

► **NEWS BRIEF**

HM CONGRATULATES BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to President Aleksandr Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere congratulations and best wishes of good health and happiness to the president and the friendly people of Belarus.

OMAN OFFERS CONDOLENCES TO IRAN

Muscat - The Foreign Ministry has expressed Oman's sincere condolences and sympathy to the government, the people of the Islamic Republic of Iran and to the families of the victims of the earthquake that struck Hormozgan Province in southern Iran on Saturday.

02

Great hope from Biden's visit to region: Sayyid Badr

Tourism to bounce back this khareef

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Governorate of Dhofar is getting ready for an influx of visitors during the Eid al Adha holidays, with some hotels expecting 100 per cent occupancy.

Hotels are geared up to receive tourists during the khareef season, which is characterised by tropical weather and moderate temperatures, making it an ideal destination for visitors and tourists from inside and outside Oman.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, an official of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism said, "Forty-one hotels with 4,566 hotel rooms are ready to receive tourists during this tourist season. Three more hotels are lined up to open in Dhofar during the season."

The three are Plaza Hotel in the Al Saada area, Tulip Inn Majan Hotel, and Salalah International Hotel in the Al Wadi area.

"We expect to see a huge influx of tourists to Dhofar this year," said Salim al Amiri, owner of Roshan Hotel in Mirbat.

He added that there are indications of an early khareef this year. "With the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, there are expectations of an increase in the number



of tourists from inside and outside the sultanate. Gulf and Omani tourists prefer to visit places such as Wadi Darbat, which is one of the most famous and beautiful valleys in Dhofar. Al Mughsail Beach is also a very popular destination."

He believes hotel occupancy will reach 100 per cent this year. "I hope the concerned authorities establish recreational parks in Dhofar to attract children and more families."

Imad Salim, operations manager at Raysut Salalah Hotel, said, "We have prepared well to receive guests. We expect an occupancy rate of more than 90 per cent."

His expectation of an exceptional season is based on all concerned parties being well prepared, especially after removal of all COVID-19 restrictions.

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41 hotels with 4,566 hotel rooms are ready to receive tourists. Three more hotels are lined up to open in Dhofar during the season

MINISTRY OFFICIAL

Rains likely for next four days over large parts of Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

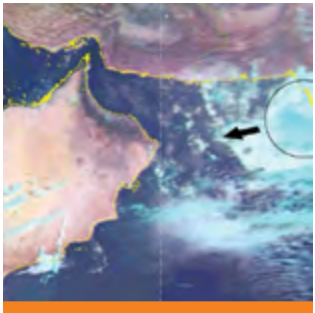
Most parts of the sultanate are likely to be affected by an extension of a low pressure system in the Arabian Sea till Wednesday.

In a special weather bulletin on Saturday, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said that the 'latest weather analysis of the National Multi Hazard and Early Warning Centre indicates that the sultanate might be affected this week by an extension of a low pressure system coming from India'.

CAA stated that on Saturday, Sunday and Monday, there are chances of thunderstorms with varying intensity of rainfall on the western and eastern Al Hajar mountains, especially in the mountainous areas located in the governorates of North Batinah, Buraimi, Dhahirah, Dakhliyah, South Batinah, North Sharqiyah and South Sharqiyah. 'The impact is expected to extend to the plains and deserts of Dhahirah, Dakhliyah and North Sharqiyah.'

For Tuesday and Wednesday, CAA said that the alert continues for weather disturbances in the Al Hajar mountains and the mountainous areas located in the above-mentioned governorates.

'Due to the extension of the low pressure system coming from the Arabian Sea, clouds



There are chances of thunderstorms with varying intensity of rainfall on the western and eastern Al Hajar mountains

CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY

with isolated rain will start to affect South Sharqiyah, Al Wusta and parts of Muscat and North Sharqiyah. Rainfall will vary between 15-40mm.'

The authority warned that for the next few days there are chances of downdraft winds gusting between 40-80kmph. 'This may give rise to dust leading to a decrease in horizontal visibility. The state of the Arabian Sea will be rough along coasts.'

It advised all to be cautious during rains, avoid overflowing wadis and check the visibility and state of the sea before sailing.



'Great hope from Biden's visit to region'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

There is great hope of US President Joe Biden's visit to the region this month having a positive impact on Arab-American relations, according to H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister.

In an interview with Egypt's *Al Ahram Al Arabi* magazine last week, H E Sayyid Badr said, "There is no doubt about Oman's commitment to the joint Arab action. We hope that the visit of US President Joe Biden to the region will have fruitful results on Arab-American relations."

On Oman's diplomacy and ability to communicate with all parties in the region and beyond, H E Sayyid Badr said, "Let's take two issues in this context. The first is the negotiations of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany. Reaching a positive outcome on this issue, through dialogue, will represent a great gain for regional and global peace, security and stability. Everyone will benefit, and there will be no losers."

"As for the second issue - Yemen - the human suffering in this Arab and brotherly neighbour country is enormous and the losses are heavy. Every Yemeni will benefit if the current ceasefire leads to lasting peace."

He believes the approach proposed by the United Nations envoy for Yemen is "good" and



Peace in Yemen and its future are a strategic decision that must be taken primarily by the Yemenis themselves; it cannot be imposed from outside

H E SAYYID BADR BIN HAMAD AL BUSAIDI

On the Palestinian issue, he said that the Arab peace initiative for the establishment of a Palestinian state is still on the table, and is respected by the international community and observers as a just initiative. "We should work to strengthen our collective cooperation and this mission must be consistent and sustainable. I think, in particular, it is very useful to listen to each other's concerns, especially those with whom we may disagree on some issues and orientations," he said about rapprochement between Arab countries.

Neutrality in today's world

On the issue of neutrality in today's world and the notion of 'whoever is not with us is against us' gaining ground, H E Sayyid Badr said, "I disagree. There is certainly a vital place for neutrality in today's world. The notion of 'he who is not with us is against us' is an unhealthy. It must be completely rejected."

"We believe in and practise positive neutrality and building of a collective interest. It is our duty to keep the channels of communication open in order to be able to communicate with all parties. We also strongly support the United Nations and the rule of international law, respect the sovereignty of all its members, and respect their sovereign decisions, whether we agree with these decisions or not."

Oman-Egypt relations

Speaking about deep-rooted Oman-Egypt relations, H E Sayyid Badr said, "To build on the solid political relations between Oman and Egypt requires all of us to push forward cooperation between the two countries in all vital economic, cultural and other sectors."

In light of the visit of President Abdul Fattah el Sisi of Egypt to Oman last week, he said the next phase of progress will witness initiatives and projects that are aimed at developing more opportunities for trade and investment between the two countries.

Oman affirms its commitment to environment preservation

Lisbon - Oman has reiterated its support to all international efforts aimed at achieving environmental stability and balance in the seas, oceans and other environments.

The sultanate made the commitment to protecting the environment and ensuring the safety of its habitats at the 2022 UN Ocean Conference, which concluded in Lisbon, Portugal, on Friday.

Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Abdullah Ali al Amri, Chairman of Environment Authority, told the conference that Oman focuses on the sustainability of the environment and natural resources based on the Basic Law of the State which mandates the protection of the environment and combatting pollution.

These are implemented through a set of legislations, such as laws on natural reserves, protection of the environment, pollution control, and preservation of water resources, among others. These laws aim to achieve the goals of Oman Vision 2040,



The sultanate spares no effort to ensure the safety of these water corridors and commercial shipping fleets

ABDULLAH ALI AL AMRI



Amri said.

He added that recent studies showed a stable condition of Oman's seas - its temperature, acidity, oxygen levels, flourishing level of chlorophyll and safe concentrations of heavy elements - but also micro-plastics.

"Based on Oman's stance in support of global peace and sta-

bility, and its strategic location overlooking the Strait of Hormuz, the Sea of Oman and the Arabian Sea, the sultanate spares no effort to ensure the safety of these water corridors and commercial shipping fleets, as well as providing quality services through its seven commercial ports."

Amri said that to protect ma-

rine resources, Oman joined several international conventions aimed at protecting and ensuring the safety of seas and water resources.

"Oman has also established 12 marine reserves and marine conservation areas. Tuesday saw the addition of the 13th marine reserve promulgated via Royal Decree No 54/2022 on establishment of the National Natural Park Reserve in the Governorate of Musandam."

He added that Oman has implemented projects for natural and artificial coral reefs, planted several mangrove forests, adopted an emergency plan to combat oil pollution and banned the use of single-use plastic bags, as well as established 25 fishing harbours to organise the artisanal fishing sector. It also launched projects on fish farming through the adoption of modern technologies.

The UN conference discussed the implementation of the 14th goal of the Sustainable Development Goals, which is themed 'Life Underwater'.



Korean Embassy showcases culture, products at lifestyle fair

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The concluding day of the Korea Lifestyle Fair 2022 at Oman Avenues Mall on Friday saw a large turnout. The two-day event was organised by the Korea Trade Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA), the commercial section of the Embassy of the Republic of Korea, in association with seven local Omani companies.

The fair was inaugurated by H E Kim Kiejoo, Ambassador of Re-

public of Korea to Oman, in the presence of Mohammed bin Salim al Harthy, former Ambassador of Oman to the Republic of Korea, Hatem al Taie, CEO of Al-roya Press and Publishing, Omar Salim al Mahrezi, Director of Department of Small and Medium Enterprises at Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industries, and others.

Speaking about the event, Sejin Kim, Commercial Attaché and Director General of KOTRA Muscat, said, "We are happy to host the Korea Lifestyle Fair

as the very first event organised in Oman to promote Korean items. The aim is to introduce Korean lifestyle and culture to consumers in Oman. We have always supported Omani SMEs to grow their business together with Korean brands."

He added that the fair also aimed to enhance bilateral trade between the two countries.

The fair showcased Korean cosmetics, fashion items, stationery, packaged food and Taekwondo performances.



Audi A8 L, S8 unveiled at National Museum

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Audi Oman, represented by Premium Motors, unveiled its latest flagship luxury models, the Audi A8 L and S8 at National Museum of Oman on Thursday. The launch event was held under the patronage of H H Sayyid Fahr bin Fatik al Said and officials from the Embassy of Germany in Oman.

These two luxury sedans promise to deliver a first-class experience for passengers and drivers alike, perfectly aligning

the brand's visions of progress and innovation in one.

Speaking at the launch, Christian Nehme, general manager of Premium Motors, said, "We are honoured to have got the opportunity to unveil the Audi A8 L and S8 at the magnificent National Museum which tells the story of the country and its rich heritage."

"Both the models are symbols of status and prestige for the brand. The new Audi S8 symbolises masterful comfort with superior sporty handling. And with striking exterior features and in-

novative interiors, every single detail creates a high-class experience to the new Audi A8 L."

The updated A8 L is powered by a hybrid technology 48 V (MHEV) 3lt V6 that develops 340hp and 500Nm of torque, coupled to an eight-speed automatic transmission and Audi's Quattro all-wheel-drive system. This setup accelerates from zero to 100kmph in 5.7 seconds, before hitting an electronically limited top speed of 250kmph.

The S8 has a 4lt twin-turbocharged V8 engine that develops 571hp and 800Nm of peak

torque, which catapults the high-performance version from standstill to 100kmph in a mere 3.8 seconds.

The A8 L and S8 meet the needs of a changing customer base. The new wheel range offers an option of three new geometries and three new rim colours. The new high-end headlights and taillights inspire with innovative functions and form the apex of the A8 L and S8's established technology portfolio, creating a contemporary and user-oriented experience - whether for passengers or drivers.

MoH makes wearing face masks mandatory in hospitals

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has alerted the public in general that wearing face masks in all health facilities is still mandatory so as to have a control over COVID-19 infections until the battle against the pandemic is won for once and for all.

Wearing face masks in both private and government hospitals in Oman is mandatory, an official from the ministry said, reminding that "the ministry has not issued any instructions to ease preventive measures in the health sector since the start of the pandemic".

"The Directorate General for Disease Surveillance and Control in the MoH has issued a set of recommendations - such as obligating health workers, patients and visitors to wear face masks inside government and private health institutions - to reduce the risk of the COVID-19 pandemic," the official said.

The ministry has also urged all health workers to take the booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine if they have completed six months since receiving the



The ministry has not issued any instructions to ease preventive measures in the health sector since the start of the pandemic

MOH OFFICIAL

last dose, the official said, while recommending proper examination of suspected cases and isolation of both suspected and confirmed COVID-19 patients, besides their classification as per the cases - suspected or confirmed.

Omani platform Nibras teams up with Shell International

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Energy giant Shell International will have its Production Universe (PU) software integrated with Oman-based company iNNOVATEQ's Nibras platform.

The union will ensure an easier, faster and enhanced workflow for asset management and production optimisation. The partnership will start rolling from September in several countries around the world.

The partnership between the two companies was inked during a press conference at InterContinental Muscat on Thursday.

Speaking about the integration with Shell International, Dr Riyadh Moosa, CEO at iNNOVATEQ, said, "We look forward to enriching our offerings with this collaboration to assist petroleum operators in accelerating their digital transformations by offering PU on Nibras."

He added that Nibras has been engineered with LEAN methodologies, which have been utilised for over a decade in wells, reservoir and facilities management in the oil and gas industry. "It is an agile, customer-focused solution enabling platform to modernise and automate daily operations while proactively driving decisions using data insights."

Established in 2017, iNNOVATEQ (Innovation Technical Solutions) specialises in digital transformation and IT solutions development with several solutions and platforms to its credit, including Nibras for the oil and gas industry.

Nibras is currently being used by 3,000 users in 17 technical and business disciplines to manage over oil 8,000 wells and more than 11,000 pieces of surface facility equipment. Nibras delivers significant business value to its clients by reducing HSE risk and saving engineers and operators time by 40 per cent.

On the occasion, Wim Servaes, CTO at iNNOVATEQ, said, "This collaboration will unlock the full value of PU in Shell Interna-



It is an agile, customer-focused solution enabling platform to modernise and automate daily operations

DR RIYADH MOOSA

tional as it links the technology of PU to the integrated asset management platform of Nibras to facilitate more accurate prioritisation and faster initiation of asset actions to address deferments and optimisations."

According to Paul Paterson, data and global workflow lead at Shell International, the energy giant's aim in integrating the PU software with iNNOVATEQ's Nibras platform is to sustain PU with cutting edge technology while reducing operating expenditures and expanding the value of PU within Shell International.

PU is a state-of-the-art software with real-time analytics application for the management of wells in oil and gas production operations. It is currently deployed over a range of Shell operated production assets from deep water to onshore.

Mohammad Sweidan, CCO of iNNOVATEQ, said, "The collaboration with Shell International will bring the industry an outstanding solution that enables customers to leverage their operational data to generate and sustain significant value. We leverage over 20 years of experience to help our clients fast track their own digital transformation journeys by focusing on what works, how to ensure wide adoption and how to sustain the business gains," he said.

Tourism to bounce back this khareef

Continued from Page 01

According to Salim, airlines and tourism companies are offering attractive packages that will promote the season and "attract many more tourists from different countries, especially people from the Gulf, who come to enjoy the monsoons".

Amri said that Dhofar is becoming a year-round tourist destination. The governorate sees a large number of European tourists from September to May, "who love to dive and enjoy watching coral reefs, dolphins and hiking".

Up Town to stimulate tourism

An official of Dhofar Municipality

said that it is establishing Up Town, a recreational area in the Itin plain in Salalah that will include various tourist and recreation services.

"The under-construction project aims to create an outlet for families to spend time in a pleasant atmosphere and stimulate tourism in Dhofar. The project will provide 60 job opportunities for jobseekers and owners of small and medium enterprises," the official said.

Dhofar Municipality urged jobseekers to register via up-town@dw.gov.om

The last date for submission of applications is July 10.

NODC announces initiative to boost date farming

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Nakheel Oman Development Company (NODC) has launched a new initiative called 'Ghars' as part of its efforts to support Omani farmers and achieve self-sufficiency in food.

In a statement, NODC said that the initiative aims to sell date seedlings, called Al Fardh, to farmers and institutions through three chosen outlets - Agricultural Textile Centre in Bahla, Al Kamil wa al Wafi and Al Najd Farms.

The deadline for applications to get seedlings is October 22, the statement added.



NODC recently exported two shipments of dates to Singapore and India, keeping with the current efforts to increase the country's national income by enhancing the global market of Omani products.

NODC confirmed that a con-

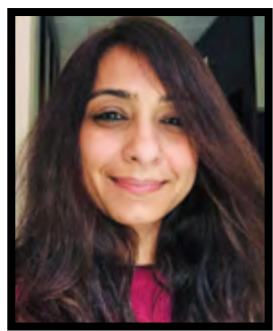
signment of Omani dates, packaged under the brand name 'Zaad', was exported recently.

The packaging, processing, marketing and export of the dates are being overseen by NODC, the investment arm of the One Million Date Palms Plantation Project of the Diwan of Royal Court.

The most important types of Omani dates are Khalas, Al Dhahirah, Fard, Khenizi Berni, Handal Bunarenga, Khasab, Straw, Umm al Sala, Majhoul, and Sukkari.

For more information, those interested can contact the authorities via emails sent to tcc@nakheel.om

BEYOND WORDS



VAISHALI HAMLAI

The columnist is a certified MBTI coach and author, and writer who delves into the complexities of the mind and soul to guide and interpret social behaviour

Driving on the roads nowadays feels like an escape room, everything is a maze, haphazard lane cutting has become a macho sign. Have you ever witnessed those drivers with their seat right back, lounging in the car like they were in some night club? It scares me when I drive past someone who seems way too comfortable slouching their back while driving. So period. Someone who is way too confident behind the wheels and a nervous wreck behind the wheel, I try to stay away from them. They ooze instability in my mind, so I run, run away fast!

I was wondering; if a bird flies right into your car while you are driving and minding your own business; or a cat attempts life-threatening stunts right in front when you are driving, is it our fault? But they are animals. Right? We don't expect them to understand. However, we are human beings. We are a special breed they say. Then why is it that I find myself fumbling on the steering wheel when some human being supposedly a special species with sense and

sensibility decides to run a marathon of crossing the road just when you are cruising at 100kmph.

I was told we have the brain and the brawn, but where is the brain. Trying to beat a massive machine that sells on the fact that it can speed fast, is by far not an act of an intelligent species. I'd like to stay away from these people too, but they are a bonus, you never know if you are getting one!

ROAD LORDS!

And how is it that whenever you try to ask Google baba about navigation, he somehow shows you the longest way. It seems like a conspiracy to me, like they are being paid royalty by fuel providers. The mandate is clear, keep the drivers circling around for three rounds, and then finally show the right directions. Each extra circle, they stay longer on your app and use more of our fuel, quite a win-win. But this is

purely my thinking. On a side note, how can you expect a driver to be alert while driving and trying to follow a navigation. So, these are another breed of drivers who I stay away from.

And then there are those blockers, these are the stickiest of the lot. I would like to remind them that, if I'm in the first lane I want to go as per the speed limit, not more than the speed limit and surely not lesser than that, this is when the blockers arrive with their manoeuvring. They cruise at lesser speed, and believe they are road lords, because they refuse to move or give way to others. In fact, as malicious as they could be, they also try to block you. So here is one more set of drivers that I stay away from.

Having put down this list, I feel satisfied and feel like I've done my duty as a citizen to create awareness about our responsibilities towards the society.

We need to start taking ownership towards some basic road rules, to make it fun for everyone to drive and enjoy the beautiful roads of Oman.

Drive to plant 700,000 wild tree seeds in Dhofar begins

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Environment Authority (EA) has launched the second phase of its programme to plant wild tree seeds in Dhofar in cooperation with volunteer teams.

In January 2020, the EA and Petroleum Development Oman launched an initiative to plant 10mn wild tree saplings in ten years.

The authority has included species such as ghaf, al samar and sidr in the programme for which nurseries are being set up.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, Hatim Salim Ali Kalshat, head of Biodiversity Department in the Directorate General of Environment in Dhofar, informed that the second phase of campaign started on June 29 and will continue for a month. "The plan this time around is to plant 700,000 wild tree seeds. More than 40 volunteers are participating in the second phase of planting seeds of wild trees such as sidr."

EA launched the first phase in June 2021 in which it targeted plantation of 1mn seeds in several parts of Dhofar.

According to Kalshat, the vol-



unteer teams are currently planting wild seeds in the wilayats of Taqah, Mirbat, Salalah, Rakhayut and Dhalkut daily from 10am to 3pm.

Referring to the challenges to the plantation programme, he said, "Overgrazing and water scarcity after khareef season are the biggest challenges we face. To overcome the problem of overgrazing, we have erected 45 fences in the areas where we have planted seeds, from Jabal Samhan to the niyabat of Qairon Hiriti."

Kalshat informed that the authority also runs awareness cam-

paigns among community members to protect the wild seeds planted and remove litter from these areas.

"The authority has formed a team to spread awareness among those visiting the governorate for khareef to preserve green areas and prevent dumping of waste. The team works from 7am to 7pm daily," said Kalshat.

"We urge khareef visitors to cooperate with us, abide by environmental laws and preserve green areas. We thank the volunteers and citizens for supporting our awareness campaigns."

The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Muscat Daily or Apex Press & Publishing

Oil price rally sharply reduces borrowing needs in GCC

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The oil price rally this year has significantly improved the economic outlook of GCC countries and sharply reduced the borrowing needs of sovereigns and corporates in the region.

GCC governments were in a much stronger footing at the start of 2022 than the previous two years, mainly led by full resumption of economic activity post the pandemic that led to faster growth in the region, Kuwait-based Kamco Investment said in a research report.

As the borrowing needs of GCC states remain significantly lower this year against previous two years, GCC debt issuances sharply declined during the first five months of 2022, mainly on the back of better fiscal position of the regional governments backed by elevated oil prices as well as a pick up in economic activity.

As per the Kamco Investment report, total fixed income debt issuances in the GCC dropped to US\$37.2bn during the first five months of 2022 as compared to US\$61.9bn during the corresponding period in 2021, registering an year-on-year decline of 40 per cent.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE remained the top fixed instrument issuers in the region with issuances of US\$24.2bn and US\$7.9bn, respectively, this year. The decline in issuances were



Muscat Daily

seen across the board with all the issuing countries seeing a decline this year.

Oman had no fixed income issuances this year as compared to

resulting in almost flat year-on-year issuances.

GCC corporates witnessed a 47.7 per cent year-on-year drop in fixed income issuances in the

porates and governments in the region, Kamco Investment said. 'The higher cost of borrowing is expected to discourage some refinancing activity in the near term. For the full year 2022, we are expecting a steep decline in issuances as a result of decline in issuances from both the government as well as corporates,' the report added.

The year 2021 saw GCC corporates offsetting a decline in debt issuances from governments but the aggregate issuances witnessed a decline versus 2020. In 2022, the decline is expected to be steeper as both corporates as well as governments are expected to see a decline in issuances, the Kamco Investment report noted.

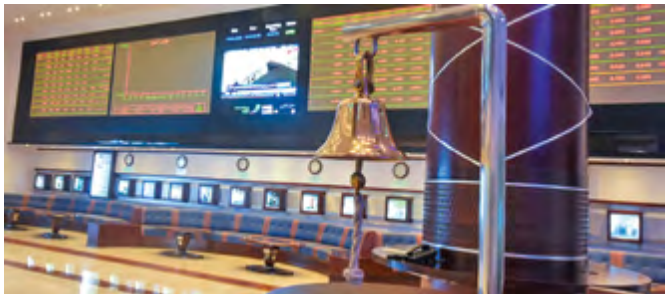
'Governments in the region are eyeing fiscal surpluses after years of deficits backed by elevated oil revenues. Corporates, on the other hand, may see a decline in issuances mainly led by higher rates and its impact on overall economic activity,' the investment firm said.

Fiscal deficits for the GCC countries are expected to see a steep decline this year mainly backed by higher oil revenues coupled with full resumption of economic activity as compared to the previous two years.

According to the forecasted general government balances of IMF, the GCC region is expected to see aggregate fiscal surplus of US\$152.2bn in 2022 followed by a surplus of US\$147.8bn in 2023.

Outlook

Bonds and sukuk maturities in the GCC is expected at US\$24.4bn for the remainder of 2022 and the refinancing of these is expected to account for the bulk of the issuances by cor-



Oman to list RO150mn sovereign sukuk on MSX today

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Muscat Stock Exchange has decided to list Oman Sovereign Sukuk Company's sixth issue of sovereign sukuk on the bond and sukuk market of the local bourse, starting from today until its maturity date on June 30, 2029.

The new issue comes within Al Ijara Sukuk programme of Oman Sovereign Sukuk Company. Oman Sovereign Sukuk Company previously issued five sukuk issues of different sizes and maturities.

The new sukuk issue is worth RO150mn, divided into 1.5mn units at a nominal value of RO100 per sukuk.

The term of the sixth issue of Oman's sovereign sukuk is seven years at a profit rate of 4.85 per cent per annum, according to an Oman News Agency report.

The new sukuk issue is expected to contribute to revitalising the trading activity on the bond and sukuk market of the Muscat Stock Exchange.

The sixth issue of sovereign sukuk is worth RO150mn, divided into 1.5mn units at a nominal value of RO100 per sukuk. The term of new sukuk issue is 7 years at a profit rate of 4.85 per cent per annum

The statistics from the Muscat Stock Exchange indicated that the market value of the bond and sukuk market has reached RO4.445bn at the end of trading last Thursday.

This represents 20 per cent of the total market capitalisation of the MSX.

The market value of all the sovereign sukuks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange at the end of trading last Thursday amounted to RO737.6mn.

MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

MSX posts weekly gains as services stocks rise

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange posted marginal increase during the last week, mainly due to gains recorded by services sector stocks.

The MSX30 Index ended the week higher by 0.18 per cent. Services Index was the only index ending higher by 0.61 per cent. Industrial Index and Financial Index closed lower by 0.31 per cent and 0.56 per cent, respectively. MSX Shariah Index also closed down by 0.50 per cent.

Local news

►Oman Chlorine Company announced to the shareholders that it has started production at its new plant of calcium chloride in Sohar Industrial Zone on June 25, 2022. The new plant has a designed capacity of 80 metric tonnes per day. This will contribute to increase the daily production of the company.

►The Sustainable City — Yiti, which is set to be the first fully sustainable community in the Sultanate of Oman, signed last week a memorandum of understanding with Sohar Islamic Bank to open an escrow account for the newly launched master planned project in the capital city of Muscat. This agreement was made in accordance with Royal Decree 30/2018, which aims to protect developers' funds. Accordingly, The Sustainable City — Yiti can now offer escrow services for the buyers of its upcoming 1,657 residential units — including 300 eco-friendly and en-

ergy-efficient villas, 1225 apartments and 132 luxury serviced apartments. The agreement was signed by Hashil bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, chairman of Sustainable Development and Investment Company (SDIC) and Abdulwahid bin Mohammed al Murshidi, chief Islamic banking officer, Sohar Islamic. The ceremony was also attended by key stakeholders from Omran Group, Diamond Developers and Sohar Islamic.

►Total number of guests in hotel properties of the 3 to 5-star category in the sultanate increased 46.2 per cent to 654,807 guests year-to-date compared to 447,778 guests for the same period of 2021. The occupancy rate increased 41.1 per cent year-on-year, according to the latest monthly statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) compared to 35.8 per cent last year. Total revenues of these hotels rose by 129 per cent to RO73.058mn year-to-date, compared to RO31.897mn during the same period of the previous year.

►Total number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) registered in the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development increased by 46.9 per cent in May 2022 compared to the same period 2021 to reach 78,089 compared to 53,166 in May 2021, according to the data released by NCSI. Among the governorates, Muscat Governorate topped the list by reaching 26,374 SMEs, comprising a rise of 47.1 per cent.



►Sur Industrial City, affiliated with the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), has signed an investment contract with Al Fairuz Projects and Investments, to establish a rubber powder production plant with an investment value of RO83mn for phase one of the project. Commenting on the project, Eng Abdulqadir bin Salim al Balushi, director general of Sur Industrial City, stated that this eco-friendly project will be developed on an area of 230,000 sqm and will adopt cutting-edge tyre recycling technologies.

GCC markets

Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Investment said that the foreign

direct investment (FDI) posted a growth of 9.5 per cent, reaching SAR7.4bn (US\$1.97bn) in the first quarter of 2022 while compared to the same period in 2021. Saudi Arabia turned in a brilliant performance in the global indices and ranked 14th at the level of G20 countries in the FDI flows for the year 2021, the ministry said in a statement on its Twitter account.

The statement was based on the findings of the World Investment Report 2022 issued by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The report reflects the competitiveness of the Saudi economy and the development of its investment environment.

Dubai's economy has posted a 6.2 per cent growth in its GDP in 2021.

The emirate's GDP also rose 5.9 per cent to AED102bn (US\$27.8bn) in the first quarter of 2022, supported by strategic initiatives and economic stimulus programmes. "The growth demonstrates the emirate's strong economic fundamentals and ability to maintain sustainable growth," Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai and chairman on Dubai Executive Council tweeted. "We are poised to enter a new phase of our economic development, which will focus mainly on the knowledge-based economy," he said.

Saudi Arabia's overall merchandise exports increased by 98 per cent in April 2022 compared to April 2021. The value of exports amounted to SAR137.1bn in April 2022, up from SAR69.3bn in April 2021. This increase originated mainly from oil exports, which rose by SAR60.5bn or 123 per cent in the same period. According to the just-released International Trade Report for April 2022, by the General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT), non-oil exports (including re-exports) increased by 36.6 per cent year-on-year in April 2022, rising to SAR27.4bn from SAR20bn in April 2021. Merchandise imports increased by 11.2 per cent (SAR5.6bn) in April 2022.

The value of imports amounted to SAR55.3bn in April 2022 compared to SAR49.7bn in April 2021.

Saudi economy expanded by 9.9 per cent in the first quarter of 2022, its fastest in a decade. Non-oil activity activities rose over 20 per cent year-on-year. The World Bank estimates Saudi Arabia's GDP to grow at 7 per cent this year.

In Bahrain, bank loan instalments will not be deferred beyond June 30, the Central Bank of Bahrain (CBB) has announced. MPs were quick to voice their concerns over the move and have urged the Cabinet to urgently intervene to overturn the decision.

The CBB has gone with the recommendations of the Bahrain Association of Banks, it said in a circular signed by CBB

Deputy Governor Shaikh Salman bin Isa Al Khalifa and directed to all retail banks. "The CBB notes and agrees to the recommendation of the Bahrain Association of Banks to discontinue the instalments deferral programme by June 30, 2022," said the circular.

Global news

In commodities, oil prices were largely steady in volatile trading on Thursday as the market weighed concerns over global supply against a build in US fuel product inventories. Crude inventories fell by 2.8mn barrels in the week to June 24, US Energy Information Administration data showed, far exceeding the 569,000 barrel drop forecast in a Reuters poll of analysts. However, fuel stocks rose as refiners ramped up activity, operating at nearly full capacity, the highest at this time of year in four years.

Meanwhile, the OPEC+ group of producers including Russia, began two days of meetings on Wednesday, though sources said there was little prospect of agreement to pump more oil. Gold fell on Thursday and was bound for its worst quarter in five as the dollar's strength and a hawkish rhetoric from central banks eroded the appeal of the non-yielding asset.

Normally, gold tends to do well in times of high inflation, but investors will be worried about parking their capital in something that doesn't yield anything, Evangelista added.

OPEC+ stays the course on oil output boost

Vienna, Austria – Major oil producers led by Saudi Arabia and Russia stuck to a previously decided output boost, despite calls for bigger increases to tame crude prices. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has exacerbated concerns about oil supplies, sending prices to record highs this year.

Oil prices fell following the announcement by the 13-nation Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries led by Saudia Arabia and its 10 partners headed by Russia.

In their monthly video conference on Thursday, which lasted about an hour, the 23 members of OPEC+ agreed to add another 648,000 barrels per day in August, the same as for July.

"As expected, OPEC+ stuck to its planned 648,000 barrel increase in August and refrained from any decision beyond then," said Craig Erlam, a senior market analyst at OANDA trading platform.

This "could add an element of uncertainty to future targets, particularly given recent reports that even Saudi Arabia and UAE are running near capacity," Erlam added. Tamas Varga, an analyst with PVM Energy, said the decision seemed "symbolic" as most OPEC+ members have been failing to meet their output quotas.

"Now all eyes will be on Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates," Varga said. "Any hint that they also struggle to increase output will probably be



met with a fresh wave of buying."

The 13 members of OPEC, chaired by Saudi Arabia, and their 10 partners, led by Russia, drastically slashed output in 2020 as the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting lockdowns sent demand plummeting.

Since last year, they have been gradually increasing output again. In recent months, the United States and other top oil consumers urged OPEC+ to open the tabs more widely.

The group finally decided at its last meeting in early June to add 648,000 barrels per day to the market in July, up from 432,000 in previous months.

But the larger-than-expected boost failed to cool prices.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, the international benchmark, Brent North Sea Crude, has added around 17 per cent, while the US benchmark WTI has jumped more than 18 per cent.

Analysts have warned that only a recession may be able to bring down prices.

"The prices will likely push higher unless the recession fears take the upper hand," said Ipek Ozkardeskaya, an analyst at Swissquote Bank.

"All the talk of a summer of discontent is likely to spill over into the autumn and winter as high oil and gas prices remain a feature of markets," said Jamie Maddock, an equity research analyst at Quilter Cheviot.

"Attention will now inevitably

turn to what OPEC+ does from September," Maddock added.

Production will be back to pre-pandemic levels after August, at least on paper.

Several OPEC+ members have been failing to meet the output quotas, while Iran and Venezuela – and now also Russia – are blocked by sanctions.

The United Arab Emirates said this week it was close to its oil output ceiling, ahead of a regional visit by US President Joe Biden, who is expected to lobby for increased production.

Biden will visit neighbouring Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, as part of his tour next month, but analysts doubt it will convince OPEC+ to boost output.

AFP

Oil market faces shortfall with G7 price cap plan: Russia

Moscow, Russia – Moscow has said that G7 plans to cap the price of Russian oil would lead to a shortfall on world markets and soaring prices for European consumers.

"This is another attempt to interfere in market mechanisms, which can only lead to market imbalance," Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said, warning of "price increases" and market shortages.

"In my opinion, this is a measure directed against them, as it has already happened more than once," Novak said in televised remarks. Leaders of the Group of Seven wealthy nations agreed at a summit last week to work on a price cap for Russian oil as part of efforts to cut the Kremlin's revenues in a bid to halt Moscow's offensive in Ukraine.

While the West has already imposed multiple layers of sanctions on Russia in response to President Vladimir Putin's order to send troops to Ukraine in February, the targeting of the oil industry represents the highest economic stakes so far.

European countries have also been trying to reduce their own consumption of Russian hydrocarbons, and Moscow has tried to redirect its energy supplies to Asia.

Novak's warning came as a surge in oil prices is causing increasing concern around the



Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak

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Novak said on Thursday that Russia's oil production had almost returned to the level it had before the start of the offensive in Ukraine, at some 9.9mn barrels per day.

"In June, we almost reached the level of February," Novak added.

The United States has led the push for an oil price cap at the gathering of the club of G7 nations – which also includes Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan.

The goal of the plan is to starve the Kremlin of its "main source of cash and force down the price of Russian oil", US President Joe Biden's national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, told reporters at the summit last week.

AFP

Bankrupt Sri Lanka's annual inflation jumps beyond 50%

Colombo, Sri Lanka – Sri Lanka's inflation hit a ninth consecutive record in June, official data showed Friday, rising to 54.6 per cent a day after the IMF asked the bankrupt nation to rein in galloping prices and corruption.

It was the first time the increase in the Colombo Consumer Price Index (CCPI) crossed the psychologically important 50 per cent mark, according to the department of census and statistics.

The figures came hours after the International Monetary Fund urged Sri Lanka to contain spiralling inflation and address corruption as part of efforts to salvage the troubled economy, which has been ravaged by a foreign exchange crisis.

The IMF ended ten days of in-person discussions with Sri Lankan authorities in Colombo on Thursday following the country's request for a possible bailout.

The CCPI has been setting new monthly highs since October, when year-on-year inflation stood at just 7.6 per cent.

In May it reached 39.1 per cent.

The rupee has lost more than half its value against the US dollar this year.

Private economists say consumer prices are rising even faster than shown in official statistics. According to an economist at Johns Hopkins university, Steve Hanke, who tracks price increases in the world's troublespots, Sri Lanka's current inflation is 128 per cent, second only to Zimbabwe's 365 per cent.

Faced with an acute energy shortage, Sri Lanka is observing a shutdown of non-essential state institutions for two weeks, along with the closure of schools to reduce commuting.

The country's 22mn people have been enduring acute short-



A man walks past LPG cylinders placed by people queuing to buy LPG, near the Galle International Cricket Stadium in Galle on June 28 (AFP)

ages of essentials – including food, fuel and medicines – for months. Protests are continuing outside President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office demanding his resignation over the unprecedented economic turmoil and his mismanagement.

Sri Lanka went to the IMF in April after the country defaulted on its US\$51bn external debt.

Sri Lanka should stamp out corruption and substantially raise taxes to rescue its economy, the IMF said Thursday after bailout talks with the bankrupt island nation.

Representatives from the global lender of last resort have just concluded a ten-day visit to the capital Colombo to map out a resolution to the South Asian country's unprecedented economic crisis.

Their meetings follow months of lengthy blackouts and days-long queues for petrol as a financial crunch leaves Sri Lanka without the funds to meet its energy needs.

But the IMF said more work

was needed to set the nation's finances right and repair its runaway fiscal deficit before a deal could be struck on a funding arrangement to address its balance of payments crisis.

"Given the low level of revenues, far-reaching tax reforms are urgently needed," the lender said in a statement.

Sri Lanka needed to "reduce corruption vulnerabilities", contain spiralling inflation and bring an end to costly energy subsidies that had long been a drain on the government budget without hurting more vulnerable citizens, the statement added.

"The authorities have made considerable progress in formulating their economic reform program and we are looking forward to continuing the dialogue with them," it said.

Sri Lanka has already reversed drastic 2019 tax cuts introduced by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa which have been blamed for precipitating the economic crisis.

AFP

Manufacturing, services rebound in China after Covid curbs eased

Beijing, China – China's factory and services activity picked up in June, official data showed Thursday, fuelled by the easing of Covid-19 restrictions in major cities such as Shanghai and Beijing.

The non-manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), a key gauge of activity in the world's second-biggest economy, defied expectations and surged to 54.7 points in June after three months of sluggish performance.

It was the first time since February that the reading was above the 50-point mark separating growth from contraction. It sat at 47.8 in May.

"As the situation of domestic epidemic prevention and control continued to improve and a package of policies... to stabilise the economy was implemented at a quicker pace, the overall recovery of our country's economy has accelerated," National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) senior



statistician Zhao Qinghe said in a statement.

In particular, business activity in industries severely hit by the pandemic such as rail and air transport picked up in June, the statement said.

Construction activity also helped fuel the PMI boost.

But the "surprisingly rapid recovery in services" likely reflects a one-off boost from reopening, said Julian Evans-Pritchard, senior China economist at Capital

Economics.

Manufacturing PMI rose to 50.2 points in June – similar to analyst expectations – up from 49.6 in May.

As work resumed after Covid lockdowns, production and demand in the sector picked up and delivery times improved, according to the NBS.

China is the only major economy still pursuing a zero-Covid approach of eliminating outbreaks as they emerge, using

snap lockdowns and mass testing. While the country is shortening quarantine times for new international arrivals, President Xi Jinping warned this week that China "would have faced unimaginable consequences" had it adopted a herd immunity or hands-off approach, signalling the government would persist with its current policy.

The approach has taken a harsh toll on the economy, with shops and factories forced to stop operations and supply chains strained.

The non-manufacturing rebound in June was "mainly due to more construction activity", said Iris Pang, chief economist for Greater China at ING.

"We think that it will be challenging for the government to achieve the 5.5 per cent GDP target set in March. There will need to be a lot more infrastructure activity if the government is to achieve this target."

AFP

Watchdog urges tighter controls on crypto transactions

Paris, France – Countries need to ramp up controls on cryptocurrency transactions to meet international standards on transparency, a watchdog said on Thursday.

The Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF) said countries had made only "limited progress" in implementing its "travel rule", which it had recommended for global adoption in 2015.

Under the rule, regulators are supposed to ensure that cryptocurrency firms verify the identities of people involved in



transactions – similar to the rules that govern regular banks.

The standard is seen as a way to minimise the risk of cryptocurrencies being used for money laundering or terrorism financ-

ing.

During March this year, the FATF surveyed 98 jurisdictions and found that only 29 had passed travel rule legislation and only 11 had started to enforce it.

The report said the gap in the rules left cryptoassets and crypto firms "vulnerable to misuse, and demonstrates the urgent need for jurisdictions to accelerate implementation and enforcement". Cryptocurrencies are largely unregulated and the value of the major ones tends to fluctuate wildly.

In recent months, the value

has plummeted, with as much as two-thirds of the market value of the sector being wiped out.

Enthusiasts regard cryptocurrencies and the technology around them as the foundation of a decentralised alternative to the mainstream banking system and argue against any regulation.

But national authorities are increasingly leaning towards stiffer rules and consumer protection, as crypto firms push into the mainstream with high-profile TV advertising and celebrity endorsements.

AFP

MoHERI, Bank Muscat sign cooperation pact

Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and Bank Muscat have signed a cooperation programme in the field of scientific research and innovation.

The agreement was signed by H E Dr Rahma Ibrahim Al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and Sheikhha Yousuf al Farsi, chief operating officer, Bank Muscat, a press release said.

Under the agreement, Bank Muscat will be supporting and financing the best graduation projects prepared by Omani students enrolled at higher education institutions within and outside Oman. The supported projects will cover areas of national priority as per Oman Vision 2040, aiming to transfer them into startup companies.

The agreement states that the Ministry would choose the right approach for this programme according to the national priorities stipulated in Oman Vision 2040. The ministry would also form an executive committee to organise, manage, and operate the programme in coordination with Bank Muscat to ensure the success of the business plan agreed upon. The designated committee will also follow-up, evaluate and supervise the winning projects



during the incubation phase.

This agreement highlights the necessity of cooperation and partnership between different institutions in the sultanate. Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation is keenly working towards enhancing and developing partnerships to support youth and provide capabilities to build and foster specific programmes that focus on entrepreneurship and innovation. Bank Muscat also believes in

strategic partnerships that enhance its social responsibility strategy which includes providing a standing point for business projects for the youth.

The programme, which aims at transferring graduation programmes into startups, is one of the programmes the Ministry implements to provide support to university students. The support would help students turn their graduation projects into startups that can develop sus-

tainable growth benefiting from a series of financial, advisory and technical support offered by sponsoring partners. For Bank Muscat, this is an additional step to enhance its leading role in corporate social responsibility. The bank fosters innovation by providing support for Omani youth and helping them develop their skills and implement their innovative ideas eventually turning them into projects that will benefit the community.

Lack of ESG framework in UAE, KSA: ASDA'A survey

Nearly two-thirds (60%) of businesses in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia do not have a framework governing their environment, social and governance (ESG) standards, and around half of those who do are not sure their employees fully understand it.

These were the top findings of an exclusive study of 200 decision makers in the two countries commissioned by ASDA'A BCW, the region's leading integrated communications agency, to mark the launch OnePoint5, its new ESG advisory dedicated to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Its name is inspired by the world's most important sustainability goal - limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, a press release said.

OnePoint5 aims to strengthen the voice of the MENA region on ESG issues while helping clients to adopt more sustainable business practices.

The new advisory arrives as Egypt prepares to host the UN Climate Change Conference, COP27, in November, to be followed by COP28 in the UAE in 2023.

Out of the 200 opinion elites interviewed, 41 per cent said their business already had an



Stephen Worsley

ESG framework in place, while a third (33%) said they were developing one. A quarter (26%) admitted their company had no ESG policy. Underscoring the need for raised awareness of the benefits of ESG standards, over half (52%) of respondents who said their company had introduced an ESG framework said they did not fully understand it.

Sunil John, president - MENA of BCW and Founder of ASDA'A BCW, said the research indicated that the Middle East's business community had work to do to meet the high expectations of their governments on sustainability best practice.

"OnePoint5 can help client develop a strong ESG proposition to deliver greater value for their shareholders and stakeholders," said John. "The spe-

cialist advisory will be led by Stephen Worsley, senior vice president at ASDA'A BCW. A communications professional with more than 25 years' experience, he has advised clients in the sustainability and energy sectors, including Masdar, Total, Zayed Sustainability Prize, Engie and First Solar."

OnePoint5 offers four key services - Advice and counsel to client decision makers to ensure sustainability thinking is central to their business planning and disclosure, auditing and gap analysis to understand a client's sustainability impacts, designing operational plans to help integrate best practices, and communications strategies and plans to help clients inform and motivate employees and internal stakeholders, as well as amplify external stakeholder awareness of their sustainability commitments.

"The gap between awareness of the acute need to advance sustainable development and action on the ground by much of the business community needs closing," added John. "Consultancies like OnePoint5 can help clients address this so-called 'say-do' gap, by combining the skills of experienced communicators with the technical abilities of sustainability specialists."

The Green Planet, Dubai Safari Park announce tie-up

The Green Planet and Dubai Safari Park have announced a Partner Exchange Programme that aims to safely exchange fascinating animals throughout the year.

The strategic movement of animals promotes high standards of animal care, welfare, and conservation-focused breeding initiatives through open dialogue and information sharing, a press release said.

The first dispatch to arrive at The Green Planet at the end of April was a pair of red-handed tamarins. These resilient monkeys have adapted well to their new home and have been living harmoniously with several other species including a family of marmosets and a tamandua anteater.

Ahmad Hussain Bin Essa, COO of The Green Planet's parent company - Dubai Holding Entertainment, said, "I'm thrilled to announce our Partner Exchange Programme with Dubai

Safari Park, which I believe is a positive step, not only for our destinations but also for our visitors. The strength of this partnership will drive the safe transition of animals between The Green Planet and Dubai Safari Park and will enable children, and families to observe and experience remarkable wildlife."

Muna Abdelrazaq Abdelrahman Alhajer, head of Dubai Safari Park, adds, "We look forward to forging a harmonious relationship with The Green Planet that will not only provide visitors with the opportunity to see more amazing species, but also enable us to create a pioneering conservation programme together that will lead the way in the Middle East and create a legacy that we hope will delight generations." Green Planet welcomes the tamarins to its successful conservation breeding programme that contributes to the survival of species.

UAE ministry, Audi and Siemens to co-operate on electric vehicle charging network

The United Arab Emirates' Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure (MoEI), Audi Middle East, and Siemens recently signed an agreement to cooperate on boosting electric vehicle charging capacity on federal roads and increasing adoption of EVs across the country.

The agreement follows MoEI's selection in June of Siemens technology for a nationwide network of ultra-fast chargers. The discussions with Audi are expected to expand on this initiative as part of the brand's ambitious infrastructure investment plans across the UAE, a press release said.

"The UAE is committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 and is on track to being the leader in the Middle East and North Africa in reaching this target," said Sharif Salim al Olama, undersecretary of the Ministry of Energy and Industry. "Electric vehicles are integral to this effort, and providing fast, efficient and convenient EV charging infrastr-



structure with partners like Siemens and Audi is a crucial step in the energy transition."

Since 2020, Audi has been the largest manufacturer of electric vehicles among Germany's three premium brands. The launch of the e-tron GT continues Audi's transformation into becoming a key provider of sustainable premium mobility.

By 2026, more than 20 all-electric Audi models will be in-

troduced and the brand is investing in several initiatives focusing on the development of a high-performance charging infrastructure in order to contribute to EV readiness in the region.

"Audi Middle East is delighted to begin this partnership with the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure and Siemens, which further underlines our commitment to electrification in the UAE as we continue to redefine the

mobility of the future," said Carsten Bender, managing director of Audi Middle East.

"We have been very vocal about our commitment to electrification in the region and look forward through this collaboration to developing solutions that will support EV customers in the UAE based around the latest technologies and charging solutions such as the Audi Charge Hub concept. "To not only be

aligned with the UAE's "Net Zero 2050" initiative, but now be an active participant in it, is an honour and a privilege we are very proud of."

On June 8, 2022, the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure said it would deploy ten Siemens Sicharge D 160 kW ultra-fast chargers on the highways in Ras Al Khaimah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain and Fujairah. All are cloud-connected devices which allow operators to monitor and manage the chargers remotely.

"We look forward to working with the Ministry and Audi on this important project that demonstrates our commitment to supporting sustainability programmes in the United Arab Emirates," said Helmut von Struve, Chief Executive Officer of Siemens in the Middle East. "Siemens is proud to be a part of the country's embrace of an electrical mobility ecosystem, and to contribute to the UAE Net Zero by 2050 strategic initiative."

Nissan KICKS continues to win hearts across Oman

The popular Nissan Kicks, which offers an impressive array of class-leading features and personalisation options, continues to serve as the SUV of choice amongst younger audiences, a year after the arrival of the SUV's 2022 model to Oman.

To celebrate the popularity of the brand's subcompact crossover in Oman, Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) has launched a new digital challenge that calls on audiences to express their personality through an exciting and entertaining lip-syncing contest, a press release said.

Building on the success of the Kicks anthem video (Built to your Beat) launched earlier this year, the contest urges audiences to record themselves singing along to the catchy track



using a dedicated filter and upload their video onto Instagram. Created by local hip-hop artist

Chyno with a 'Why?', the Kicks anthem highlights the youthful appeal and unique features of

the subcompact crossover and has garnered over 13 million views across social platforms to

date, including popular music streaming service Anghami. Participants are encouraged

to use the #NissanKICKS hashtag, and tag the official Instagram accounts of both SBA Nissan Oman and Nissan Middle East to enter the competition. Set to run until July 5, the competition engages younger audiences across Oman and offers participants the opportunity to win an exclusive test drive of the Kicks.

Additionally, participants also stand a chance to win a Bose Bluetooth speaker allowing them to enjoy listening to their favourite music inside and outside the car. One winner will be announced on July 7.

A senior official of Nissan Oman said, "Since its introduction to the market in 2017, Nissan Kicks has attracted young, enthusiastic drivers to the brand and offered them the freedom of

self-expression.

Through this new challenge, we are engaging with the model's trendy and youthful target audience while highlighting the latest features and stylish appeal of Kicks that has made it an indispensable part of our SUV line-up in the region."

The 2022 Nissan Kicks offers a unique set of features, technology, style, and value that buyers seek in a subcompact crossover.

In addition to an attractive two-tone colour scheme, the KICKS offers buyers enhanced connectivity and safety through the implementation of Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity as well as the introduction of numerous Nissan Intelligent Mobility (NIM) features.

Two Omani scientists participate in Lindau Nobel Laureates Meetings

Two Omani scientists have been nominated by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation to represent the Sultanate of Oman in the 71st edition of Lindau Nobel Laureates Meetings, which was held between June 26 – July 1 at Lindau, Germany.

Dr Mona Hamad Salem al Hinaï, assistant professor at International Maritime College Oman and the National University, and Dr Zakiya Hilal Nasser al Azri, Corporate Research and Development advisor at Petroleum Development Oman and researcher in Hydrogen Energy and Carbon Capture Solution, with around 600 emerging researchers from more than 80 countries were carefully selected by the review panel of the Council for the Lindau Nobel Laureate Meetings to attend and participate in the panel discussions, lectures, scientific events and various social activities for this year's event.

The 71st Lindau Nobel Laureates Meetings was dedicated to Chemistry. There were about 35 Nobel Laureates participating this year to present their research, reflect their career and talk to the selected young scientists. Lindau Meetings are based



largely on the principle of dialogue and interactive discussion. Therefore, there were several discussion sessions and recreational and social events to activate the exchange of ideas and experiences between the Nobel Prize winners and the young sci-

entists for a period of 5 days, a press release said. The event aimed to build the capabilities of Omani researchers, transfer knowledge and exchange experiences, refine the scientific and research skills of the Omani youth, give

the Omani youth the opportunity to get acquainted with Nobel Laureates closely and to know the latest scientific developments, and create scientific partnerships and links with scientists from different countries of the world. It is worth noting

that the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation have been an accredited academic partner with the Lindau Nobel Laureates Meetings since 2015 with the goal of spreading the culture of research and science in the sultanate.



Mazoon Dairy launches spicy cheese spread

Mazoon Dairy has recently launched a new spicy flavour to its spread of cheese products. The new spicy cheese product made its debut in markets across the Sultanate of Oman along with the launch of Mazoon Dairy's cheese campaign, a press release said.

Added to an already successful string of cheese products namely, Mazoon's Cream Cheese and Cheddar Cheese spread which are available in 240g, 500g and 900g, the new and flavourful Spicy Cheese is a welcome extension to the Omani brand's unique variety of products. With the launch of its cheese campaign, Mazoon Dairy endeavours to reach a wider segment of consumers in Oman.

With Mazoon Dairy unveiling new products under the highest standards of quality and food safety, it is no wonder that it is the leading Omani cheese brand in the country. Free of additives like hydrogenated vegetable oils, Mazoon cheese is made from pure cow's milk sourced straight from their state-of-the-art integrated dairy farm in Al Sunainah, and under the direct supervision of its quality assurance and control team.

Being one of the most technologically advanced dairy companies in the GCC, Mazoon Dairy's aim is to deliver fresh and nutritious products to every home in Oman and the region. Mazoon Dairy's export operations have expanded to reach a number of countries in the region, with its wide range of dairy products being exported to 20 countries.

Ever since its inception, Mazoon Dairy has been working tirelessly to launch its products and meet the needs of the local market. Mazoon Dairy's array of products, which includes fresh milk, fresh yoghurt, flavoured milk, long-life milk, long-life flavoured milk, flavoured yoghurt, natural juices, cheese, fresh cream, labneh and ice cream, are the hallmark of quality and signifies the importance of local produce.

In addition to producing high-quality products for the sultanate, and raising the local dairy industry standards to support and develop the same, Mazoon Dairy is dedicated to playing a key role in creating sustainable communities throughout Oman and the GCC.

OAB supports Design Muscat 2022

In line with its sustainability strategy and its commitment toward supporting the community development, Oman Arab Bank (OAB) recently sponsored Design Muscat 2022 event.

Held under the patronage of H H Dr Adham Turki al Said, assistant professor of Economics, Sultan Qaboos University, the event took place in Scientific College of Design from June 13 - 15. The symposium witnessed vari-

ous international and local participations from the public and private sectors. Many experts in the design and sustainability sector and those interested in the field also attended, a press release said.

"Supporting effective initiatives that are aligned with our sustainability strategy comes at the forefront of our mandate. Through our contribution to these initiatives, we aspire to en-



Rashad al Zubair

hance socio-economic growth. Design Muscat is one of the essential events that resonate with Oman Vision 2040 which aims to uplift the quality of life by harnessing sustainability and keeping abreast with the latest international developments. Therefore, building a bright future for the Sultanate and its people," said Rashad al Zubair, chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Arab Bank.

Under the theme 'Re-thinking creative industries role towards sustainability', the event organised several interactive workshops and delivered presentations that discussed applying the elements of sustainability in art and design. It also focused on the challenges and solutions related to implementing sustainability in the physical environment and integrating sustainability into academic modules.

Sunidhi Chauhan concert in Dubai on August 13

PME Entertainment in partnership with Dubai Summer Surprises has organised 'Sunidhi Chauhan live in concert' at Coca Cola Arena, in Dubai, on August 13.

Sunidhi is one of the most versatile singers in India, with countless songs in her repertoire. For decades she has ruled millions of hearts among the Bollywood Music industry and still continues to do so, a press release said.

Sunidhi has represented Indian music in multiple prestigious international platforms, and has judged, motivated, and guided upcoming talents in shows such as The Voice and Indian Idol.

The award-winning playback singer of 'Ruki Ruki Si Zindagi' is one of the first female artists to



have a successful international collaboration with the popular singer Enrique Iglesias and is the voice of the very famous animated character Elsa from the award-winning movie Frozen (in Hindi). She has also appeared four times in Forbes' Celebrity 100 of India.

The show is presented by Emirates NBD & Burj Mayfair Property Brokers. PME Entertainment is known for bringing signature Bollywood events and were instrumental to kick start the Live concerts in the UAE with back to back concerts last July in Dubai.

Spotify, Gamers8 team up for international esports season

Gamers8 have unveiled an exclusive partnership with streaming giant Spotify, who will become the official audio streaming partner for the all-new major esports and gaming season taking place live in Riyadh this summer.

With a worldwide community of more than 422 million monthly active listeners, including 182 million subscribers, across 183 markets, Spotify has revolutionised music listening forever with its leadership in music recommendation and discovery, offering every music fan a wealth of playlists tailored to their personal tastes, activities and mood. Under this partnership, gamers and their fans can enjoy specially curated audio inspired by the esports commu-

nity, a press release said. From the official co-curated playlist by Spotify's music team and Gamers8 gaming professionals to playlist takeovers by some of the biggest gaming celebrities, every music moment has been designed to elevate the gaming experience throughout this season.

Spotify and Gamers8 will create and launch a podcast dedicated to the season in partnership with Rising Giants Network. The eight-episode series will be the go-to place for gaming enthusiasts to hear about the top players through game highlights and one-on-one interviews.

The partnership will also see the release of the highly anticipated Gamers8 anthem pro-

duced by world-renowned DJ producer R3HAB, featuring Saudi pop artist Meteb Alshalan. Music and gaming fans can gear up for an unmissable performance as the song will be performed live during the opening ceremony celebrations.

Omar Batterjee, head of Marketing, Communications, and Partnerships at the Saudi Esports Federation, said, "Music and audio are an essential part of esports. We are thrilled to partner with Spotify to provide our fans with a one-stop destination where they can enjoy the ultimate curated content and iconic experiences.

Together with Spotify, we can collectively combine esports, technology, entertainment, and music to inspire the

gaming community, as well as the next generation of gamers and fans."

Commenting on the partnership, Nicole Aoun, Spotify's Marketing and Partnership lead in Saudi Arabia said, "While at Spotify, we continue to be laser-focused on growing the creators' community, we are equally as passionate about creating memorable experiences for the Saudi youth, demonstrating our commitment to the local community.

"The Saudi Esports Federation shares our vision of providing world-class entertainment for the gaming community, and we are thrilled to embark on this journey together, making Saudi gamers and fans connect meaningfully through music and podcasts."

Gulf Islamic Investments acquire major stake in OFFA

Gulf Islamic Investments, a leading Shariah compliant global investment company based in the United Arab Emirates, with assets under management in the sectors of real estate, private equity and venture capital, announces a majority investment in OFFA, the UK's first Shariah-compliant bridge financing provider for the real estate market.

The investment will further

expand OFFA's real estate financing proposition through the development of short-term and longer-term real estate financing products, a press release said. Pankaj Gupta, Co-CEO of Gulf Islamic Investments, said, "OFFA is a highly attractive bridge-financing house that benefits from strong net profit margins and operates in a rapidly growing market that is currently worth GBP5.1bn.



Mohammed al Hassan



Pankaj Gupta

"The company is based in the Birmingham area of England, which has the largest Muslim population in the UK, and is the only Shariah-compliant bridge financier in the UK.

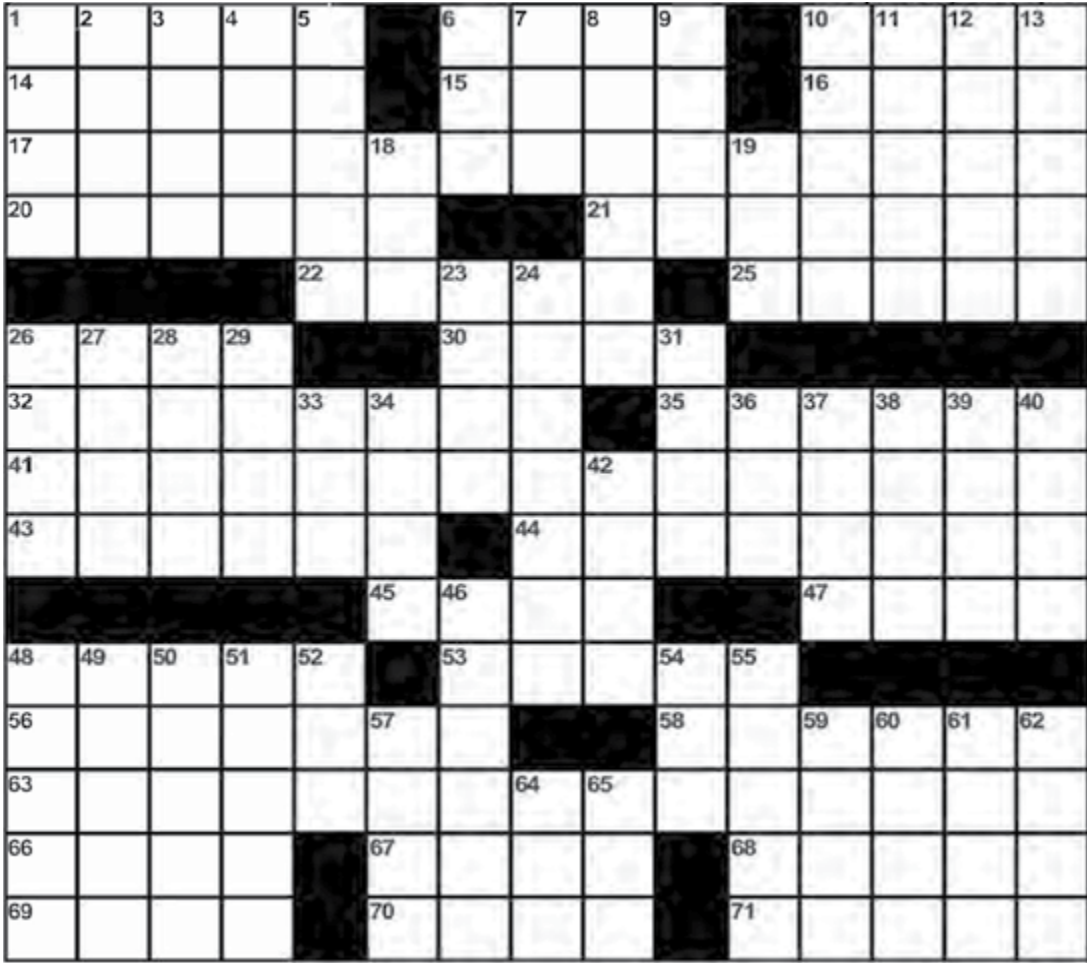
The value of bridge financing in the UK grew 8.5% in the first three months of 2022, and we believe the combination of property prices, demographics and OFFA's unique market position makes this a com-

elling investment opportunity." Mohamed al Hassan, co-CEO of Gulf Islamic Investments, said. "This key investment in a high potential market reflects our commitment to identifying attractive opportunities across the globe. Further to our recent acquisition of the digital bank, we are in the process of continuing to seek out attractive opportunities in the same space and in the direct credit sector to

grow sustainable investor and stakeholder value."

Bilal Ahmed, CEO of OFFA, added, "This significant investment by Gulf Islamic Investments will provide us with the capital to expand our asset book and product range. We carefully evaluated potential investors and selected GII for its commitment to genuine partnership, and true understanding of Shariah investment."

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**

1) Celebrity haunt of the Rockies

6) Mountain peaks

10) Drained of color

14) Sparkly stone

15) Ready for publication

16) Homecoming visitor, for short

17) Nintendo 3DS, for one

20) Passionate states

21) Arrogance

22) Dictionary subject

25) Smart-mouthed

26) "No" voter

30) Head-and-shoulders sculpture

32) Friendly disposition

35) "Into the Wild" setting

41) Have no need for negotiations

43) Go around and around

44) Went about aimlessly

45) " Do not open til_"

47) Gullets

48) Santa's reindeer, sans
- Rudolph

53) Like some indie films

56) Revered threesome

58) Not as knotty

63) Etsy offering, some-times

66) Pointless Olympic event?

67) Kent's beloved

68) Coin of Pakistan

69) NL Central team

70) Dermatological diagnosis, perhaps

7 J) Baseball card data

DOWN

1) Turkish honorific

2) Brown meat

3) Diminutive lake

4) Taro root

5) Jacket named for an Indian leader

6) _Aviv

7) Not even

8) Forty-niner's quest

9) Greek portico

10) Pre-marathon staple

11) "A Lesson from_" (Fugard drama)

12) Whoppers
- 13) Manicuring material

18) Driving-exam curve

19) Xi preceders

23) Not incompetent

24) 1990-91 hostilities

26) Culture medium gelatin

27) Cape Canaveral cancellation

28) Civil wrong

29) Mental germ

31) Mountain lake

33) Soaking

34) Goat seen on treks

36) Escorted

37) "May I have your attention?"

38) Gilbert of TV

39) Had down cold

40) Annexes

42) Kiln

46) Seaman's "Help!"

48) "None of the above"

49)_ myrtle

50) With prongs

51) "Alive" setting

52) Lacking in brightness

54) Meet, in poker

55) Bawls loudly
- 57) Rash treatment

59) Serve as an usher

60) Mozart's Trojan princess

61) Once, in the past

62) Some shaggy rugs

64) Coast Guard officer below It.

65) Boeing 747, e.g.
- NOTE PAD
- ALSO LEAS ACRID LIAR ALGA LHASA ACME MOON TUMMY SHOOTINGSTAR KEA SAG EARLOBE ANNIE AMIR HAS STATE TSHIRT CONSTELLATION FOSTER BURRS OIL EDAM ESTER PROVISOR ARA ARE ASTRONOMICAL ATALL SLAP DOSE ROGUE EIRE OMEN TWEET TOYS LAST

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You're certainly passionate about what you believe right now, even more so than usual. Maybe you're convinced that an aspect of work should be handled in a specific manner, or maybe something in current events has your sensibilities inflamed, or perhaps there's an issue from another area altogether. You're wound up and unlikely to unwind anytime soon. Expressing your views is one thing, but guard against getting inappropriately emotional about it.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Modesty definitely becomes you right now. You're putting aside what kind of rewards you could be angling for whether at work, in a relationship, or in another arena and simply operating on the strength of your desire to do the right thing. The goodwill you're creating is reflected in everything around you, making your world both calm and bright. The bonus is that your karma is getting better by the minute.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

You're just being you, enjoying the hubbub all around you and following your mood. The funny thing is your relaxed manner and optimistic attitude are far more alluring than other people's best come-hither looks or cutest pickup lines. So right about now you're attracting all sorts of admirers for all the right reasons. And, interestingly, relationships are in the stars. If you're in one, it could intensify. If not, you soon could have that option.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Sometimes you tend to think others should be as stable and predictable as you usually are, but people just act irrationally at times. It can be disconcerting, but jumping to conclusions about their motivations might be a bit premature. The reason could be as simple as a bad (or good) mood. If you're truly concerned, just ask them if they want to talk about it. Their answer could end up surprising you.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

It's never too late to make a good impression on someone whose opinion you value. Don't give up if the last few times you encountered this person you weren't exactly having a shining moment. No one's perfect all the time, not even you! When you get some face time with them, don't put a lot of pressure on yourself to blow their socks off. Just be yourself. Engage them in some friendly conversation and listen attentively and they'll be impressed.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

It's just one of those days, or nights, as the case may be, when no matter what you're doing, suddenly something else sounds more appealing. If you're out and about, the cozy comforts of home will likely start calling to you. If you're nesting on the couch, a little stir-craziness could set in. Solo time might sound perfect, then you're on the phone chitchatting for an hour. If you're with someone, you might want to be alone. Keep your plans loose and your options open.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Financial matters are highlighted at the moment, particularly those that involve other people. If you've got a joint account with your significant other or a business partner, make sure you're on the same page about how that money is being used (and how quickly). If you're the one buying things, you might be concerned about how much to spend. It's possible to pay a little less and get something just as good if you take some time to compare items.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Getting involved in some kind of intrigue, as you're likely to be doing right about now, might not sit very well with you. Other people enjoy cloak-and-dagger operations or covert schemes, but these types of things always make you wonder whether it's all being conducted fairly. Your instinct might be to just get it all out on the table, but there could be unforeseen consequences to doing so. Keep your head down, at least for the time being.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Your daily routine may not go quite as smoothly as usual now, especially with work interactions. Someone's motives likely are not what they seem, and dealing with their hidden agenda is probably the last thing you want to do. Avoid getting emotionally involved in it all, and find a way to handle it and move on. You'll definitely want to be able to feel like some resolution has been achieved so you can leave this stuff where it belongs: behind you.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

The stars are shining their prettiest light right on you, and you look fabulous in the glow. What'll you do with all that great energy? Your natural tendency is to shy away from the cosmic limelight and modestly redirect the attention elsewhere, but it's high time you learned to take a compliment gracefully and confidently. Be ready to smile, simply say thank you (to the cosmos, to your partner, to anyone), and feel wonderful.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Wow. The moment you decide to just let things happen instead of trying to guide them, they really start happening. Putting your strong sense of drive into neutral takes a lot of self-control, but right now it's the best thing to do. Try getting in touch with the cosmic flow, the moods of those around you as well as your own feelings and intuition, without being attached to the outcome. Quite soon, some magic begins to occur.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

The world is full of sparkly possibilities at the moment, with the potential for joy right around every corner. It's time to open yourself up to something new, something completely of the present, something in which you let your expectations go and embrace the moment. Allow the past to rest and the future to take care of itself for the time being. This might even be a romantic thing you're embracing. How wonderful!

01. Who wrote the influential book "Areopagitica"?

A. Aristotle

B. Plato

C. Sir Philip Sidney

D. John Milton

02. Where is the opera "Dialogues of the Carmelites" set?

A. Italy

B. France

C. Spain

D. England

03. When was Berlin's Tegel Airport first given its time-saving hexagonal terminal complex, and substantially increased in capacity, function, international use and runway length?

A. 1948

B. 1974

C. 1919

D. 1925

Answers: 1.D 2.B 3.A

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

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

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER

C

N

D

O

A

E

V

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

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

Strong earthquakes kill five in southern Iran

Tehran, Iran - A series of strong earthquakes rocked southern Iran on Saturday, killing at least five people, injuring over 80 others and flattening dozens of buildings.

The quakes, including two of magnitude 6.0, struck west of the major port city of Bandar Abbas in Hormozgan province, the US Geological Survey said.

The first rattled an area north of the town of Dezhgan shortly after 2am (2130 GMT), before a 5.7 tremor hit two hours later followed quickly by the second 6.0 magnitude quake, said the USGS.

Hormozgan governor Mehdi Dousti said five people were killed, as cited by the official news agency IRNA.

Dousti told state television that the village of Sayeh Khosh, close to the epicentre, had been completely destroyed.

"84 people were injured out of whom only 15 are still in hospital for treatment," national emergency services spokesman Mojtaba Khaledi told state television on Saturday.

The state broadcaster showed video footage of resi-



People sit by the rubble amidst destruction in the aftermath of a 6.0 magnitude earthquake in the village of Sayeh Khosh in Iran's southern Hormozgan province on Saturday (AFP)

dential buildings reduced to rubble in Sayeh Khosh, which was plunged into darkness in a power outage.

Ambulances and other vehicles tried to navigate roads covered in debris as shocked residents took to the streets or tried to recover items from their flattened homes.

People also spent the night outdoors in the provincial capital Bandar Abbas, with a population of more than 500,000, located about 100km east of the epicentre, where long queues formed in front of gas stations, state media reported.

Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi visited Hormozgan province and told state televi-

The quakes including two of magnitude 6.0, struck west of the major port city of Bandar Abbas in Hormozgan province. The first rattled an area north of the town of Dezhgan, shortly after 2am, before a 5.7 tremor hit two hours later

in the morning that search and rescue operations were nearly over. "We are concentrating on housing the victims of the earthquake," Dousti told television.

Iran sits astride the boundaries of several major tectonic plates and experiences frequent seismic activity.

The Islamic republic's deadliest quake was a 7.4-magnitude tremor in 1990 that killed 40,000 people in the north, in-

jured 300,000 and left half a million homeless.

In 2003, a 6.6-magnitude quake in southeastern Iran levelled the ancient mud-brick city of Bam and killed at least 31,000 people.

In November 2017, a 7.3-magnitude quake in Iran's western province of Kermanshah killed 620 people.

In December 2019 and January 2020, two earthquakes struck near Iran's Bushehr nuclear power plant.

Iran's Gulf Arab neighbours have raised concerns about the reliability of the country's sole nuclear power facility, which produces 1,000 megawatts of power, and the risk of radioactive leaks in case of a major earthquake.

In February 2020, a magnitude 5.7 earthquake in northwestern Iran killed nine people, including children, in neighbouring Turkey and injured dozens on both sides of the border.

One person was killed in November last year when Hormozgan province was hit by twin 6.4 and 6.3 magnitude quakes.

AFP

Israel strike on Syria wounds two civilians, says ministry

Damascus, Syria - An Israeli air strike wounded two civilians on Saturday in the Syrian government's heartland on the war-torn country's west coast, the defence ministry said.

"The Israeli enemy carried out an air strike" after daybreak near the town of Al-Hamidiyah, the ministry said, identifying the locations hit as poultry farms, without elaborating.

The strike was conducted from the Mediterranean Sea, west of Lebanon's northern city of Tripoli, and led to the injury of two civilians, including a woman', it said in a statement.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor said the facility that was struck had formerly been used to keep farm animals but was now used by Lebanon's Shiite movement Hezbollah, a Syrian government ally. The Israeli army told AFP on Saturday that they 'do not comment on reports in the foreign media'.



This image grab taken from footage broadcast by Syrian State TV channel on Saturday shows people inspecting the site of an Israeli strike in the Syrian government's heartland on the country's west coast (AFP)

Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian of Iran, also a staunch ally of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, condemned the Israeli strike.

"With its attacks, the Zionist entity is trying to portray Damascus as an unsafe city to obstruct the return of displaced Syrians," he said on Saturday during a visit to the Syrian capi-

tal. Video footage by Syrian's official news agency SANA showed rubble at what it said was the site of the targeted facility. People are seen inspecting the site, where pulverised chunks of concrete and iron lay on the earth in the middle of a field.

Al-Hamidiyah is located south of Tartus, a bastion of the Syrian government and home to a naval

port used by Russia, whose armed forces have backed Assad. Since civil war broke out in Syria in 2011, Israel has carried out hundreds of air strikes against its northern neighbour.

The raids have targeted Syrian government troops as well as allied Iran-backed forces and Hezbollah fighters.

AFP

Iran's top diplomat in Syria to calm Turkey offensive tensions

Damascus, Syria - Iran's foreign minister travelled on Saturday to Damascus on what he said was a mission to calm tensions, after Turkey threatened to launch a new offensive on Kurds in northern Syria.

Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said his visit 'was aimed at establishing peace and security in the region between Syria and Turkey', according to Iran's official news agency IRNA.

Iran is a major ally of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and an important trading partner for Turkey.

Turkey has launched a string of offensives in Syria since 2016 targeting Kurdish militias as well as Islamic State group militants and forces loyal to Syria's President Bashar al-Assad.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said earlier this year he wanted to encourage one million Syrian refugees to return to their country by building them housing and local infrastructure in their homeland.



Hossein Amir-Abdollahian (AFP)

In recent weeks, Erdogan said he planned to launch a military offensive against Kurdish fighters in Syria waging an insurgency against his country.

These include the US-backed Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which formed a crucial part of an international coalition against the Islamic State group. Amir-Abdollahian's trip to Syria comes five days after he visited Turkey.

"After my visit to Turkey... it is necessary to have consultations with the Syrian authorities,"

Amir-Abdollahian was quoted as saying on Saturday by IRNA.

On Monday Amir-Abdollahian said he understood the need for a new Turkish military operation against Kurdish fighters in northern Syria.

"We understand Turkey's security concerns very well," he told a joint news conference in Ankara with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu.

"We understand that... maybe a special operation might be needed," he said, adding that 'Turkey's security concerns must be addressed fully and permanently.'

Iran is hostile to Kurdish separatists who carry out operations in both Turkey and Iran.

Following the 2011 start anti-government protests in Syria, which devolved into civil war after they were brutally repressed by Damascus, Ankara supported the uprising against Bashar al-Assad as well as armed rebels.

AFP

Pope 'greatly disappointed' over cancelled Africa visit

Vatican City, Holy See - Pope Francis has said he is 'greatly disappointed' he cannot make a planned visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan on Saturday due to knee pain.

The 85-year-old pontiff suffers chronic arthritis in his knee, according to Vatican sources, and has cancelled a string of events in recent months. "The Lord knows how greatly disappointed I am to have had to postpone this long-awaited and much-desired visit," the pope said in a video message released by the Vatican on Saturday. "But we remain confident and hopeful that we shall be able to meet as soon as possible."

The Vatican had postponed the pope's trip to South Sudan and the DRC on June 10 'at the request of his doctors' to avoid jeopardising treatment.

In his video message, the pope offered a 'heartfelt blessing' to the two countries he was set to visit.

He said: "I think of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the exploitation, violence and insecurity from which it suffers, particularly in the east of the country, where armed conflicts continue to cause much intense suffering, aggravated by the indifference and the convenience of many."

"I think of South Sudan and the plea for peace arising from its people who, weary of violence and poverty, await concrete results from the process of national reconciliation."

"Dear Congolese and South Sudanese friends, at this time words are insufficient to convey to you my closeness and the affection that I feel for you," he added.

The pope - who has needed a wheelchair at official events - has also spoken of an injured ligament and suffers from hip pain which forces him to limp. Last July, he spent 10 days in hospital after undergoing colon surgery.

AFP

In Turkish valleys, Afghan shepherds dream of home

Tunceli, Turkey - In Turkish mountains so high the silver clouds almost touch the top of his head, the homesick Afghan shepherd prepares his baaing flock for a good shear.

The pebbly valley around him was once full of Kurds, who staged a violently suppressed rebellion in Tunceli in the early years of the modern Turkish state.

But the Kurds in the eastern Mercan Valley have been gradually replaced by Afghans, who fled here by foot and truck across Iran from the poverty and bloodshed back home.

Now, with two decades of conflict behind them, some are thinking of going back, no matter the resurgent Taliban's hardline rule.

"Nobody would leave their country unless they had to," says Hafiz Hasimi Meymene, a 20-year-old with a fiancée impatiently waiting for him in Afghanistan.

"We come here, make money through shepherding, and send it to our families," he says.

A handful of nylon tents are



Hafiz Hasimi Meymene, a 20-year-old Afghan shepherd, shears a sheep in Tunceli, in Dersim mountains, on June 13, this year (AFP)

tied down to the hard ground around him, the Afghan families' new homes.

A few men crouch in a shed, milking their sheep and goats. Their friend ushers the flock into

Meymene says.

"When the (Afghan) state was fighting the Taliban, the economy was hit hard. But now we are planning to return."

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan estimates that 300,000 Afghans now live in Turkey, which also hosts 3.7mn people from war-ravaged Syria.

Tunceli native Mustafa Acun says the locals have grown used to Afghans taking care of their herds.

The 67-year-old works alongside them, making cheese and yoghurt from sheep's milk.

"I mean, our children either cannot or do not want to do this job," he says looking up from his stool, tending to some steaming pots over an open flame.

It is surprisingly dangerous work.

'Love the mountains'

An old rifle hangs off one of the men's shoulders, the better to shoot the wolves and bears that come out hunting at night.

This is also a good time to graze the sheep, which suffer in the baking sun.

The rifle did not keep two of Abudullah Umari's animals from being torn apart and eaten by a bear the other week.

"I take care of the flock like this," the 55-year-old Afghan said, the rifle casually swinging behind his back.

"I have been here for seven years. I worked for three years and returned to Afghanistan. But then I decided to come here again," he recalls, glossing over the pain and danger of each voyage.

"God willing, if my health allows, I will go back to Afghanistan in August," when the summer heat begins to subside, he said.

But although 29-year-old Suleyman Ezam had not seen his Afghan wife and two little children for four years, says he will miss working as a shepherd in the Turkish mountains with his dogs.

"I love the mountains," Ezam says after showing a photograph of his four-year-old daughter on his phone. "The mountains of Turkey are so beautiful."

AFP

Protesters storm, set fire to Libya's parliament in eastern city of Tobruk

Tripoli, Libya - Protesters stormed Libya's parliament in the eastern city of Tobruk on Friday and set parts of it ablaze, venting their anger at deteriorating living conditions and months of political deadlock.

Black smoke billowed as men burned tyres and torched cars after one protester had smashed through the compound's gate with a bulldozer and others attacked the walls with construction tools, local media reported.

The building was empty, as Friday falls on the weekend in Libya.

Libya's House of Representatives has been based in Tobruk, more than 1,000km east of the capital Tripoli, since an east-west schism in 2014 that came three years after a mass popular revolution toppled dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

A separate legislature, formally known as the High Council of State, is based in Tripoli as the oil-rich North African country remains divided between rival administrations vying for control.

Libya, sweltering in summer heat, has endured days of power cuts - a situation worsened by the blockade of key oil facilities amid the entrenched political rivalries.



A fire is seen inside the building used by Libya's Tobruk-based parliament in the country's east, early on Saturday (AFP)

"We want the lights to work," chanted protesters, some of whom were brandishing the green flags of the Gaddafi regime.

The parliament condemned the 'acts of vandalism and the burning' of its headquarters.

The interim prime minister of the Tripoli-based government, Abdulhamid Dbeibah, meanwhile voiced support for the protesters' concerns in a Twitter

message.

Political stalemate

The two governments have been vying for power in Libya for months: the one based in Tripoli, led by Dbeibah, and another headed by former interior minister Fathi Bashagha, appointed by the parliament and supported by eastern-based strongman Khalifa Haftar.

Presidential and parliamen-

tary elections, originally set for last December, were meant to cap a UN-led peace process following the end of the last major round of violence in 2020.

But the vote was never held due to several contentious candidacies and deep disagreements over the polls' legal basis between the rival power centres.

The United Nations said on Thursday that talks between the rival Libyan institutions aimed at

breaking the deadlock had failed to resolve key differences.

Parliament speaker Aguila Saleh and High Council of State president Khaled al-Mishri met at the UN in Geneva for three days of talks to discuss a draft constitutional framework for elections.

While some progress was made, it was not enough to move forward towards elections, with the two sides still at odds over

who could stand in a presidential vote, said the UN's top Libya envoy Stephanie Williams.

'Escalating quickly'

The prospect of elections appears as distant as ever since the parliament appointed Bashagha, arguing that Dbeibah's mandate had expired.

After Bashagha failed to enter Tripoli in May, the rival administration has taken up office further east in Sirte, Gaddafi's coastal hometown. Recent weeks have seen repeated skirmishes between armed groups in Tripoli, prompting fears of a return to full-scale conflict.

Demonstrators rallied in other cities on Friday including Tripoli, where protesters held up crossed-out images of both Dbeibah and Bashagha.

"Popular protests have erupted across Libya in exasperation at a collapsing quality of life, the entire political class who manufactured it, and the UN who indulged them over delivering promised change," tweeted Tarek Megerisi of the European Council on Foreign Relations.

"Things are escalating quickly and the response will define Libya's summer."

AFP

Shiite cleric shot in central Iran: State media

Tehran, Iran - A Shiite cleric in central Iran was injured on Saturday morning after an assailant on a motorcycle shot at him, Iranian state media said.

Mohsen Akhavan, who holds the clerical rank of hojatoleslam, was targeted in the city of Isfahan, according to the website of state broadcaster IRI.

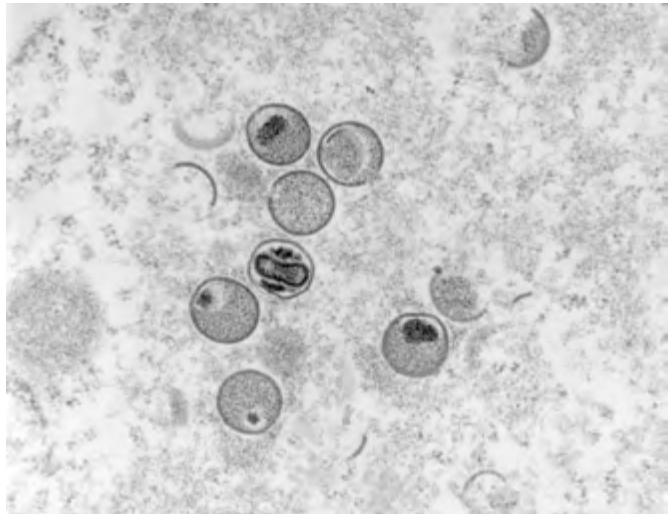
Akhavan, who was the imam of a mosque in the city, was returning home after leading the morning prayer when the attack occurred, IRI reported.

The report added that the cleric, who had earlier been working at the Isfahan Islamic seminary, was 'not seriously injured' and was being treated in hospital.

In early April, a Sunni extremist of Uzbek origin stabbed two Shiite clerics to death and injured a third in the courtyard of the main shrine of the northeastern holy city of Mashhad.

Abdolatif Moradi, 21, was hanged on June 20 in the same city after being convicted over the attack, according to the judicial authority. Moradi 'was accused of moharebeh ('war against God', in Persian) using a weapon to terrorise the population in the shrine and even outside it', judicial authorities said.

AFP



An electron-microscopic capture of the monkeypox virus (AFP)

Monkeypox symptoms in UK different to prior outbreaks: Study

Paris, France - British monkeypox patients are exhibiting symptoms that differ from previous outbreaks, the first study examining UK cases said on Friday, leading researchers to call for the definition of the disease to be updated.

Until a few months ago, monkeypox had been largely confined to West and Central Africa, where new outbreaks were mostly caused by humans being infected with the virus by animals like rodents.

But since May, more than 3,400 cases have been recorded worldwide, the large majority of them in Western Europe among men who have sex with men and have no known links to the sub-Saharan African cases.

Britain detected some of the earliest new global cases and the first study into patients there was published in The Lancet Infectious Diseases journal on Friday. The researchers analysed 54 monkeypox patients in London, all men who have sex with men, who represented 60 per cent of UK cases as of May 26.

All but two were unaware they had been in contact with someone who had monkeypox.

A quarter of the men were HIV-positive and a quarter had a sexually transmitted disease while they had monkeypox.

All patients had skin lesions, of which 94 per cent were in the genital and anal areas.

These factors suggest that the virus is being transmitted during skin-to-skin contact as during sex, the study said.

The World Health Organization is investigating cases of semen testing positive for monkeypox but has maintained that the virus is not sexually transmitted and is primarily spread through close contact.

Less fever, fatigue

Only 57 per cent of the UK cases suffered fevers, compared to 85-100 per cent of cases in outbreaks before this year.

Previous outbreaks also saw far more lesions on limbs, faces and necks.

However, in three quarters of the UK cases, lesions were only in one or two areas, mostly on or around genitals, the study said.

The UK patients also had mostly mild cases lasting fewer than three days, with just five being hospitalised.

The study's lead author Nicolo Girometti said that the UK's definition of monkeypox symptoms, which describes it as an acute illness with a fever, 'should be reviewed to best adapt to the current findings'.

"At least one in six of this cohort would have not met the current 'probable case' definition," said Girometti, of the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.

AFP

US, Taliban talk earthquake aid, foreign reserves

Washington, US - Talks between the United States and the Taliban continued in Doha earlier this week to discuss earthquake aid, the State Department said on Friday, months after the two parties last met in the Qatari capital in March.

The Taliban is seeking a way to unlock some the country's foreign reserves - currently frozen by the United States - following a devastating earthquake last month, with the United States looking for assurances the money would go to help the population.

During the meetings on Wednesday and Thursday, the United States reiterated an earlier pledge of US\$55mn in new assistance for earthquake relief, the State Department said in a



Taliban fighters stand guard as earthquake affected people wait for aid in Khost province on June 26 (AFP)

statement on Friday.

And 'the two sides discussed in detail US actions to preserve US\$3.5bn in Afghan central bank reserves for the benefit of the Afghan people', the statement said, money which the White House said last week the US was

'urgently' working to sort out.

Last week's 5.9-magnitude earthquake in eastern Afghanistan, which killed more than 1,000 people and left tens of thousands homeless, adds urgency to the funding debate.

"The United States expressed

condolences for the loss of life and suffering in Afghanistan caused by recent earthquakes," the State Department said of the meeting, which was led by Special Representative for Afghanistan Thomas West. The United States raised 'concerns

regarding increased interference by the Taliban in the delivery of humanitarian assistance' and 'concerns regarding transparency in delivery of services', the statement said of the aid.

According to the State Department, US representatives also pushed the Taliban authorities on women's rights - a sticking point which led Washington to cancel talks in Doha in March, when the group closed girls' secondary schools in Afghanistan.

"The United States supports the Afghan people's demands that girls be allowed to return to school and that women be allowed to work, contribute to the country's economic growth, and move and express themselves freely," the statement said.

AFP

Independent Algeria turns 60, but colonial-era wounds remain

Algiers, Algeria - Algeria marks 60 years of independence from France on Tuesday, but rival narratives over atrocities committed during more than a century of colonial rule still trigger bitter diplomatic tensions.

The North African country won its independence following a gruelling eight-year war which ended with the signing in March 1962 of the Evian Accords.

On July 5 of the same year, days after 99.72 per cent voted for independence in a referendum, Algeria finally broke free from colonial rule - but memories of the 132-year occupation continue to mar its ties with France. The country's authorities are planning to mark the anniversary with pomp and ceremony, capped by a vast military parade in Algiers, the first of its kind in 33 years. A show is also planned at the capital's opera house that 'retraces the long history of Algeria', said the minister for independence fighters, Laid Rebiga.

The government has even commissioned a logo - a circle of 60 stars containing military figures and equipment - to mark 'a glorious history and a new era'.

Algeria's war of independence left hundreds of thousands of



This file photo shows Algerians gather in the Kasbah of the capital Algiers to celebrate, a day after the self-determination referendum on the independence of their country, on July 2, 1962 (AFP)

dead and, despite a string of gestures by French President Emmanuel Macron, a crisis late last year underlined how spiky the issue remains six decades on.

Macron reportedly questioned whether Algeria had existed as a nation before the French invasion and accused its 'political-military system' of rewriting history and fomenting 'hatred towards France'.

Algeria withdrew its ambassador in response.

"Relations between the power system in Algeria and 'official France' have been punctuated by crises and pseudo-reconciliations since independence," said Athmane Mazouz, head of Algeria's secularist opposition party RCD. "At this point, all bets are off on whether they can establish better ties."

'Take heat out of debate'

France has ruled out any form of

apology for the colonial period. But Macron has also made a number of gestures aimed at mending ties with the former colony. Visiting Algiers during his first presidential campaign in February 2017, he described colonisation as a 'crime against humanity'.

He has since acknowledged the French army was behind the death of Algerian nationalist lawyer Ali Boumendjel and anti-colonialist French mathematician

Maurice Audin.

France has returned the skulls of 19th century Algerian resistance fighters and opened state archives on the Algerian war.

And the two sides appear to have moved on from the latest crisis. Macron and his Algerian counterpart Abdelmadjid Tebboune confirmed in a June 18 phone call their desire to 'deepen' relations. Tebboune even congratulated Macron on his 'brilliant' re-election and invited him to visit Algeria.

Historian Amar Mohand-Amer said it was time for 'a quick return to a normal situation'.

"Sixty years after independence, isn't it time we took the heat out of this debate?"

Mohand-Amer pointed out that the anniversary celebrations come at a time of raised tensions in the wider region around Algeria. The country cut ties with regional arch-rival Morocco last August, accusing it of 'hostile acts'.

In early June, Algiers suspended a two-decade-old cooperation pact with Madrid after Spain backed Morocco's stance in the long-running dispute over Western Sahara.

AFP

Ukraine's Zelensky accuses Russia of 'terror'

Rockets struck residential properties in Solviansk in the heart of the embattled Donbas region

Kyiv, Ukraine - Missiles rained down on Ukraine killing many civilians and wounding dozens in built up areas as the weekend began, prompting President Volodymyr Zelensky to accuse Russia of state 'terror'.
Strikes on a southern resort town left 21 dead and dozens wounded after missiles slammed into flats and a recreation centre in Sergiyvka, 80km south of Black Sea port Odessa.
Rockets struck residential properties in Solviansk in the heart of the embattled Donbas region, killing a woman in her garden and wounding her husband, a neighbour told AFP Saturday, describing debris showered across the neighbourhood. The witness said the strike on Friday was thought to use cluster munitions which spread over a large area before exploding, striking buildings and people who were outdoors.
The attacks came after Moscow abandoned positions on a strategic island in a major setback to the Kremlin's invasion.
Victims of the Sergiyvka attacks included a 12-year-old boy, Zelensky said in his daily address



Burned cars are seen in front of a destroyed building in the city of Mariupol on Friday, amid the ongoing Russian military action in Ukraine (AFP)

to the nation, adding that some 40 people have been injured and that the death toll could rise.
"I emphasise: this is an act of deliberate, purposeful Russian terror - and not some kind of mistake or an accidental missile strike," Zelensky said.
"Three missiles hit a regular nine-storey apartment building, in which nobody was hiding any weapons, any military equip-

ment," he added. "Regular people, civilians, lived there."
"Cruel manner"
Germany swiftly condemned the violence. "The cruel manner in which the Russian aggressor takes the deaths of civilians in its stride and is again speaking of collateral damages is inhuman and cynical," said German government spokesman Steffen

Hebestreit.
The attacks follow global outrage earlier this week when a Russian strike destroyed a shopping centre in Kremenchuk, central Ukraine, killing at least 18 civilians. President Vladimir Putin has denied his forces were responsible for that attack and Moscow made no immediate comment on the Odessa strikes.
On Friday, Zelensky hailed a

new chapter in its relationship with the European Union, after Brussels recently granted Ukraine candidate status in Kyiv's push to join the 27-member bloc, even if membership is likely years away. "Our journey to membership shouldn't take decades. We should make it down this road quickly," Zelensky told Ukraine's parliament.
The president of the European

Commission Ursula von der Leyen, addressing Ukrainian lawmakers by video link, said membership was 'within reach' but urged them to work on anti-corruption reforms. Norway, which is not an EU member, on Friday announced US\$1bn worth of aid for Kyiv including for reconstruction and weapons.
And the Pentagon said it was sending a new armament pack-

age worth US\$820mn, including two air defence systems and more ammunition for the Himars precision rocket launchers the United States began supplying last month.
Soup spat
In a decision that further cooled relations between Kyiv and Moscow, the UN's cultural agency inscribed Ukraine's tradition of cooking borsch soup on its list of endangered cultural heritage. Ukraine considers the nourishing soup, usually made with beetroot, as a national dish although it is also widely consumed in Russia, other ex-Soviet countries and Poland.
UNESCO said the decision was approved after a fast-track process prompted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
We 'will win both in the war of borsch and in this war', said Ukraine's Culture Minister Oleksandr Tkachenko on Telegram.
Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said: "Hummus and pilaf are recognised as national dishes of several nations. Everything is subject to Ukrainisation."
On Thursday, Russian troops abandoned their positions on Snake Island, which had become a symbol of Ukrainian resistance in the first days of the war, and sat aside shipping lanes near Odessa's port. The Russian defence ministry described the retreat as 'a gesture of goodwill' meant to demonstrate that Moscow will not interfere with UN efforts to organise protected grain exports from Ukraine.
AFP

Dozens missing in shipwreck during South China Sea typhoon

Hong Kong, China - More than two dozen crew members are unaccounted for after their ship broke into two during a typhoon in the South China Sea on Saturday, with rescuers scrambling to find them, officials say.
An engineering vessel that was 160 nautical miles southwest of Hong Kong 'suffered substantial damage and broke into two pieces' and the 30-member crew abandoned ship, according to the Hong Kong Government Flying Service.
Three people had been rescued as of 3pm local time (0700 GMT) and were taken to hospital for treatment, authorities said.
Dramatic footage provided by Hong Kong authorities showed a person being airlifted onto a helicopter while waves crashed over the deck of the semi-submerged



The ship which broke into two amid Typhoon Chaba, in the South China Sea (AFP)

ship below.
The three survivors said other crew members may have been swept away by waves before the

first helicopter arrived, according to a government statement.
Typhoon Chaba earlier formed in the central part of the South

China Sea and on Saturday afternoon made landfall in Guangdong province in southern China.
AFP

25 dead, 40 missing in India landslide

Guwahati, India - The search for survivors buried under a landslide in India's northeast entered its third day on Saturday with 25 bodies pulled from the rubble and nearly 40 people still missing.
Security forces and disaster relief teams raced against the clock to find any more survivors trapped under the debris at a railway construction camp in Manipur state.
Most of the victims were reserve soldiers from the Territorial Army who had been working on the railway project. Eighteen people have so far been pulled alive from the earth with no more rescued overnight, an army statement said.
AFP



Portuguese visual artist Goncalo Mar poses next to his work 'Mural for the deep ocean' in Lisbon on Friday (AFP)

Outgunned island states vow to fight deep-sea mining

Lisbon, Portugal - A handful of postage-stamp nations in the South Pacific launched an uphill battle this week against the deep-sea mining of unattached, fist-sized rocks rich in rare Earth metals. The stakes are potentially enormous.
Companies keen to scrape the ocean floor five to six thousand metres (17,000 to 20,000 feet) below sea level stand to earn billions harvesting manganese, cobalt, copper and nickel currently used to build batteries for electric vehicles.
But the extraction process would disfigure what may be the most pristine ecosystem on the planet and could take millennia, if not longer, for nature to repair.
The deep-sea jewels in question, called polymetallic nodules, grow with the help of microbes over millions of years around a kernel of organic matter, such as a shark's tooth or the ear-bone of a whale. "They are living rocks, not just dead stones," former US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration chief scientist Sylvia Earle said in Lisbon.
"I look at them as miracles."
An incipient deep-sea mining industry also sees them as miraculous, though for different rea-

sons. "High grades of four metals in a single rock means that four times less ore needs to be processed to obtain the same amount of metal," notes The Metals Company, which has formed exploratory partnerships with three South Pacific nations - Nauru, Kiribati and Tonga - in the mineral-rich Clarion-Clipperton fracture zone.
Nodules also have low levels of heavy elements, which means less toxic waste compared to land-based extraction, according to the company.
Commercial mining has not started anywhere in the world, but about 20 research institutes or companies hold exploration contracts with the International Seabed Authority (ISA) in the Indian, Pacific and Atlantic oceans.
Surangel Whipps Jr., president of Palau, kicked off the anti-mining campaign at the just-concluded UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon, flanked by Fiji Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama.
"Deep-sea mining compromises the integrity of our ocean habitat and should be discouraged to the greatest extent possible," Whipps said, calling for an open-ended moratorium.
AFP

'Proper ventilation of public spaces must to fight COVID'

Paris, France - The world is still not using one of its most effective weapons against COVID - properly ventilating public spaces - more than two years into the pandemic, experts warn.
At the moment there is a 'fragile, armed peace' with COVID-19, said Antoine Flahault, director of the Institute of Global Health at the University of Geneva.
"In the hopes of stemming the tide of the pandemic and reducing mortality, we need to reduce the level of contamination, which the vaccine cannot do alone," he told AFP.
"We need a new phase - improving the quality of indoor air."
COVID-19 is primarily transmitted through the air. It is carried in large droplets or fine aerosols when an infected person breathes - and even more so when they talk, sing or shout.



A man wears a protective mask against COVID-19 as he rides on the open deck of a double-decker tourist bus in Paris, on Friday (AFP)

In a closed off or poorly ventilated room, these aerosols can remain in the air for some time, moving around the space and greatly increasing the risk of infection. While it is generally accepted that COVID can be transmitted within two metres

via both droplets and aerosols, there is still no consensus on the importance of long-distance airborne transmission indoors.
A team of researchers from the UK Health Security Agency and the University of Bristol reviewed 18 studies in several

In the hopes of stemming the tide of the pandemic, we need to reduce the level of contamination
ANTOINE FLAHAULT

countries on airborne transmission. In research published in the BMJ this week, they found that people can infect each other when they are more than two metres apart.
Open that window
We know one thing for sure: if you open a window, or well-ventilate a space, the virus-carrying aerosols dissipate like smoke.
But experts say that nowhere near enough is being done to

ventilate public and private spaces across the world.
"On the whole, this is an issue that governments have not yet taken up," Flahault said.
He called for massively increased funding to ventilate many public spaces, starting with schools, hospitals, public transport, offices, bars and restaurants. 'Just as we knew to filter and treat drinking water' in homes at the beginning of the 1900s, 'one can imagine some households will equip themselves with air purifiers and consider opening their windows'.
Only a few countries have announced ventilation plans since the start of the pandemic. In March the US government called on all building owners and operators, as well as schools and universities, to 'adopt key strategies to improve indoor air quality'.
AFP

GOGOL CENTRE

CURTAINS!

A rebel Moscow theatre shuts doors after a final show last week

Gogol Centre artistic director Alexey Agranovich (C) gives a speech on stage after a performance in Moscow on June 30



The Gogol Centre theatre, one of the last bastions of artistic freedom in Vladimir Putin's Russia, shut its doors Thursday night with a defiant final show called 'I Don't Take Part In War'.

The emotional play protesting against the Kremlin's military intervention in Ukraine marked a dramatic end of an era for the Russian capital's ever-shrinking opposition and intelligentsia circles.

Previously run by rebel director Kirill Serebrennikov, who left Russia after criticising Moscow's offensive in Ukraine, the Gogol Centre staged daring plays for a decade, often testing increasingly strict laws and Moscow's sharp conservative turn.

Thursday's performance had some of the audience in tears when actors recited poems by Soviet poet and soldier Yuri Levitansky, a Soviet poet and soldier who was born in what is now Ukraine.

The play's name was taken from one of Levitansky's emblematic verses - 'I don't take part in war, it takes part in me.' As the show ended, the theatre's outgoing artistic director, Alexei Agranovich announced, "The Gogol Centre is closed. Forever."

This week the Moscow authorities announced a change of leadership at a number



Gogol Centre actors and personnel stand on stage after a performance in Moscow

of the capital's top theatres.

They include the Gogol Centre, which will now function under new management and its old name - the Nikolai Gogol Drama Theatre.

Serebrennikov, who transformed the theatre company into a national cultural beacon, accused the authorities of 'murdering'

the Gogol Centre. On Thursday, he addressed the audience via video link from Avignon in southeastern France.

"The Gogol Centre is an idea, the idea of freedom. Freedom is not dead. Freedom lives on as long as we live," he said.

Another prominent Moscow theatre, the Sovremennik, will also have a change of

The Gogol Centre is an idea, the idea of freedom. Freedom is not dead. Freedom lives on as long as we live. There was this building. There will be another. I hope some day the war will end and the beautiful Russia of the future will emerge

SEREBRENNIKOV

management, authorities said. These changes are seen as part of an increasing crackdown on any dissent since President Putin sent troops into Ukraine.

Before the play, some spectators lay roses against the theatre's white walls.

"They are closing everything, blocking everything," Daria Kozhevnikova, a 36-year-

old teacher who came to see the play, told AFP.

She paused, before smiling uneasily, "Soon we will all be shackled together by one chain." Her voice trembled and she appeared on the verge of tears. "It was a place where I felt good."

Symbol of freedom

"The Gogol Centre is a place of freedom," said 39-year-old marketing specialist Aliya Talibova, who also came to see the play. "Now they are taking it away from us."

Actor Ilya Vinogorsky, 22, said the closure of the theatre in its current iteration was 'very painful'.

"This should not be happening. Especially in the 21st century, when we claim to be a civilised society and state," he said.

Serebrennikov was artistic director of the Gogol Centre between 2012 and 2021. The 52-year-old was caught up in a high-profile fraud case that his supporters say was punishment for challenging the Russian authorities. He was forced to leave his post in February 2021.

In his address, Serebrennikov vowed that despite the closure in Moscow, the theatre's mission would live on.

"There was this building. There will be another," he said. "I hope some day the war will end and the beautiful Russia of the future will emerge."

AFP

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CHANGING TIMES IN KSA



VALLEY OF THE ARTS

Saudi artists marvel at a surprise patron - their own rulers - as plans materialise to rebrand the kingdom as a 'global arts destination'



I'm being rediscovered by my people, my community. They used to follow me on Instagram. Now they can actually go and see the artworks

MANAL ALDOWAYAN



Nora Aldabal, the Executive Director for Arts and Creative Industries at the commission

In one of Saudi artist Ahmed Mater's best-known works, a silhouette of a gas pump morphs into a man holding a gun to his head - a clear critique of oil's damaging influence.

Yet for several years, most Saudis couldn't see the piece, titled 'Evolution of Man', as local curators deemed it too sensitive to show in the oil-reliant kingdom. Its inclusion in a recent exhibition in the capital Riyadh is just one sign of changing times.

With Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the de facto ruler, eager to rebrand conservative Saudi Arabia as a global arts destination, officials are heaping previously unheard-of opportunities on Mater and his peers.

They unveiled the latest on Monday - a plan to feature Mater and another politically minded Saudi artist, Manal AlDowayan, in a series of permanent installations in the deserts outside Al-Ula, a budding tourist magnet in the northwestern Medina region.

Critics might say such projects smack of 'artwashing', but for artists like Mater, the state backing is a welcome relief after years of straining to



Saudi artist Ahmed Mater works at his studio in the capital Riyadh, on a project to be exhibited in the desert outside Al-Ula, in the northwestern Medina region

reach Saudi audiences and cultivate vibrant domestic arts scene.

"I usually believe in creating a grassroots movement that will be organic, but what if there is top-down support for this? Even better," he told AFP.

"That's the change. That's the new thing."

Valley of the arts

The project in Al-Ula -- known as Wadi AlFann or 'Valley of the Arts' -- is ultimately meant to cover 65sqkm of Saudi desert with new examples of 'land art', the movement that sought to bring art out of galleries and into nature.

Besides Mater and AlDowayan,

contributors include land art giants like Hungarian-American Agnes Denes, who in the 1980s famously planted and harvested two acres of wheat just blocks from Wall Street.

It is part of a broader goal to transform Al-Ula, famed for its ancient Nabataean tombs dotted amid sandstone mountains and wadis, into a top-tier arts hub, complete with luxury eco-resorts and a posh theatre covered in mirrored panels.

"The Wadi AlFann works are on a scale and ambition, and they have such vision behind them, that I think people will want to come for many, many generations to visit them", said curator Iwona Blazwick, former director of London's Whitechapel Gallery.

AlDowayan, one of the Saudi contributors, told AFP that until recently her work had been seen more frequently outside the kingdom than within it, though she dismissed the notion that this had anything to do with censorship.

"I was talking about very tough subjects when it was really restrictive here, and I was fine. They published me in every single newspaper. I've never been censored," she said.

The nature of visual artists' work

gives them more space to speak out than Saudi activists might enjoy, said Eman Alhussein, non-resident fellow with the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington.

"Artists are able to express themselves more freely because their artwork can be interpreted in different ways," she said. That seems especially true these days, as Saudi authorities lean on the arts to help soften their austere reputation.

After two decades of showing largely for foreigners, AlDowayan is now basking in a surge of domestic attention.

"I'm being exhibited constantly here," she said. "I'm being rediscovered by my people, my community. They used to follow me on Instagram. Now they can actually go and see the artworks."

Legacy of restrictions

Mater, too, has had mostly positive experiences with Saudi authorities.

Yet he has also seen the limits on free expression in Saudi Arabia through the case of his childhood friend Ashraf Fayadh, a fellow artist who has been behind bars for nearly a decade.

Fayadh, a Palestinian poet living in the kingdom, was charged with apostasy in 2014 and sentenced him to death in 2015, though his sentence was reduced to eight years on appeal.

Mater sees Fayadh's case as a throwback to a less open period and does not think it would play out the same way today. Nevertheless, "the case is still very important because Ashraf has to come out", Mater said, adding that he hopes his friend will be released soon.

In the meantime, Mater is pressing on with his politically charged work. His project for Wadi AlFann involves building tunnels that visitors can enter. Once inside, their hologram-like images will be projected above the dunes - an effect akin to a mirage.

The idea is to use a monument to centre ordinary people, a concept that doesn't necessarily jibe with monarchical rule. "Usually sculpture is about landmarks of power," Mater said. "And what I'm talking about here is - the power is the people themselves."

AFP



This handout picture obtained from the Royal Commission for AlUla on June 22, shows a view from the intended site of Wadi AlFann or 'Valley of the Arts'



Counterpunching Bumrah hands Broad the dubious distinction of bowling the costliest over in Test history during India run-spree

Birmingham, United Kingdom - India stand-in captain Jasprit Bumrah starred with both bat and ball as England's Stuart Broad conceded the most expensive over in Test history, giving up 35 runs at Edgbaston on Saturday. India were all out for a breath-taking 416 in their first innings of the Covid-delayed fifth Test, with the tourists 2-1 up in a five-match series.

Bumrah, who hit Broad for 29 runs in an over that also featured five wides and a no-ball he struck for six, then led from the front in his primary role of strike bowler. In between several rain breaks, he took all three England wickets to fall with the hosts 60-3, a deficit of 356, at tea on the second day. Broad had become just the sixth bowler to take 550 Test wickets when he lost his composure by repeatedly bowling too short at Bumrah, deputising as skipper for the Covid-hit Rohit

Sharma. It was a forlorn effort to intimidate tailender Bumrah, who had responded to a similar England bouncer barrage by smashing an unbeaten 34 during India's 151-run win in the second Test at Lord's last year. Bumrah batting at No 10 and facing the new ball, dismantled Broad's figures during eight remarkable deliveries. The six legitimate balls were thrashed for 23 runs, including four fours and a

six. Broad, 36, also sent down a wide that went all the way over the head of wicketkeeper Sam Billings for four and a no-ball Bumrah top-edged for six. The previous record of 28 runs in a Test over had been achieved on three occasions in the format's 145-year history, with Broad's team-mates James Anderson and Joe Root two of the bowlers on the receiving end. Broad did not get a chance to make amends with the ball, although he did end the innings by catching last man Mohammad Siraj. **Ton-up Jadeja** India, 338-7 overnight, smashed 78 runs in 11.5 overs.



Ravindra Jadeja



Rishabh Pant

England captain Ben Stokes set the tone for what followed with a ragged opening spell as Ravindra Jadeja, resuming on 83 not out, completed the third century of his 60-Test career and first overseas.

Jadeja had been the junior partner in a stand of 222 with Rishabh Pant, who hit a rapid 146, that rescued India from the depths of 98-5 after they had been sent into bat. Jadeja commandingly cut

Matthew Potts for four to complete a 183-ball century including 13 boundaries. Broad then achieved his landmark wicket when Jack Leach caught Mohammed Shami. Anderson bowled Jadeja for 104 with the new ball and then ended the innings when Siraj holed out to finish with 5-60 in 21.5 overs. Bumrah followed up his 31 not out by bowling opener Alex Lees between bat and pad for six. Crawley's poor run of form continued as he fell for nine after nicking Bumrah to third slip. Bumrah later lured Ollie Pope (10) into an expansive drip outside off stump, with second slip Shreyas Iyer taking the catch. AFP

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Australia's Head eyes bigger bowling role

Galle, Sri Lanka - Batsman Travis Head said his off-spin is going to be worked into Australia's strategy for the second Test against Sri Lanka after he bagged an unlikely four wickets in the series opener. Head, a left-hand batsman and an occasional bowler, returned figures of 4-10 to match lead spinner Nathan Lyon's second innings wicket haul in Friday's three-day thrashing of the hosts at Galle. The middle-order batsman was only declared fit just ahead of the first Test after he missed the fifth one-day international due to a hamstring injury. But the 28-year-old said he was clear about his all-rounder

Australia's Travis Head delivers a ball as coach Daniel Vettori looks on during a practice session in Galle on Thursday (AFP)

role on Galle's turning pitch before the match began. "It was a waiting game for a few days before the Test and

bowling was a big part of that," he told reporters. "I knew I was going to have a role at some point but the two

spinners, all the bowlers, did a fantastic job for myself and Marcus (Labuschagne) not to be needed at all. "It's going to be a huge part of the next Test," he added. "I expected to bowl (in the first Test) but maybe not at that stage of the game." Head was called on to bowl in the 19th over of Sri Lanka's second innings with the hosts already struggling at 95-4 after returning to bat with a deficit of 109 runs. The finger spinner struck on his second ball to send back Dinesh Chandimal for his maiden Test wicket after 26 previous appearances. AFP

Momota finds form to set up Axelsen showdown in Malaysia Open

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - Japan's Kento Momota expressed delight Saturday at reaching his first final of the year after enduring "difficult times", following a convincing victory at the Malaysia Open over Thailand's Kunlavut Vitidsarn. The second seed will face world number one Viktor Axelsen in Sunday's final, after the Dane defeated Indonesia's Jonatan Christie 21-15, 20-22, 21-11. Momota's victory was a major boost following a recent run of poor form, and came in the country where a car crash more than two years ago sent his career into

Kento Momota hits a return to Kunlavut Vitidsarn (AFP)

free fall after winning the last Malaysia Open to be played before the pandemic shutdown in

2020. The defending champion received a rapturous reception

from spectators as he walked out for his semi-final in Kuala Lumpur, and Momota wasted no time in imposing himself on Kunlavut who struggled to keep pace. Momota needed only 42 minutes to beat the Thai player 21-11, 21-12, delivering accurate smashes coupled with precise net play. "I just tried not to make any mistakes and move the shuttle as much as possible into the opponent's side," said Momota after his win. "I'm so happy to reach this final after enduring so many difficult times." AFP



JT Poston in action at the John Deere Classic on Friday (AFP)

Poston posts 65 to lead PGA John Deere Classic

Washington, United States - JT Poston fired a six-under par 65 to build a four-stroke lead in Friday's second round of the US PGA John Deere Classic.

The 29-year-old American, who matched his career low with a 62 on Thursday, stood on 15-under 127 after 36 holes at TPC Deere Run in Silvis, Illinois.

That was enough to hold off compatriot Denny McCarthy, who shot 65 to stand second on 131.

"The ball striking has been great," Poston said. "Made a few good putts. My speed has been pretty good on the greens. I just have that feeling. I know if I can give myself some decent looks, I feel confident enough over the putter

I can make some birdies."

Poston, whose only PGA victory came at the 2019 Wyndham Championship, has three top-10 efforts this season, the best of them a runner-up effort at last week's Travelers Championship.

"Last week, the one thing I think I learned after playing well Thursday was to try and keep the pedal down," Poston said.

Austria's Matthias Schwab, making his tournament debut, fired a 65 to share second on 132 with American Chris Gotterup, making only his fifth US PGA start thanks to a sponsor's exemption, Argentina's Emiliano Grillo and Monday qualifier Chris Naegel.

AFP

Johnson, Ortiz share LIV Golf lead in Portland

The DP World Tour also sanctions members lured by LIV Golf's massive pay cheque

Los Angeles, United States - Dustin Johnson and Carlos Ortiz shared the second-round lead in the LIV Golf Series stop in Portland on Friday as players jumping to the breakaway circuit continued to face criticism.

Johnson, the former world number one whose two major titles include the 2020 Masters, briefly threatened to make it a runaway before three late bogeys saw him settle for a four-under par 68 and an eight-under total at Pumpkin Ridge.

He'll go into the final round of the 54-hole, shotgun start event neck and neck with overnight leader Ortiz, who birdied the final hole to cap a 69.

They are two strokes ahead of South African Branden Grace, who also signed for a 69.

"I'm really happy with the way I'm swinging it," said Johnson, who at 17th in the world is the highest-ranked player to risk the wrath of the US PGA Tour and make the jump to the lucrative new circuit.

"Tomorrow I just need to go and do the same thing, just drive in the fairway."

Johnson made his LIV debut in the inaugural event near London in June while Mexico's Ortiz is playing for the first time.

Ortiz won his lone US PGA Tour title at the Houston Open in 2020, joined the list of players suspended by the US circuit after teeing off in the upstart Saudi-backed series.

The DP World Tour has also sanctioned members lured by the massive paydays on offer that included signing bonus and



Dustin Johnson sinks a birdie putt on the fourth hole during the second round of the LIV Golf Invitational - Portland on Friday (AFP)

a \$20 million purse for this week's 48-player field with an additional \$5 million prize money on offer in a team competition.

DP World Tour chief executive Keith Pelley launched a scathing attack Friday on players who threatened the tour with

legal action unless their sanctions - fines and suspensions - for competing in LIV Golf were rescinded.

Pelley called their demands, made in a letter that was published in The Telegraph, contained inaccuracies and that the players knew "there would be

consequences if they chose money over competition."

Golf Digest reported Friday that the breakaway series has accelerated growth plans for 2023 with 14 events rather than 10 and plans a name change to the LIV Golf League.

The report, citing an un-

named LIV Golf official, said the quick expansion is a product of signing several top US PGA players ahead of this week's event, including Americans Bryson DeChambeau, Patrick Reed, Brooks Koepka and Matthew Wolff.

AFP

Sainz takes maiden pole for 150th start at British GP

Silverstone, United Kingdom - Carlos Sainz grabbed his maiden pole position on Saturday when he outpaced world champion Max Verstappen, who survived a spin in an exciting rain-hit qualifying for the British Grand Prix.

The 27-year-old Spaniard clocked a best lap of one minute and 40.983 seconds to beat the Red Bull driver by 0.072 seconds in the closing minute of a tense session run in treacherous wet conditions.

His first pole came ahead of what will be his 150th Grand Prix start in Sunday's race, just two weeks after he was a very close second to the Dutchman in a thrilling finish at the Canadian Grand Prix.

In a topsy-turvy session that saw positions shuffled rapidly in the changing conditions, Charles Leclerc was third in the second Ferrari ahead of Sergio Perez of Red Bull and home hero seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton



Carlos Sainz drives his Ferrari in the rain at Silverstone circuit on Saturday (AFP)

of Mercedes.

After promising to fight for the front row, it was a disappointment for the local fans as Hamilton failed to extend his run of eight British front row starts.

Lando Norris was sixth for McLaren ahead of two-time champion Fernando Alonso of Alpine, George Russell in the second Mercedes, Zhou Guanyu of Alfa Romeo and Williams'

Nicholas Latifi.

"I put together a lap that I thought was nothing special, but it was on the board to see how it was - and it was pole position which came as a bit of a surprise!" said Sainz.

"I was struggling a lot with the standing water. There was a lot more standing water on the racing line and it was very easy to have snaps and lose the lap."

He added, as a joke, that as a Spaniard he was unaccustomed to racing in the wet British conditions.

Verstappen, who was briefly booed by a section of the crowd, said: "It was tricky - raining and drying, so you had to be on the track at the right time. The car was working well, but it was a bit of a lottery."

AFP

Campillo in charge at the Irish Open

London, United Kingdom - Spain's Jorge Campillo moved to the top of the Irish Open leaderboard after Friday's second round as home favourite Shane Lowry made the cut in dramatic fashion.

Campillo carded 68 after his opening round 65 to reach 11 under par, one shot ahead of Poland's Adrian Meronk and Paraguay's Fabrizio Zanotti.

"I played great over the last two days, so I can't complain," the world number 350 said.

"It's going to be a hard weekend, but if I can keep putting the ball in play off the tee and hit good irons like I've been doing, it will be a good weekend I think."

Ireland's Lowry looked set for an early exit until he birdied his last four holes for a second round of 70.

The former British Open champion rounded off a brilliant fightback by holing from 20 feet on the 18th to the delight of the crowd.

AFP

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WIMBLEDON ROUND-UP



GREEN GRASS, BLUE SKIES...

Tunisia's Ons Jabeur reacts during her match against France's Diane Parry on Friday (AFP)



Simona Halep returns the ball to Magdalena Frech (AFP)

Halep beats Frech to move into last 16

London, United Kingdom - Former champion Simona Halep reached the Wimbledon fourth round on Saturday with a comfortable 6-4, 6-1 win over Poland's Magdalena Frech.

Halep, seeded 16, fired an impressive 24 winners past her 92nd-ranked opponent, who has never beaten a top-20 player.

"It was a good match but a little difficult because of the wind," said 2019 champion Halep, who has yet to drop a set this year at the tournament.

"I have great memories here and having won the title here before helps my confidence."

The Romanian will next face either two-time champion Petra Kvitova or fourth-seeded Paula Badosa for a place in the quarter-finals.

Earlier, Amanda Anisimova came from behind to beat 11th seed Coco Gauff 6-7 (4/7), 6-2, 6-1 in an all-American clash on the Centre Court on Saturday.

French Open finalist Gauff took the first set after a tie-break but was broken three times in the second set as the 20th seed levelled the match.

A break in the fourth game of the decider put Anisimova in the box seat and she swept into a 5-1 lead with another break.

AFP

Tunisia's Ons Jabeur says she's enjoying playing on grass after cruising past Diane Parry in the third round

London, United Kingdom - Ons Jabeur is getting stronger with every match and if that's not ominous enough for her title rivals, she is "enjoying playing on the grass."

The third-seeded Tunisian, the champion in Berlin two weeks ago, ran her grass-court winning streak in singles to eight with a 6-2, 6-3 win over French teenager Diane Parry on Friday.

She has dropped just 13 games in six sets at the Championships so far. Against 19-year-old Parry

on Centre Court, she won both the first five games and the match's last 14 points. Jabeur expertly handled the teenager's now-unique one-handed backhand and slice.

"It honestly easy to go down like every time when she slices," Jabeur said. "But I love playing here. I want to keep it as short as I can. For now, I'm just enjoying really playing on grass."

"Those few rounds is always tricky. I want to play my best tennis. Obviously if you're too com-

Everybody is following me, expecting me to do better and better. I hope I continue being that person that gives them what they're expecting

ONS JABEUR



fortable, it's not that good as well. I'm trying to keep focused. ... I'm always ready. I'm just trying to play my game and keep it as simple as possible, for sure."

The world number two is hoping to become the first Arab or African woman to win a Grand Slam singles and with every match she making her claim

stronger.

"It would mean a lot for me, for my family, for my country, just to keep proving ... that nothing is impossible and if you put your mind (to it), you can achieve it," Jabeur, who is playing at the grasscourt major at a career-high second in the rankings, told reporters after reaching the last 16.

"Everybody is following me, expecting me to do better and better. I hope I continue being that person that gives them what they're expecting. I'm just trying

my best to break records, to really open the path for the next generation.

"I wanted to be a top-10 player, then I achieved that. I wanted to win more titles, and it's still coming," she said.

Jabeur next faces No.24 seed Elise Mertens, who ousted former champion and No.15 seed Angelique Kerber for her first win over a Top 20 player in more than a year. Mertens beat Jabeur in the third round of last year's US Open, their only prior meeting.

Swiatek's 37-match winning streak ends at Wimbledon

London, United Kingdom - Iga Swiatek was dumped out of Wimbledon in straight sets on Saturday by French veteran Alize Cornet, ending the world number one's 37-match winning streak.

Cornet, ranked 37, took advantage of an error-strewn performance from her Polish opponent to win 6-4, 6-2 on Court 1 in their third-round tie.

Swiatek made a total of 33 unforced errors in an uncharacteristically sloppy display, compared with just seven by Cornet. In reaching the fourth round, the French player matches her run at Wimbledon in 2014, when she beat Serena Williams in the third round.

"I have no words right now," she said. "It reminds me of the time I beat Serena on the same court eight years ago exactly. This court is a lucky charm for me."

Cornet said she felt Swiatek could be vulnerable on grass after pulling off the biggest shock



Iga Swiatek leaves the court after losing to Alize Cornet on Saturday (AFP)

at Wimbledon so far.

Tan in fourth round

Harmony Tan, who knocked Serena Williams out of Wimbledon, demolished British wild card Katie Boulter 6-1, 6-1 on Saturday

in just 51 minutes to reach the fourth round.

The 24-year-old French player broke Boulter five times in a dominant display to disappoint the crowd on Court Two.

AFP

'He played hard to get': Venus in winning return with Jamie Murray at Wimbledon

London, United Kingdom - Venus Williams made a winning return to Wimbledon on Friday when the 42-year-old American teamed with Britain's Jamie Murray in the mixed doubles.

Williams, playing her first event since Chicago in August last year, and Murray defeated Michael Venus and Alicja Rosolska 6-3, 6-7 (3/7), 6-3 in their first-round clash. The pair said their decision to play was last-minute but Williams revealed she had wanted to partner the Briton for some time.

"He played hard to get," she said. "I wanted to play with him for ages but it was super last-minute."

Williams said when she first arrived in London, it wasn't her intention to get back on the courts.

"I was at the French Open which is beautiful but my heart didn't beat the same way as when I saw the grass."

Williams, a five-time singles champion at Wimbledon, is a



Venus Williams and Jamie Murray in action against Michael Venus and Alicja Rosolska on Friday (AFP)

two-time Grand Slam mixed doubles champion.

However, both those titles came back in 1998 alongside Justin Gimelstob at the Australian Open and French Open.

She was runner-up in the

mixed doubles at Wimbledon in 2006 with Bob Bryan.

Murray is a five-time Slam champion in the event, winning Wimbledon in 2007 and 2017 with Jelena Jankovic and Martina Hingis.

"I was supposed to play with Venus last year but I hurt my neck," said the 36-year-old.

"I couldn't say no twice. It was amazing to be on the court with such a champion."

AFP

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