

66,469 labour complaints received by MoL in 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) has stated that it received 66,469 labour complaints from different parts of the sultanate in 2022.

An official at MoL said, "The ministry conducted more than 12,045 inspection visits and 2,114 awareness campaigns in various governorates in 2022."

He added that inspection teams arrested 17,801 expatriates for violating the law and the ministry received 27,954 reports of absconding workers.

"The ministry reviewed the fees for issuing and renewing licences to recruit non-Omani workforce, besides issuing new regulations for practising some professions," the MoL official added.

According to him, the ministry is currently working on a new system to reduce the cost of recruiting private labour. "The ministry is in the process of finalising regulations for private sector companies. Provisions will be made to hire workers on contractual basis - hourly, daily or monthly - with the option to terminate the contract any time."

The first phase of this new arrangement will begin with spe-



(Supplied photo)

MoL arrested 17,801 expats for violating the law and received 27,954 reports of absconding workers

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cific groups, where type and hours of work can be chosen. "It will later include domestic workers."

He added that labour unions play a major role in the market. Fifty-seven unions were registered in the sultanate by 2022.

110,000 jobseekers till March 2023: H E Ba'owain

Muscat - There were 110,000 jobseekers in the sultanate at the end of March, according to H E Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Ba'owain, Minister of Labour.

Speaking to reporters at the Ministry of Labour's (MoL) annual press conference held last week where its achievements in 2022 were reviewed and plans for the current year announced, H E Ba'owain said, "As many as 45,026 jobseekers were appointed through direct employment, replacement



H E Dr Mahad bin Said Ba'owain

or work-related training. A total of 13,453 employees availed the job security system in various governorates."

According to H E Ba'owain, MoL aims to provide 35,000

job opportunities this year, of which 14,000 will be through replacements in the private sector and 10,000 in the public sector, 5,000 through work-related training, 2,000 vocational opportunities for GED holders, 2,000 jobs through industry initiatives, and 2,000 vacancies generated by initiatives overseen by government agencies.

Of the set target of 35,000 job opportunities this year, 21 per cent has already been achieved.

Digital stamps a must for fizzy drinks from July 20

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Starting July 20, carbonated and sweetened drinks will be required to get Digital Tax Stamps in order to be imported or sold in the Omani market.

Manufacturers and importers who do not comply with the Digital Tax Stamp scheme could be penalised RO500 to RO5,000.

Oman Tax Authority (OTA) stipulated the rules, terms and conditions for implementation of the Digital Tax Stamp scheme for excise goods in the sultanate through Ministerial Decision No 21/2022.

As part of the initial phase, the scheme focused on cigarettes and was later expanded to include shisha and other tobacco products. OTA now intends to further expand regulations to implement Digital Tax Stamps for carbonated, energy and sweetened drinks.

Starting May 4, OTA will accept requests for tax stamps from importers and manufacturers. From July 20, the sultanate will apply customs enforcement, prohibiting import of goods into Oman without tax stamps, and starting October 12, trade of local goods without tax stamps will be banned.

Digital Tax Stamp on excise



goods is a tax managing scheme introduced in the sultanate to enforce tax administration and compliance in line with international best practices, professional services and advisory firm PwC stated in a recent publication.

Digital Tax Stamps allow monitoring, tracking and tracing movement of excise goods throughout the supply chain. The main objectives of introducing Digital Tax Stamps are to protect government revenues, combat illicit trade, promote fair competition in markets, provide real time statistical data for both tax policy and better analysis, and audit of the supply chain, according to PwC.

'As a result, manufacturers and importers of excise goods are mandated to affix seals with special security features on the selected excise goods. Only goods bearing these special marks are allowed to be imported into Oman or be produced and sold in the local market.'

► NEWS BRIEF

MORE THAN 20 PEOPLE FEARED DEAD IN SHIPWRECKS OFF ITALY

Rome, Italy - More than 20 people are feared to have drowned off Italy, the UN's refugee agency said on Monday, as good weather prompted fresh attempts at the perilous Mediterranean crossing. Last week, a deadly shipwreck off Libya claimed 34 lives.

"Two shipwrecks off Lampedusa with 22 missing. Condolences to those who have lost family members at sea," Chiara Caroletti, UNHCR's representative for Italy, tweeted.

The 36 survivors of the first shipwreck told the Italian coastguard that 19 people on board their boat had died after it partially capsized. Three other people were reported to have died in a second incident.

OMANI PHOTOGRAPHERS WIN REGIONAL AWARD



Salem Sultan al Hajri

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Two Omani photographers - Hussein Ali al Amri and Salem Sultan al Hajri - made the sultanate proud by winning Qatar's Sheikh Saoud al Thani Single Image Award for 2023.

Organised by Tasweer, established by Qatar Museums, the photo festival has been developed as a focal point for the personal and professional creative growth of photographers and image-makers in the region.

The event saw participation of photographers from Arab, West Asian and

North African countries.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Hajri said, "My winning photo is of an al ardha camel show held in Qabel, North Sharqiyah in 2022."

Amri's winning image is from 2019 of a mother in traditional Vietnamese attire embracing her son. "While taking the picture, a dog entered the frame to feed its pups. The photo is called 'Motherhood.'"



Hussein Ali al Amri



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Fitch revises outlook on OQ, EDO to 'positive'

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Bangladesh swears in new president ahead of election

Mass exodus of foreigners as fighting rages in Sudan; 427 people killed

Khartoum, Sudan - Multiple nations pushed on Monday with frantic evacuations of their citizens from chaos-torn Sudan, where fighting raged for a tenth day between forces loyal to two rival generals.

As army and paramilitary forces again clashed in Khartoum and across the country, terrified Sudanese have endured acute shortages of water, food, medicines and fuel as well as power and Internet blackouts, the UN said.

At least 427 people have been killed and more than 3,700 wounded, according to United Nations agencies, which also reported Sudanese civilians "fleeing

areas affected by fighting, including to Chad, Egypt and South Sudan".

"Morgues are full, corpses litter the streets" and overwhelmed hospitals often have to stop operations for security reasons, said Dr Attiya Abdallah, head of the doctors' union.

The United States and European, Middle Eastern, African and Asian nations have launched emergency missions to bring to safety their embassy staff and Sudan-based citizens by road, air and sea.

US special forces swooped in with Chinook helicopters on Sunday to rescue diplomats and their dependents, while Britain



launched a similar rescue mission involving more than 1,000 military personnel.

European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said more than 1,000 of the bloc's citizens had been taken out during a "long and

intense weekend" involving missions by France, Germany and other member nations.

'It's destroyed'

With Khartoum international airport disabled after battles that

left charred airplanes on runways, many foreigners were airlifted from smaller airstrips and taken to safety in countries including Djibouti and Jordan.

China said on Monday it had "safely evacuated" a first group of citizens and would "try every means to protect the lives, properties and safety of 1,500 plus Chinese compatriots in Sudan".

Long convoys of UN cars and buses have made their way from the capital, where gunfire and explosions have echoed through the streets, to Port Sudan on the Red Sea coast, an arduous 850km road trip away.

"The war fell upon us all without warning," a Lebanese evac-

uee told AFPTV upon his arrival by bus to Port Sudan.

"The situation in Khartoum is very sad ... It's destroyed. I left with this T-shirt and these pyjamas, all that I have with me after 17 years."

Those Sudanese who can afford to are also fleeing Khartoum on crowded buses on the more than 900km drive north to Egypt.

Among the 800,000 South Sudanese refugees who previously fled civil war in their own country, some are choosing to return, with women and children crossing the border, UN refugee agency official Marie-Helene Verney said.

AFP



37% of Mwasalat's bus passengers are citizens

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman National Transport Company - Mwasalat - transported more than 850,000 passengers in the first quarter of 2023 compared to 635,000 in the same period of 2022.

With over 9,000 daily passengers, the government-owned company transported the 850,000 passengers within cities of the sultanate.

Mwasalat's ferry service transported over 60,000 passengers in Q1 2023 compared to 51,000 in Q1 2022.

Omanis made up 37 per cent of the passengers availing the bus service, while on ferries they accounted for 81.2 per cent of the total passengers.

Mwasalat transported over 221,000 passengers through its ferries in 2022.

The ferry service routes include Shinas-Khasab, Shannah-



'The high demand for bus and ferry services clearly indicates the Omani public's awareness and interest in public transport services'

Masirah, Khasab-Lima, Shinas-Dibba, Lima-Shinas, Lima-Dibba, and Hallaniyat Islands-Taqa. Additionally, there are integrated bus and ferry services connecting the Governorate of Musandam and Masirah Island.

According to Mwasalat, the high demand for its bus and ferry services clearly indicates the Omani public's awareness and interest in public transport services.

The company attributed this to its marketing activities and efforts to develop the efficiency of all the services it provides. Mwasalat firmly believes that its success is dependent on its customers' satisfaction.

'The total number of training hours for jobseekers at Mwasalat reached 8,480. The percentage of Omanisation in the company is 92.8 per cent,' it stated.

MoHUP offers 7 plots to boost fisheries sector in 4 governorates

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) is offering seven plots of land for investment to boost the fisheries sector.

An official at MoHUP said, "The ministry has floated tenders for those wishing to invest in the fisheries sector. It is offering investment opportunities in seven plots for fishery products in four governorates."

Of the seven, two sites are in Dhofar to set up fish collection centres in Hadbeen and Sadah.

Two sites - in the Siya area of the wilayat of Bahla in Dakhliyah and another in the wilayat of Buraimi - will see the establishment and operations of fish markets.

According to the official, bids are also invited to set up fish collection centres in the Al Saqla and Al Juwairiya areas of



Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, and the wilayat of Sur in South Shariyah.

"Bidders must submit an integrated plan for the management and operation of these investment projects and their associated activities," the official said.

"This initiative aims to cre-

ate job opportunities for Omanis, increase production of a wide variety of fish and enhance food security. It also aims to increase the contribution of fisheries to the GDP and transfer modern technologies to the fisheries sector to enhance fisheries investment in the sultanate," he added.

Adventure centre in Musandam to be launched on Wednesday

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has announced that it will officially open Oman Adventure Centre and launch the world's longest zip line over water on Wednesday, April 26, in Musandam.

Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) recently announced the soft opening of the 1,800m dual zip line project in Khasab. The project is part of an integrated adventure centre - Oman Adventure Centre - designed to offer tourists unique experiences that combine adventure and exploration.

The zip line project is the first activity offered by the centre, which has been developed as part of a comprehensive development plan for the region.

Oman Adventure Centre has been designed to accommodate a broad range of facilities, including a waiting area, providing visitors with an integrated tourism experience. The zip line is man-



(Supplied photo)

aged and operated by LEOS, a specialist operator that runs adventure and entertainment projects in the region and other parts of the world.

On the occasion of the soft opening, Mubarak bin Ali al Rahbi, head of Musandam Governor's Office, said, "The governorate has a wealth of tourism offerings that can be utilised to develop a wide range of tourism projects. This project illustrates

our ongoing efforts to utilise these elements for tourism development."

He added, "We are confident that the zip line project will encourage businesses within and outside the governorate to develop more tourism-related services. In doing so, they will contribute to the sector's growth, aligning with our vision to place Musandam on the local and regional map of the most promi-

nent tourist destinations, especially in the areas of exploration and adventure."

According to Said Hareb al Obaidani, Director General of Tourism Development in the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the ministry is working to stimulate development and investments in key tourist destinations in Oman, especially Musandam.

The ministry allocated the land and budget for the zip line project, which was implemented by Omran in partnership with Musandam Governor's Office.

"Besides the zip line project, we are also developing several hiking and mountain biking trails in the governorate, and installing information and guide signboards that meet all required safety and security standards. The ministry is seeking, in cooperation with all partners, to explore investment opportunities in Musandam's tourism sector, aiming to make it a destination of choice for investments," Obaidani said.

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Fitch revises outlook on OQ, EDO to 'positive'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Global credit rating agency Fitch Ratings has revised up its outlook on Oman's global integrated energy group OQ and state-owned Energy Development Oman (EDO) to 'positive' from 'stable' and affirmed both companies' long-term issuer default ratings at 'BB'.

The revision of the outlook on OQ and EDO reflects the recent revision of Fitch's outlook on Oman's sovereign rating. Fitch said in its statements.

Earlier this month Fitch revised its outlook on Oman's long-term foreign-currency issuer default rating to 'positive', from 'stable', and affirmed the sultanate's rating at 'BB'. The rating agency said that the positive outlook reflects Oman's lower government debt-to-GDP ratio,



with high oil prices and spending restraint reducing external liquidity risk.

'OQ's 'BB' rating is equalised with that of Oman, given the strong links between the com-

pany and the sovereign, in line with Fitch's government-related entities (GRE) rating criteria,'

Fitch noted. Fitch assesses OQ's stand-alone credit profile (SCP) at 'b+',

which is supported by successful project execution in the upstream and downstream segments, alongside stronger financial performance. OQ's SCP also reflects its solid business profile with integrated operations spanning exploration and production, refining, marketing, chemical and petrochemical segments, the rating agency said.

For Energy Development Oman, Fitch said EDO's rating is constrained by the rating of its sole shareholder, the government of Oman, given their close links. This reflects the influence the state exerts on the company through strategic direction, taxation and dividends, the rating agency said.

Fitch assess EDO's SCP at 'bbb', supported by the company's large-scale oil and gas operations and low leverage. The SCP is constrained by a fairly

complex operating structure and short reserves life, albeit with a strong record of successful reserves replacement, the rating agency said.

The recently revised 'positive' outlook on Oman incorporates Fitch's expectation that the government remains committed to fiscal consolidation. The rating agency said that fiscal reform should be sufficient to limit a deterioration of Oman's budget, debt-to-GDP ratio and external position under its assumption of lower oil prices this year and next. Oman's government debt-to-GDP ratio fell to 40 per cent in 2022, from 61 per cent at end-2021, and Fitch expects it to reach 37 per cent by end-2024.

Fitch projects a government budget surplus of 2.3 per cent of GDP in 2023, against 4.9 per cent in 2022, Oman's first surplus since 2013.

Oman's oil output up 2.6% in Q1, exports drop 6.8%



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's daily average production of crude oil increased to 1.064mn barrels per day (bpd) during the first quarter of 2023, up by 2.6 per cent in comparison to 1.036mn bpd output recorded in the same period of last year.

The sultanate's total oil production in the first three months of this year grew by 2.6 per cent to 95.7mn barrels compared to 93.3mn barrels in the same period of 2022, according to the statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Of the total production, crude output increased by 2.2 per cent year-on-year to 75.3mn barrels during the first quarter, while condensates output increased 4.1 per cent to 20.4mn barrels during January - March period.

However, Oman's total oil exports dropped by 6.8 per cent during the first three months of

2023 to 76.04mn barrels as compared with 81.6mn barrels recorded in the corresponding period of 2022, the NCSI data showed.

The sultanate's total oil production for the full year 2022 increased by nearly 10 per cent to 388.4mn barrels compared to 354.5mn barrels in 2021.

Exports to China rise Increased exports to China, the biggest buyer of Oman's crude, mainly driven the growth in Oman's total oil exports. Oman's oil shipments to China accounted for more than 90 per cent of the sultanate's total oil exports during the first quarter of this year.

Total exports to China grew by 8.6 per cent to 69.8mn barrels during the first quarter of 2023 compared to 64.3mn barrels recorded in the same period of 2022.

On the other hand, exports to India plunged by 86 per cent to just 1.7mn barrels in the first three months of this year from

12mn barrels in the same period of 2022.

The average price at which Oman sold its crude during the first quarter of 2023 increased 3.2 per cent to US\$81.5 per barrel against US\$79 per barrel recorded in the same period of 2022. The average price for March increased to US\$80.9 per barrel from US\$77.4 in February, the NCSI data showed.

Last week Oman crude price at the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) reached to its highest level in the more than five months, mainly supported by the OPEC+ production cuts and expectations of a tighter oil market.

The surprise production cuts announced by the OPEC+ alliance at the start of April provided a big boost to global oil prices that had slid to a 15-month lows in March following the banking sector crisis in the US and the resulting fears of a contagion to other regions and asset classes.

Manufacturers hope for AI boost in factories

Hanover, Germany - Manufacturers are hoping for the artificial intelligence revolution to reach their factories, envisaging robots being used to repair complex machinery.

There has been an explosion of interest in uses of AI across many sectors since the launch last year of chatbot ChatGPT from US startup OpenAI.

And at last week's Hanover Fair on industrial technology in Germany, the potential for artificial intelligence in the manufacturing sector was firmly in focus.

Via the tablet in his hands, a young employee of American IT services provider HPE chatted with an AI-equipped virtual assistant, asking it to operate the arm of a robot.

In order to solve a technical problem, "factory workers no longer need to get a qualified expert on site: the artificial intelligence takes charge" of guiding the repairs, said Thomas Meier, a data analyst from HPE who was presenting the prototype.



Philip Singer, a business architect for data and AI at Hewlett-Packard Enterprises (HPE), operates a robot at the Hanover Technology Fair in Hanover, Germany on April 17 (AFP)

The US firm, which has some 60,000 employees, has been working for the past year with Aleph Alpha, a German startup with some 50 staff, seen as one of OpenAI's leading European rivals.

The innovation communicates with factory workers who can, for example, send a photo of a machine for the programme to detect any problems or check that it

is correctly installed.

Aleph Alpha's resources are modest compared to those available to OpenAI, which has received major financing from Microsoft.

But the German startup believes it has at least one major advantage -- it will keep customer data in Europe.

But Aleph Alpha CEO Jonas Andrulis told AFP that Europe's

contribution to the AI revolution must go "beyond regulation".

At another stand at the Hanover fair, Siemens was also exhibiting an application aimed at improving factory performance.

In partnership with Microsoft, the German industrial conglomerate is this year planning to bring out a new version of the Teams messaging platform.

It will feature ChatGPT and be specifically designed to help workers and spot defaults in products. Microsoft and Siemens, who say they are working with a number of clients in the automotive and aerospace industries, rejected accusation that AI will lead to job losses.

Anthony Hemmelgarn, CEO of Siemens Digital Industries Software, said that 70 per cent of issues were not being recorded and that AI was "not replacing anybody", as certain tasks were not getting done.

"It's all about increasing efficiency", he added. AFP

Profits at India's Reliance jump on energy, retail business

Mumbai, India - Indian conglomerate Reliance Industries reported a better-than-expected lift in net profit for the March quarter on Friday, driven by strong growth in its energy and retail divisions.

Reliance, owned by Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani, reported a net profit of 192.99bn rupees (US\$2.35bn) in the first three months of the year.

The result was 19.11 per cent

higher than the same period last year and exceeded analysts' expectations of slower profit growth of around 168bn rupees, according to a poll by The Economic Times.

Reliance's oil-to-chemical segment "posted its highest-ever operating profit despite global uncertainties and disruptions in commodity trade flows", Ambani said in a statement.

"Our oil and gas segment also delivered very strong

growth."

Revenue from operations came in slightly below market estimates at 2.16tn rupees (US\$26.37bn), 2.1 per cent higher from the previous corresponding period but 1.9 per cent lower than the December quarter.

Earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation for the oil-to-chemical unit was 162.93bn rupees (US\$1.99bn), an increase of

14.4 per cent from the 2022 reporting quarter.

But revenues for the division slipped 11.8 per cent on lower crude oil and downstream product prices.

Telecom arm Reliance Jio reported a 13.01 per cent increase in net profit to 47.16bn rupees (US\$574.76mn) from a year ago but saw an increase of just 1.68 percent from the previous quarter. AFP

Over \$68bn withdrawn from Credit Suisse ahead of UBS takeover

Zurich, Switzerland - Tens of billions were withdrawn from Credit Suisse in the first three months of 2023, the bank's earnings report showed Monday, providing clues to the towering challenges ahead as UBS prepares an emergency takeover.

Switzerland's long-time second largest bank saw 61.2bn Swiss francs (US\$68.6bn) withdrawn in the first quarter alone, it said Monday in what is likely its final quarterly report before it is swallowed by its larger domestic rival, UBS.

The bank also reported deceptively bloated net profits for the quarter, after its high-risk debts were wiped out in the mega-merger deal, but warned

of "substantial" losses to come.

Investors had been eagerly awaiting the results as they seek clues to the magnitude of the challenges facing UBS, Switzerland's largest bank, after it was strongarmed last month by Swiss authorities into the shotgun marriage.

The results seemed to be greeted with some optimism.

In early afternoon trading, Credit Suisse's shares rose nearly two percent to 0.81 Swiss francs a piece and UBS's were up 1.6 percent at 18.35 francs a share, as the Swiss stock exchange's main SMI index rose 0.14 per cent.

But Vontobel analyst Andreas Venditti warned in a research



note that Credit Suisse's report "reveals the bad shape the firm is in".

"UBS undoubtedly faces a major (and urgent) task in deeply restructuring its former competi-

tor."

Credit Suisse said the "significant net asset outflows" were particularly heavy in the second half of March, as it was engulfed by panic in the days surrounding the hastily arranged takeover.

"These outflows have moderated but have not yet reversed as of April 24, 2023," the bank said in its earnings statement.

Analysts with the Zurich Cantonal Bank (ZKB) stressed that Credit Suisse's outflows for the quarter were "less than feared".

But they come after the bank already saw 110.5bn francs in outflows in the fourth quarter of 2022.

Venditti pointed out that over the past six months, Credit Su-

isse's wealth management division alone had seen 140bn francs in net new money outflows.

The bank meanwhile said it saw its net profit swell in the first quarter to 12.4bn francs, up from a significant loss a year earlier.

But that was largely attributed to holders of high-risk Credit Suisse debt being wiped out in the emergency takeover deal.

Swiss authorities required that close to 16bn Swiss francs (US\$17.9bn) in so-called additional tier 1 (AT1) bonds be rendered worthless before Switzerland's two biggest banks united.

The order by the Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority (FINMA) infuriated

bondholders, and a number of them have begun launching legal action against the regulator.

Credit Suisse said its quarterly results were also boosted by the 700mn-Swiss-franc sale of a significant part of its Securitized Products Group to Apollo Global Management.

But despite this, on an adjusted basis, the bank said it nonetheless suffered a pre-tax loss for the quarter of 1.3bn Swiss francs.

The bank, which last October launched a vast restructuring plan including carving out its investment arm, said that unit had suffered an adjusted pre-tax loss of 337 million in the first quarter. AFP

European countries to boost wind energy production

Ostend, Belgium – Nine European countries were holding a summit Monday aimed at scaling up wind power generation in the North Sea, spurred by the fallout of the Ukraine war and the push for renewables.

Hosted by Belgium in the coastal town of Ostend, the meeting gather the leaders of EU members France, Germany, Ireland, Denmark, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, with European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen also attending.

Norway and Britain will participate, too, though the UK's energy minister was leading his delegation and not Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who stayed in London on another engagement.

"We need offshore wind turbines – and we need a lot of them," the leaders of the countries, including French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Sunak, said in a joint op-ed published in Politico.

"We need them to reach our climate goals, and to rid ourselves of Russian gas, ensuring a more secure and independent Europe."

The collective goal, they said, was to boost offshore wind power generation to 120 gigawatts by 2030 – from just 30 GW now – and at least 300 GW by 2050.

The North Sea summit is the



second one to be held, after the four countries in the inaugural gathering last year -- Belgium, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands – decided it was necessary to broaden cooperation.

They recognised this was "a massive undertaking" requiring "huge investments in infrastructure".

Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said ahead of the summit that it would be focused on "speed of execution" and standardising equipment to build the offshore wind farms faster and cheaper.

Around 100 bosses of companies in the wind turbine supply chain were also participating in the summit.

The leaders' op-ed emphasised the need to source expertise and parts from Europe rather

than elsewhere.

"We need to make space for European value chains when it comes to green tech and diversify our sources of critical raw materials for wind turbines, batteries and the like," they said.

China currently dominates the supply of critical components such as rare earths, and the United States is heavily subsidising industry to onshore that sector.

"We are bolstering our energy security and sending a strong signal to (President Vladimir) Putin's Russia that the days of his dominance over global power markets are well and truly over," British Energy Security Secretary Grant Shapps said as he headed to the summit.

Security of the offshore installations was also a topic of the summit, given recent reports of a

Russian spy ship in the North Sea and the sabotage of Nord Stream gas pipelines in the Baltic Sea in September 2022. A NATO official was taking part to discuss the topic.

Industry criticism

WindEurope, the federation representing Europe's wind energy industry, believes the summit's ambitions are doable.

But it highlighted a lack of "adequate funding mechanisms" and recruitment in the sector.

Current policy, aimed at getting to a carbon-neutral future in Europe, "is overly focused on technological breakthroughs, rather than actual scaling up of existing supply chains", WindEurope said in a statement.

It also criticised "uncoordinated market interventions, price caps and national clawback

measures" that "deterred investments".

The organisation says Europe needs to build the offshore infrastructure to add 20 GW in output per year, yet the sector currently has capacity for just seven GW annually, with supply chain bottlenecks for cables, substations and foundations, and in the availability of offshore wind vessels.

Investment to get Europe where it wants to be is massive: the EU has calculated the cost of getting to 300 GW in offshore energy production by 2050 at 800bn euros (US\$900bn).

Britain has the biggest fleet of offshore wind farms, 45 of them, currently producing 14 GW, with plans to expand capacity to 50 GW by 2030.

Germany's 30 wind farms produce eight GW, followed by the Netherlands with 2.8 GW and Denmark and Belgium both with 2.3 GW.

The other participating countries produce less than a gigawatt from their existing installations but share ambitions to greatly ramp up wind energy capacity.

The European Union recently set a goal to double the proportion of renewables in its energy mix, to 42.5 per cent, notably by making it easier to get permits to install the infrastructure.

AFP

US inflation now 'broad-based,' top Fed official says

Washington, US – Inflation in the United States has become "broad-based," a top Federal Reserve official said, suggesting the US central bank's fight against price rises through interest rate hikes has some road left to run.

The Fed has raised its benchmark lending rate nine times in a row since March last year to tackle inflation, which remains well above its long-term target of two percent.

Several senior Fed officials have suggested in recent weeks that interest rates may need to increase further, and remain high, to control inflation.

Overall inflation, and other underlying measures of consumer price increases, remained high, Fed governor Lisa Cook said in prepared remarks in Washington on Friday.

"All of these measures have come off their peaks but remain elevated, suggesting that inflation has become broad-based in the economy," said Cook, who is a member of the Fed's 12-person rate-setting committee.

Cook said the path back to stable inflation "could be long and is likely to be uneven and bumpy."

The "appropriate path" of interest rate hikes would be determined by the impact of the recent financial sector turmoil on bank lending, she added.

"But if data show continued strength in the economy and



Lisa Cook

Fed has raised its benchmark lending rate nine times in a row since March 2022 to tackle inflation, which remains well above its long-term target of 2%

slower disinflation, we may have more work to do," she said.

The Fed will announce its next interest rate decision on May 3.

Most futures traders now expect the US central bank will raise its benchmark lending rate by 25 basis points, according to data from CME Group.

AFP

Russia's Sber launches GPTChat rival Gigachat

Moscow, Russia – Leading Russian technology company Sber on Monday announced the launch of its conversational artificial intelligence app intended to rival the US star ChatGPT.

The state company said in a statement on its website that it was "launching its own version" of a chatbot, which will be called GigaChat – a first for Russia.

The Russian-language app is now only available by invitation in test mode.

Sber said GigaChat can "have a conversation, write messages, respond to factual questions" but also "write code" and "create images from descriptions".

Sber chief executive German Gref, who has spearheaded the company's digital transformation in recent years, said the launch was "a breakthrough for the whole vast universe of Russian technologies".

Russia has been strengthening its domestic technology sector in recent years, particularly



since being hit by a barrage of Western sanctions after the Kremlin launched its Ukraine offensive. It has also been strengthening laws to regulate the sector, against a backdrop of growing political repression.

The Kremlin has called for different sites and social media platforms to be blocked as a way of censoring voices critical of its offensive in Ukraine.

The launch of GigaChat

comes in the wake of the run-away success of ChatGPT and is being seen by experts as the latest twist in Russia-US competition in technology.

ChatGPT's success sparked a gold rush among other tech firms and venture capitalists, with Google hurrying out its own chatbot and investors pouring cash into all manner of AI projects.

AFP

Sunak seeks to boost business links amid crisis

London, UK – British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak sought to repair the government's tarnished economic record Monday, reaching out to the business community rocked by a scandal engulfing the Confederation of British Industry.

Sunak's Conservatives and the main opposition Labour party are jockeying for position ahead of a general election expected next year.

The Tories, traditionally regarded as the party of business, have lost ground with the cost of living crisis and after former premier Liz Truss sparked chaos with unfunded tax cuts last year.

Sunak told business leaders on Monday that his so-called "Business Connect" platform will enable companies to engage directly with his administration.

The news comes as a small number of high-profile firms withdrew from the CBI on Friday after the nation's business lobby was rocked by fresh rape allegations.

Business Connect will look to boost economic growth, Sunak insisted Monday before an audience of more than 200 high-pro-



Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak delivers a speech on ending the "anti-maths mindset" to boost economic growth, during a visit at the London Screen Academy (LSA), on April 17 (AFP)

file chief executives and business figures.

"We are going to keep engaging to make (Britain) the most pro-business pro-growth country in the world," Sunak said in an address that was also broadcast on social networking site LinkedIn.

The UK remains plagued by double-digit inflation that has sparked a cost-of-living crunch, prompting calls from many employers for the government to do more to stimulate economic output.

Hospitality, retail and tourism chiefs have also called for Sunak to reinstate tax-free shopping for tourists.

Monday's event focused partly on growth sectors including advanced manufacturing, life sciences and technology.

"Business Connect provides the next fantastic opportunity to demonstrate how we are growing the economy," added Sunak.

"We are bringing together some of the UK's biggest companies and investors for meaningful dialogue - and I'm a prime minis-

ter passionate about working with business to unlock opportunity and progress."

However, Labour slammed the announcement and accused the government of mismanaging the economy.

"After 13 years, the pattern of Tory economic failure is grinding on," said finance spokesman Pat McFadden.

"Families in Britain are being harder hit by price rises than many comparable economies."

The Conservatives have been in power since 2010, including an initial five years in coalition with the Liberal Democrats.

Monday's initiative comes as the business community reels from recent events at the CBI, which earlier this month sacked its director-general Tony Danker after misconduct allegations.

Danker is not linked, however, to reports of two allegations of rape said to have involved CBI staff.

The CBI on Friday decided to suspend all activity until an extraordinary general meeting in June.

AFP

Netflix subscribers at record high, password crackdown coming

San Francisco, US – Netflix last week said that its number of subscribers hit a record high 232.5mn in the first quarter of the year and that its nascent ad-supported tier was faring well.

The streaming television giant reported a quarterly profit of US\$1.3bn, in line with expectations, but said it had delayed a broad crackdown on sharing of account passwords "to improve the experience for members."

Netflix said it expects to begin rolling out its options for paid password sharing this quarter instead.

"It's clear that the company wants to manage any fallout from the new strategy," said Third Bridge analyst Jamie

Lumley. That means some membership and revenue benefits resulting from the move were postponed, Netflix said in a letter to shareholders.

Netflix has dabbled with "borrower" or "shared" accounts in a few markets, but plans to roll them out in the United States and elsewhere this month, co-chief executive Greg Peters said in a streamed earnings interview.

Netflix said it is taking time to make sure subscribers have seamless access to the service away from home or on various devices such as tablets, TVs or smartphones.

"We learned from this last set of launches about some improvements we can do," Peters



Netflix expects to begin rolling out its options for paid password sharing this quarter

said. "It was better to take a little bit of extra time to incorporate those learnings and make this transition as smooth as possible for members."

And while a new ad-subsidized subscription tier at Netflix is in its early days, engagement is above initial expectations and Netflix has seen "very little

switching from our standard and premium plans."

Market tracker Insider Intelligence forecast that Netflix will bring in US\$770mn in ad revenue from the new tier this year, and that revenue figure will top US\$1bn next year.

As growth at Netflix cooled last year, the Silicon Valley based streaming company focused on creating a lower priced subscription tier with advertising. Netflix also set out to nudge people watching for free with shared passwords to begin paying for the service without alienating subscribers.

"This account sharing initiative helps us have a larger base of potential paying members and grow Netflix long term,"

said co-chief executive Ted Sarandos.

Future of TV

For the first time ever, US adults will spend more time this year watching digital video on platforms such as Netflix, TikTok and YouTube than viewing traditional television, Insider Intelligence has forecast.

The market tracker expects "linear TV" to account for less than half of daily viewing for the first time ever.

"This milestone is driven by people spending more and more time watching video on their biggest and smallest screens, whether it's an immersive drama on a connected TV or a viral clip on a smartphone,"

Insider Intelligence principal analyst Paul Verna said in a release.

Netflix and YouTube are "neck and neck" leaders when it comes to digital video audience attention, according to Insider Intelligence.

Netflix planned to continue spending about US\$17bn annually on shows and films, with that amount perhaps climbing after next year. "Netflix subscriber growth shows that the streaming wars are still on," said analyst Lumley.

"The company is ahead of where it was this time last year but still clearly facing the pressure from all the players in this crowded space."

AFP

Jetour showcasing achievements with latest models at Shanghai Auto Show



The Chinese up-and-coming SUV brand Jetour Auto is showcasing multiple models including the DASHING i-DM, T2 (named Traveller in the Chinese market) and T3 concept cars at the 2023 Shanghai Auto Show, which opened on April 18.

More than 200 partners and media from the Middle East, Africa, Central and South America, Asia-Pacific and other regions have been invited to the event, said a press release.

In recent years, the international competitiveness of Chinese companies has significantly increased, and the Chinese automobile industry has successfully transformed its capability from 'manufacturing' to 'creation'.

According to the statistics of China Association of Automobile Manufacturers, China exported 3.11mn automobiles in 2022, up 54 per cent year-on-year, surpassing Germany for the first time and becoming the world's second largest exporter of autos.

Chinese auto brands are deeply involved in global competition, and Jetour Auto has become a sample of rapid growth, achieving 700,000 sales in 55 months. Jetour Auto embarked on the journey of going global in 2019 and has established over 400 sales and service locations in more than 35 countries and regions across the Middle East, Africa, Central and South America, Asia-Pacific, and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

In 2022, Jetour Auto has made itself the up-and-coming SUV brand with the most overseas sales and the second fastest-growing auto exporter in China.

Jetour T2 expected to be launched this year

T2 is Jetour Auto's new flagship product for 2023 and has attracted a lot of attention at the Shanghai auto show. In line with the 'Travel+' brand positioning, Jetour T2 is designed for travel scenes, focusing on free and comfortable experiences. Embracing a muscular design style, Jetour T2 is built with sharp lines and angles that exude rugged beauty.

The interior of the vehicle is decorated with simplistic yet powerful elements, which is highly consistent with the exterior design.

The Kunpeng Power is standard on the Jetour T2 series which includes the oil-fueled and PHEV versions, achieving a balance between strong power and low fuel consumption, and providing a more economical and efficient travel experience. Built for all terrains and multiple scenes, Jetour T2 is equipped with the latest sixth-generation 4WD system from BorgWarner, which maximizes the 4WD performance under different driving modes, to provide users with a better driving experience. Jetour Auto states that Jetour T2 is expected to be launched globally this year.

On the New-Energy Path: DASHING i-DM and Kunlun Platform Lead the Way

At the 2023 Shanghai Auto Show, Jetour Auto is also exhibiting its first vehicle with a green license plate: The 2023 DASHING i-DM. This model is equipped with the dual motor driving system, the first for Chinese brand, and boasts a driving range of 1,000+ kilometres.

It generates a 240kW combined power and a 545Nm torque, providing drivers with a more thrilling experience. The new vehicle also comes with a standard 3,000W capacity for charging other devices, making outdoor travel even more enjoyable. 2023 marks the year that Jetour Auto taps into the HEV segment. Following the launch of DASHING i-DM, the brand will start a shift to fully embrace new energy, aiming to get all models qualified for green license plates in China by 2024 and concurrently expanding into international markets.

The X70 and X90 models will also be iterated into HEVs and be introduced into international markets.

Notably, Jetour Auto's Kunlun platform has also made its debut at the auto show.

The platform has core advantages in scalability, shift to new energy, smart cockpit and driving, and electronic and electrical architecture. All future Jetour models will be built on the Kunlun platform.

Additionally, the brand new concept car Jetour T3 also made its debut on the same stage. It features a non-load-bearing body that better adapts to complex off-road conditions, beefs up its off-road recovery capability and improves its durability.

Winning Together with the World: Becoming a global 'Travel+' automotive leading brand.

By showcasing its new products, technologies and latest achievements at the Shanghai Auto Show, Jetour Auto has greater confidence in deepening its international market presence. In the future, Jetour Auto will continue to adhere to the 'Travel+' development strategy, embrace the global automotive market with the ambition to become a global 'Travel+' automotive leading brand.

The auto show will continue till April 27.

CMS promotes Charles Dolphin as partner

International law firm CMS recently announced promotion of Charles (Charlie) Dolphin as partner in the firm's annual global promotions for 2023.

Charlie is based in the Oman office.

Having joined the firm in 2018, Charlie is a highly skilled lawyer with extensive experience in strategic energy and infrastructure projects, most notably in the utilities sector. He has advised clients across a range of sectors and jurisdictions, gaining a strong understanding of the required procurement process for infrastructure projects in the Middle East.

This experience has been recognised by leading legal directory Legal 500 EMEA, which has named Charlie as a 'Rising Star' for Oman Projects and Energy in each of the past several years.

Commenting on the promotion, Ben Ewing, Managing Partner of CMS Oman, said, "Charlie is an outstanding lawyer who has made a significant contribution to our firm since he joined us. He is highly respected by his colleagues and clients alike, and his promotion to partner is well deserved. We are confident that he will continue to make a valuable contribution to our clients and the firm as a whole."

Charlie added, "I am thrilled to be made partner at CMS. I look forward to continuing to work with our talented team of lawyers and providing our clients with the high-quality legal advice and representation they expect from us."

Penelope Warne, the senior partner, CMS UK, expressed happiness saying, "We're delighted to welcome these talented lawyers to the partnership. The promotions extend across a broad range of countries as well as practice and sector groups, reflecting the industries and geographies in which our clients are based and operate. It's also a reflection of the investment and support the firm provides to its people enabling them to thrive and reach their full potential. We congratulate these new partners on achieving this significant milestone."

Sixty-five new partners were promoted representing an increase on last year's global promotions round. The appointments span 28 cities across the UK, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America, with women accounting for almost one third of the promotions globally.



Charles Dolphin

ISC-Sanskrit Wing celebrates Indian New Year



The Indian Social Club-Sanskrit Wing celebrated the Festival of Varsha-Pratipada (Indian New Year) on April 14 at the main hall of the College of Banking and Financial Studies in Muscat.

The chief guest for the programme was H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, a release stated.

In this mega event, the spirit of Varsha-Pratipada was on its full glory and the cultural richness of India was witnessed from various states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Bihar. Around 115 children of various age groups along with 80 parents participated in the Shobha Yatra at the start of the programme.

While addressing the gathering H E Narang congratulated Sanskrit Wing for organising



Varsha-Pratipada festival with the Indian community and particularly involving kids in such events.

He informed that Varsha-



H E Amit Narang

Pratipada celebrated with different names all over India and its perfect example of unity in diversity of our culture. For instance, in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana it is called Ugadi, in Karnataka it's called Yugadi. It's celebrated as Sajibu-Cheiraoba in Manipur. In the state of Maharashtra it is

called Gudi Padwa and in Punjab it is known as Vaisakhi.

Earlier in the event, Dr Surendra Swami explained the significance of the Varsha-Pratipada.

Jayapal Detha, second secretary from the Indian Embassy; Indian Social Club's treasurer Govind Negi; Al-Maha Ceramic CEO Ajay Ganti; Intisar Corporation director Anil Bhai Waher; Al-Maha Petroleum CFO Hiriyananna; Narsh Pai of Nasma Telecom; D N Rao, principal of Indian School Al-Wadi Al-Kabir; and the members of the board of directors of Indian schools - Ambalavanan, Krishnendhu and Harshendu Bhai - along with 700 members of the Indian community enjoyed the cultural programme.

Indian PM sends Eid greetings to His Majesty

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has extended his sincere greetings to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the friendly people of the Sultanate of Oman on the auspicious occasion of Eid al Fitr.

In his personal letter to His Majesty Sultan Haitham, the Prime Minister noted that the festival of Eid al Fitr, celebrated with fervour by 200mn Muslims in India, brings with it the universal message of piety, compassion and service.

The Prime Minister said that this year India is honoured by the participation of the Sultanate of Oman in the G-20 under India's Presidency, which will provide an additional platform for the strengthening of the bonds of friendship between the people of India and Oman.

Qbot malware spike hits corporate emails with malicious PDF: Kaspersky

Kaspersky - a global cybersecurity and digital privacy company - discovered a Qbot malware spike targeting corporate users, spread via a malicious spam-email campaign.

Attackers use advanced social engineering techniques: they intercept existing work correspondence and forward malicious PDF attachments to the same email threads, Kaspersky stated.

The last method is considered unusual for this malware.

Since April 4, more than 5,000 emails containing PDF attachments have been received in various countries, with the campaign continuing. Kaspersky researchers conducted a technical analysis of the scheme.

Qbot is a notorious banking Trojan that functions as part of a botnet network. It is capable of stealing data such as passwords and work correspondence. Also, it allows threat actors to control an infected system and install ransomware, or other Trojans on other devices in the network. The operators of the malware use various distribution schemes, including sending emails with malicious PDF attachments - not commonly observed within this campaign before.

Since early April, Kaspersky observed a spike in activity from a spam email campaign using this particular scheme with PDF attachments.

The wave began on the evening of April 4, and since then the experts have discovered more than 5,000 spam emails with PDF files spreading this malware in English, German, Italian, and French.



A sample of a forwarded email with a malicious PDF attachment. The message from the attacker is over the line

The banker is distributed through the real work correspondence of a potential victim, stolen by cybercriminals. They forward an email to all participants of the existing thread and usually ask them to open the malicious PDF attachment under various plausible circumstances. For example, attackers could ask to share all the documentation related to the attachment or calculate the amount of the contract according to the costs estimated in the attachment.

"We recommend companies stay vigilant because Qbot malware is very harmful, even though its core functionality hasn't changed over the last two years. The operators are constantly enhancing their techniques, adding new convincing elements of social engineering. This increases the likelihood that an employee will fall victim to the ploy. To remain safe, carefully check various red flags, such as sender's email address spelling,

weird attachments, grammatical errors, and so on. In addition, specialised cybersecurity solutions can help ensure the security of corporate emails," said Darya Ivanova, Malware Analyst at Kaspersky.

The content of the PDF file is an image mimicking a notification from Microsoft Office 365 or Microsoft Azure. If a user clicks 'Open', the malicious archive downloads to their computer from a remote server (compromised website).

Kaspersky experts conducted a detailed technical analysis of this scheme. It is available on Securelist.

To protect an organisation from related threats, Kaspersky experts recommend one to properly check the sender's address.

'Most spam comes from email addresses that don't make sense or appear as gibberish. By hovering over the sender's name, which itself may be spelled oddly, you can see the full email

address. If you're not sure if an email address is legitimate or not, you can put it into a search engine to check,' Kaspersky said in a statement.

Spammers often try to apply pressure by creating a sense of urgency. For example, the subject line may contain words like 'urgent' or 'immediate action required' - to pressure one into acting. 'Providing your staff with basic cybersecurity hygiene training; also conducting a simulated phishing attack to ensure that they know how to distinguish phishing emails and genuine ones,' it further said.

Using a protection solution for endpoints and mail servers with anti-phishing capabilities, such as Kaspersky Endpoint Security for Business, can help decrease the chance of infection through a phishing, besides having a reliable security solution such as Kaspersky Secure Mail Gateway, which automatically filters out spam messages.



Indian School Muladha marks World Earth Day

World Earth Day was celebrated splendidly at Indian School Muladha in a programme to make students aware of environmental problems and the importance of its conservation.

The special assembly included informative speeches which emphasised the issues and the remedies to be adopted for the conservation of nature. The concepts of sustainable development, protection of nature and conservation of energy were discussed.

The school choir enthralled audience with a melodious song on the importance of saving the environment.

The theme of the year 2023 'Invest in Our Planet' was underlined during the presentation. The informative charts, posters and messages displayed in the campus created awareness among the students.

Various competitions were also organised as part of the celebration. Students of classes IV and VI took part in the colouring

and painting competitions held. Tree plantation was done in the school premises.

The students took the pledge to protect the environment. Science teachers enlightened the students about the immediate need of afforestation to save the environment and living beings.

The extensive event organised went a long way in orienting the young minds to develop a continuing compassion for Mother Earth and thus making a difference.

Aloft Hotels brings its brand for music lovers and travellers to Muscat

Aloft Hotels, the design-driven hotel brand for music lovers and travellers, and part of Marriott Bonvoy's portfolio of 30 extraordinary brands, arrives in Muscat, marking the brand's debut in the Sultanate of Oman.

Anchored in design, culture, and music, the 193-guestroom hotel brings the brand's bold modern style to the capital and its vibrant social scene with buzzing open spaces to connect.

Each of the urban inspired, loft-style guestrooms feature high ceilings, plush platform beds and 50-inch LED TVs. The modern bathrooms feature walk-in rainfall showers and custom Aloft bath amenities.

"Oman is a thriving leisure destination for travellers who seek original experiences and warm hospitality," said Sandra Schulze-Potgieter, vice president - Premium and Select Brands, Europe, Middle East & Africa, Marriott International. "Driven by bold design Aloft Muscat is a place for creative self-expressors to meet and mingle."

"With this first venture into the hotel market, we were eager to apply the knowledge and expertise we have gained from 35 years in real-estate development to create an exciting, fresh new destination," said Aadil Thomas Alexander, Owner and Executive Director.

"Aloft Muscat represents a



space where style is necessary, connectivity keeps up with you, social scenes are vibrant, and the only direction is forward. As well as being a hot spot in its own right, the hotel will act as a wonderful base to explore the dynamic city of Muscat and the intriguing expanses of the rest of Oman."

The hotel's signature public spaces are designed as innovative, comfortable places to socialize and relax. At the sleek Re:mixSM lounge, guests can enjoy a game of pool, with day-to-night lighting and music to switch up the vibe. Dining destinations include the brand's signature bar W XYZ, an outdoor space to enjoy a meal at Arcade, which offers global craft beverages and delicious international comfort food, or Re:fuel by AloftSM, which offers a self-

serve grab-and-go option for snacks.

Guests can build their own burger from the bun all the way to the sauce at California Beach-inspired eatery Wave Burger, while The Backstage dining space serves up world-class international cuisine with a Mediterranean twist for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

A haven for digital nomads and business guests, the hotel has three state-of-the-art Tactic meeting rooms for up to 40 people, equipped with state-of-the-art A/V, plasma TV, and fast complimentary WiFi.

Additional facilities include Re:charge gym, a day or night fitness center equipped with all the tools to keep you healthy, and Splash Pool, where guests can jump in and revive or lounge in style from morning to night.

Roscongress Foundation chairman meets with OCCI delegation in Moscow

Alexander Stuglev, chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer of the Roscongress Foundation, met with a delegation from Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Moscow.

In his welcome speech, Alexander Stuglev emphasised that establishing direct contact between Russian and Omani companies "is of great importance for strengthening mutual trust, finding common ground and building strategic cooperation".

"As early as the end of April, under the umbrella of SPIEF, a delegation from the Roscongress Foundation will

visit Oman. I am confident that this platform will bring together industries, enabling both countries' business communities to reach a new level of agreement," the chairman added.

During the meeting, the parties discussed possible formats of cooperation. In particular, they discussed the expansion of mutual tourism between Russia and Oman and the signing of an agreement between Roscongress Foundation and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry during SPIEF 2023.

Humanitarian cooperation was another topic of discussion.

The cultures of Russia and Oman are rich and unique, and everything should be done to preserve them for future generations.

"Cultural and humanitarian ties between our countries have been developing well lately. I would like to point out that Hans-Joachim Frey, the main founder of the Art Bridge Foundation and a partner of the Roscongress Foundation, held the first Dresden Opera Ball in the United Arab Emirates in Dubai last November. I suggest thinking about holding a similar event in Oman," said Alexander Stuglev.

"The relationship between

Russia and Oman is strategic. Trade between the countries is growing, and we hope that forums will be great platforms to accelerate growth," said Siham Ahmed Yousuf al Harthi, board member of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and chief executive officer and founder of Siham Development and Investment.

The St Petersburg International Economic Forum will take place from June 14 to 17. As is tradition, the opening day of SPIEF will host an SME Forum, the Drug Security Forum, and events within the Arctic agenda.

Apparel Group opens 26 new stores in ME, India to enhance global presence

Apparel Group, a leading global fashion and lifestyle retail conglomerate, is delighted to open 26 new stores across the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and India, as part of its ongoing expansion strategy.

In the UAE, this significant wave of store openings includes the much-awaited launch of Calvin Klein in Yas Mall, Abu Dhabi, offering the latest in fashion trends and iconic collections. Additionally, Beverly Hills Polo Club (BHPC) celebrates its 20th store in the UAE with its second store opening in Dubai Hills Mall, further solidifying its presence in the region.

In Saudi Arabia, R&B - an Ap-

parel Group homegrown brand - continues its aggressive expansion plan in the kingdom with the opening of nine new stores in various locations, including Othaim Mall in Khafji, Manar Mall in Madina, Taif Park Mall, Lulu Kilo 7 in Jeddah, Othaim Mall in Al Bateen, Makan Mall in Howtat Bani Tamim, Tabuk Park in Tabuk, Najran Park Mall, Tuwaiq High Street. This brings the total count of R&B outlets in Saudi Arabia to 45 stores.

ASICS, a leading sports brand, opened its second store in Riyadh Park, offering the latest in sports and fitness footwear and apparel to sports enthusiasts.



In addition to these developments, the retail landscape in

Saudi continues to grow and diversify with the opening of new

stores, such as a BHPC store in West Avenue Mall, another

BHPC location, Levi's store in Panorama Mall, a Crocs store, and a Skechers store, all situated in Taif Park Mall.

These openings showcase the ongoing commitment to providing a wide range of shopping options for consumers in the region

In Qatar, Tommy Jeans has opened a new store in a luxury shopping destination, Place Vendôme, providing customers the chance to explore and experience the brand's iconic collections.

In India, Beverly Hills Polo Club (BHPC) also opened three new stores in Lulu Lucknow, Banjara Hills, and Viviana Thane.

With the successful completion of its first event in India, BHPC now boasts a total of 136 stores across all regions. The group further expands its footprint with the opening of Bath and Body Works, ALDO, and Charles & Keith in the prestigious Palladium Mall, Ahmedabad.

Apparel Group's commitment to providing an unparalleled shopping experience is evident in its aggressive expansion strategy.

With these 26 new stores, customers will witness and experience an even wider variety of fashion, lifestyle, and beauty products to cater to their diverse needs and preferences.

South Korea's Yoon heads to US ahead of Biden summit

Seoul, South Korea - South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol flew to Washington Monday for a six-day state visit, as the allies move to bulk up military cooperation over North Korea's expanding nuclear threats.

Pyongyang has conducted another record-breaking string of sanctions-defying launches this year, including test-firing the country's first solid-fuel ballistic missile this month - a key technical breakthrough for Kim Jong Un's military.

In response, Yoon has pulled South Korea closer to long-standing ally Washington, and the trip has a packed schedule including a summit with US President Joe Biden on Wednesday, where the pair will celebrate 70 years of ties.

"The two leaders will spend a lot of time together over the course of many events to celebrate the achievements of the South Korea-US alliance over 70 years, and exchange in-depth views on the alliance's future," principal deputy national security adviser Kim Tae-hyo told reporters ahead of the trip.

But analysts say Yoon and Biden will have a lot to hash out at their summit, as even though such events are "highly scripted" the two leaders have some "uncomfortable" topics to discuss, said Katharine Moon, Professor Emerita of Political Science at Wellesley College.



South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol (R) and his wife Kim Keon-hee board a plane as they leave for Washington at Seoul Air Base in Seongnam on April 24. President Suk Yeol flew to Washington on April 24, for a six-day state visit, as the allies move to bulk up military cooperation (AFP)

The trip comes as Yoon grapples with the South's increasingly nervous public about the US commitment to so-called extended deterrence, where US assets - including nuclear weapons - serve to prevent attacks on allies.

A majority of South Koreans now believe the country should develop its own nuclear weapons, multiple surveys show. Yoon has hinted Seoul

could pursue this option.

"There is a greater need for the United States to show its deterrence commitments at the alliance level," said Park Won-gon, a professor of North Korean Studies at Ewha University in Seoul.

The South Korean president has seen his domestic approval ratings dive, hit hard by public disapproval over his handling of a recent US intelligence leak that

appeared to reveal Washington was spying on Seoul.

'Ironclad'

The White House has said the visit showed how the "ironclad" alliance "has grown far beyond the Korean Peninsula, and is now a force for good in the Indo-Pacific and around the world".

"The breadth and the depth of the relationship will be amply reinforced and showcased," during

the visit, said US State Department deputy assistant secretary Jung Pak.

Yoon is likely to come under pressure to do more to help the US support Ukraine, as Washington looks to South Korea -- the world's ninth-largest arms exporter -- to help secure ammunition and weapons for Kyiv.

South Korea has sent humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, and has sold tanks and how-

The two leaders will spend a lot of time together over the course of many events to celebrate the achievements of the South Korea-US alliance over 70 years, and exchange in-depth views on the alliance's future

KIM TAE-HYO

itzers to Poland, but Seoul has a longstanding policy of not providing weapons to active conflict zones.

Seoul is also mired in a diplomatic spat with Beijing after Yoon blamed recent heightened tensions over Taiwan on "attempts to change the status quo by force" in an interview.

Yoon must be careful to avoid "unintentionally provoking" other countries like China and Russia during this trip, an editorial in the JoongAng Ilbo newspaper said Monday.

"It is hoped that the presidential office will show the wisdom of maximising opportunities while reducing diplomatic risks," it added.

AFP

Singapore, China to hold joint naval drills

Beijing, China - China and Singapore will hold joint naval drills this week, Beijing's defence ministry said on Monday.

The Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy will dispatch its frigate Yulin as well as the Chibi minesweeper for the drills, which will take place around Singapore from "end-April to early May", the ministry said in a statement. The two countries agreed last year to hold the drills at a meeting of defence ministers, though details were not announced at the time.

Singapore regularly conducts drills with countries from the region and around the world, with personnel from the city-state taking part in the massive Cobra Gold exercises with US soldiers in Thailand in March.

The announcement comes days after the US Commander of the Pacific Air Forces met with Singapore's defence minister Ng Eng Hen to discuss enhanced cooperation in military training.

Chinese Navy representatives will also participate in the IMDEX Asia naval and maritime defence expo in Singapore next month, the ministry said.

AFP



Former Peruvian president Alejandro Toledo (L) during an identity control hearing prior to being transferred to a prison in Lima on April 23

Peru ex-president extradited from US, taken to prison

Lima, Peru - Peru's former president Alejandro Toledo was jailed on Sunday, hours after arriving back in his homeland following extradition from the United States to face charges of money laundering and corruption during his mandate.

The 77-year-old, who served as Peru's president from 2001 to 2006, was flown in the evening by helicopter to the Barbadillo prison, journalists witnessed.

Toledo is wanted by Peruvian prosecutors investigating a scandal involving Brazilian construction conglomerate Odebrecht.

He is accused of having received millions of dollars from Odebrecht in return for public works contracts, and prosecutors are asking that he be sentenced to more than 20 years in jail. Toledo arrived in Lima from Los Angeles in the custody of Interpol officers, who handed him over to local law enforcement, television images showed.

The former president, wearing a red sweater, appeared before a judge and gave his name, age and national identity number, the judiciary tweeted along with a series of photos.

Toledo had been living in the United States for several years before surrendering Friday at a federal court building in San Jose,

California, where he was handed over to the US Marshals Service.

Prison for ex-leaders

Toledo is due to remain in detention while awaiting trial in 18 months. The Barbadillo prison where Toledo was sent also houses fellow former presidents Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000) and Pedro Castillo (2021-22).

Castillo was ousted and arrested last December shortly after attempting to dissolve Congress and rule by decree.

His arrest sparked months of street protests which left dozens dead and disrupted the countries lucrative tourism industry.

Toledo's lawyer, Roberto Su, told journalists in Lima that his client "has many pains" and is suffering from "cancer." He did not offer more details.

Toledo has denied the allegations against him and had filed several petitions to contest his extradition, which Peru had sought since 2018.

He was first detained in 2019 and then placed under house arrest a year later and ordered to wear an electronic ankle monitor.

Peruvian prosecutors say they have testimony from two people who claim Toledo received bribes from Odebrecht.

AFP

Climate activists stop Berlin traffic to pressure government

Berlin, Germany - Environmental activists blocked dozens of streets in Berlin on Monday in a bid to push the government to do more to tackle climate change, an action condemned by Germany's finance minister as "physical violence".

"We no longer accept that the government has no plan to stop the destruction of the basis of our existence," Carla Rochel, a spokeswoman for Last Generation, the group behind the protests, said in a statement.

Campaigners halted traffic across the city by glueing themselves to the street surface, including on the busy motorway A100.

Some 33 sites were blocked at



Policemen carry away an activist of the environmental group Last Generation sitting on the ground and causing a traffic jam in Berlin (AFP)

9:00 am local time (0700 GMT), a spokeswoman for the Berlin police told AFP, adding that around 500 officers had been deployed to secure the

streets and remove the protesters.

Police used a drill to dislodge one activist who was glued firmly to the ground, an AFP journalist

saw, leaving the protestor with a slab of asphalt stuck to his hand.

Berlin's transport information network said on Twitter that the protests caused "massive traffic disruptions", although police were able to clear most of the blockages.

Finance Minister Christian Lindner condemned the protesters' action, saying on Twitter that "no motive, no matter how noble, can hide the fact that the Berlin Blockade is nothing other than physical violence".

"Those who want a different policy can found a party and seek majorities for their positions," he added. The government had done "more for the climate than any before it", Chancellor Olaf

Scholz's spokesman Steffen Hebestreit said at a regular press conference, adding that the government did not support the activists' tactics.

The Greens, also part of Scholz's coalition, likewise criticised the protests. The street blockades were "not productive", Britta Hasselmann, the Green party's leader in parliament, told broadcaster ARD.

Last Generation has signalled its intention to continue with the blockades over the coming days.

"We're bringing the city to a standstill so the government moves," Last Generation activist Raphael Thelen said in a video posted on Twitter.

AFP

Australia unveils biggest defence reform in decades

Canberra, Australia - Australia launched its biggest defence overhaul in decades Monday, vowing to turn a military that is "no longer fit for purpose" into a fighting force that could deter China or any would-be foe.

Defence Minister Richard Marles unveiled a strategic review that called for a sharp shift toward long-range deterrence -- using missiles, submarines and cyber tools to keep adversaries at arm's length.

"Today, for the first time in 35 years, we are recasting the mission of the Australian Defence Force," Marles said.

Describing China's military build-up as the largest and most ambitious of any country since World War II, the review warns "the risks of military escalation or miscalculation are rising".

Australian planners have viewed China's military rise warily, fearing Beijing's now-vast capabilities could effectively cut Australia off from trading partners and global supply chains.

In response to that threat, Australia's military will develop



A handout photo from the Australian Department of Defence on April 24 shows Australia's PM Anthony Albanese (R), Minister for Defence Richard Marles (C) and Minister for Defence Industry Pat Conroy (L) (AFP)

the ability to strike from air, land and sea, strengthen northern bases and recruit more troops.

"We aim to change the calculus so no potential aggressor can ever conclude that the benefits of conflict outweigh the risks," the review said.

Asked about the overhaul and the reasons given for it, Beijing said it hoped some countries

would "refrain from using China as an excuse to expand their military power or groundlessly hype up the 'China threat' theory".

China's military policy is "defensive in nature" and poses "no threat to any country", foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said at a regular press briefing.

Australia has already an-

nounced a key tool in its new strategy -- the development of stealthy long-range nuclear-powered submarines that could retaliate with a barrage of cruise missiles and little warning.

There will be a short, independent review this year of the navy's surface combatant fleet to ensure its size, structure and composition complement the

capabilities provided by the new nuclear-powered submarines.

Marching orders

The biggest changes may be felt in the Australian army, which will now have a sharper focus on coastal defence, particularly in the country's vast north.

Australia's northern city of Darwin was bombed by Japan in World War II, but until recently defence planners believed they would get a decade's warning before any new attack was imminent.

"The rise of the 'missile age' in modern warfare, crystallised by the proliferation of long-range precision strike weapons, has radically reduced Australia's geographic benefits," the review concluded.

As a result, the army will also be tasked with providing "a long-range strike capability", while existing land-focused projects will be put to the knife.

A plan to purchase 450 infantry fighting vehicles will be scaled back to just 129.

AFP

Operations begin to evacuate foreigners from war-hit Sudan

Khartoum, Sudan - Battles raging in Sudan have sparked multiple evacuation operations to rescue foreign citizens or embassy staff by road, air and sea.

The main airport in the capital Khartoum has been the site of heavy fighting and is under the control of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) that is battling the army.

Some evacuations are taking place from Port Sudan on the Red Sea, an 850km drive from Khartoum.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia led the first reported successful evacuations on Saturday, with naval operations picking up more than 150 people including foreign diplomats and officials.

Riyadh announced the 'safe arrival' of 91 Saudi citizens and around 66 nationals from 12 other countries - Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Tunisia, Pakistan, India, Bulgaria, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Canada and Burkina Faso.

US and Canada

On Sunday, the US military sent three Chinook helicopters to evacuate American embassy staff from Khartoum.

More than 100 US forces took part in the rescue to extract fewer than 100 people, which saw the choppers flying from Djibouti to Khartoum, where they stayed on the ground for less than an hour.

US officials have warned that any wider effort to evacuate American citizens is unlikely in the coming days.

Canada has also pulled its embassy team out, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said.

Britain, Norway, Switzerland

The British army has evacuated UK embassy staff and their families in a 'complex and rapid' operation, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said. British citizens still trapped in Sudan have been calling on social media for help.



This photo - released by the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs - shows French and other nationals at the French military air base in Djibouti during the 'RESEVAC/Sagittaire' evacuation of around 100 people from Sudan on the first French flight out of the war-hit country (AFP)

The Norwegian ambassador said he other Norwegian diplomats had also been evacuated. The Swiss foreign ministry said seven embassy staff and five others were evacuated with the help of other countries.

EU nations

European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said Monday that 1,000 EU citizens had been evacuated.

The main airport in the capital Khartoum has been the site of heavy fighting and is under the control of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces that is battling the army

Two French planes landed in Djibouti on Sunday with a total of 200 people of multiple nationalities.

On board were 25 Swedish citizens, Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said on Monday, including foreign ministry staff and aid workers.

The Netherlands' Foreign Minister Wopke Hoekstra said a

'handful' of Dutch people had been evacuated on a French aircraft, with another group leaving Khartoum by road in a UN convoy.

Italy evacuated around 200 people in a military operation on Sunday, including all Italian citizens who 'had asked to leave' and other nationalities, including representatives of the Vatican.

The Greek foreign ministry said a first group of evacuees de-

70 other nationalities - left Sunday for Djibouti, Madrid said.

The Irish government is deploying 12 defence personnel to Djibouti to help evacuate 150 citizens in Sudan.

Turkey

Ankara began operations at dawn on Sunday, taking some of its estimated 600 nationals by road from two Khartoum districts and the southern city of Wad Madani.

But plans were postponed from one site in Khartoum after 'explosions' near a mosque designated as the assembly area, the embassy said.

Arab nations

Egypt's military last week evacuated 177 of its soldiers from Sudan. On Sunday the foreign ministry said 436 citizens had left by land. Over 10,000 Egyptians are thought to live in Sudan.

Jordan on Saturday said it had begun the evacuation of some 300 Jordanian citizens, adding it engaged in 'continuous cooperation with the UAE and Saudi Arabia'.

Iraqi embassy staff left Khartoum on Saturday, foreign min-

istry spokesman Ahmed al-Sahhaf said, while on Sunday, 14 citizens arrived in Port Sudan.

Lebanon said 52 citizens who had travelled by road from Khartoum to Port Sudan had boarded a Saudi naval vessel on Monday.

Libya on Monday said 105 citizens would be flown home from Jeddah after being evacuated by the Saudi navy.

The Tunisian embassy has announced an evacuation operation planned for Monday, with some citizens having already left aboard Saudi ships.

Asia

The Philippines said Monday it would begin evacuating nearly 700 Filipinos 'within the next 24 hours', having contracted buses heading to Egypt.

Japan and South Korea have deployed forces to nearby countries and are preparing for evacuations, while Japanese media is reporting some nationals were onboard the French aircraft.

India's foreign ministry said two air force planes are 'on standby' in Saudi Arabia and a naval ship has arrived in Port Sudan.

AFP

60 killed in Burkina Faso 'by men in army uniform'

Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso - About 60 civilians were killed in a village in northern Burkina Faso by men wearing military uniforms, the local prosecutor said late on Sunday, announcing an investigation into the latest bloodshed in the insurgency-hit country.

Landlocked and in the heart of West Africa's Sahel, the country is one of the world's most volatile and impoverished. Attacks blamed on suspected extremists are on the rise in Burkina Faso, which is battling an insurgency that spilled over from neighbouring Mali.

"About 60 people were killed by people wearing the uniforms of our national armed forces" on Thursday in the village of Karma, in northern Yatenga province, Ouahigouya High Court prosecutor Lamine Kabore told AFP in a statement, citing the gendarmerie.

"The wounded have been evacuated and are currently being taken care of within our health facilities," he said, adding that the perpetrators had 'taken various goods'.

The village of Karma is near the Malian border and attracts many illegal gold miners.

According to residents contacted by AFP, survivors said more than 100 people on motorbikes and pick-up trucks raided the village.

Dozens of men and young people were killed by the men, dressed in military uniforms, they said.

Survivors gave a toll of 'around 80 dead'.

'General mobilisation'

The latest bloodshed occurred a week after 34 defence volunteers and six soldiers were killed in an attack by suspected extremists near the village of Aorema, about 15km from provincial capital Ouahigouya and 40km from Karma.

Following that attack, Burkina Faso's military junta declared a 'general mobilisation' to give the state 'all necessary means' to combat a string of bloody attacks blamed on extremists affiliated with Al Qaeda and the Islamic State group.

AFP

Israel arrested MP on suspicion of arms smuggling, says Jordan

Amman, Jordan - Israel has arrested a Jordanian member of parliament suspected of trying to smuggle weapons and gold into the occupied West Bank, Jordan's foreign ministry said.

Amman is 'following the case of representative Imad Adwan who has been detained by Israeli authorities', foreign ministry spokesman Sinan Majali said in a statement. Adwan has been arrested 'for interrogation in a case concerning alleged smuggling of quantities of weapons and gold', Majali added.

"The ministry and all relevant agencies in the kingdom are working to ascertain the details

of this issue and address it as quickly as possible."

Adwan (35) is a member of the Jordanian parliament's Palestine Committee.

Israeli media reported he was arrested at the King Hussein (Al-Ilenby) crossing in the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since the 1967 Six-Day War.

Reports say that authorities have seized weapons and gold found in his car. A video circulating on social media showed pistols and automatic rifles allegedly seized from Adwan's car. AFP could not independently verify the authenticity of the video.

AFP

Majority of Britons back keeping monarchy: Survey

London, UK - Most Britons want to keep the monarchy but King Charles III lacks support from young people, a new poll suggested on Monday, less than two weeks before his coronation. Fifty-eight percent of respondents backed retaining the monarchy, compared to 26 per cent in favour of an elected head of state and 16 per cent who 'don't know', according to the YouGov survey.

But the poll, commissioned by the BBC before Charles' May 6 coronation, indicated that only about a third of young people support the monarchy while 38 percent would prefer an elected head of state.

They showed broad indifference towards the institution, with more than three-quarters of 18-24 year-olds saying they were 'not interested' in the royal family. Support for the royals was greatest among older people, with 67 per cent backing among those aged 50-64, and 78 per cent in the over-65s.

Meanwhile, 45 percent of the 4,592 people surveyed said they think Charles is out of touch with the experiences of the British public, versus 36 per cent viewing him as 'in touch'.

Charles (74) founded the



The new uniform of Yeoman Warder with Britain's King Charles III's insignia ahead of his coronation (AFP)

Prince's Trust in the 1970s while heir to the throne. By 2020 it had helped one million young people aged 11-30 from disadvantaged backgrounds.

He has also been a lifelong supporter of protecting the environment and fighting against climate change.

But as Britons grapple with the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation, the financial burdens of the royal family also appear to be weighing on their popularity amongst young people.

There has been grumbling about the cost of the coronation, which is paid for by the government, given the current financial

pressures on ordinary people.

Costs for the event are not expected until after the event, but the last, of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953, cost the equivalent of £20.5mn.

The criticism is part of wider questions about the transparency of royal finances, and plans by republicans to protest at the coronation.

While 54 per cent in the BBC-commissioned survey said they thought the family were 'good value', more youngsters responded that they were bad value (40 per cent) than good (36 per cent).

AFP

Kenya's Ruto vows action after 58 bodies found

Malindi, Kenya - Kenyan President William Ruto on Monday vowed to crack down on 'unacceptable' religious movements as police discovered more fatalities in a Christian cult that practised starvation, bringing the toll to 58.

A major search is under way in a forest near the coastal town of Malindi where dozens of corpses were exhumed over the weekend, with authorities fearing more grisly discoveries could be made.

A full-scale investigation has been launched into the Good News International Church and its leader, named in court documents as Paul Mackenzie Nthenge, who preached that death by starvation delivered followers to God.

Police had previously named the suspect as Makenzie Nthenge.

It is believed some of his devotees could still be hiding in the bush around Shakahola, which was raided by police earlier this month after a tip-off from a local non-profit.

Since then, a number of people have been rescued and dozens of bodies unearthed in mass graves dug in shallow pits.

"Fifty-eight people (have been) confirmed dead and this is out of bodies exhumed and those who died on the way to the hospital," said police chief Japhet



Security personnel carry a rescued young person from the forest in Shakahola, outside Malindi, on Sunday (AFP)

Koome who visited the site on Monday.

The toll had stood earlier Monday at 51.

A 325-hectare area of woodland has been declared a crime scene as teams clad in overalls search for more burial sites and possible cult survivors.

Ruto, speaking in Kiambu county neighbouring Nairobi, said there was 'no difference' between rogue pastors like Nthenge - who has been arrested and is awaiting trial - and terrorists.

"Terrorists use religion to advance their heinous acts. People like Mr Mackenzie are using religion to do exactly the same thing."

"I have instructed the agencies responsible to take up the

matter and to get to the root cause and to the bottom of the activities of... people who want to use religion to advance weird, unacceptable ideology."

'Unfolding horror'

As authorities try to uncover the true scale of what is being dubbed the 'Shakahola Forest Massacre', questions have emerged about how the cult was able to operate undetected despite Nthenge attracting police attention six years earlier.

"The unfolding horror that is the Shakahola cult deaths should and must be a wake up call to the nation, more particularly the National Intelligence Service (NIS) and our community policing programme," Amason Jeffah Kingi, the speaker of the senate, said in

a statement.

"How did such a heinous crime, organized and executed over a considerable period of time, escape the radar of our intelligence system?"

Nthenge was arrested in 2017 on charges of 'radicalisation' after urging families not to send their children to school, saying education was not recognised by the Bible.

He was arrested again last month, according to local media, after two children starved to death in the custody of their parents.

He was released on bail of 100,000 Kenyan shillings (US\$700 approx) before surrendering to police following the Shakahola raid.

AFP

Ten years of Bangladesh factory tragedy

Survivors weep at the ruins of Rana Plaza, which collapsed on April 24, 2013 killing 1,130 workers

Savar, Bangladesh - Hundreds of workers in Bangladesh shouted slogans for justice and survivors wept at the ruins of a factory that made clothes for Western shoppers and collapsed ten years ago killing more than 1,130 people.

The Rana Plaza tragedy on April 24, 2013 was one of the world's worst industrial disasters, highlighting the global fashion industry's reliance on factories in developing countries where working conditions are often poor.

Early on Monday morning, survivors including some who lost limbs or were disabled placed wreaths at a memorial at the site of the former nine-storey Rana Plaza complex that made products for brands like Mango and Primark.

"Ten years have passed, but what happened to the killers?" the workers shouted as they slowly walked to the memorial in the industrial town of Savar outside the capital Dhaka.

"It is a scandal that ten years have passed and yet the garment factory owners and the factory building owner have not been punished for the murders of 1,138 workers," Nilofa, a 32-year-old survivor, told AFP, as tears rolled down her cheeks.

"I barely got anything. My leg was crushed and I can't work in factories. My husband left me five years ago as he does not



Victims of the Rana Plaza garments factory tragedy take part in a protest on its 10th anniversary at the site where the building once stood, in Savar on the outskirts of Dhaka on Monday (AFP)

want to bear my medical expenses," she said. Shila Akhter (42) showed

the brace she has to wear permanently after the disaster ruptured her spinal cord.

"We want full compensation and lifelong medical treatment as we've lost the ability to

work," she said. "The government should know what we have been going

through. Some survivors are forced to beg on the streets." Union leaders acknowledged

improvements in fire and factory safety across the world's second-largest apparel exporter after China, with fewer deadly accidents in recent years.

But they slammed the government for the slow pace of legal proceedings, including against Sohel Rana, the Rana Plaza owner who is one of 38 people indicted for murder over the tragedy.

He allegedly forced employees to work despite a crack appearing in the building a day before the collapse. His trial resumed last year but prosecutors say a verdict may take years.

"Fewer than ten per cent of the witnesses have been cross-examined," prosecutor Bimal Samadder told AFP.

Following the disaster, two watchdogs were set up to improve standards. Wages of the country's 4mn workers - mostly women - were also tripled.

Bangladesh garment factory owners, a powerful group as the sector accounts for around 84 per cent of the country's exports, say they have invested some US\$2bn to make their plants safe.

Laura Bourgeois at advocacy organisation Sherpa warned however of factory managers' potential to influence worker interviews during safety inspections and of 'rigged' factory audits. AFP

Second cheetah brought from Africa dies in central India

New Delhi, India - A cheetah brought from South Africa to India has died, wildlife officials said, the second such death within a month in a country where the big spotted cat was declared extinct seven decades ago.

So far, 12 cheetahs from South Africa and eight from Namibia have been brought to India after its top court ruled in 2020 that the species should be reintroduced. The male cheetah, named Uday, was found unwell in an enclosure in central India's Kuno National Park and tranquilised for treatment, but died later in the day, forest official J S Chauhan said in a statement issued on Sunday.

Tests are being conducted to determine the cause of death, Amit Mallick of India's national tiger conservation programme told AFP.

In March, a Namibian cheetah named Sasha died of a kidney ailment.

Authorities said they were not



A file photo of the cheetah, which died at the Kuno National Park in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh on Saturday (ANI)

The male cheetah, named Uday, was found unwell and tranquilised for treatment, but died later in the day

J S CHAUHAN

informed of the ailment before the Namibian group was flown to India six months earlier.

The reintroduction of cheetahs is a major prestige project for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who presided over the release of the animals into an enclosure after their arrival.

The programme aims to bring in about 100 cheetahs over the

next decade.

The last Asiatic cheetah to roam the sub-continent was believed to have been hunted down in 1947 by an Indian prince, and was declared officially extinct in the country in 1952.

The spotted feline's reintroduction in India is the first inter-continental relocation of the planet's fastest land animal.

Also in March, another Namibian cheetah gave birth to four cubs at the Kuno park, the first since the globally listed 'vulnerable' big cat's extinction in India. Critics have warned the creatures may struggle to adapt to the Indian habitat due to competition for prey from a significant number of leopards.

Researchers and scientists from the Cheetah Research Project of Leibniz-IZW in Namibia have recently said the relocation programme ignored 'spatial ecology' and the size of Kuno National Park was much less than the big cats usually need to thrive. AFP

Bangladesh swears in new President ahead of election

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Mohammed Shahabuddin, a former judge and a ruling party official, was sworn in as the president of Bangladesh on Monday, just months before a general election. Shahabuddin (73) was an anti-corruption commissioner and fought in the country's 1971 war of independence against Pakistan, the presidential palace said.

"He was sworn in as the 22nd president of the People's Republic of Bangladesh today," Sham-pad Barua, secretary of the president, told AFP.

He was elected by lawmakers in February after the ruling Awami League party nominated him instead of the speaker of parliament, who had been seen as the favourite.

Shahabuddin replaces Abdul Hamid, a former speaker and Awami League stalwart, whose second term expired on Monday.

The election comes as the country faces mounting protests over the next general election,



Bangladesh's new President Mohammed Shahabuddin (left) receives a bouquet from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina (second from right)

scheduled to be held in January 2024.

The opposition has staged a series of protests in recent months, demanding that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina step down and let a caretaker government hold a free and fair election.

The opposition accuses Hasina, who has been in power since 2009, of rigging the previous two votes, and Western

countries and rights groups have also raised concerns. Hasina has rejected the demand.

If Hasina was forced to resign or the protests descend into chaos, the otherwise largely ceremonial presidential office could end up playing a bigger role. Although he enjoys few powers in his new position, Shahabuddin now oversees the military. AFP

Nepal issues record 454 permits for Everest summit this season

Kathmandu, Nepal - Nepal has issued a record 454 permits to climb Mount Everest this season, officials said on Monday, four years after at least four deaths on the world's highest peak were blamed on overcrowding.

"This is the highest number of permits the department has issued to summit Mount Everest," Bigyan Koirala from the tourism department said, adding that numbers could rise further.

As most of these mountaineers will attempt to summit Everest with the help of a Nepali guide, over 900 climbers will be heading for

the summit in the next few weeks.

This could cause heavy traffic and bottlenecks en route to the summit if there is a shorter window period to reach it because of unfavourable weather.

In 2019, a massive queue on Everest forced teams to wait hours in freezing temperatures, lowering depleted oxygen levels that can lead to sickness and exhaustion.

The highest number of climbers receiving permits this season were from China (96), followed by the United States (87).

AFP

New Armenia-Azerbaijan tensions serious concern, says Moscow

Moscow, Russia - Moscow on Monday expressed 'serious concern' over fresh tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and warned against ceasefire violations between the foes, who have been locked for decades in a territorial conflict.

The comments came a day after Azerbaijan set up a checkpoint on the only land link to the contested region of Nagorno-Karabakh, sparking anger from Armenia.

Armenia and Azerbaijan have fought two wars over the mountainous enclave of Karabakh that have left tens of thousands dead.

The majority ethnic Armenian region is still internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan despite breaking away after



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov chairs a Security Council meeting at the UN Headquarters, in New York on Monday (AFP)

the fall of the Soviet Union, with tensions regularly flaring between the two countries.

Moscow brokered a ceasefire after the latest bout of fighting in 2020, and posted

peacekeepers along the sole road linking Karabakh to Armenia, the Lachin corridor.

"We express our serious concern about the situation within the zone of responsibility

of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh," the Russian foreign ministry said.

The statement also warned against 'unilateral steps' in violation of the ceasefire.

Tensions over the Lachin corridor have soared since last year, with Armenia accusing Azerbaijan of blockading the route and creating a humanitarian crisis in the mountainous enclave.

'Exacerbated' tensions

Under the ceasefire agreement, Azerbaijan must guarantee safe passage through the corridor.

Azerbaijan, however, said it set up the checkpoint on Sunday 'to prevent the illegal transportation of manpower,

weapons, mines'.

It added the checkpoint 'shall be implemented in interaction with the Russian peacekeeping force'.

Armenia denied the claims as a 'far-fetched and baseless pretext' and said the move breached the ceasefire.

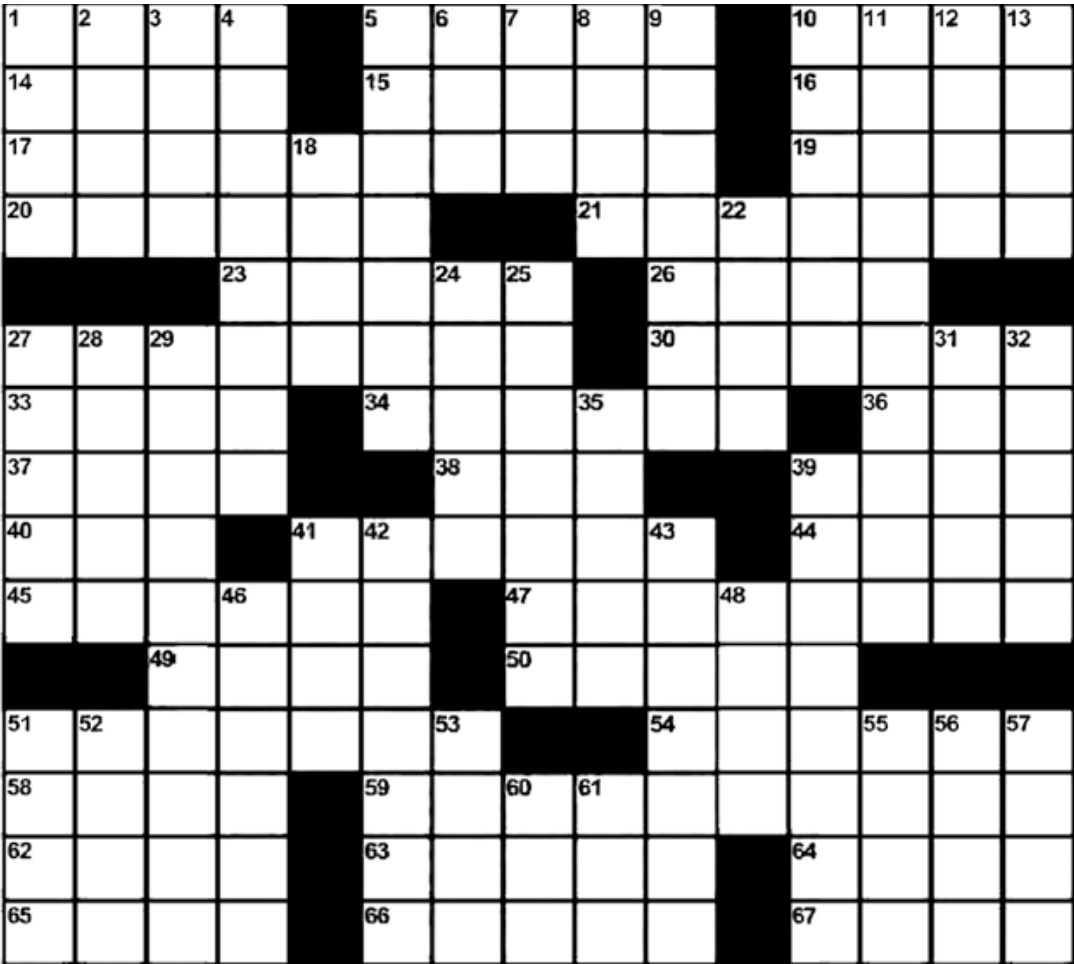
Armenia has accused Russia, distracted by the Ukraine offensive, of failing to fulfil its peacekeeping role.

On Monday, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said Armenia was facing threats 'exacerbated due to regional or extra-regional reasons'.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that "the situation is not easy, it requires additional efforts."

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) " ... and make it fast!"

5) Wedge placed under a wheel

10) The point of a tooth

14) Seaweed one can eat

15) Boxing ring site

16) Start to freeze?

17) Reviewed

19) Cut and paste

20) Blue jeans

21) Humdingers

23) Theatrical hit

26) Forgo the letter opener

27) Roadblock

30) Foot bone

33) Pro _ (in proportion)

34) Yarn ball chaser

36) Explosive letters

37) Monopoly token, once

38) Always, to a poet

39) Effervescent beverage

40) Psychoanalysis subject

41) Cowboy's parking lot?

44) "What's _ problem?"

45) Accounts book

47) Ornamental shrub

49) Arm part

50) Kept for a rainy day

51) Kitchen set

54) Literary slips

58) Icelandic epic

59) Slighted

62) " _ here long?"

63) Musical show

64) Terrible thing for one to waste

65) Paving products

66) Contemptuous look

67) Partner of "odds"

DOWN

1) " _ Lang Syne"

2) _gin fizz

3) Big cosmetics company

4) India neighbor

5) Pathetically inept person

6) Paid player

7) Gun, as an engine

8) Again

9) Inquisition collar

10) Kind of salad

11) "I get it"

12) Ado

13) Cherry parts

18) Peel of "The Avengers"

22) Withdraw from gradually

24) More cunning

25) They're straight

27) Architectural projection

28) Mississippi sight

29) Used, as an umbrella

31) Excessive, as influence

32) Brenda of the comics

35) Start of a refrain

39) Group of symptoms

41) Penny

42) Figures of speech?

43) Tool for evening?

46) Extracts

48) Prefix with "dynamic"

51) Balance sheet item

52) Think tank nugget

53) Not odd

55) All in the family

56) Run the bar

57) Tries to find the bottom line

60) Adam's mate

61) Regret

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You'll have a great time working in groups today, whether they're social or work groups. Of course, the line between these two groups in your life is starting to blur a little bit as you get friendlier with coworkers, but this doesn't have to complicate things.

All you need to do is make sure that you treat everyone equally. Playing favorites will only get you backed into a corner, and it could tag you with a less than ideal reputation.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Talking is good. Talking clears up relationship issues, helps you find a different approach for a continuing problem, and can be good fun. Plus, it's free! So don't clam up if you have feelings that aren't getting communicated. Open your mouth and just say how you feel. And don't get too caught up in the script of what you say. It will only help you procrastinate. You need to just start talking and the rest will come out eventually. Trust the person you're talking to.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You must work extra hard to make all of your communications clear today. There can be no mistakes. People have been making a lot of assumptions about what you're going to do, and none of them bothered to check in with you to see if they were right. You might have to deliver a few harsh wake-up calls to these folks, so be sure that you aren't vague or confusing about what you say. Be blunt, be clear, and then be gone! You'll be too busy to answer a lot of questions.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Laughter will be contagious today, and you will be the main carrier! You're spreading joy and a positive attitude wherever you go, and even the grumpiest people will simply love being around you.

This is a great day for a party, networking event, or any situation where a lot of different people can get together to have fun. Some outrageous times are ahead of you, so unfold your most radical plans. You'll get plenty of takers.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Get involved in a new project today. It's time to put the thinking aside and start the doing! Contact one of your entrepreneurial friends and let them know that you want to get involved with their schemes. They could use a hand, and the idea of working closely with someone they like so much is thrilling for them. This is the beginning of a beautiful partnership, and you'll finally be able to fully understand the power of collaboration.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Keeping the peace simply isn't your job, so don't take on any additional burdens by trying to ease tense situations. Your compassion is admirable, but if there's a conflict today, you need to do your best to avoid it. Resist your urge to step in and make these people talk to each other or try to come to an agreement. This is something you aren't a part of, and you should stay out of it. Let them work out their problems on their own. You can't help.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You might not consider yourself an intellectual, but someone else does. They admire your thoughtful nature and will make moves today to pick your brain a bit about a problem they're trying to solve. Give them all the time you can, and invite them along if you have to run errands. You can make good use of the travel time by getting to know them better and letting them get to know you. Get ready for an interesting conversation. They have a lot of questions you've never considered before.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You certainly don't like to be preached at, so you should be able to understand that no one else does either. Use your empathy today. Let it prevent you from shoving your beliefs down someone else's throat. If you were thinking of climbing up on that soapbox, don't! People are happy about your success and happiness, but that doesn't necessarily mean you have all the answers to their problems. Let them work it out on their own.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Keep your mind open today, even if doing so doesn't feel very comfortable at certain points in the day. You realize that someone is trying to change your opinion, but so what? Let them try. The worst thing that could happen is that what they say starts to make a lot of sense. And if that's the case, are you so stuck in your ways that you won't alter your positions for fear that it will make you look bad? You're smarter than that! Think with your brain, not your ego.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Being focused on achieving a goal is important in life, but is your current goal really attainable? Reassess your current hopes for the future and make sure than none of them are unrealistic. Yes, you have to challenge yourself and push yourself to do better, but at a certain point you could be setting yourself up for failure. Pull back a little. Instead of climbing that mountain today, how about asking yourself to get to the second highest peak? You can tackle the highest one later.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You can try to teach someone who's rigid to be more flexible, but don't get too disheartened if that stubborn friend, family member, or coworker shows little if any sign of ever loosening up! Their failure isn't your fault. In order to learn to be flexible, people have to be ready to be flexible. They have to be able to see things from other people's perspective, to walk a mile in their shoes. This person needs empathy to start to relax their uptight attitude.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You could find a great deal of comfort in your daily routine today, so embrace the sameness and don't try to change things just for the sake of it. What might seem dull and boring to other people you find interesting and rewarding. All your confusion is starting to clear up. This is the time to revel in your accomplishments and savor the success. The people who crave constant action are the people who aren't happy with themselves.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Garampani sanctuary is located at

- A.Junagarh, Gujarat
- B.Diphu, Assam
- C.Kohima, Nagaland
- D.Gangtok, Sikkim

2. For which of the following disciplines is Nobel Prize awarded?

- A.Physics and Chemistry
- B.Physiology or Medicine
- C.Literature, Peace and Economics
- D.All of the above

3. Hitler party which came into power in 1933 is known as

- A.Labour Party
- B.Nazi Party
- C.Ku-Klux-Klan
- D.Democratic Party

Answers: 1.a 2.d 3.b

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

S	S	E	O
M	E	C	N
S	B	Y	G
K	M	A	E

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

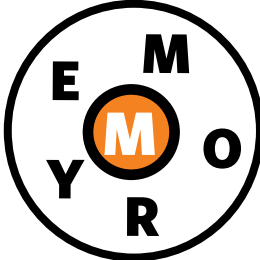
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

GLORY BECKONS

Raspadori fires Napoli past Juve and to the brink of title triumph

Milan, Italy - Giacomo Raspadori fired Napoli to the brink of their first Serie A title in over three decades on Sunday with his stoppage-time winner in a 1-0 triumph at Juventus which was packed with late drama.

Italy international Raspadori was left completely unmarked to lash home a volley from Eljif Elmas's cross in the 93rd minute of a pulsating encounter in Turin, pushing Napoli 17 points ahead of second-placed Lazio, who lost at home to Torino on Saturday.

Raspadori's late winner means that Napoli, who were knocked out of the Champions League by AC Milan on Tuesday, can win Serie A for the first time since 1990 next weekend if they beat Salernitana and Lazio fail to win at Inter Milan.

"It was a very important goal, but we still have matches to win. Today gave us a great hand as we came from disappointment in the Champions League," said Raspadori.

"We only have one thing on our minds, get three points against Salernitana."

Juve stay third, where they rose to on Thursday following the decision to revoke their 15-point penalty for illicit transfer activity, after their third straight



Napoli's Giacomo Raspadori celebrates with teammates after scoring against Juventus in their Italian Serie A match in Turin on Sunday (AFP)

'It was a very important goal, but we still have matches to win. Today gave us a great hand as we came from disappointment in the Champions League'

GIACOMO RASPADORI



league defeat. However they await a new ruling from the Italian Football Federation's (FIGC) appeals court to see if they will be handed a new points penalty, a decision which will have a big impact in Serie A's race for the Champions League.

"We played well but we con

ceded a really idiotic goal," said Juve coach Massimiliano Allegri.

"It's the 93rd minute you have to have bodies into the box to defend."

Juve thought they had snatched the points for themselves when substitute Angel Di Maria netted a brilliant solo effort

with eight minutes remaining, only for referee Michael Fabbri to then rule it out for a foul on Stanislav Lobotka which Juve were convinced was a good tackle.

By that point Victor Osimhen should have already put Napoli ahead through one of the three golden chances he missed mid-

way through the second half.

First he clipped the outside of the post in the 70th minute following great work from Elmas and then headed a great opportunity straight at Wojciech Szczesny from the subsequent corner.

AFP

Spalletti urges calm as Napoli ready for title party

Milan, Italy - Luciano Spalletti said it isn't time for Napoli to start celebrating despite a last-gasp 1-0 triumph at Juventus leaving his team needing potentially one more win to claim a historic Serie A title.

Giacomo Raspadori smashed in the stoppage time decider to claim a huge win at Juve which pushed Napoli 17 points clear at the top of the table, sweeping aside disappointment at being knocked out of the Champions League by AC Milan midweek.

If Napoli beat regional rivals Salernitana on Saturday they will need Inter Milan to avoid home defeat to Lazio on Sunday to be crowned champions for the first time since 1990.

"We need to wait before we pop any bottles, and hearts, because we still have a little way to go," said Spalletti to DAZN.

"They played really well and it wasn't easy to do that so soon after being knocked out of the Champions League. I don't think



Luciano Spalletti

'We need to wait before we pop any bottles and hearts, because we still have a little way to go'

LUCIANO SPALLETTI

we could have done any more tonight."

Barring a nightmare collapse in the final seven games of the

season Napoli will win the league, the crowning glory of Spalletti's career which has been a long road from lower league football as a player to the summit of the Italian game.

The Scudetto would be his first league title since the two he won in Russia with Zenit Saint Petersburg in 2010 and 2012 and his first trophy in a major league since an Italian Cup with Roma in 2008.

The 64-year-old has long been considered a capable coach who doesn't have the winning mentality, who gets his teams playing great football but who ultimately achieves little.

"It's obviously very satisfying to be here," added Spalletti. "It has been a tougher road here for me than for others who began from a higher level, those who earned respect from their playing careers and had the opportunity to lead a top team right from the start."

AFP



Newcastle United's Jacob Murphy (C) celebrates with team-mates after scoring against Tottenham Hotspur on Sunday (AFP)

Newcastle hit troubled Spurs for six to shatter their top four bid

London, United Kingdom - Tottenham's bid to qualify for the Champions League suffered a hammer blow as they conceded five times in the first 21 minutes of a humiliating 6-1 defeat at top-four rivals Newcastle on Sunday.

Cristian Stellini's side were buried by an avalanche of goals from Jacob Murphy and Alexander Isak, who both netted twice, and strikes from Joelinton and Callum Wilson.

Harry Kane's reply was no consolation for woeful Tottenham, who look certain to miss out on a place in the Premier League's top four after a second successive loss.

The north Londoners are six points behind third-placed Newcastle and fourth-placed Manchester United, having played two more games than United and one more than Newcastle.

AFP

Marseille reclaim second after late Lyon own goal

Paris, France - Marseille climbed back into second place in Ligue 1 on Sunday after a 2-1 win at Lyon following a farcical own goal by Malo Gusto with the final kick of the game.

Cengiz Under put Marseille in front on the stroke of half-time before Alexandre Lacazette brought Lyon level midway through the second half with his 20th league goal of the season.

Lyon were punished for their failure to deal with a cross deep into added time as Sinaly Diomande hit Chelsea loanee Gusto with his attempted clearance and the ball ricocheted into the net. Marseille's first league win in Lyon since 2007 sent them a point clear of third-placed Lens again and snapped their opponents' seven-game unbeaten streak.

"I hope it's a turning point but there's still a lot of points to play for between now and the end of the season," said Marseille coach Igor Tudor. "It's a really valuable win but we're still far from our ob-



jective. This goal in the final second is why people love football."

Only the top two in Ligue 1 qualify automatically for the Champions League, with the team finishing third entering in the third qualifying round.

However, third place will gain direct entry to the group stage if the winner of this season's Europa League also qualifies for the continent's elite club competition via their domestic championship.

AFP

Ferran Torres earns Barca narrow win over Atletico as Sevilla stun Villarreal

Barcelona, Spain - Ferran Torres's strike helped Barcelona emerge from a recent slump to earn a 1-0 win over Atletico Madrid on Sunday in La Liga, taking a big step towards clinching their first title since 2019.

Sevilla, fresh from thrashing Manchester United in the Europa League, snatched a late winner to beat high-flying Villarreal 2-1, with Youssef En-Nesyri heading home in stoppage time.

After two consecutive goal-less draws for Barca, second-place Real Madrid cut into their lead by beating Celta Vigo on Saturday, but Torres's low first-half finish restored their advantage to 11 points with eight

games remaining.

Diego Simeone's Atletico, third, arrived as Spain's most in-form side but Torres stroked home from the edge of the box in the 44th minute to secure victory for Xavi Hernandez's side.

Both sides had clear chances to score in the second half but Barcelona held on to their lead to inflict Atletico's first defeat since these sides met in January at the Metropolitano.

The hosts recorded a 23rd clean sheet of the season in La Liga, with Marc-Andre ter Stegen making a fine save to deny Antoine Griezmann an equaliser.

"I've always said Marc is among the top three goalkeepers



Barcelona's Ferran Torres scores against Atletico Madrid in their Spanish league match on Sunday (AFP)

in the world, and for our game, I think he's the best," Xavi told reporters. "He's a guarantee, our defence too - defensive work is fundamental and Marc has been decisive at various moments."

Xavi brought Frenkie de Jong back into the starting line-up after injury, but Pedri had to make do with a seat on the bench after his two-month absence.

Griezmann almost struck immediately against his former side, rattling the crossbar with a fine effort from distance within the first minute.

Barcelona broke the deadlock just before the interval, with Raphinha controlling a long ball and crossing to Torres on the

edge of the box, who swept the ball home past Jan Oblak.

It was Barcelona's first goal since Torres's strike against Elche on April 1, ending a painful run of three games without finding the net. Barcelona brought on Pedri to roars from the Camp Nou in the second half.

Gavi and Raphinha both mishit efforts from point-blank range in the space of a few seconds that should have put the game out of reach.

"It's a fact that being decisive makes you champions - if you're strong in both boxes, you have a much bigger chance of being champions," said Simeone.

AFP

ACC Men’s Premier Cup: Oman trounce Malaysia by eight wickets



Jatinder Singh celebrates after completing his century against Malaysia on Sunday

Muscat - Oman bounced back from the defeat against hosts Nepal in style as they hammered Malaysia by eight wickets in a Group A match of the ACC Men's Premier Cup at Mulpani Cricket Ground in Kathmandu on Sunday.

Oman rode on a sparkling unbeaten ton (101) from Jatinder Singh and his century opening-wicket partnership with Kashyap Prajapati (66), coupled with an all-round performance by skipper Zeeshan Maqsood (52 n.o.

and 4/35) to register a dominant victory and stay on path for a semi-final spot.

Oman are second in the group behind hosts with four points and will conclude their league engagement against Saudi Arabia on April 26, Wednesday. A top-two finish will assure Oman a place in the semi-finals. Nepal lead Group A with four points and better net run-rate (1.726) and have also played a game less than Oman.

After suffering an 84-run loss

at the hands of hosts Nepal on Friday, the determination to come back strongly was evident in the Oman side as they excelled in all departments of the game.

Having restricted Malaysia to 227/9 in 50 overs after sending them to bat, Oman openers, Jatinder and Kashyap sent the rival bowlers on a leather hunt as they smashed the attack to all parts of the park. Kashyap's 69-ball 66 was laced with nine boundaries and a six and their

123-run stand came off in 22.3 overs. Kashyap was the first to depart and though Shoaib Khan got out early to leave Oman at 128/2 in 25 overs, they never looked uncomfortable in their chase.

Maqsood joined Jatinder and then shared an unbroken 100-run third wicket stand to steer the team home in 42nd over.

Jatinder's reached his milestone in style as he hit two consecutive fours to race from 92 to 100. His knock came in 111 balls

and was studded with 12 boundaries and a six. Maqsood's 58-ball 52 had ten hits to the fence as Oman boosted their net run-rate too.

Earlier, Malaysia's Virandeep Singh missed his century by six runs as he top-scored with 94.

Bilal Khan claimed two wickets while Ayaan Khan scalped two in one over. But it was Maqsood who ran through the middle order and claimed the prize wicket of Virandeep as Malaysia was restricted to 227/9.

RED DEVILS IN FINAL

Man Utd beat Brighton on penalties to set up FA Cup final against Man City

London, United Kingdom - Manchester United beat Brighton on penalties at Wembley on Sunday to set up an FA Cup final against treble-chasing Manchester City after the match finished goalless.

Victor Lindelof scored the decisive spot-kick as Erik ten Hag's team won 7-6, following a miss by Solly March, staying on course for a domestic cup double.

The semi-final in front of a crowd of more than 81,000 finished 0-0 after extra-time, with neither side showing the cutting edge required to break the deadlock.

The result means United will have the chance to derail City's bid to match their unique achievement of winning the treble of Champions League, Premier League and FA Cup in the first-ever meeting between the rivals in an FA Cup final.

But the Red Devils, who won the League Cup earlier this season to end a six-year trophy drought, will have to find better form if they are to compete with Pep Guardiola's red-hot team.

"On Thursday I saw a team I didn't recognise but today we



Manchester United players celebrate after their penalty shoot out victory against Brighton in the English FA Cup semi-final at Wembley Stadium in north west London on Sunday (AFP)

I could see determination and resilience. We fought for every yard and competed in every battle. We had good chances.

ERIK TEN HAG

went back to usual," Ten Hag told the BBC, referring to their Europa League horror show against Sevilla.

"I could see determination

and resilience. We fought for every yard and competed in every battle. We had good chances."

Luke Shaw came in at centre-

back for the suspended Harry Maguire, with Marcus Rashford and Bruno Fernandes replacing Jadon Sancho and Marcel Sabitzer following Thursday's 3-0 defeat in Spain, which meant a 5-2 defeat on aggregate in the Europa League quarter-finals.

Brighton, who lost the FA Cup final replay to United 40 years ago, had won the past two league fixtures between the sides and came to Wembley on

a high after beating Chelsea last week.

The south-coast club settled first and had an early sight of goal when Kaoru Mitoma was brought down clumsily on the edge of the box by Antony in the sixth minute.

Argentine World Cup winner Alexis Mac Allister hit a fine curling effort that David De Gea did well to keep out before Julio Enciso flashed a shot wide.

Brighton control

Roberto De Zerbi's Brighton were dominating possession, with United apparently content to sit back and try to exploit the pace of Rashford and Antony. Brighton goalkeeper Robert Sanchez beat out a Fernandes effort in United's first meaningful attempt on goal.

The massed ranks of Brighton fans were keen to play on the nerves of De Gea whenever the

ball landed at his feet following a nightmare game for the Spaniard in Seville. United, for long periods scrappy, produced a flurry of chances shortly before half-time, with Fernandes, Anthony Martial and Christian Eriksen failing to convert. Brighton were quickly out of the blocks at the start of the second half. Enciso forced De Gea into a smart save before Danny Welbeck headed over from the resulting corner.



Sifan Hassan of the Netherlands wins the women's race at the London Marathon on Sunday (AFP)

Hassan - the Iron Lady

Paris, France - Sifan Hassan's strength of character has never been in doubt when facing trials and tribulations on and off the track and on Sunday she displayed that once again in winning the London Marathon.

The 30-year-old Ethiopian-born naturalised Dutch athlete looked as if her debut over the distance would end in misery as she struggled with a painful hip.

However, displaying the grit and determination she has shown since she was a child she battled back to the lead group and then sprinted clear of a world

class field. Her steeliness is reflected in her favourite saying taken from the Koran, as she told Dutch newspaper NRC in 2021: "For indeed, with hardship will be ease."

She showed this at the delayed Tokyo Olympics in 2021 winning the 5,000 and 10,000 metres titles - the latter 24 hours after her hopes of 1500m gold were shattered.

In achieving the distance double she emulated Ethiopian Tirunesh Dibaba's feat at the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Despite her success at the

Tokyo Games, Hassan remains a divisive figure in the world of track and field and questions over her association with disgraced coach Alberto Salazar still dog her.

Hassan did little to make those questions go away when she chose a former assistant of Salazar's, Tim Rowberry, as her coach.

Hassan insists she joined Salazar's now disbanded Nike-funded Oregon Project in 2016 so she could train with British distance running legend Mo Farah.

AFP

Swiatek beats Sabalenka to win second consecutive Stuttgart title

Berlin, Germany - World number one Iga Swiatek defeated Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka in straight sets to win her second consecutive Stuttgart title on Sunday.

Swiatek eased past her second-ranked Belarusian opponent 6-3, 6-4 on the clay in one hour and 50 minutes. A first tournament triumph since February will give Swiatek a confidence boost ahead of her French Open title defence in May.

"I wanted to win really, really hard, but I knew that I can't really focus on that and just I have to keep doing my job as I did in previous matches," she said.

"I'm pretty happy that I could kind of have a good mentality and just focus on what I want to do tennis-wise."



Carlos Alcaaz claims second straight Barcelona title

Barcelona, Spain - Carlos Alcaraz brushed aside Stefanos Tsitsipas in straight sets on Sunday to claim a second successive Barcelona title and hammer home his status as likely successor to Rafael Nadal as French Open champion.

The 19-year-old world number two won 6-3, 6-4 to bag his third trophy of 2023, after winning in Buenos Aires and Indian Wells, and the ninth of his career.

With 14-time French Open champion Nadal sidelined since January with a hip injury and world number one and two-time Roland Garros winner Novak Djokovic struggling with an elbow problem, Alcaraz reinforced his credentials as a major contender to add the clay-court Grand Slam title to the US Open he captured last year.

On Sunday, his only blip was dropping serve in the third game of the match.

From that point on, Alcaraz powered to a 79-minute triumph against the world number five, his fourth win in four meetings with



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz celebrates with the trophy after beating Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas in the final of ATP Barcelona Open on Sunday (AFP)

the Greek. Tsitsipas has now lost three finals in Barcelona after losing to Nadal in 2018 and 2021.

"It is incredible," Alcaraz said. "To feel this energy and lift the trophy in Barcelona in front of my family and friends, and most members of my team are here as well. Playing this level and to lift the trophy in front of them is a good feeling for me."

After Tsitsipas broke for a 2-1 lead, Alcaraz won five of the next six games to take charge.

Alcaraz now heads to the Madrid Masters where he is also

defending champion.

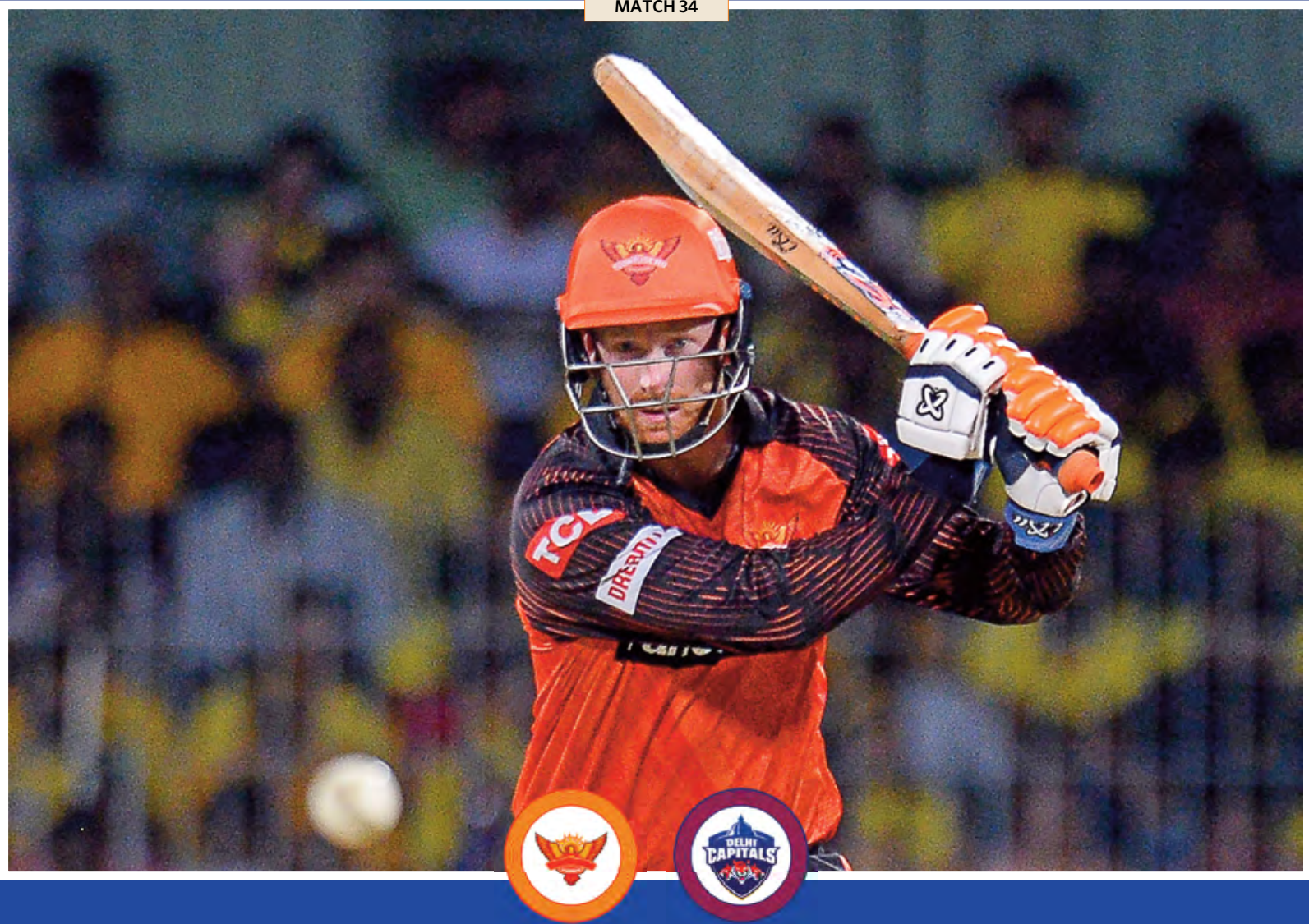
Rune wins Munich title

Holger Rune shrugged off a shoulder injury and saved four match points in a dramatic third set fightback to defeat Botic van de Zandschulp and claim a second straight ATP Munich title.

Rune prevailed 6-4, 1-6, 7-6 (7/3) in a rematch of last year's decider in Munich which he won when Van de Zandschulp retired with chest pains when leading in the opening set.



DELHI SURVIVE KLAASEN SCARE TO BEAT HYDERABAD IN LOW SCORING GAME



Heinrich Klaasen was in blistering form again but still could not take Sunrisers Hyderabad past fellow strugglers Delhi Capitals in the IPL on Monday. Though Hyderabad restricted their opponents to 144 for 9 in a low-scoring game, with noteworthy contributions from Manish Pandey (34) and Axar Patel (34), it proved enough for Delhi in the end. Patel and Anrich Nortje shone with the ball and despite Klaasen's quickfire 31 off 19 balls, Delhi won by seven runs for their second victory.

TODAYS MATCH

MATCH 35

6 PM



GUJARAT TITANS



MUMBAI INDIANS



Royal Challengers Bangalore's Harshal Patel celebrates after taking the wicket of Rajasthan Royals' Sanju Samson on Sunday (AFP)

Bangalore's Impact Player strategy allows Du Plessis and Harshal to flourish

Bangalore, India - Abdul Basith walked to the middle at Chinnaswamy Stadium needing to hit 10 runs off his first two balls in IPL cricket to clinch a victory for Rajasthan Royals against Royal Challengers Bangalore.

He looked around briefly to scope out his boundary options, then limbered up as Harshal Patel ran in to bowl. He shaped to power him over the leg side, lining up the stands at deep mid-wicket, but was foxed by Harshal's slower ball. The ball dribbled away for a single, and

the game was RCB's. This was a moment that exposed the difference in utility that these two teams had extracted from the Impact Player rule. Faf du Plessis is having a phenomenal IPL. Nearly halfway through the league stage, he is the Orange Cap holder, has scored five half-centuries in seven innings, and is striking at 165.30. Most top T20 batters are either destructive or dependable; this version of du Plessis falls into a rare category that are both. ESPNcricinfo

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RAHANE MAGIC

Chennai Super Kings steamroll Kolkata Knight Riders

Kolkata, India - An electric 71 not out off just 29 balls by Ajinkya Rahane helped Chennai Super Kings rack up this season's highest total of 234-5 as they blew away Kolkata Knight Riders and moved top of the IPL table on Sunday.

Despite a blistering 61 off 26 by Jason Roy and a valiant half-century by Rinku Singh, Kolkata fell 49 runs short in front of 60,000 fans at a noisy Eden Gardens stadium to suffer their fourth straight defeat.

Put in to bat, opener Devon Conway hit his fourth consecutive half-century before Rahane and Shivam Dube launched into the Kolkata attack with a barrage of 10 sixes and eight fours to put on 85 off just 32 balls.

Once Kulwant Khejroliya dis-



Chennai Super Kings' Ajinkya Rahane plays a shot during their match against Kolkata Knight Riders on Sunday

missed Dube in the 18th over Rahane moved up a gear, smashing 21 runs off the final five balls he faced to give Chennai their third-highest total in IPL history.

"I came into the season with a clear mind and trying to enjoy my batting," Rahane said. "Playing with (Chennai captain) MS Dhoni, he makes you feel that you can achieve anything."

Kolkata got off to a disastrous start, with Sunil Narine falling for a duck to Akash Singh and Narayan Jagadeesan back in the hutch for one to leave the hosts flailing on 1-2.

Venkatesh Iyer struck a useful 20 before falling leg-before to Moeen Ali and Nitish Rana made 27 as Roy raced to his 50 accompanied by the dangerous Rinku.

But the English bruiser was out-foxed by Maheesh Theekshana and Rinku - who made 53 not out - lost partners, with Andre Russell, David Wiese, Umesh Yadav and Varun Chakravarthy all out cheaply.

AFP

A climber in a blue jacket and yellow helmet scaling a rock face.

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AMERICAN DREAM

GLAMOROUS FEMINIST

Diane von Furstenberg: From Brussels to the big time in the States

Diane von Furstenberg is a US fashion icon. But she never forgot her Belgian roots - as evidenced by a return to Brussels, the city of her birth, to celebrate a half-century of her glamorous career.

"I really lived an American dream as a young European and it was fascinating," the 76-year-old told AFP in an interview as the Belgian capital puts on an exhibition of her work.

The show, at Brussels' Fashion and Lace Museum, is the first exhibition in Europe dedicated to the Belgian-American designer, organisers said.

Naturally, pride of place goes to von Furstenberg's signature wrap dress, which made her famous as soon as it went on sale in 1973, three years after she made New York her home.

Sought after for its simplicity and practicality, the soft jersey wrap dress has been

made in several dozen iterations in bright colours, making it an enduring feature in celebrity wardrobes.

"It makes a woman confident. And if you are confident, you are beautiful," von Furstenberg said with a wide smile.

"The jersey: Very practical. Doesn't crinkle. You put in a print that moves and moves with your body. That all of a sudden makes beautiful curves in your body. The shape: Very simple."

At age 25, von Furstenberg was making 25,000 dresses a week to keep up with demand.

Her star never dimmed, enabling her to go into philanthropy and support her view of herself as 'a big feminist'.

That's a theme informing the Brussels exhibition, which is titled 'Woman Before Fashion'.

"What is most important to me is to use my voice, my experience, my knowledge, my resources, my connections in order to help other women to be the women they want to be," she said.

A miracle

With her second husband, US media billionaire Barry Diller, von



What is most important to me is to use my voice, my experience, my knowledge, my resources, my connections in order to help other women to be the women they want to be

DIANE VON FURSTENBERG



Furstenberg runs a foundation that annually hands out awards to personalities seen as inspiring other women.

For her own sources of inspiration, she cites first above all her mother, a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps who incarnated, for her, combativeness and a desire for freedom.

Liliane Halfin, nee Nahmias, came from a Greek-Jewish family. She was deported to Auschwitz in Poland and then to the Ravensbrueck camp in Germany as a young bride in her 20s.

When she was freed in 1945 she weighed less than 25kg and was in such poor condition that doctors recommended she postpone having children.

"She was a skeleton amongst ashes. She went to concentration camps and she wasn't supposed to survive," von Furstenberg said, adding that her own birth 18 months later was 'a miracle'.

After the end of World War II her parents settled in Brussels, where the future designer, then named Diane Halfin, lived until age 14 before going to boarding school in Switzerland and England.

It was during her university studies that she met her first husband, a jet-setting European prince named Edward Egon von Furstenberg, whose name she kept after their divorce. That name is now indelibly linked to the world of fashion.

For the curator of the Brussels exhibition, Nicolas Lor, one of the keys to the success of the Diane von Furstenberg label was the combination of a dress of typically European style with material that offered comfortable wear.

"She mixed the concept of the little dress that was thought up in the 1920s with the principles of sportswear and comfort that clearly defined apparel in the United States," explained Lor, a French fashion expert who has worked at Chanel and Christian Dior.

"For me, she was American," he smiled.

The exhibition runs to January next year. AFP

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