Tuesday (AFP)

EU parliament backs biodiversity bill in close vote

Strasbourg, France - The European Parliament on Wednesday narrowly backed a key biodiversity bill aimed at rewilding EU land and water habitats, overcoming a backlash by conservative lawmakers who said it would hurt farmers.

The text endorsing the Nature Restoration Law passed with 336 votes in favour, 300 against and 13 abstentions, setting the scene for the parliament to negotiate a final law on the issue with EU member state governments.

The parliament's biggest political grouping, the conservative European People's Party (EPP), had sought to shoot down the text, arguing that it would reduce EU food security and limit possibilities to build wind and hydro-electric energy facilities.

But it was outnumbered by other lawmakers who feared de-

feat of the text would send a signal that Europe was backing away from its green goals.

The conservative opposition to it, supported by extreme-right lawmakers, meant parts of the text were amended in ways that leftwing lawmakers said watered it down.

Much of the political fight around the text stemmed from electoral manoeuvres as parties positioned themselves ahead of EU elections to take place in June 2024.

The Nature Restoration Act, initiated by the European Commission, aims to resuscitate degraded ecosystems by boosting forested areas, marine habitats and increasing connectivity between rivers. It notably seeks to grow populations of bees, birds and butterflies.

AFP

UN Human Rights Council condemns Quran burnings

Geneva, Switzerland - The UN Human Rights Council voted on Wednesday to condemn recent Quran burning incidents, but many countries declined to back the measure, fearing it encroached too much on free speech.

Despite overwhelming condemnation of the Muslim holy book being desecrated, the vote brought more division than unity as Western nations said that more negotiation could have resulted in a unanimous consensus.

Pakistan and other Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries brought forward a resolution after an Iraqi refugee burnt pages from the Quran outside Stockholm's main mosque last month, triggering a diplomatic backlash across the Muslim world.

The United Nations' top rights body backed the resolution by 28 votes in favour, with 12 against and seven abstentions.

Despite the vote passing to applause, there was little cheer in the chamber in Geneva.

US ambassador Michele Taylor said that with more time and open discussion, a consensus could have been reached.

"Unfortunately our concerns were not taken seriously," she said.

"I'm truly heartbroken that this council was unable to speak with a unanimous voice today in condemning what we all agree are deplorable acts of anti-Muslim hatred while also respecting freedom of expression."

There was scant sense of triumph in Pakistan ambassador Khalil Hashmi's speech after the vote.

Speaking for the OIC, Hashmi said the resolution did not seek to curtail free speech, but was instead aimed at striking a prudent balance.

AFP

Webb's 1st year celebrated with image of stellar birth

Washington, US - Jets of red gas bursting into the cosmos, and a glowing cave of dust: NASA unveiled a spectacular new image on Wednesday depicting the birth of stars to mark the first anniversary of the James Webb Space Telescope's science operations.

The picture is of the Rho Ophiuchi cloud complex, the nearest star-forming region to Earth, whose proximity at 390 light years allows for a crisp closeup uncluttered by foreground stars.

"In just one year, the James Webb Space Telescope has transformed humanity's view of the cosmos, peering into dust clouds and seeing light from far-away corners of the universe for the very first time," said NASA Administrator Bill Nelson.

"Every new image is a new discovery, empowering scientists around the globe to ask and answer questions they once could never dream of."

Webb's image shows around 50 young stars, of similar mass to our Sun or smaller.

Some have the signature



This NASA handout image shows a small star-forming region in the Rho Ophiuchi cloud complex, the closest star-forming region to Earth (AFP)

shadows of circumstellar disks - a sign that planets may eventually form around them.

Huge jets of hydrogen appear horizontally in the upper third, and vertically on the right.

"These occur when a star first bursts through its natal envelope of cosmic dust, shooting out a pair of opposing jets into space

"Webb's image of Rho Ophiuchi allows us to witness a very brief period in the stellar lifecycle with new clarity. Our own Sun experienced a phase like this, long ago, and now we have the technology to see the beginning of another star's story," said Webb project scientist Klaus Pontoppidan.

New era of astronomy

Webb, the most powerful observatory in orbit, was launched in December 2021 from French Guiana, on a million mile (1.6mn kilometre) voyage to a region called the second Lagrange point.

Its first full colour picture was revealed by President Joe Biden on July 11, 2022: the clearest view yet of the early universe, going back 13bn years.

The next wave included 'mountains' and 'valleys' of a star-forming region, dubbed the Cosmic Cliffs, in a region of space called the Carina Nebula; and a grouping of five galaxies bound in a celestial dance, called Stephan's Quintet.

Webb boasts a primary mirror

measuring more than 21 feet (6.5 metres) that is made up of 18 hexagonal, gold-coated segments, as well as a five-layer sunshield the size of a tennis court.

Unlike its predecessor Hubble, it operates primarily in the infrared spectrum, allowing it to look back nearer towards the start of time, and to better penetrate dust clouds where stars and planetary systems are being formed today.

Key discoveries include some of the earliest galaxies formed a few hundred million years after the Big Bang, finding carbon dioxide in the atmosphere of a planet outside our solar system, and, in our own neck of the woods, stunning new views of the planet Jupiter.

Webb has enough fuel for a 20-year mission, promising a new era of astronomy.

It will soon be joined in orbit by Europe's Euclid space telescope, which launched on July 1 on a mission to shed light on two of the universe's greatest mysteries: dark energy and dark matter.

AFP

Czech novelist Milan Kundera dies at 94

Kundera passed away on Tuesday, according to Milan Kundera Library in his native city of Brno

Paris, France - Milan Kundera, the author of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* whose dark, provocative novels delved into the enigma of the human condition, has died, a spokeswoman for the Milan Kundera Library in his native city of Brno said on Wednesday. He was 94.

“Unfortunately I can confirm that Mr Milan Kundera passed away yesterday (Tuesday) after a prolonged illness,” she told AFP.

Through his characteristic satire and poetic prose Kundera had sought to express all that is compelling and absurd about life, drawing on his own experiences of being stripped of his Czech nationality for dissent.

Life, he said in his work of criticism *Art of the Novel* (1986), ‘is a trap we’ve always known: we are born without having asked to be, locked in a body we never chose, and destined to die’.

Young rebel

Kundera was born on April 1, 1929, in the town of Brno, in what was then Czechoslovakia. His father was a famous pianist.

He studied in Prague, where he joined the Communist Party, translated the French poet Apollinaire and wrote poetry of his own.

He also taught at a film school where his students in-



This file photo shows Czech writer Milan Kundera posing with his wife in Prague on October 14, 1973 (AFP)

cluded the future Oscar-winning director Milos Forman.

Although he professed faithfulness to communism, the independent spirit of Kundera’s writing soon got him into trouble. He was expelled from the party in 1950, re-joined in 1956 and was expelled a second time

in 1970 after the Prague Spring reform movement - in which he was seen as playing a role - was crushed.

Locked out

Kundera’s first novel *The Joke*, a work of dark humour about the one-party state published in

1967, led to a ban on his writing in Czechoslovakia while also making him famous in his homeland.

In 1975, he and his wife Vera went into exile in France, where he worked for four years as an assistant professor at the University of Rennes. They were

stripped of their Czech nationality in 1979.

In his adopted home, where he became a citizen in 1981, his reputation and success grew as translations of his novels appeared, such as *Life is Elsewhere* (1973) set in Czechoslovakia about a poet entrapped by the

Through his characteristic satire and poetic prose Kundera had sought to express all that is compelling and absurd about life, drawing on his own experiences of being stripped of his Czech nationality for dissent

Communist regime.

The Book of Laughter and Forgetting (1979) playfully explored through seven interlinked narratives the nature of forgetting in politics, history and daily life.

The novel was ‘brilliant and original’, said the *New York Times* in 1980, ‘written with a purity and wit that invite us directly in; it is also strange, with a strangeness that locks us out’.

Kundera was an author ‘fascinated by sex, and prone to sudden, if graceful, skips into autobiography, abstract rumination, and recent Czech history’, said the *Times* reviewer, John Updike.

By far his most famous work,

The Unbearable Lightness of Being was published in 1984 and turned into a film starring Juliette Binoche and Daniel Day-Lewis in 1987.

The novel is a morality tale about freedom and passion, on both an individual and collective level, set against the Prague Spring and its aftermath in exile.

No going back?

Kundera’s critics say he turned his back on fellow Czechs and dissidents following his exile in France.

In 2008, a Czech magazine accused him of being a police informer under Communist rule, which he denied as ‘pure lies’. In 2013, Kundera published his first novel after a 13-year hiatus.

The Festival of Insignificance, about five friends in Paris, received mixed reviews, with *The Atlantic* noting its ‘near-impenetrable irony’ and *The Guardian* deeming it a ‘stinker’.

What Kundera ‘has to tell us seems to have less relevance’, said the *New York Times*. “You can’t help wondering what his evolution would have been like if he had stayed, or stayed longer, in Czechoslovakia.”

In 2019, the Czech Republic restored his nationality and in 2023 the Milan Kundera Library opened in his hometown of Brno.

AFP



People watch a television screen showing a news broadcast with footage of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul on Wednesday (AFP)

North Korea fires a long-range ballistic missile

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea has fired a long-range ballistic missile, the South Korean military said on Wednesday, days after Pyongyang threatened to down US spy planes that violated its airspace.

Relations between the two Koreas are at one of their lowest points ever, with diplomacy stalled and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un calling for increased weapons development, including tactical nukes.

In response, Seoul and Washington have ramped up security cooperation, vowing that Pyongyang would face a nuclear response and the ‘end’ of its current government were it to ever use its nuclear weapons against the allies.

South Korea’s military said it had detected the launch of a long-range ballistic missile fired from the Pyongyang area around 10am (0100 GMT).

“The ballistic missile was fired on a lofted trajectory and flew 1,000km (620 miles) before splashing down in the East Sea,” the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, referring to the body of water also known as the Sea of Japan.

A lofted trajectory involves firing a missile up and not out, a method Pyongyang has previously said it employs in some weapons tests to avoid flying over neighbouring countries.

The launch ‘is a grave provo-

cation that damages the peace and security of the Korean peninsula’ and violates UN sanctions on Pyongyang, the JCS said, calling on North Korea to stop such actions. Pyongyang last fired one of its most powerful intercontinental ballistic missiles in April - the purportedly solid-fuelled Hwasong-18 - and in February launched a Hwasong-15, which flew a similar 989km.

The flight time of around 70 minutes is also similar to some of North Korea’s previous ICBM launches, experts said.

“Given what we have at this point, it’s about 90 per cent certain that it was an ICBM launch,” Choi Gi-il, a professor of military studies at Sangji University, told AFP. He added that it could also have been North Korea attempting to re-test its satellite launch technology to prepare for another attempt to put a spy satellite into orbit, after a May launch failed.

Wednesday’s launch came after North Korea on Monday accused a US spy plane of violating its airspace and condemned Washington’s plans to deploy a nuclear missile submarine near the Korean peninsula.

A spokesperson for the North Korean Ministry of National Defence said the United States had ‘intensified espionage activities beyond the wartime level’.

AFP

South Korea welcomes birth of first giant panda twins

Seoul, South Korea - A South Korean zoo has announced the birth of two giant panda twins - the first to be born in the country - triggering an outpouring of excitement online.

The female twins were born at the Everland theme park near the capital Seoul on Friday, the zoo revealed in a video posted on its YouTube channel.

The video, uploaded on Tuesday, shows the mother, Ai Bao, in labour, rolling around her cage before giving birth to two tiny panda cubs.

The first twin weighed 180 grams and the second 140 grams, the zoo said.

“Both the mother and the twin pandas are in good health,” a representative from the zoo said in a statement.

“Ai Bao is taking good care of her cubs, putting her experience



Giant panda mother Ai Bao and her newly born female twin pandas at Everland Amusement and Animal Park in Yongin (AFP)

with Fu Bao to use.”

Fu Bao, born in July 2020, is the twins’ older sister and the first giant panda born in South Korea through natural breeding.

The YouTube video of the twins’ birth has garnered 640,000 views since it was uploaded, with viewers gushing about the arrival of the cubs.

“Welcome to the world, sweet babies! Congrats to the Bao family and thanks to the grandpas and all the staff taking care of them,” wrote one viewer.

Another commented: “Tears keep on running from my eyes because I’m so proud of Ai Bao! Well done, Ai Bao!”

AFP

Explosives attack kills 3 police officers in Mexico

Guadalajara, Mexico - Three police officers were killed and 10 other people wounded on Tuesday in an ‘unprecedented’ explosives attack in the Mexican state of Jalisco, the state governor said.

Police officers and staff from the state prosecutor’s office ‘suffered a cowardly attack with explosive devices, which preliminarily caused the death of three colleagues from the municipal police and the Prosecutor’s Office, as well as 10 people injured’, Governor Enrique Alfaro said on Twitter.

“This is an unprecedented event that shows what these organised crime groups are capable of,” the governor said. “This attack also represents a challenge against the Mexican state as a whole.”

The western state is the base of operations of the

Jalisco New Generation cartel, one of Mexico’s most powerful drug trafficking groups that has a presence in a large part of the country and is embroiled in disputes with other drug syndicates.

Alfaro said Jalisco’s security cabinet was ‘in permanent session’ to investigate the attack, which has not been attributed to a specific criminal organisation.

Authorities learned of the incident shortly after 8pm on Tuesday, with reports indicating a vehicle on fire with five people inside in Tlajomulco de Zuniga, a suburb of the city of Guadalajara, police sources said.

Forensic investigators were on the scene, as well as several ambulances to transport the injured to hospital.

AFP

Thai election body asks to suspend PM frontrunner

Bangkok, Thailand - Thai election chiefs on Wednesday asked the country’s top court to suspend Pita Limjaroenrat, the frontrunner in the race to become prime minister, over allegations he broke campaign rules as an MP.

The recommendation is the latest hurdle thrown into the path of the progressive candidate, whose Move Forward Party (MFP) scored the most votes in May’s election by tapping into Thais’ appetite for change.

The Election Commission’s referral to the Constitutional Court was announced just a day before parliament was due to vote on a new premier.

While popular among voters, Pita’s bid for the premiership faces stiff opposition over his plans to amend Thailand’s royal defamation laws, which protect King Maha Vajiralongkorn and his family.

Following the commission’s



MFP leader and prime ministerial candidate Pita Limjaroenrat is seen mobbed by supporters during a rally in Bangkok on July 9 (AFP)

The EC’s referral to the Constitutional Court was made just a day before parliament was due to vote on a new premier

announcement, MFP secretary general Chaithawat Tulathon said the party still wanted the vote to go ahead.

“Tomorrow is a day of crossroads to see if we will continue to disregard the people’s politics, or a chance to return to normal democracy and move Thailand forward,” he said.

“I believe people will not ac-

cept it any more.”

Pita told reporters at parliament after the announcement that he was in ‘good spirits’, adding that ‘the process tomorrow continues as planned’.

The kingdom has endured a dozen coups in the past century, with political instability a regular danger and progressive movements often abruptly curtailed.

May’s election was the first since huge pro-democracy demonstrations swept the capital Bangkok in 2020, with tens of thousands making unprecedented calls for reform to the royal defamation laws.

The EC’s investigation into Pita centred on his ownership of shares in a now-defunct media company. Legislators are not allowed to own media shares.

“The Election Commission has considered the issue... and perceives that the status of Pita Limjaroenrat is considered to be

voided, according to the Thai Constitution,” the EC said in a statement on Wednesday.

Chairman Ittiporn Boonprakong confirmed to AFP the body had recommended the Constitutional Court suspend Pita as an MP.

It is unclear when the Constitutional Court may rule on the case, although it was due to meet on Wednesday.

Even if the constitutional court suspends Pita as an MP, he is still eligible to stand for prime minister in the vote on Thursday.

But if he were to face a criminal investigation, he could be barred from politics or face up to 10 years in prison.

Pita says he inherited the shares in the iTV television station, which has not broadcast since 2007, from his father.

The 42-year-old has consistently denied any wrongdoing.

AFP

INDIA

India shoots for the moon with latest rocket launch

Bengaluru - India on Friday launches its latest attempt at an unmanned moon landing, the next frontier of a burgeoning, cut-price aerospace programme rapidly closing in on the milestones set by global superpowers.

If successful, the mission would make the world's most populous nation only the fourth country after Russia, the United States and China to achieve a controlled landing on the lunar surface.

The latest iteration of the Chandrayaan ('Mooncraft') programme comes four years after an earlier attempt ended in failure, with ground crew losing contact moments before landing.

This time around, there is optimism that the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will succeed, as it sets its sights on a future manned lunar mission.

"We're sure this one will be successful and will bring pride and recognition to everybody who has worked for it," Anil G. Verma of Godrej & Boyce, ISRO's principal engine and components supplier, told AFP.



An engineer works on a component at a Godrej Aerospace manufacturing plant, which manufacture various parts for the Vikas and cryogenic engines for the ISRO space missions, in Mumbai on Monday (AFP)

The latest iteration of the Chandrayaan programme comes four years after an earlier failed attempt

The 14-day mission comes with a price tag of US\$74.6mn,

according to media reports, and aims to successfully land a rover to explore the lunar surface.

A huge crowd is expected to attend the launch, scheduled for 2:35pm local time (0905 GMT) from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre north of Chennai.

"I am very happy and hopeful," K. Sivan, the ISRO chief during India's last lunar landing attempt, told AFP.

India's space programme has

grown considerably in size and momentum since it first sent a probe to orbit the moon in 2008.

In 2014, it became the first Asian nation to put a satellite into orbit around Mars, and three years later, the ISRO launched 104 satellites in a single mission.

The ISRO's Gaganyaan ('Skycraft') programme is slated to launch a three-day manned mission into Earth's orbit by

next year. India is also working to boost its two per cent share of the global commercial space market by sending private payloads into orbit for a fraction of the cost of competitors.

Experts say India can keep costs low by copying and adapting existing space technology, and thanks to an abundance of highly skilled engineers who earn a fraction of their foreign counterparts' wages.

Chandrayaan-2, its previous attempt at a lunar landing in 2019, cost US\$140mn - nearly twice Friday's launch, but a much smaller price tag than similar ventures by other countries.

The mission, which coincided with the 50th anniversary year of Neil Armstrong's first-ever moonwalk, ended in disappointment when the lander went silent just 2.1km (1.3 miles) from touchdown.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, present at mission control in Bangalore, consoled glum scientists and clasped the ISRO chief in a lengthy hug, saying India was still 'proud' of their efforts.

AFP

Delhi: Prohibitory orders in flood-prone areas

New Delhi - In a bid to ensure the safety of the public, Delhi Police on Wednesday imposed Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) in flood-prone areas of the national capital as preventive measures.

Prohibitory orders have been enforced as a precautionary measure to prevent any untoward incident during the monsoon season. A senior Delhi police official said that the measure has been put into place fearing chaotic situation during the relocation of people affected due to the flood in Delhi.

"Going with present situation, two police stations located in flood-prone areas in North East Delhi have been ordered to shift to higher floors and other police stations in the vicinity have been instructed to be on alert as Yamuna River has breached the danger level and the water level continues to rise," the official said.

The police is coordinating with other local bodies to deal with any untoward situation. "All police stations have been put on alert as evacuation has been initiated from flood-affected

areas."

On Wednesday, the waterlevel in Yamuna breached the danger-level mark and touched 207.25 metres at Old Railway Bridge at 8am, officials said.

The previous record was in 1978 when water level in Yamuna was recorded at 207.49 metres.

In the year 2013, water level in the Yamuna had touched 207.33 metres.

Rescue and rehabilitation teams are engaged in relocating those living in low-lying areas to safer locations.

Police personnel and Civil Defence Volunteers at such locations have issued advisories to people to keep away from the river.

Meanwhile, 2500 tents have been set up in six districts of the national capital to which people are being shifted. Those living in the affected areas are being shifted to these camps set up at higher places.

"If the water level of Yamuna rises, Kejriwal government is ready to deal with every situation," Delhi Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj had said yesterday.

ANI

Centre plans tomato procurement from key growing states as prices skyrocket

New Delhi - Amid a sharp spurt in tomato prices across the country, the Central government has directed its agencies - NAFED and NCCF - to immediately procure the staple vegetable from key growing states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra.

The rise in tomato prices is reported across the country, and not just limited to a particular region or state. In key cities, it rose to as high as Rs 150-160 per kg. Once procured, these will be despatched for simultaneous distribution in major consumption centres where retail



People purchase tomatoes in Chennai (ANI)

prices have recorded maximum increase in the past one month, the officials said.

The periods during July-August and October-November are generally the lean production months for tomato.

The stocks of tomato will be distributed through retail outlets at 'discounted prices' to the consumers in Delhi NCR region by Friday, this week, said a food ministry release on Wednesday.

"The targeted centres for release (of tomato) have been identified on the basis of absolute increase in retail prices over the past one month in cen-

tres where prevailing prices are above the All-India average."

Tomato is produced almost in all the states in India, though in varying quantities.

The rise in tomato prices is reported across the country, and not just limited to a particular state or region

Maximum production is in southern and western regions of India, contributing 56-58 per cent of total production. "Southern and Western re-

gions being surplus states, feed to other markets depending on production seasons. The production seasons are also different across regions. The peak

tion across regions are primarily responsible for price seasonality in Tomato. Apart from the normal price seasonality, temporary supply chain disruptions and crop damage due to adverse weather conditions etc. often lead to sudden spikes in prices."

The government attributed the rise in prices to the monsoon season, saying that it added to further challenges related to distribution and increased transit losses.

Tomatoes have a relatively lower shelf life. ANI

ASEAN chair Indonesia urges political solution to Myanmar crisis

Jakarta, Indonesia - ASEAN chair Indonesia on Wednesday urged a political solution to the Myanmar crisis at regional talks where Thailand's envoy announced he met the country's deposed democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi last week.

Myanmar has been ravaged by deadly violence since a military coup ousted Suu Kyi's government more than two years ago, unleashing a bloody crackdown on dissent. The 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations has long been decried as a toothless talking shop, and it remains split over diplomatic attempts to resolve the crisis as it tries to form a united position on the junta-run country.

"Only a political solution will lead to a durable peace," Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi told ASEAN counterparts in her opening remarks on the second day of talks in Jakarta.

The meeting was dealt a surprise when Thailand's foreign minister disclosed he met with Myanmar's ousted democracy

leader Suu Kyi on his own on Sunday in the country's capital Naypyidaw and said she was in 'good health'. In the meeting Suu Kyi - who has only been seen once since she was detained after the coup in early 2021 - 'encouraged dialogue', Don Pramudwinai told reporters on the sidelines of the ministerial meeting.

The Philippines' foreign minister said Don briefed ASEAN ministers on his meeting with Suu Kyi, but he reiterated any independent effort to restart the peace process should be in line with a five-point ASEAN plan agreed two years ago with Myanmar's junta. "We feel any initiative should be consistent with the five-point consensus. He (Don) just reported on that," Enrique Manalo told reporters.

Indonesia's top diplomat repeated the bloc's position that a resumption of dialogue between Myanmar's warring parties and a negotiated political pact would be the only way to bring an end to more than two years of turmoil. AFP

Western promises no substitute for NATO membership: Ukraine President Zelensky

Vilnius, Lithuania - Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky welcomed new security guarantees from Western powers on Wednesday but warned that, in the face of Russian invasion, this would be no substitute for eventual NATO membership.

On the last day of NATO's Vilnius summit, the G7 group of major powers made a long-term pledge of support to help Ukraine defeat the Russian threat and to deter future aggression after the war ends.

This was enough to draw a furious condemnation from the Kremlin, but not sufficient to meet the ambition of Zelensky, who came to the Lithuanian capital seeking an invitation and clear timetable for Ukraine to join the Atlantic alliance.

"The best guarantee for Ukraine is to be in NATO," Zelensky said, expressing confidence that once the war is over Ukraine would be welcomed, but warning that the G7 guarantees should be seen 'not instead of NATO, but as security guarantees on our way to integration'.

The 31 NATO leaders had agreed on Tuesday that Ukraine would get an invite when they agreed that all 'conditions are



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (right) shakes hands with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky ahead of a joint press conference on the sidelines of the NATO Summit in Vilnius on Wednesday (AFP)

met'. Zelensky explained this by saying: "I understand this as 'when it will be safe on our land'."

'Meet as equals'

NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg was sympathetic to Zelensky's position but stressed the importance of the progress he said Ukraine had made at the summit, held under tight security on NATO's eastern flank, 16

months after Russia's all-out invasion of Ukraine.

He noted that Zelensky joined NATO leaders at an inaugural meeting of the Ukraine-NATO Council, and said several allies were boosting bilateral assistance, such as France with a pledge of long-range missiles and the Netherlands leading a coalition to train fighter pilots.

"Today, we meet as equals, I

look forward to the day we meet as allies," Stoltenberg said.

In a joint statement seen by AFP, the G7 - Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, United States - said they would send weapons and support to help Ukraine defeat both the ongoing Russian invasion and to deter any future attack once peace is secured.

"We will stand with Ukraine

as it defends itself against Russian aggression, for as long as it takes," the statement said.

US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told CNN that Ukraine could not join NATO right away, because it would be 'an inescapable fact' that the treaty's mutual defence clause would mean that the allies would be immediately in a direct war with Russia.

But he stressed that 'the G7 ... will stand up with President Zelensky to announce we're prepared to provide that security assistance long out into the future.

"And certainly for the duration of the period while Ukraine is working its way on the pathway towards NATO," he said.

The G7 pledges might have fallen short of Ukraine's hopes, but they were more than enough to enrage Moscow.

"By giving security guarantees to Ukraine, they are undermining the security of the Russian Federation," President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, warning that the step 'will make Europe much more dangerous for years and years'.

AFP

Oman Sail continue fine form at Pan Arab Games in Algeria

Muscat - After four days of racing, Oman's sailing squad continues to excel at the 2023 Pan Arab Games in Algeria. At the halfway point in the competition, all seven sailors remain in contention for medals across all three classes with Omani sailors occupying first, second and third in the Optimist event.

Tuesday's racing was halted by a lack of wind, so Tamim Suleiman al Balushi retained his place atop of the leaderboard after a series of strong performances.

He extended his lead over Feras Haitham al Nabhani in second to eight points, while Hassan Nasser al Wahaibi rebounded well today after a setback on



Oman's Hatem Mohsin al Oreimi moved to second in ILCA 4

Monday to finish just one point behind in third.

Soud Talib al Shaqsi is currently in sixth place, level on points with Mallim Zakaria of Algeria in fourth after a competition best performance in race six, and just five points behind Idriss Dardaoui of Tunisia fourth.

Hatem Mohsin al Oreimi moved up a place to second in the ILCA 4, six points behind leader Waleed Daraan of Bahrain who posted two perfect runs in races six and seven. Teammate Abdullatif Zaid al Qasbi stays in fifth, seven points from the podium positions.

Abdulla Janahi of Bahrain continues to be unbeatable in the ILCA 7, notching seven straight

wins to take command of the competition. Oman's Ahmed Hassan al Balushi remains in third place with Adil Khaled of the United Arab Emirates in second.

National Team Manager, Ahmed al Qasbi, said, "The Pan Arab Games, so far, has been a very valuable experience for our sailors.

"We have worked on the technical and mental aspects of racing and prepared for a variety of scenarios. It is good to see these lessons in action and show that our methods are working.

"All of the sailors are performing very well, and we are optimistic or the remainder of the competition."

Speaking about his performance so far, Tamim al Balushi, leader in the Optimist event, added, "I am very happy with my performances over the first four days, and the performances of my teammates.

We are helping each other as a team and supporting each other. There is a lot of racing still to come but we are calm and sailing well together, and we hope to win medals for Oman at the end of the competition."

The Omani team joins nearly 4,000 athletes from 18 countries from across the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa at the 15th edition of the Pan Arab Games, being held in Algeria for the first time since 2004.

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MESSI IN FLORIDA AHEAD OF INTER MIAMI MOVE

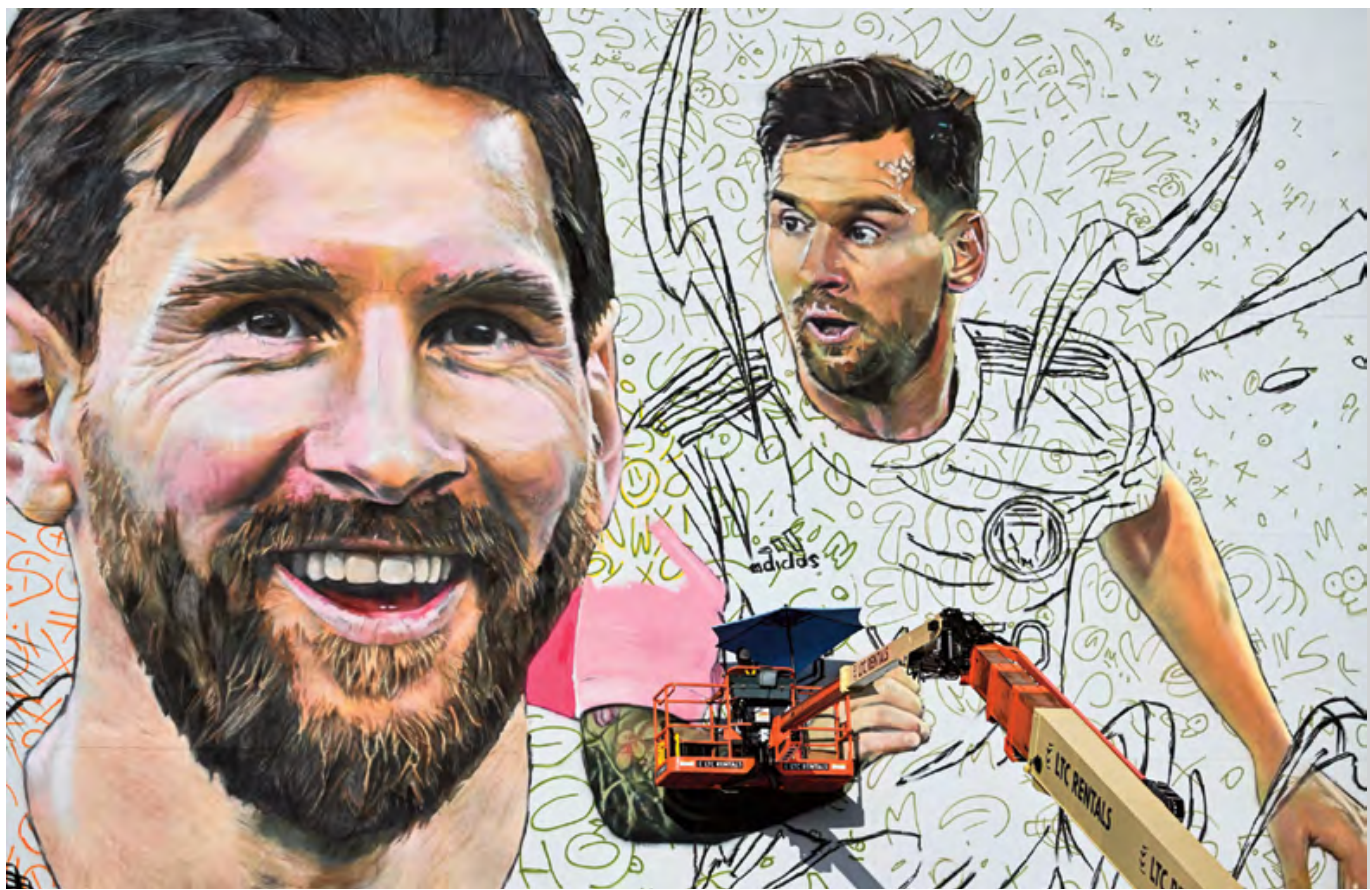
Argentine star expected to sign two and a half year deal

Fort Lauderdale, United States - Argentine star Lionel Messi landed in Florida on Tuesday ahead of putting the final touches on his move to US Major League Soccer club Inter Miami.

Argentine television footage showed Messi, with members of his family, walking off a private jet at a small, executive airport adjacent to Inter Miami's stadium in Fort Lauderdale.

The World Cup winner is expected to put pen to paper on a two and a half year deal, reported to be worth \$60 million a year, before being presented to fans at a stadium event on Sunday.

"We are happy with the decision we made. Prepared and eager to face the new challenge, the new change," Messi said in an interview with Argentine TV show, Llave a la eternidad, released on Tuesday.



Argentine artist Maximiliano Bagnasco paints a giant mural of Lionel Messi in Wynwood, Miami's art district, in Florida on Monday (AFP)

"My mentality and my head are not going to change and I am going to try, wherever I have to be, to give my best for myself and my new club and continue to perform at the highest level."

Messi is the biggest name to ever move to MLS and the greatest player to head to the United States since Brazilian great Pele signed for the New York Cosmos in 1975. MLS hope that

Windies win toss, opt to bat against India

Roseau, Dominica - West Indies captain Kraigg Brathwaite won the toss and chose to bat on the first day of the opening Test of a two-match series against India at Windsor Park Stadium in Dominica on Wednesday.

With the home side seeking to end a run of more than 21 years without a Test victory against India, either at home or away, 24-year-old Dominican native Alick Athanaze makes his Test debut in the middle-order in place of the injured Kyle Mayers.

India, whose last assignment was a 209-run defeat to Australia in the World Test Championship final at The Oval in London last

This is the 99th Test between the two teams since the first in Delhi in 1948 and marks the start of the third cycle of the World Test Championship

month, include two debutants in their line-up.

Yashasvi Jaiswal, a 21-year-old, is set to open the batting with captain Rohit Sharma while wicket-keeper-batsman Ishan Kishan, who turns 25 next Tuesday, plays his first Test at the expense of incumbent Srikanth Bharat.

This is the 99th Test between the two teams since the first in Delhi in 1948 and marks the start of the third cycle of the World Test Championship, culminating in the final in 2025.

England must defy injuries and dip in form to win World Cup

Manchester, United Kingdom - Injuries to key players and a dip in form have left England coach Sarina Wiegman with plenty to ponder if the European champions are to win the Women's World Cup for the first time.

Barring a massive shock when the tournament begins on July 20, England should cruise through a group featuring China, Denmark and debutants Haiti.

But their path through the knockout stages is loaded with danger, with co-hosts Australia or Olympic champions Canada likely opponents in the last 16.

Preparations have not been ideal, a year on from England

winning the Euros at a packed Wembley for their first major trophy in women's football.

In April, England were held 1-1 by Brazil before winning the first-ever women's Finalissima - a clash between the champions of Europe and South America - on penalties.

Their 30-game unbeaten run was then ended by the Australians and Wiegman's team failed to break down Portugal in a 0-0 draw in their only warm-up friendly earlier this month.

The Lionesses' World Cup build-up has also been overshadowed by an ongoing row over bonuses for the players.

Then there are injuries which



England players at a training session

have ruled out captain Leah Williamson, Euro 2022 Golden Boot winner Beth Mead and Chelsea forward Fran Kirby.

England still have a squad that is the envy of most other teams, but the experience of Ellen White and Jill Scott is also missing from the side that conquered Europe after they retired. Wiegman, who took her native Netherlands to the World Cup final four years ago before losing to the United States, is publicly unconcerned.

"I think the team has changed so there's another team dynamic now," Wiegman said after the Portugal stalemate.

AFP

Bullish De Laurentiis keen to keep hold of Napoli stars

Naples, Italy - Napoli owner Aurelio De Laurentiis insists that there is no need to sell star players Victor Osimhen and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia as the Italian champions begin preparations for their Serie A title defence.

Nigeria striker Osimhen has been the subject of summer transfer talk after smashing in 31 goals in Napoli's first Scudetto-winning season in over three decades.

In an interview with AFP De Laurentiis, 74, said that he has received no offers for Osimhen, a player the film mogul has reportedly priced at 150 million euros (\$165 million).

Last month he said Osimhen had already come to a verbal agreement to extend his current



Victor Osimhen

contract by two years until 2027, while Kvaratskhelia is reportedly set to more than double his annual salary of 1.2 million euros in a bid to stave off attention from Europe's richer clubs.

At Monday's launch of Napoli's new kit he told reporters

Osimhen would be wearing it the coming season unless "a more than indecent offer came in".

"First of all Osimhen has two years left on his contract and Kvaratskhelia has four years. So you can keep talking about contract renewals and satisfying

their agents' ravenous hunger, but in reality, it's down to Napoli to decide what to do," De Laurentiis told AFP.

"I could decide to push forward, play on for two years and then let Osimhen go for nothing. It depends, but at that point, I would have to find someone else at centre-forward, you can understand my point of view, right?"

"But I believe that in the end it's to everyone's benefit to find fair, serious modifications that don't involve unrealistic demands."

De Laurentiis' bullish attitude towards his players' status flies in the face of the image of Italian clubs being easy meat for Premier League and state-backed clubs.

Bilbao ends Spanish wait on scorching Tour de France stage

Issoire, France - Pello Bilbao won a hot and hilly stage 10 of the Tour de France on Tuesday, becoming the first Spaniard in five years to win a stage on the world's biggest bike race.

The main contenders for the overall title crossed the line together nearly three minutes after Bilbao. You have to go back to 2018 and Omar Fraile's win for the last victory by a Spanish rider.

Bilbao dedicated the victory to Gino Maeder, his Bahrain Victorious team-mate who died last month after a crash on the Tour of Switzerland.

Maeder, a 26-year-old Swiss rider, plunged into a ravine while competing in his home race in



Spanish rider Pello Bilbao finishes ahead of Germany's Georg Zimmermann to win the 10th stage of Tour de France on Tuesday

June, and succumbed to his injuries a day later. "He was such a great guy and we are trying to honour his legacy with charity

work - this is our project to remember him, and not just by sports," said Bilbao.

AFP



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SWEET REVENGE

Jabeur beats Rybakina to reach Wimbledon semifinals

London, United Kingdom - Ons Jabeur gained revenge for her defeat in last year's Wimbledon final on Wednesday, coming from behind to beat Elena Rybakina and reach the last four.

In a repeat of the 2022 title match, the Tunisian sixth seed beat her third-ranked opponent 6-7 (5/7), 6-4, 6-1 on Centre Court.

The 28-year-old will face Belarusian second seed Aryna Sabalenka for a place in Saturday's final at the All England Club.

"I'm very happy with the performance - a lot of emotion out there, especially playing someone that serves really well," she said. "It's frustrating to return but I'm glad I did everything, shouted, got angry, then got calm and fo-



Ons Jabeur celebrates after defeating Elena Rybakina in the Wimbledon quarterfinal on Wednesday (AFP)

"I'm very happy with the performance - a lot of emotion out there, especially playing someone that serves really well"

ONS JABEUR

cused and hopefully I can manage my emotions like this for the next two matches."

Rybakina was first to pounce, breaking to love in the fourth game when Jabeur went wide with a backhand but the Tunisian hit back immediately.

Jabeur took advantage of a loose volley at the net from Rybakina to break again and edge into a 6-5 lead.

But this time she was the player who failed to consolidate, squandering a set point as Rybakina forced a tie-break, which she won. The Kazakh survived break

points in the second game of the second set while Jabeur was forced to dig deep on her serve to move into a 3-2 lead.

Both players held serve until the 10th game, when Rybakina cracked and Jabeur levelled the match.

The force was with Jabeur in the decider as she opened up a 3-0 lead and saved two break points to move 4-1 ahead.

Jabeur powered a backhand down the line to break once again and held her serve to seal the win, letting out a roar of delight.

Sabalenka powered into a second Wimbledon semi-final with a 6-2, 6-4 win over Madison Keys of the United States.

A double break secured the first set and Sabalenka, who was defeated by Karolina Pliskova in the last four in 2021, dug herself

out of a deep hole at 4-2, 40-0 down in the second set.

The world number two from Belarus was banned from the 2022 tournament following the invasion of Ukraine along with all Russian and Belarusian players.

AFP



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates after beating Russia's Andrey Rublev (AFP)

Djokovic says he's 'favourite' to win Wimbledon

London, United Kingdom - Novak Djokovic said he considers himself "favourite" to lift this year's Wimbledon title even if it makes him sound "arrogant".

The Serb star reached his 12th Wimbledon semi-final and record-equalling 46th at the Grand Slams with a four-set victory over Andrey Rublev on Tuesday.

Djokovic, chasing an eighth title at the All England Club and 24th career major, came through 4-6, 6-1, 6-4, 6-3 and will face Italy's Jannik Sinner for a place in the final.

He has now reached as many semi-finals at the Slams as the retired Roger Federer.

"I don't want to sound arrogant, but of course I would consider myself favourite," said Djokovic.

"Judging by the results I had in my career here, the last four times at Wimbledon that I won, so I do consider myself

favourite, yes."

The 36-year-old was playing in his 400th Grand Slam match on Tuesday and insisted he was enjoying being the man to beat.

"I love it. Any player wants to be in the position where all the other players want to beat you," he said after preserving his record of not being defeated on Centre Court since 2013.

"The pressure never goes away every time I come on court.

"They want to get a scalp and the win -- but it ain't happening!"

Rublev, the world number seven, has now lost all eight quarter-finals he has played at the majors.

"I had these little chances but I didn't make them. He made them. That's why he's Novak, one of the greatest players in history," he said.

AFP



Italy's Jannik Sinner returns the ball to Russia's Roman Safiullin (AFP)

Sinner beats Roman Safiullin to reach Wimbledon semis

London, United Kingdom - Jannik Sinner beat unseeded Russian Roman Safiullin at Wimbledon on Tuesday to reach his first Grand Slam semi-final.

The Italian eighth seed recovered from a mid-match wobble to win 6-4, 3-6, 6-2, 6-2 and will face either Novak Djokovic or Andrey Rublev for a place in Sunday's final.

"It was obviously tough," said the 21-year-old, who squandered a two-sets-to-love lead against Djokovic in last year's quarter-final.

"I was a break up in the second. I got down mentally a little bit so this is a part we are working on a lot and obviously I'm very happy how I reacted in the next couple of sets."

Sinner said he would take to the court in his semi-final with a "good mentality".

"I know Novak hasn't lost on Centre Court in 10 years so it will be a tough one but maybe it's my day and in another way Andrey is also playing (to reach) the semi-finals for the first time."

AFP

‘Are you crazy?’: Svitolina writes off Wimbledon title dream

London, United Kingdom - Elina Svitolina dismissed her chances of winning Wimbledon as "crazy" on Tuesday, preferring to focus on the tidal wave of support she is receiving from her war-torn Ukraine homeland, which "melts my heart".

The 76th-ranked new mum defeated world number one Iga Swiatek 7-5, 6-7 (5/7), 6-2 despite being a break down in both of the first two sets against the reigning US Open and French Open champion.

Svitolina, also a semi-finalist in 2019, will take on Marketa Vondrousova of the Czech Republic for a place in Saturday's championship match.

The 28-year-old has made no secret of her desire to deliver victories for Ukraine and she said the reaction to her progress at the tournament has been overwhelming.



Ukraine's Elina Svitolina celebrates after beating Poland's Iga Swiatek

"I'm happy I can bring a little happiness to their lives. There were many videos on the internet where the kids are watching on their phones," said Svitolina.

"This really makes my heart melt seeing this."

However, could she go on to win the title this weekend?

"Are you crazy?" said Svitolina, who gave birth in October and only returned to the tennis tour in April.

"Marketa, she's a tough opponent. It's going to be a tough challenge for me. That's why I don't want to rush and think about I might be playing a final, might not play the final.

"These kind of things, they distract so much the mindset."

Svitolina has reached the last four by seeing off a quartet of Grand Slam title winners in Venus Williams, Sofia Kenin, Victoria Azarenka, in a stormy last-

16 clash, and now Swiatek.

She said she intended to "enjoy the moment and have a beer". The Ukrainian, playing on a wild card, hailed Swiatek for her unwavering support following the Russian invasion.

Swiatek, in turn, backed Svitolina as a potential champion.

"I'll root for her, especially because we like each other as people. I told her on the net that I hope she wins this tournament," said the 22-year-old Pole.

Svitolina said having a baby daughter Skai with tennis-playing husband Gael Monfils, as well as the effects of the war, had modified her outlook on her career and life. "I think the war made me stronger. I don't take difficult situations like a disaster. There are worse things in life. "Having a child, and the war, made me a different person. I look at the things a bit differently."

Osaka gives birth to baby girl: report

Los Angeles, United States - Four-time Grand Slam tennis champion Naomi Osaka has given birth to a baby girl, *People magazine* reported on Tuesday.

The 25-year-old Japanese star and rapper boyfriend Cordae welcomed their first child in Los Angeles and both mother and daughter were doing well,

according to People, citing an unnamed source.

The couple said that Osaka was expecting a baby on social media in January. Osaka said last month that when it came to names, she and Cordae were thinking of something unusual rather than traditional.

Osaka said that 2023 would

be a year "full of lessons" adding she planned to return to tennis next year and compete at the 2024 Australian Open in January.

Osaka won her first major tennis crown at the 2018 US Open and then captured the 2019 Australian Open.

AFP



Naomi Osaka



14

BREW LIES

Don't get carried away with deceptive cuppa stories - brew your own 'chai'



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IN TOWN

Alawi Swimmers Academy annual day and Hajj felicitations



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ENTERTAINMENT

A peek into tinsel town in Hollywood and Bollywood



DIRTY PICTURE

Photos: V K Shafeer

Abandoned cars leave a shabby mark on many streets in the capital

Hubert Vaz

Are you heading for a holiday? Make sure to securely park your car and ensure that it remains in good condition while you are away – cars abandoned on streets and public parking lots in a shabby condition stand a good chance of getting towed away by the concerned authorities.

Despite efforts by Muscat Municipality (MM) to caution motorists against parking cars along streets and public places for long periods, one can find a large number of vehicles lying parked in a dirty/dusty condition in many areas of Muscat, often occupying prime parking space. Some cars seem to be abandoned by their owners who could've left for good.

According to official sources, 'One of the prominent phenomena plaguing municipal efforts is abandoned cars neglected in public squares and roads. Such vehicles block streets and distort the urban landscape as they accumulate dust and rodents. This necessitated municipal authorities to reduce the spread of this phenomenon through the intensification of inspection campaigns on a permanent basis, in order to improve the quality of life and achieve the highest standards of safety, public health, and a beautiful civilised appearance.'

The MM website states that Muscat Municipality has taken up a drive to tow away neglected vehicles and clear them from public view. The municipal urban in-



spection department has been carrying out field visits to monitor neglected vehicles for long periods, or those cars that occupy public space for the purpose of sale without returning to the authorities to obtain the necessary permits.

The inspection department deals with neglected vehicles by placing an 'alert' sticker on cars left in public or residential neighbourhoods for a period of two weeks, provided that it coordinates with the Royal Oman Police to ensure that there is no report or circular on the vehicle or any other restrictions.

The municipality may also tow away and detain neglected vehicles in squares and public places after the expiration of the specified period from the placement of the warning sticker and after prior notification to the car owner to remove his car from the place where it is parked. Also,

the municipality shall not bear the consequences or damages that may be caused to the abandoned vehicle during the transportation process and during the period of its detention.

Statistics registered by Muscat Municipality show that about 829 vehicles lay neglected in the governorate in 2020. Amerat itself registered the highest number of abandoned vehicles (686) followed by Bousher (88) and Quriyat (54). Surprisingly, only one abandoned vehicle was picked up from Muttrah. Most of these impounded vehicles were found in industrial areas.

Regulations

'Leaving vehicles for a long time violates the administrative decision no. (171/2018) issued on the regulation of neglected vehicles in public places in

Muscat Governorate. Article No 2 of the regulation stipulates that the owner of the vehicle is prohibited from leaving vehicles in public places in a way that distorts the aesthetic appearance.

Action

Article 6 stipulates that the municipality shall coordinate with the Royal Oman Police to take action to sell the neglected vehicles by a public auction in case the owner of the vehicle fails to appeal to the municipality to reclaim his vehicle after paying the due fine within 90 days of it being towed away.

Fines

According to Article 5, an administrative fine is imposed on the owner of a neglected vehicle after impounding it, once the owner appeals to the municipality. The fine is RO200 for cars, buses designed to transport 15 passengers or less, and bicycles, whereas a fine of RO400 will be imposed for trucks, buses designed to transport more than 15 passengers, and trailers, tractors, and equipment. Also, RO1000 fine is applicable to vehicles intended to transport hazardous materials, plus RO5 for each day late in claiming the vehicle from the detention site.

cook-up

TEA VS CHAI

BREW LIES

Tea is a popular, stimulating beverage prepared by pouring hot or boiling water over cured leaves of 'Camellia sinensis', an ever-green shrub native to East Asia. Chai is simply the Hindi word for tea which was derived from the Chinese word for tea – Cha. It involves boiling tea leaves along with water, milk, spices and a sweetener. Don't get fooled by attempts to brand the humble cuppa with words like 'Karak' etc. Karak chai, in Hindi, means 'strong tea', nothing else, and it is being exploited the world over (like a brand) to introduce this version of tea that is popular in every street in south east Asian nations. Here's how to make a variety of popular brews at home:



Sulaimani Chai

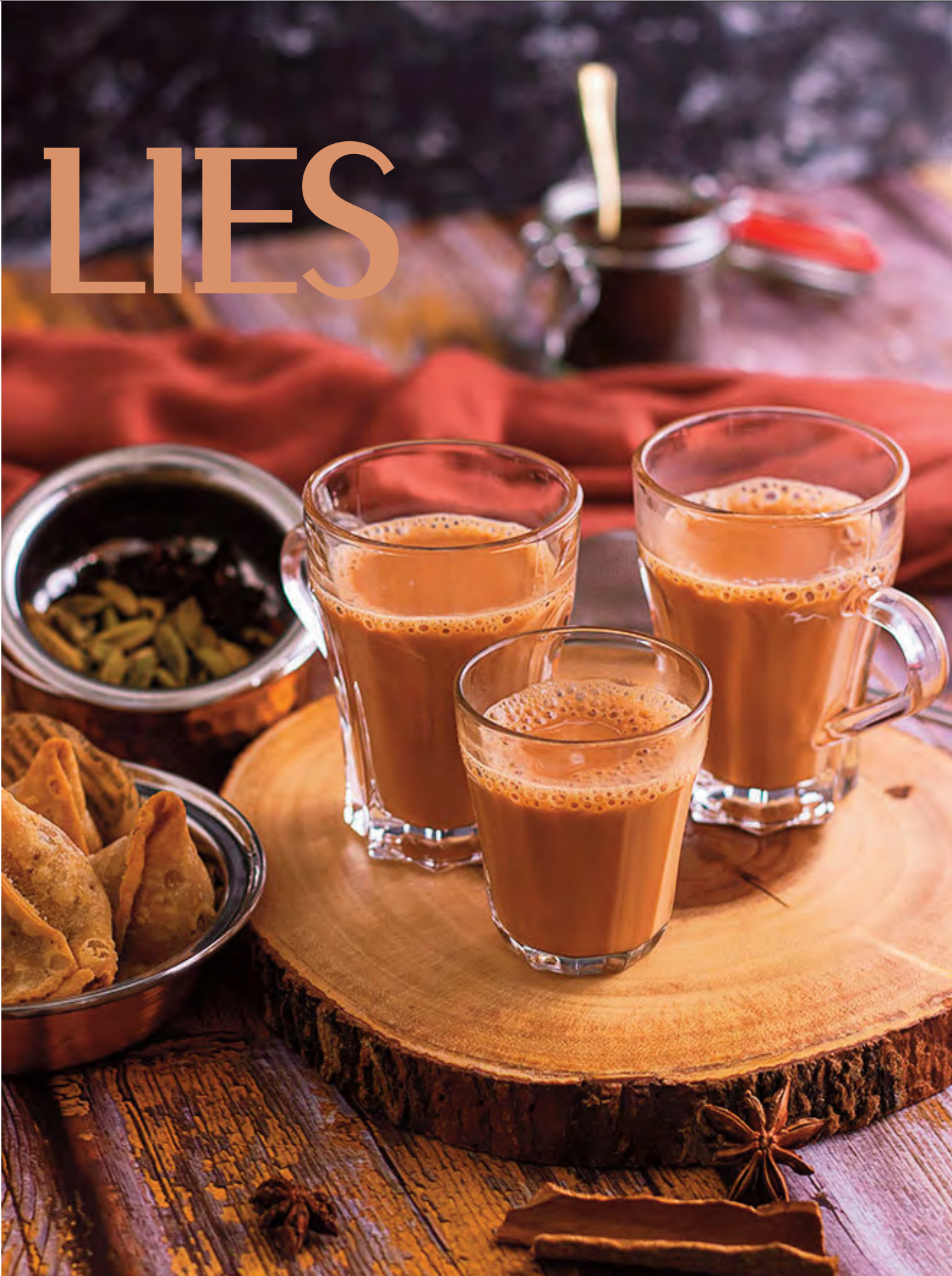
Popular in the Malabar region of southern India, Sulaimani Chai actually has its origin in the Arab world. According to folklore, since ancient times, the Arabs enjoyed drinking a beverage called 'Ghava' prepared with dates and black pepper (but no tea) added to it. Due to trade relations with nearby India, slight changes were introduced, and the brew included tea and spices like cardamom, cloves, cinnamon, and ginger.

Ingredients

- 3 cups water, 3-4 cloves, 2cm piece cinnamon
- 2cm piece ginger – crushed
- 2-3 green cardamoms
- 1tsp black tea powder
- Lemon wedges (optional)

Method

Bring water to a boil in a pot. Add crushed ginger and boil for 2-3 minutes on medium flame. Pound the rest of the spices coarsely in a mortar-pestle, add it to the pot, and boil for another 3-4 minutes on medium flame. Now, add tea powder and let it boil for a couple of minutes. As the tea changes colour and the flavour sets in, remove from heat. Add a sweetener of your choice (optional). Strain the tea onto serving glasses and serve hot or warm. Sulaimani Chai is often had with a slice of lemon or a few drops of fresh lemon juice added to it.



Karak Chai

Karak Chai refers to the refreshing hot beverage prepared by boiling tea leaves with water, milk, spices and sugar/jaggery – it is popular in the Indian subcontinent as well as in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and few other nations in the region. The spices used include a combination of cardamom, cinnamon, cloves and dried or fresh ginger.

Ingredients

- 3 cups water, 1 cup milk
- 4tsp sugar (or as per taste)
- 4 whole cardamoms - crushed
- 2 whole cloves
- ½tsp dried ginger powder or
- 2cm piece of ginger – crushed
- 3cm piece of cinnamon
- 2tsp black tea powder or
- 3-4 black tea bags

Method

In a saucepan, add the water, ginger, cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, and let it boil on medium flame. When the water comes to a boil, add sugar and the tea powder/teabags and let it boil for a couple of minutes. Then reduce flame and simmer for a minute. Now add the milk and bring the tea to a boil again. Simmer for a minute, and pour piping hot through a strainer into teacups or glasses. The tea tastes best when served in a mud tumbler (called kullad)

Tandoori chai

A unique version of the 'Karak Chai' is the 'Tandoori Chai' which has gained popularity over the past few years. To get the tandoori flavour, mud tumblers are heated in a charcoal furnace till they get scalding hot. Then, freshly brewed tea is poured into a scalding hot mud tumbler



and allowed to over flow into a saucepan. In this way, the tea bubbles over and gets a smoky flavour, and so is called 'Tandoori Chai'.

CHAI TYPES

While the basic process of boiling tea along with a combination of milk and water or either remains the same, one can attain a whole variety of tea flavours by simply juggling with the spices available. One might enjoy just one flavour or a combination of various spices, depending on how strong or flavourful one likes the tea to be. Some popular flavours include:



Masala Chai

Tea spiced with cardamom, clove, black pepper, cinnamon, ginger and nutmeg forms the popular 'Masala Chai' that is always prepared with milk and a sweetener. Ready 'Tea masalas' are available while some add tulsi and other dried herbs.



Ginger Chai

Ginger Chai is one of the most popular, consumed especially during the monsoon or in winter. Grated fresh ginger or dried ginger powder (called soont) is added to the tea pot while the tea is brewing. This is also considered an elixir for colds.



Cardamom Chai

Another hot favourite, this chai uses freshly ground or powdered cardamom, which is added just before switching off the flame. Some prefer to have their chai boiled with only cardamom, instead of other spices to enjoy just a mild flavour.



Bombay Cutting Chai

Popular in Mumbai, this 'Cutting Chai' is called so because the flavour of the tea is so strong that half a glass is sufficient to refresh the drinker. It's a form of 'masala chai' and is always served in small 'cutting glasses', not cups, at road-side tea stalls.



Kashmiri Kahwa

Originating from Kashmir, this is a traditional green tea prepared with exotic spices. The signature flavour is derived from saffron strands, which are included in the blend. Cardamom, almonds, cinnamon, and cloves are added to this afternoon brew.



Tulsi Chai

Known more for its health benefits, Tulsi Chai uses one of India's most sacred herbs – the holy basil. Fresh tulsi leaves are added to the brew and it helps in building up immunity to colds. This can be prepared with/without milk and best had in the morning.

take a break

IN TOWN

SWIMMERS' CELEBRATION



Alawi Swimming Academy held its third year annual celebration at Kalbou Park last weekend



(Photos: VK Shafeer)

Felicitation of Hajj returnees



The Muscat Sunni Centre held a felicitation programme for those who have returned after performing Hajj



(Photos: VK Shafeer)

BOGGLER

K	R	E	N
V	S	O	S
A	O	E	T
U	E	Y	T

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY:

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

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

Weird but True...or False?



Can you spot the difference between a fun fact and a made-up tidbit? Take this 'Weird But True...or False' quiz to find out, based on facts from National Geographic Kids magazine.

The African country of Sudan has more pyramids than Egypt - True or False?

True: Sudan's pyramids outnumber those in Egypt. Like the Egyptian pyramids, Sudan's were used for royal burials.

Royalty

Royalty in ancient China wore burial suits made of which mineral?

- a. Calcite
- b. Jade
- c. Aquamarine
- d. Salt

Answer - Ancient Chinese royalty wore burial suits made of jade because they believed the mineral preserved their bodies.

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Balancing your family evenly with your career isn't always required. On days like today, it will be clear which one should take top priority. You can't let good opportunities pass you by. When you have the chance to move forward at work, you have to grab it. Your family will understand.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Today the Universe is sending you some strong energy that will keep you grounded when you move into an unfamiliar situation. Don't worry if you're going on a first date, have a job interview, or expecting some other kind of unsettling conversation. You'll stay cool, calm, and collected no matter what. You'll be able to focus more on the exhilarating aspects of the unknown.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

People have been making a lot of assumptions about you lately, and today you'll need to clear up some of their confusion. Let them know who you are and what you're all about. But keep in mind that the most effective way to make them understand you isn't by talking. It's by doing. Your actions speak louder than words, so do the right thing today.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Things are about to equalize in your life, so get ready to enjoy a healthier, more balanced period. This is a great time to examine one of your closer relationships. You have the proper perspective on the people you care most about, and they're open to having a deeper discussion than you've ever had.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

People have tons of respect for you, which will become evident early on today when you get wind of someone's glowing comments about you. Try not to blush too long, because by this afternoon you're going to be thrust onto center stage and you'll need to look as responsible and composed as everyone thinks you are! Your self-respect is climbing the charts.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Putting events together or planning a party will be a lot of fun for you today. All the details will be lining up and it looks like it's coming together beautifully. This will be quite a feather in your cap, although now you're just going to have to do even better next time! Not to worry.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Watch out for people who say one thing and do another today, no matter how powerful they are. You don't have to call them out on their hypocrisy, but you do have to avoid sharing any of your secrets with them! Working with other people could be a challenge in general today. Your goals are not in complete alignment with theirs, and compromises might not be possible.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You might not realize it, but you make a very good role model! The younger people in your life could learn a lot from your ideas and attitudes, so why not be more open with them today? Despite what you might think about the younger generation, they're genuinely interested in what you have to say. They just might be a little too shy to ask you.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Your impatient half is going to dominate your patient half today, which could lead you to make some hasty decisions. In an effort to get projects or chores out of the way, you could be choosing a short-term answer that has long-term, negative ramifications. But quick fixes don't work for long, so you can expect some of your haste to come back to haunt you unless you double-check your work.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Rather than get annoyed when someone with high energy explodes onto the scene today, try to soak up some of the excess enthusiasm. Sure, their bright-eyed obnoxiousness might not be your cup of tea, but they are on to something with all of this positive thinking stuff. Give it time and you'll feel much more comfortable with them by the end of the afternoon.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Change is good, but it's not always comfortable. If you're going through some transitions in your life right now, get ready to combat that discomfort by surrounding yourself with the people and things that make you feel comfy and cozy. Better yet, if you can take some time off from work or school, you'll be helping yourself even more.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You could feel a little out of sync with the people around you early in the day, probably because of the odd dreams you had last night that left you tossing and turning. You might be tempted to try to decode all of them, which will distract you from what's going on. Try to leave your nighttime visions alone. Don't give them a second thought for now. Then it will be easy for you to get back into the rhythm of the day.

entertainment

BRAD PITT
THRILLS DRIVERS
AT SILVERSTONE



Brad Pitt was full of praise and respect for Formula One and, in particular, the drivers on Sunday after spending the weekend in their company for filming at the British Grand Prix.

The Hollywood film star told Sky Sports F1 that the paddock and sport as a whole had welcomed and embraced the as yet unnamed Apple-supported F1 film project in which he is starring.

"I'm having the time of my life," he said, having raced around the track himself.

"I'm a little giddy right now! It's great to be here. We're having such a laugh. It's the time of my life."



AMBER HEARD'S
FILM PREMIERE
IGNITES
CONTROVERSY

The world of cinema is buzzing with anticipation as Amber Heard prepares to make her comeback at the illustrious Taormina Film Festival with her latest film, *In The Fire*.

While fans celebrate her return, a storm of controversy surrounds the festival's decision to showcase Heard's movie amidst ongoing disputes with her ex-husband, Johnny Depp. As battle lines are drawn on social media, Hollywood finds itself at a crossroads, with calls for support of survivors echoing throughout the industry.

AI CAN'T REPLACE MICKEY
MOUSE, SAYS VOICE OF
DISNEY MASCOT

Aw, gee! The technology driving artificial intelligence sure is swell, but it could never capture the essence of Mickey Mouse, according to the man who voices Disney's mascot.

As part of Disney's upcoming 100th anniversary celebration, the animators, archivists and Mickey voice actor Bret Iwan were asked about the company's past and future, including the potential for AI - a topic currently roiling Hollywood.

"Gosh, I would say, of course there's amazing technology being developed with AI, and it's so impressive," said Iwan. "But I don't think anything can replace the heart of a character, and more importantly, the heart of storytelling."



BULGARIAN-GERMAN FILM
WINS TOP PRIZE AT CZECH
FESTIVAL

Blaga's Lessons, a Bulgarian-German film, on Saturday won the main Crystal Globe award at the Karlovy Vary film festival, one of Europe's top cultural events.

The film by Bulgarian director Stephan Komandarev tells the story of a recently widowed elderly woman who has fallen prey to phone scammers.

Komandarev received the Grand Prix Crystal Globe for Best Film, along with Bulgarian actress Eli Sko-rcheva, at the event.

Madonna to kickstart
'Celebration' concert
from Europe

Madonna has announced that due to her medical emergency last month, the North American dates of her 'Celebration' tour will be rescheduled to an unspecified future time. The tour will now begin in Europe in October. The previously scheduled European dates were slated to begin on October 14 in London and carry on through the European mainland for seven weeks before concluding with two more London dates on December 5 and 6.



HOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW

**MISSION IMPOSSIBLE:
DEAD RECKONING - I**

Genre: Action, thriller
Starring: Tom Cruise, Hayley Atwell, Rebecca Ferguson, Esai Morales

KEY TO AVOID
CATASTROPHE

With seven films in the series of Tom Cruise's Mission Impossible, the series nears 30 years of its existence since it dealt its inaugural punch in 1996. As a testament to Cruise's incredible staying power, the film franchise is still alive and kicking and the 61-year-old star seems to be just raising the bar each time, thanks to the incredible stunts in every upcoming edition.

The last two in the series - Rogue Nation (2015) and Fallout (2018) - indicated that the actor had found a muse in director, co-writer and co-producer Christopher McQuarrie, who transformed the series into a much-appreciated blockbuster franchise.

The lucky duo now hits the celluloid world with the latest installment - Dead Reckoning - which not only ups the ante but also keeps the franchise moving

in full steam ahead.

As the first chapter of the two-part finale, the plot follows Ethan Hunt (Cruise) being pitted against an AI device, dubbed as The Entity, and the only way to access it is via a missing golden key that many government agencies and powerful individuals are searching for. The Entity could very well be a reason to bring global catastrophe and it is up to Hunt to prevent it from falling into the wrong hands.

Now you got it! And for some spice, Hunt faces a ghost from the past in Gabriel who is also looking for the key and knows a little more about The Entity than others.

There are some cleverly crafted nail-biting moments, and the tension during these scenes is so palpable that it pierces through the screen and keeps one hooked all through. The run-time of two hours 43 minutes simply runs by. A good watch.

Rating ★★☆☆☆

'Succession' and strikes:
what to expect from
Emmy nominations

Can any TV show topple *Succession* at the Emmys? Will Amazon's lavish *Lord of the Rings* prequel rule them all? And, with ongoing Hollywood strikes, will television's finest even be honoured this year?

Nominations for television's equivalent of the Oscars will be announced in a live-streamed ceremony Wednesday starting at 8:30am Pacific time (1530 GMT), after which final-round voting begins for the 75th Emmy Awards, tentatively set for September 18.

In normal years, TV pundits argue over which shows will be nominated - not whether the Emmys will even take place. But this year's ceremony is already jeopardised by a writers' strike, now in its 11th week. A Screen Actors Guild (SAG) shutdown would mean a boycott by stars - and therefore, a likely delay - of the Emmys.

COMING SOON

PADMINI

Genre: Comedy **Starring:** Kunchacko Boban, Madona Sebastian, Vincy Aloshious, Aparna Balamurali **Language:** Malayalam

The film deals with Rameshan, a part-time poet and a full-time college teacher, overcoming this struggle with the support of his friends, family, and some new faces along the way.