

Ban on import of plastic bags from January 1, 2023

Our Correspondent
Muscat

HE Qais Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, has issued a Ministerial Decision (No 519/2022) banning the import of plastic bags. It will come into effect on January 1, 2023.

An administrative fine of RO1,000 will be imposed on any individual importing plastic bags after 2022.

Sami al Sahib, Director General of Industry in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), said that the decision aims to prevent the import of materials and goods that harm the Omani environment and is part of a comprehensive plan agreed upon by the ministry with the Environment Authority.

"The decision will support Omani factories by limiting unfair competition with the imported products that do not meet environmental standards," Sahib said.

He added that through its co-operation with the Environment Authority, MoCIIP aims to move from the current plastic-intensive



Importers are not following the Omani specifications

RASHID AL FARRAJI

industries to environmentally friendly industries in the future.

According to Sahib, the decision will help local plastic bag factories increase their production capacity to cover the domestic markets' shortfall, in turn increasing their sales and income.

"Eliminating plastic bags is one of the challenges that the min-

istry seeks to overcome in cooperation with the concerned authorities and find specifications for manufacturers and suppliers to ensure the correct transition to alternatives to plastic bags that harm the environment," said Sahib.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Rashid Khamis al Farraji, CEO of Horizon Plastic Company, said, "It is a good decision. Importers are not following the Omani specifications for single-use plastic bags."

Environment Authority banned the use of single-use plastic shopping bags of less than 50 micron starting January 1, 2021.



HIS MAJESTY CONDOLES QUEEN'S DEATH, CONGRATULATES KING CHARLES

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik offered his condolences on the death of Queen Elizabeth II as well as congratulated King Charles III on his accession to the UK throne, on Sunday evening at a reception hosted in Buckingham Palace. Dubbed as the 'reception of the century', the event saw a gathering of world leaders, including presidents and royalty.

MHT looking to make Oman an adventure tourism hub

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With the objective of attracting adventure enthusiasts to explore Oman's diverse offerings, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT), in cooperation with Omran, will organise the first edition of Oman Tourism Meet on September 27-28 at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The ministry seeks to develop adventure tourism as it is one of the fastest growing segments of tourism in the world, attracting those wishing to explore adventure activities as well as encouraging eco-tourism and sustainable practices.

The latest global statistics indicate that the global adventure tourism market grew to US\$282.1bn in 2021 and is expected to expand at a compound annual growth rate of 15.2 per cent from 2022 to 2030.

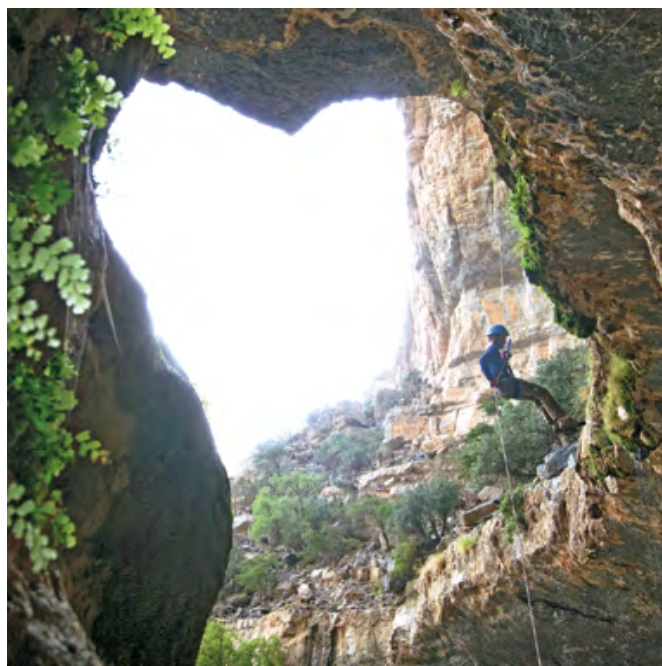
"Oman Tourism Meet will be a great opportunity to meet organisers, developers, researchers and those interested in adventure tourism, as it is one of the tourism products that the ministry wants to develop and meet the aspirations of the domestic and international tourists in the segment," the ministry stated.

About the ministry's efforts to develop adventure tourism, Dawood bin Sulaiman al Rashidi, director of Tourism Product



MHT has been working with New Zealand and aims to benefit from its experience in managing adventure tourism

DAWOOD AL RASHIDI



Development in the Directorate General of Tourism Development, said, "The ministry, in co-operation with the concerned authorities, has set a plan to develop adventure tourism, including providing security and safety requirements for workers and participants. This will be done by preparing a legal and regulatory framework for adventure tourism

in the sultanate."

According to Rashidi, the aim is to make the sultanate one of the best destinations in the world for adventure activities. "The ministry has been working with New Zealand and aims to benefit from its experience in organising and managing adventure tourism and creating training programmes, including rescue, first

aid and ambulance services."

The ministry, in cooperation with Omran, has funded a number of projects to develop hiking tracks in Musandam, in addition to a mini oasis project in Wadi Bani Awf in the wilayat of Rustaq to engage in activities such as crossing canyons and climbing mountains.

Of future plans, Rashidi said, "The ministry is currently working on inventorying and evaluating natural sites, caves and wadis to know the requirements in order to ensure the protection and safety of adventurers so that they can enjoy their adventure in a safe way. Efforts are also being made to identify rapid response points for emergency first responders and facilitating easy access to these sites."

He informed that the ministry issued a decision (No 124/2021) to add organising adventure trips to the list of activities of travel and tourism offices.

In July, MHT and the Ministry of Defence signed a training agreement in the field of adventure tourism in Jabal Akhdar at the Combat Training Centre of Royal Army of Oman.

The aim of the agreement is to make the centre a destination for auditing and training on security and safety systems for engagement in adventure tourism activities in a professional and safe manner.

► NEWS BRIEF

MCSY LENDS FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR CAMEL RACES

Muscat - As part of the attention accorded to camel sports by H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MCSY) has earmarked a financial support for holding camel races in designated racecourses in the governorates of Oman.

Sheikh Said Saud al Ghufaili, chairman of Oman Camel Racing Association, said that the gesture seeks to preserve camel racing as an aspect of heritage that constitutes economic revenue to camel breeders and racers.

He added that the association will announce details of the camel races over the next few days.

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GCC region set for fastest growth in a decade

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La Palma - Lure of lava in Spanish isle La Isla Bonita

72% of ME consumers shop more online

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Middle East consumers are ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) conscious, digitally driven and more price-sensitive while shopping, according to PwC's latest *Global Consumer Insights Survey*.

The latest results reveal shoppers' habits in terms of choosing retailers, shopping channels and outlets, and products' features. At the same time, the survey explores how Middle East retailers are dealing with several challenges including higher costs and supply chain issues, and their efforts in retaining the loyalty of digitally savvy shoppers.

The survey found that 72 per cent of ME consumers (vs 63 per cent globally) say they have increased the amount of shopping they do online. While the region's shoppers continue to be more price conscious amid increasing prices, both online and in-store outlets are facing various challenges. Forty-eight per



cent of ME consumers (vs 57 per cent globally) say grocery prices at physical stores have almost always or frequently increased since their last visit during the previous three months.

Also, 54 per cent of consumers (vs 56 per cent globally) report that the rising prices for online grocery purchases was among the top three issues undermining their online shopping experience. Simultaneously, retailers in the region are still wrestling with serious disruptions to their supply chains post-pandemic.

Master's in Leadership programme for govt department heads

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Royal Academy of Management launched its flagship programme 'Master of Leadership and Management' for the government sector in collaboration with Thunderbird School of Global Management at Arizona State University on Sunday.

The programme targets section heads and equivalent positions in the government sector with the objective of preparing executive leaders in Oman, enabling them to contribute to building effective and innovative



government sector entities in line with the New Economy era.

Dr Ali Qasim al Lawati, president of Royal Academy of Management, said, "Launching this Master of Leadership and Man-

agement programme puts His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's Royal Directives regarding the development of all levels of government leadership into action."

Lawati noted that the world is witnessing an accelerated change in the global economic order, which requires an equally accelerated pace in developing the human capital needed to thrive in this competitive economy. "Therefore, this programme will equip middle management in the government sector with the necessary skills, knowledge and attributes allowing them to adapt to as well as keep pace with the evolution of the new economy with all its integrated forms, be it knowledge economy, digital economy, circular economy or innovation-based economy."

The aim of this programme, Lawati added, is to keep abreast of the sultanate's paradigm shift especially in the realm of developing government sector leaders, noting that the academy's contribution is aligned with the diverse and ever-changing needs of the economic and management world orders.

"The programme has been designed in close coordination with Thunderbird School of Global Management emphasising real-life application in line with the sultanate's development plan, thus offering participants both modern knowledge

(through the academic programme) and the practical application of it (through the applied projects)."

Kawther al Mahrouqi, Master of Leadership and Management, programme lead, stated that 25 section heads and their equivalents from the government sector will be selected to start the course in January 2023.

The programme will involve 12 months of blended learning, exploring the latest global trends in leadership, management, innovation, strategy, public policy analysis, and agile governance, among other areas.

Earlier in the month, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism announced that Oman will offer free multiple-entry 60-day visas to World Cup fans having Hayya Card - the personalised fan ID required to attend any FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 match.

Besides the football fan visa, there will be fast lanes at Muscat International Airport, a 9,000sqm World Cup festival village at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre and a host of other activities held across Oman.

Hayya Card holders can be accompanied by first-degree relatives for stay in Oman and the visa can also be changed to another category while in the sultanate.

Special bus stops will be established for the smooth flow of fans to and from the airport.

Oman is making tourism offerings through 20,000 hotel rooms and more than 200 tourist products in cooperation with more than 35 local operators and ten land transporters.

Are these measures enough and were they announced in time for the sultanate to make the most of this big-ticket international event in the region to boost local tourism?

Big enough bait?



Bader al Lawati
Government employee

Oman is well prepared for the spectacle. With so many high-end as well as budget hotels, the country can easily handle any spill from Qatar. Also, Oman is an enthusiastic football nation and this will be an additional welcoming factor.

Mohammad Lawati
Businessman

With so many flights and incentives for Hayya Card holders, Oman has an extraordinary fare for FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 guests. This is an opportunity for international guests to see the country's rich heritage and untouched nature.

Vikram Kumar
Sales executive

With easy access to the country from Qatar, coming here will definitely help foreign tourists have another beautiful perspective of the Arab world. Oman, with its rich nature and cosmopolitan and hospitable environment, will surely charm people.

Abhijit Prasad Nair
Student

Oman's initiatives of free multi-entry visa, 24 daily Match Day Shuttle flights, airport and transportation programmes and the recent announcement to host the German football team for a friendly match will undoubtedly bring an incredible influx of travellers to the sultanate. However, further initiatives such as conducting affordable trips highlighting the rich culture and heritage of Oman, conducting friendly football matches in the country during this period, and appointing translators in key areas such as airports and hotels, will enhance the experience of football fans travelling to Oman.

Jay Prakash
Private sector employee

The sultanate has immense potential for tourism during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 to be played this November-December. Oman has pristine nature, history and modern infrastructure - all the elements needed to woo international tourists.

Ruskeen S
Private sector employee

Definitely. The incentives offered will prompt several high profile countries' teams to set up their preparatory camp in Oman, which will attract fans from all over the world and help local tourism. Our seamless visa and travel procedures will add to Oman's billing as a destination on the world tourism map.



NEXT ON YOUR SAY

Oman will ban import of plastic bags from January 1, 2023. What more needs to be done to curb the use of single-use plastics bags?

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

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

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

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MUSCAT DAILY

3 new hospitals to come up in 3 governorates; tenders floated

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health has announced that it will establish three hospitals in three governorates as part of its efforts to develop health services throughout the sultanate.

A statement issued by the Secretariat General of the Tender Board, said companies are invited to submit proposals for establishing hospitals Al Falah in South Sharqiyah, Al Nama in North Sharqiyah and Samail Hospital in Dakhliyah. The



deadline for bid submission is October 24.

In August, the Ministry of Health took stock of the progress of work at the 700-bed Sultan Qaboos Hospital Salalah. Being built at a cost of RO138mn, 33 per cent of the project and 75 per cent of the

hospital building structure are complete.

Sultan Qaboos Hospital Salalah is one of the promising projects in the sultanate's health sector that will cater to the needs of citizens and residents in Dhofar.

Last month, the ministry also reported that construction work of the 50-bed Mazyona Hospital in Dhofar, being built on an area of 90,000sqm since March 2022, is gaining pace. With a built up area of 15,276sqm, the hospital is being constructed at a cost of

RO15.35mn.

In a report on the health projects in the pipeline, the ministry said it is currently implementing projects in various governorates at a cost exceeding RO275mn.

The projects include Suwaiq Hospital, Khasab Hospital, raising the capacity of Medha Health Centre in Musandam, expansion projects at The Royal Hospital, Nizwa Hospital and Sohar Hospital, establishment of a kidney unit in Bahla Hospital, and construction of accident, emergency and dialysis units in Yanqul Hospital.

WHO delegation evaluates Nizwa for 'Healthy City' listing

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A delegation from World Health Organization (WHO) is visiting Dakhliyah to evaluate the Nizwa Healthy City and Nizwa Healthy Lifestyle project and assess Nizwa as a healthy city within the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

WHO's 'Healthy Cities' is a global movement working to put health high on the social, economic and political agenda of city governments. The WHO European Healthy Cities Network has brought together close to 100 flagship cities and 30 national networks under the programme.

The two-day visit, which started on Sunday, aims to audit the indicators of the city that address all developmental aspects affecting human health directly or indirectly.

On the first day of the visit, Sheikh Rashid al Kalbani, Wali of Nizwa and head of Health Com-



mittee, met the visiting delegation and Dr Ali al Dhawi, director general of Health Services of Dakhliyah. The meeting discussed all issues related to Nizwa Healthy City.

The visiting delegation also met the concerned officials of the executive office of Nizwa Healthy City. The meeting addressed community engagement strate-

gies, health and social indicators, intersectoral actions, and a healthy lifestyle clinic.

The visit will include Birkat al Mouz Health Centre, Omani Women Association in Nizwa, Tanuf School for Basic Education, water and electrical power generation projects, as well as several developmental projects in the wilayat.

Oman Embassy in Japan warns citizens

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's Embassy in Tokyo has urged citizens in Japan to be cautious and follow instructions of local authorities issued due to Cyclone Nanmadol which made landfall on Sunday.

In a statement issued earlier, Oman's Embassy in Tokyo, said, 'The Embassy is monitoring the developments of Typhoon Nanmadol and calls on all Omanis in the areas expected to be affected to take caution and adhere by the instructions of the local authorities. You can contact the Embassy around the clock on 09017071989, 0 8 0 4 3 3 2 8 8 4 , 08034344439.'

Omani startup develops education kit to instill engineering mindset in students

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To create a generation of students capable of keeping pace with the Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies and Oman Vision 2040, BRQ Advanced Technology, in cooperation with the Directorate General of Education in South Sharqiyah governorate, has successfully developed a curriculum in 100 schools through its Easy Stem Learning Kits.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, BRQ Advanced Technology CEO Saud al Mukhaini said, "We started the project in April and succeeded in developing 100 educational kits targeting 100 schools in the wilayats of South

Sharqiyah. The project is the first of its kind in Oman."

The project, funded by Daleel Petroleum, aims to integrate concepts of electronic engineering into educational curricula and teach young students the

We succeeded in developing 100 educational kits targeting 100 schools in the wilayats of South Sharqiyah. The project is first of its kind in Oman

SAUD AL MUKHAINI

techniques of 4IR such as electronic control and remote sensing, developing innovation skills set, and achieving goals of Oman Vision 2040, he



Supplied photo

explained.

"The project also aims to support the curriculum of science and mathematics through a systematic training programme for students and teachers."

According to Mukhaini, the kit consists of a computer motherboard which includes, a control panel, 25 sensors, connection cables, and a computer programme.

"A training programme has been prepared for the teachers and students to ensure the readiness of the teaching staff and talented students to achieve the maximum possible benefit from the project."

BRQ aims to expand in the local market to ensure that every member of the community has

access to quality products.

Of future, Mukhaini said, "BRQ is considered the leading Omani brand in manufacturing phone chargers. We are working on plans to raise the culture of using approved products and electrical safety among members of the Omani society."

"We are also working on a cost control plan in the market to provide the latest technologies and the highest quality at the lowest possible cost."

Mukhaini urged the Omani youth to rely on their ideas and open their small and medium enterprises, especially in the field of technology, because "it is the future and going to be the basis for economic development in the country".

Oman sends humanitarian aid to Pakistan

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Oman Charitable Organization (OCO), in cooperation with the Royal Navy of Oman, on Saturday sent additional supplies to Pakistan, which has been ravaged by devastating floods recently.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) said, 'The Royal Navy of Oman has sent relief through its military transport ships, which started sailing on Saturday from the Saeed bin Sultan Naval Base,



Supplied photo

carrying a variety of necessary humanitarian supplies on board.'

Air supply, in coordination with the Royal Air Force of

Oman, is on to transport various items of essential humanitarian needs within the framework of the relief programme imple-

mented by OCO, the MoD said.

According to Unicef, 'super floods' in Pakistan have left 3.4mn children in need of 'immediate, lifesaving support'. The floods have impacted 16mn children in total, Unicef's Pakistan Representative Abdullah Fadil said.

Due to the magnitude of devastation, the OCO opened the door for individuals to donate through Bank Muscat account 0423010700010017, Bank Dhofar 01040609090001, Bank Nizwa 00122200222001 or via www.donate.om.

Stamps on fresh water Omani fishes issued

Our Correspondent
Muscat

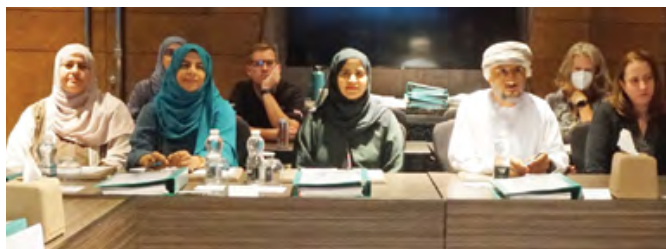
With active participation of the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), Oman Post on Sunday launched four commemorative stamps on fresh water Omani fishes.

"These fishes are a sample of 23 species of fresh water fishes found in Oman," said Saud al Jufaili, head of Marine and Fisheries Sciences at the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences in SQU, adding that "they are classified into 15 genera, 10 families, seven ranks and one sect".



These fishes are found in wadis, caves and natural wells, along with salt marshes and artificial dams in three regions of Oman, including Al Hajar Moun-

tains, Dhofar Mountains, and the southwestern coast and the interior regions. "SQU is conducting more studies together with the Iranian University of Shiraz."



International training on laboratory equipment maintenance begins

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A five-day long international training on laboratory equipment maintenance began in a city hotel in Muscat on Sunday.

Organised by the Ministry of Health (MoH), the workshop began in the presence of Dr Saif al Abri, Director General of Diseases Surveillance and Control.

The Central Public Health Laboratories of the Directorate General of Diseases Surveillance and Control is conducting the event on behalf of MoH, in collaboration with the Association of Public Health Laboratories, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization and the Southeast European Center for Surveillance and Control of Infectious Diseases.

Dr Hanan al Kindi, Director of

MoH's Public Health Laboratories, underlined that the maintenance of laboratory equipment is an integral part of quality management system as proper maintenance ensures that an equipment is kept in good condition with maximum accuracy.

Proper maintenance would prevent unnecessary repair expenses, she added.

Twelve participants from Oman, Mediterranean and Eastern European regions are taking part in the training workshop, which has been designed to educate participants on the best laboratory equipment maintenance principles for experienced technicians and medical engineers. The workshop seeks to update the knowledge and skills of the participants and guide them to pass the learning to other technicians at their respective workplaces.

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Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

UK eyes axing cap on bankers' bonuses: FT

Britain's new finance minister Kwasi Kwarteng could this week axe a bankers' bonus cap, in place since 2014 and a legacy of EU membership, the Financial Times reported.

The Treasury declined to comment on the report when approached by AFP, and would not be drawn on media speculation that Kwarteng would also hold a "mini budget" on September 23.

With Britain facing a cost-of-living crisis amid sky-high inflation, one trade union leader said Kwarteng should focus on raising everyone's salary rather than boosting pay of the highest earners working in the "City", London's financial sector.

"While City executives rake it in, millions are struggling to keep their heads above water," said Frances O'Grady, head of British union umbrella group TUC, in response to the FT report.

GCC region set for fastest growth and largest surplus in a decade

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The combined GDP of six GCC countries is expected to grow by 6.7 per cent this year, the fastest growth rate since 2011, thanks to higher oil prices and increased production in the energy-rich region.

A latest Economic Insight report, commissioned by ICAEW and compiled by global advisory firm Oxford Economics, revealed a positive regional economic outlook despite a significant downgrade in global GDP growth against a backdrop of rising inflation and interest rates.

The Middle East economic growth in 2022 is now projected at 5.5 per cent, slightly up on Oxford Economics' forecast three months ago. The positive outlook is underpinned by solid projections for activity in the GCC economies.

'GCC GDP is expected to grow by 6.7 per cent this year, the fastest rate since 2011, driven by higher oil production, the recycling of government revenues into investment initiatives and, to a lesser extent, household and business spending,' Oxford Economics said. However, the pos-



sibility of a global recession limiting oil demand remains a key downside risk to this view, it added.

Similarly, the International Monetary Fund has also projected GCC economic growth at 6.4 per cent for 2022.

Oil prices remain supportive of GCC public finances and are expected to contribute to an overall budget surplus of 9.7 per cent of GDP for the GCC region, the widest since 2012, according to Oxford Economics. It expects oil prices to average at US\$103.8 per barrel for 2022.

'This should drive a decline in

the debt-to-GDP ratios since much of the GCC retains plenty of fiscal headroom. Fiscal break-even prices (as estimated by the IMF) are below US\$80 per barrel in all GCC countries except Bahrain, suggesting economic growth across the region will remain robust in the coming quarters,' Oxford Economics report said.

Inflation remains muted

Inflation slowed in July in Oman, Kuwait and Qatar, thanks to easing food prices, though it edged up in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

ICAEW and Oxford Economics predict GCC inflation to average 3.1 per cent this year, up from 2.3 per cent in 2021, before falling back to 2.7 per cent in 2023.

As the US Federal Reserve continues its rate hiking cycle to tackle rising inflation, all central banks across the GCC region have tightened monetary policy.

'Given the currency pegs to the US dollar, GCC policy rates tend not to fall too far out of step with the US, which are expected to continue hiking until early 2023. Given supportive energy and fiscal trends, higher borrowing costs will gradually drag

Oil prices remain supportive of public finances and are expected to contribute to an overall budget surplus of 9.7 per cent of GDP for the GCC region, the widest since 2012, according to Oxford Economics

down demand and growth, with the impact being felt more in 2023,' the report said.

Mark Billington, ICAEW managing director - international, said, "While oil continues to buffer GCC economies, the looming possibility of a recession in the US and Europe reinforces the importance of accelerating economic diversification efforts. Fortunately, current indicators measuring the region's non-oil performance point to ongoing strength, even as inflation remains high."

Scott Livermore, chief economist and managing director at

Oxford Economics Middle East, said, "The Middle East is withstanding global economic pressures, but the broader outlook is challenging.

The windfall from an increase in oil prices has seen markets like Saudi Arabia boom. However, with the OPEC+ alliance likely to cut production as the demand outlook weakens, such growth cannot be sustained without more diversification."

"Continued re-investment of budget surpluses into public projects, increasing non-oil trade and new fiscal policy should help shield the GCC economies from the worst of the recessionary tension," he added.

According to ICAEW and Oxford Economics report, travel and tourism activity in the GCC countries has gathered momentum, shrugging off the impact of strong dollar-pegged regional currencies and underpinning non-oil recovery.

It said inbound travel to the region is outpacing global trends, in part thanks to major international events in the region in 2022, including the forthcoming FIFA World Cup in Qatar, which hopes to attract 1.5mn visitors.

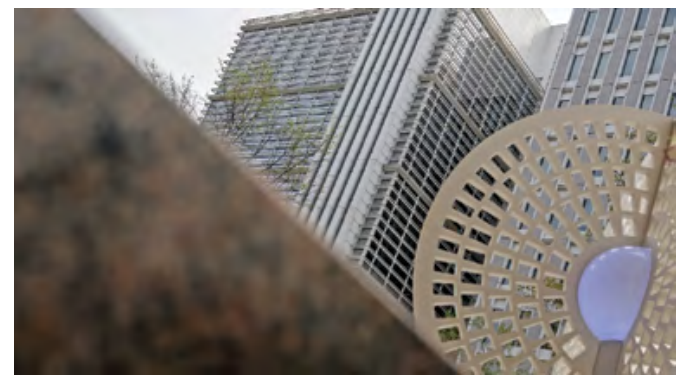
World Bank warns recession risk rising

Washington, US - The threat of a global recession is growing as central banks focus on bringing down soaring inflation rates, the World Bank warned, calling on governments to help boost supply to ease the constraints behind rising prices.

Inflation worldwide has been rising at the fastest pace seen in decades, due to supply constraints amid high demand as countries emerged from the pandemic. It has been exacerbated this year by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and Covid lockdowns in China.

Major central banks have responded forcefully, raising borrowing costs to cool demand and douse red-hot inflation.

But in a new paper, World Bank economists warned that the actions may not be enough to bring high prices under con-



The World Bank headquarters in Washington, DC (AFP)

trol, leading to a need for more interest rate hikes, which in turn will put the brakes on growth.

Many countries will not be able to avoid a recession, but the worldwide slowdown and tightening monetary policy "could give rise to significant financial stress and trigger a global recession in 2023," the paper said.

In that scenario, global GDP

growth would slow to 0.5 per cent in 2023 - a 0.4 percent contraction in per capita growth, meeting the technical definition of a global recession.

"Global growth is slowing sharply, with further slowing likely as more countries fall into recession," World Bank President David Malpass said in a statement.

"My deep concern is that these trends will persist, with long-lasting consequences that are devastating for people in emerging market and developing economies."

He urged policymakers to "shift their focus from reducing consumption to boosting production."

The World Bank in early June slashed its forecast for global growth to 2.9 per cent, more than a full point lower than the estimate in January.

Indermit Gill, the newly installed chief economist at the Washington-based development lender, said his biggest concern is that because of the slowdown and pandemic crisis, "poverty reduction has stopped." But he expressed some optimism as well.

AFP

Bank Muscat to sell its 27% stake in SICO Capital

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Bank Muscat has decided to sell its 27.29 per cent stake in Saudi-based SICO Capital to Bahrain-based investment bank SICO for a consideration of RO1.95mn.

'The bank would like to notify the market that it has now entered into an agreement with SICO to sell the remaining 27.29 per cent stake held by Bank Muscat in SICO Capital (previously named Muscat Capital) to SICO,' Bank Muscat said in a disclosure submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange on Sunday.

The sale consideration is estimated to be approximately RO1.95mn for the remaining 27.29 per cent stake of Bank Muscat in SICO Capital, based



on its net book value as of March 31, 2022, the disclosure said.

Bank Muscat further said that it intends to acquire an additional stake in SICO in an amount equal to the sale consideration.

'The closing of the transaction is subject to receipt of necessary regulatory approvals. Bank Muscat will inform the market once the transaction is completed,'

Bank Muscat added.

In March 2021, SICO had acquired a majority 72.71 per cent stake in Muscat Capital (now SICO Capital) from Bank Muscat.

SICO Capital is a full-fledged capital markets service provider in Saudi Arabia with multiple licenses including asset management, investment banking and brokerage.

Eyeing tourism boom, Saudi scrambles to train hotel staff

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Under the watchful eye of an instructor, Munira al-Rubaian spreads fresh bed linen in a mock hotel room in the Saudi capital, aiming to land a job in the desert kingdom's growing tourism sector.

The unemployed 25-year-old is one of thousands of Saudis enrolled in the state-run "Tourism Pioneers" programme, which aims to prepare 100,000 job-seekers for a field that government officials insist is set to take off.

At two facilities in Riyadh, Rubaian and other trainees study tasks like welcoming hotel guests, plating food in upscale restaurants and keeping luxury suites squeaky-clean.

Others are sent abroad for short courses in countries with far more advanced tourism industries, including the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland and France.

This army of newly minted bellboys, cleaners and higher-paid hospitality managers is expected to help Saudi Arabia - a famously conservative and closed-off Gulf kingdom that

only opened its doors to tourism three years ago - make a positive impression on first-time visitors.

The scheme also supports the government's goal of employing more Saudis in roles traditionally occupied by migrant labourers.

The niqab-wearing Rubaian signed up for Tourism Pioneers after her own efforts to find a job at a hotel went nowhere. She is optimistic the experience will help her get a foot in the door.

"I've had the opportunity to learn and improve my capabilities for employment," she told AFP.

"I will now have the experience and self-confidence to deal with people."

Aiming high

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's 37-year-old de facto ruler, is counting on a tourism boom to diversify the economy of the world's largest oil exporter.

In 2019, two years after Prince Mohammed became first in line to the throne, the country introduced tourist visas, but the coronavirus pandemic dashed hopes



Mohammed Bushnag (right), Saudi Deputy Tourism Minister for Human Capital Development, speaks to students at a training seminar in Riyadh on August 30, 2022 (AFP)

of an immediate influx.

Authorities nonetheless remain committed to their eyebrow-raising goal of drawing 30mn foreign guests annually by 2030, up from just four million last year.

That's on top of 70mn targeted domestic trips each year by Saudis and foreign residents.

Of the combined 100mn a

year hoped-for tourists, officials project some 30mn will be making religious pilgrimages, largely to Mecca and Medina, Islam's two holiest sites, in western Saudi Arabia.

The rest, officials hope, will be partially powered by new attractions like Al-Ula, a budding arts hub set amongst ancient Nabatean tombs, and the Red

Sea Project, a Maldives-style resort destination.

But while the kingdom has in recent years relaxed rules barring cinemas, mixed-gender concerts and sports events, other regulations including an alcohol ban remain in place, potentially denting its appeal.

In a bid to lure more Arab tourists and better compete with

regional rivals like the United Arab Emirates, the tourism ministry announced last week that residents of the GCC could apply for electronic tourism visas.

That right has already been granted to 49 countries, mainly in Europe and North America.

Overseas exposure

To make their dreams a reality, Saudi leaders recognise the need to dramatically increase the number of people working in tourism.

Some 850,000 currently work in the sector, only 26 per cent of them Saudis, according to official figures.

Prince Mohammed's Vision 2030 reform agenda aims to create one million new tourism jobs and boost the portion of Saudis filling them to 70 per cent.

Tourism Pioneers, launched in June, has a budget of US\$100mn, with programmes for 52 specific jobs from entry-level to management.

"We need to build the knowledge, the skills, the competencies for Saudis at the highest levels," said Mohammed Bush-

nag, deputy tourism minister for human capital development.

Al-Waleed al-Zaidi, who works as a sales manager in Riyadh for a foreign hotel chain, visited Switzerland for a week-long course and got a taste of what it's like to serve leisure travellers - an altogether different challenge from the business clientele he's accustomed to.

Instead of questions about dry-cleaning services and international call rates, he was being pressed for recommendations on attractions and how best to use public transportation.

The experience "opened my understanding of the different needs of tourists in terms of activities, food and places they would like to visit", he said.

For Bushnag, this kind of education will ensure Saudis can provide a high level of service.

"We are extremely keen about quality and global exposure for Saudis" who, until now, have seen little of how other countries' tourism industries operate, he said.

"We need to bridge this gap."

AFP

Steep Fed rate hike seen as certainty amid high inflation

Washington, US - The US Federal Reserve is poised to unleash another massive interest rate increase this week after the latest data showed a worrying US inflation picture, which confirmed the need for the central bank to continue to act aggressively.

Soaring prices have pushed annual inflation to a 40-year high, inflicting pain on American consumers and businesses, despite the welcome drop in gasoline prices at the pump in recent weeks.

The disappointing consumer price report for August, released last week, showed housing, food and medical costs continued to rise. And when volatile food and energy prices are stripped out, so-called core inflation accelerated.

Families have been struggling with rising prices sparked initially by high demand as the world's largest economy emerged from the pandemic amid supply chain snarls. The situation has been exacerbated by Covid lockdowns in China and surging energy and food prices due to Russia's war in Ukraine.

It is not just current high inflation that concerns policymakers, but the fear that consumers and businesses begin to expect rising prices will become a permanent feature, which could set off a dangerous spiral and a phenomenon called stagflation.

That fear has driven the Fed to front-load its rate hikes, rather than pursuing the more



In this file photo taken on July 27, Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell speaks during a news conference in Washington, DC (AFP)

customary course of small, gradual steps over a longer period.

The US central bank has cranked up the benchmark lending rate four times this year, including two straight three-quarter-point hikes in June and July.

The aim is to raise the cost of borrowing and cool demand – and it is having an impact: home mortgage rates have now topped six per cent for the first time since 2008.

A third massive increase is expected Wednesday at the conclusion of the Fed's two-day policy meeting. And some people are raising the possibility the

US central bank could take an even bigger step.

But concerns are rising that the aggressive action could tip the US economy into recession, which would reverberate around the globe.

"The sizzling-hot, core inflation figures that came out this week for August have upped the pressure on the Federal Reserve to raise rates a full percentage point instead of 0.75 per cent at the upcoming meeting," Diane Swonk, chief economist at KPMG US, said in an analysis.

"This will be one of the hardest and most politically charged of decisions. It marks the Federal Reserve's first move toward

an actual recession."

Avoiding repeat of 1970s

Fed Chair Jerome Powell has made it clear that a recession is a risk he is willing to take. In fact, it is a risk the central bank must take to avoid an even more dire outcome: a repeat of the damaging, runaway inflation of the 1970s and early 1980s.

"We need to act now forthrightly, strongly as we have been doing and we need to keep at it until the job is done," Powell said in his last public comments before the policy meeting.

Powell's predecessor from the last high-inflation era, Paul

Volcker, had to take extreme measures after rising prices became entrenched, resurging and surpassing the peak of the mid-1970s after repeated failed efforts to tame them.

That led to a deep recession and unemployment over 10 per cent.

The Fed's aim is to avoid "the kind of very high social costs" of the Volcker era, and maintain public confidence in the central bank's commitment to fighting inflation.

"The clock is ticking," Powell warned.

While the latest data showed US annual inflation slowed slightly to 8.3 per cent in August – from a peak of 9.1 per cent in June – prices actually accelerated slightly in the month, reflecting widespread price increases.

Central bankers have the luxury of a strong job market, low unemployment and a resilient US consumer, but many economists now see a recession as likely.

Former US Treasury secretary Lawrence Summers is among those warning that joblessness will have to rise to get inflation under control.

He also favours more aggressive Fed action.

"If I had to choose between 100 basis points in September and 50 basis points, I would choose a 100 basis points move to reinforce credibility," Summers said in a recent tweet.

AFP



Workers produce deoxidising agents at a factory in Nanjing in China's eastern Jiangsu province on Friday (AFP)

China's industry output beats expectations

Beijing, China - China's factory output and retail sales beat expectations in August, new data showed, despite the economy being hammered by Covid-related curbs, heatwave and a deepening property market slump.

The world's second-largest economy saw a bounce in business activity, with retail sales up by 5.4 per cent year-on-year in August, according to official data. That was well above the 3.2 per cent growth forecast by Bloomberg analysts.

Industrial production also rose by 4.2 per cent in August from a year earlier – beating the 3.8 per cent increase expected by analysts – despite power outages in major production hubs due to heatwaves.

"The economy held out against multiple unexpected headwinds in August and showed a positive recovery with

the help of more additional supportive policies," the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said in a statement.

China is the only major economy persisting with a zero-Covid strategy to stamp out virus clusters as they emerge, but swift and harsh lockdowns associated with that approach have sapped economic activity.

The central bank slashed key interest rates last month in a bid to kick-start the country's stuttering economic recovery.

Fixed-asset investment rose by 5.8 per cent in the January-August period as the government poured billions of dollars into building new railways and industrial parks, NBS data showed.

The unemployment rate declined to 5.3 per cent in August from 5.4 per cent in the previous month.

AFP



Russia's Rosneft sees 13% rise in profit

Moscow, Russia - Russian energy giant Rosneft said its half-year net profit rose 13.1 per cent despite "adverse external factors" amid the Russian offensive in Ukraine.

The Russian energy giant has been hit by Western sanctions over Ukraine, which impeded its global financing and trading.

But its net profit still rose to 432bn rubles (US\$7.2bn) following an increase in crude oil prices due to rising global demand and supply constraints brought about by the Russian operation in Ukraine.

The company's revenues increased by 32.5 per cent, reaching 5.17tn rubles (US\$86.7bn).

In a statement, Rosneft chief executive Igor Sechin hailed "stable results" despite the "unprecedented pressure of adverse external factors and unlawful sanctions."

The company's statement said that "significant increase in the cost of logistics, rise in railroad transportation tariffs (...) as well as higher electricity costs" had a negative impact on the company.

So did the "unprecedented increase of the Bank of Russia's key rate" that was as high as 20 per cent and has now gone down to eight per cent.

Having processed 45.8mn tonnes of oil this semester, Ros-

neft said its debt decreased by 12 per cent from the beginning of the year. It also announced the "discovery of two new deposits with recoverable crude oil reserves of 101.4mn tonnes" in the area of the gigantic project "Vostok Oil" in the region of Krasnoyarsk, Siberia.

The construction of the Vostok Oil project facilities, which started in 2021, "continues as planned" the statement added.

The Russian energy giant previously announced it expected to start hydrocarbon production at the Vostok project in 2024, where it is aiming to produce up to 100mn tonnes per year by the beginning of the next decade.

The beginning of 2022 was not smooth sailing for Rosneft.

After the beginning of the offensive UK energy company BP exited its 20 per cent shareholding in Rosneft.

In May, former German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, who was chairman of the board of the company since 2017, stepped down from his position after a flurry of criticism in Germany.

He remains head of the shareholder committee at the Nord Stream AG, which operates the controversial Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline from Russia to Germany, which has been idle since the beginning of the month.

AFP

Russia says its payment system faces 'difficulties'

Moscow, Russia - Russia is encountering difficulties in the global expansion of its payment system set up to circumvent Ukraine-related sanctions, the head of the Russia's central bank said.

Visa and Mastercard suspended their operations in Russia following the Ukraine offensive, meaning foreign-issued cards no longer worked there and cards issued in Russia no longer worked abroad.

Bank transfers between Europe and Russia have become difficult too.

Russia began developing its own domestic payments system in 2015 following a first round of Western sanctions over Russia's annexation of Crimea the previous year.

It resulted in the creation of a card payment system called Mir, or World, but it fact the cards are not accepted around the



world.

Russian authorities would like the cards to be accepted abroad, which would ease the financial difficulties Russians now face while travelling.

"We are working with many regulators from many countries to extend the use of Mir bank cards but we are running into difficulties," Russian central bank chief Elvira Nabiullina said

Friday.

She added that foreign banks were reluctant to join the Mir system as they are "trying to minimise the risk of (potential) sanctions against them."

UK probes Microsoft's \$69bn bid for gaming giant

London, UK - Britain has announced an "in-depth investigation" into Microsoft's planned \$69bn takeover of US gaming giant Activision Blizzard, citing UK competition concerns.

US technology giant Microsoft in January announced a bid to create the world's third biggest gaming company by revenue, behind China's Tencent and Japan's Sony, by purchasing the owner of hit games "Candy Crush" and "Call Of Duty".

The proposed deal, already controversial owing to allegations of sexual harassment against women at Activision, now faces a probe by Britain's Competition and Markets Authority.

"The CMA has referred the anticipated acquisition by Mi-



crosoft Corporation of Activision Blizzard for an in-depth investigation," a statement said.

It added that the "merger may be expected to result in a substantial lessening of competition

within a market or markets in the United Kingdom".

Activision Blizzard's portfolio

also includes the popular game "World Of Warcraft".

Sorcha O'Carroll, senior director of mergers at the CMA, previously expressed concern that Microsoft could use its control over Call Of Duty and World Of Warcraft "to harm rivals, including recent and future rivals in multi-game subscription services and cloud gaming".

Sony has expressed concerns that Call of Duty might no longer be accessible on its PlayStation console.

Microsoft dismissed such a suggestion, however, saying in a statement Thursday that "it makes zero business sense... to remove Call of Duty from PlayStation given its market leading console position".

AFP

OOA to hold programme for promotion of e-sports



The Oman Olympic Academy (OOA) is holding a three-day programme from Tuesday to spread awareness about e-sports in Oman. To be held in cooperation with the Oman E-Sports Committee, the 'E-Sports, Future Sports' course aims to spread cultural awareness about e-sports, which generated a lot of interest among people during the past few years.

E-sports is one of the official sporting events recognised in many countries, said a press release.

This week's event aims to introduce the participants in the e-games industry and the awareness of the psychological factors associated with it and the risks and how to deal with it. All together, 27 candidates from the OOA, other federations, sports committees, club employees, those interested in e-sports and their practitioners are attending the programme, the release said.

Asma al Yahya, a member of the Oman E-Sports Committee and a member of the Women's Committee of the Arab Federation for E-Sports, is also attending the event.

The course includes many theoretical axes and practical episodes, where the history of electronic sports, the concept of electronic sports, classification of games and e-Sports, its importance, and the psychological factor in electronic sports, in addition to reviewing the experience of one of the players in e-sports.

Bugatti Sur Mesure offers automotive piece of art



The Chiron is the fastest, most powerful, and exclusive production super sports car in the history of Bugatti. Arguably, each car is one-of-a-kind, built to a level of customisation that reflects the character of its owner. But the Sur Mesure programme takes that one step further to deliver an entirely unique automotive piece of art with every car.

Bugatti recently revealed three exclusive custom Chiron Sure Mesure finishes delivered to customers in the UAE, two Chiron Super Sports and one Chiron Pur Sport. As the ultimate Grand Tourer, the Chiron Super Sport is designed for effortless cross-continental journeys in opulent luxury, while remaining perfectly composed at its top speed of 440 km per hour thanks to its unique longtail silhouette.

All three Chirons have custom paintwork, with the Chiron Pur Sport and one of the Super Sports featuring the intricate hand painted 'Vagues de Lumière' effect. Meaning 'waves of light', the base colour is painted with another shade to mimic how light naturally reflects off the sweeping curves of the car.

MG presents Abdo Feghali in Red Bull Car Drift in Amman

MG Motor and legendary driver, Abdo Feghali, teamed up to showcase the abilities of the new MG GT at the 11th Red Bull Car Drift in Amman, the capital of Jordan.



The sporty MG GT was the focal point of a special, adrenaline-fuelled demonstration, thanks to a partnership between Red Bull and the British-born brand's retail partner in the country, MESC.

The demonstration combined Feghali's renowned experience and skill with the impressive performance of the sporty MG GT, which remarkably incorporated only minimal tuning to the hand-brake and exhaust. Beneath the car's sporty exterior, the 1.5T MG GT is equipped with a highly-efficient four-cylinder turbocharged engine that delivers maximum horsepower of 173 PS and up to 250 N.m of torque. The tournament featured more than 20 participants who put their drifting skills to the test on the most challenging and exciting of routes in the Showground at Airport Road in Amman. Driver Anas El Helo was crowned champion of the Red Bull Car Park Drift tournament.

ESO, Omran with Yiti clear over 1.5 tonnes of marine debris from Muscat beaches

The Sustainable City - Yiti, alongside Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group), Diamond Developers, and the Environment Society of Oman (ESO), organised a community cleanup campaign along Al Hail beach, to mark World Cleanup Day, on Saturday.

More than 1.5 tonnes of marine litter was removed from the beaches, said a press release.

The cleanup saw an astonishing attendance from the Omani community, with more than 125 volunteers rallying to clear trash from one of Oman's most popular beaches. As a result, millions of plastic and micro-plastic particles could be prevented from entering the marine ecosystem and thereby made a major contribution towards the preservation of the environment and wildlife bionetwork, the statement added.

Yiti Tourism Development Company's Development Director Ammar al Kharusi said, "Protecting the environment and preserving its natural resources and biodiversity are among the strategic priorities of the Sustainable City - Yiti. The 1mn square meters project is designed to preserve natural resources and provide residents with a sustainable lifestyle."

Kharusi praised the efforts of the ESO, saying: "We hope that such campaigns can contribute to raising awareness about the importance of maintaining a clean environment, and properly reducing waste production and disposal, as well as instilling a culture of volunteerism among youth."

ESO Director Suaad al Harthi said, "It has been a pleasure to collaborate with The Sustainable City - Yiti to bring this campaign to life. The response from the community was inspiring and serves as a reminder to us all of our shared responsibility for the conservation of our environment."

"On the occasion of World Cleanup Day however, we also remind the community that where there is no waste, there is no need for cleanups! There are many steps we can take to reduce the amount of waste we produce and to dispose of the waste we do create responsibly. Oman is blessed with one of the most stunning coastlines in the region and we hope that this beach cleanup inspires the community to continue maintaining its natural resources."



Protecting the environment and preserving its natural resources and biodiversity are among the strategic priorities of the Sustainable City - Yiti. Protecting the environment and preserving its natural resources and biodiversity are among the strategic priorities of the Sustainable City - Yiti

AMMAR AL KHARUSI

sponsibly. Oman is blessed with one of the most stunning coastlines in the region and we hope that this beach cleanup inspires the community to continue maintaining its natural resources."

The campaign was organised in commemoration of World Cleanup Day, an annual global social action programme aimed at combatting the global waste problem, whilst also raising awareness about the dangers of

waste to both human and environmental health.

Additionally, protecting the environment and conserving Oman's rich biodiversity are among the key objectives of The Sustainable City - Yiti, which aligns with Oman Vision 2040. The project, which is a partnership between Omran Group and Diamond Developers, will be the largest and most sustainable operational sustainable

community in the region. It is designed to deliver measurable outcomes across all the three pillars of sustainability: Social, environmental, and economic, bringing forward the UN emission reduction targets for 2050.

Waste management will also be a key priority within the community, with sufficient in-built recycling and disposable systems designed to keep waste out of landfill and the environment.

As part of their mission to help conserve Oman's natural heritage, ESO undertakes numerous beach and underwater clean ups each year.

To date in 2022, ESO, with the support of over two hundred volunteers, has cleared more than 72 tonnes of marine debris from beaches and coral reefs. "These events would not have been possible without the help of the community. To do your part, sign up to become an ESO member at www.eso.org.om," ESO said.

Al Buraimi Industrial City honours students for academic performance

Al Buraimi Industrial City, which falls under the umbrella of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates 'Madayni', organised a ceremony to honour students for their outstanding academic performance in Al Buraimi governorate under the auspices of His Excellency Sheikh Dr Hilal bin Ali al Habsi, Wali of Al Buraimi.

The event comes in line with Al Buraimi Industrial City's annual plan to promote and enhance the concept of social responsibility in cooperation with the companies and factories based at the industrial city.

The ceremony also marked the end of a five-day training programme on investor service excellence to equip the participants with key investor and customer service skills, and introduce them to effective communication skills, quality standards of investor service, and customer types.



The programme highlighted several areas including skills of understanding and addressing investor and client needs, negotiation skills, teamwork motivation, time and pressure management, among other topics.

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ahli islamic opens investment avenues

With an expected return rate of up to 3.54 per cent per annum, ahli islamic is opening investment avenues for depositors with its exclusive Al Namaa Savings Account, which is designed and structured to inspire a culture of saving among its patrons and potential customers.

Through the Mudaraba based Savings Account, depositors can enjoy high profits calculated and paid on a monthly basis.

As per the set protocol, the depositor (Rab-ul-Mal), investing in Al Namaa Savings Account, authorises the Bank (Mudarib) to invest his/her funds into Sharia'a-compliant high net worth business avenues.

The bank has added ease and convenience to the account and made it feasible for customers with varying financial capabilities by incorporating multiple deposit tiers that caters to the different customer segments. At the same time, the account assures just weightages that are in sync with the balance maintained in the account.

Highlighting the features of the account and the benefits accruing from the deposits, Noora Sabah Sultan - AGM, Head of Retail, ahli islamic, said, "The main premise behind Al Namaa is to earn highest possible profits on every riyal invested with the bank. We want our customers to



understand the potentials of their deposits to earn them profits that are commensurate with their investments.

"Our investment tiers are weightage-based and the same is distributed on a monthly basis, with payment assured on average balance maintained."

Yousuf al Rawahi, DGM and Head of ahli islamic, said, "This

account is, literally, a call for investors to gain extra mileage with their deposits. We have, through our various products and services, encouraged our customers to save and prosper, both personally and professionally.

"With Al Namaa Savings Account, we are taking that initiative a step further by offering high profit generating deposit product. While our loyal patrons are buoyed by the prospect of enhancing their investments by simply depositing their incomes, we would also like to urge all new customers to recognise the potential of this account to grow their savings without any hassles."

Bank Muscat holds draws to pick winners for Qatar event

Bank Muscat conducted an exciting live draw at its Head Office recently to choose the winners of the Hospitality Packages to FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, courtesy of Visa.

Attended by members of the bank's management team, bank customers and media personnel, the special draw saw 51 Hospitality Packages of two persons each being given away to the lucky winners. The packages will enable 102 people in total to visit and enjoy select matches at the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, courtesy of Visa. To add further excitement, the ceremony was broadcast live to the public through Bank Muscat's social networking sites. This announcement of winners is part of the biggest campaign ever in the Sultanate of Oman to give customers an opportunity to participate in the FIFA World Cup in Qatar in November.



Alshaya Group marks World Cleanup Day with drive

As part of World Cleanup Day, Alshaya offices across the region organised a series of campaigns and activities aimed at improving marine habitats and keeping the coastlines free of trash and waste.

The regional initiative attracted volunteers who championed sustainability by cleaning up the beaches and raising awareness on the damaging impact of plastic pollution. The drive resulted in over 8,000kg of solid waste being collected, sorted and removed from the beaches.

Elaborating on the drive, Seneca Cottom, Head of Sustainability Alshaya Group said, "We are happy to be part of this commendable activity, doing our bit for the environment. We are amazed at the overwhelming response and participation from our colleagues across the region."



Indian expats celebrate Onam with fervour

Residents of Hatat complex in Muscat celebrated the festival of Onam - the harvest festival of the southern Indian state of Kerala.

This celebration gave the multicultural Indian community a unique immersive experience of the rich tradition of Kerala, a press statement said. The celebration started with a magnificent and highly resonating presentation of Chenda melam, followed by the traditional dance Pulikali (leopard/tiger dance).

Onam is celebrated to honour the home-coming of King Mahabali and festivities are arranged to welcome Mahabali. King Mahabali is considered to be the noblest and most prosperous ruler, who transformed his kingdom into a heavenly place.

Hatat residents were delighted to see Mahabali in Oman and welcomed him with a beautiful pookalam (floral rangoli) and other indigenous elements associated with the festival which took everyone back to the 'God's Own Country' and made them reminiscence their childhood memories. Enthusiastic participation of people in traditional games such as vadamvali (tug of war) and presentation of traditional songs and dance forms, followed by Onam Sadya.

Oman's Sport Makers roped in for first Arab Football Corporate Cup



The first Arab corporate football will be played between the International Socca Federation and two of its members, including one from Oman in 2023.

According to a press statement, an agreement was signed in the Hungarian capital of Budapest, which coincided with the organisation of the third edition of the Socca World Cup 2022.

As per the agreement, the first Arab Football Corporate Cup will be played in Morocco in early next year.

Sport Makers from the Sultanate of Oman and the 2 Brothers Group from the Kingdom of Morocco have signed the agreement have been assigned the task of supervising and organising the competition, the statement added.

International Socca Federation's founder and president David Leone signed the agreement with the 2 Brothers Group CEO Imad Mahassine and the Sports Makers founder and CEO Waleed al Obaidani, in the presence of Tom Nash, Tournament Director for the ISF.

The International Socca Federation lauded Oman's Sport Makers and the 2 Brothers Group from Morocco for their 'prominent role' in the development of sports competitions for the employees of companies in both countries and their outstanding contribution to the success of the different editions of the world cup organised by the International Socca Federation since 2018.

Sport Makers is considered as one of the most prominent members representing their countries from the Middle East in the International Socca Federation, since its establishment in 2017 and its accession as a representative member of Oman in the Socca Federation in 2018, the statement added.

At the GCC level, Sport Makers is one of the leading companies in activating corporate and amateur sports in Oman and in the other GCC countries.

'It has a proven track record in managing and organising local tournaments and international participations representing the Sultanate of Oman in corporate and amateur world championships,' the statement pointed out.

Sports Makers also have a long-term partnership with a number of government and private agencies in Oman and in the Middle East. It is credited with

taking precedence in changing the culture of sports competitions for corporate employees and amateur teams and introducing them to international competitions representing the sultanate since 2016.

The 2 Brothers Group is the leading company in creating and organising corporate events in the Kingdom of Morocco. Over the course of more than ten years since its establishment, the group has succeeded in making a leap in the quality and volume of major corporate sporting events in Morocco, by involving more than 18,000 participants, representing more than 430 companies - national and multinational - in various sports competitions.

The 2 Brothers Group is now recognised as the leading company in the management and execution of corporate sporting events in Morocco and Africa, and one of the most prominent players in this field in the Arab world.

The International Socca Federation aims to sign the agreement with the 2 Brothers Group and Sport Makers to create sports competitions with a high level of organisation for employees of companies operating in the region.

Sport Makers is considered as one of the most prominent members representing their countries from the Middle East in the International Socca Federation, since its establishment in 2017

Ooredoo ties up with Starlink to expand ICT capabilities in Oman

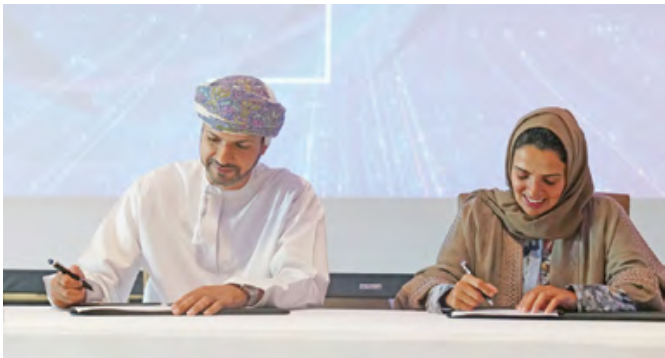
Ooredoo has signed a strategic partnership with Starlink for the distribution of co-branded ICT solutions across Oman, a press release said.

Under the partnership, both parties will collaborate to provide a host of smart technology solutions including connectivity, hardware, software, implementation, and managed services to B2B customers in the sultanate, a press statement said.

It's the latest in a series of partnerships Ooredoo has entered into, as it seeks to harness technological innovation and transform businesses, while contributing to Oman's digital development.

"In line with our strategy, we have been investing heavily to position Ooredoo as a prominent ICT player and building resilience across people, process and technology," said Sultan Ahmed al Wahaibi, Chief Business and Wholesale Officer at Ooredoo.

"By partnering with Starlink,



we are leveraging each other's vast experience across many areas of expertise. Together, we are offering world-class solutions and services that have the potential to play an integral role in enabling organisations - of whatever size and sector - to drive their digital transformation and unlock new competencies and value propositions, all with the excellent customer experience they have come to expect from Ooredoo."

Starlink CEO Munera al Dosari said, "As the latest in an

extensive list of partnerships that extends across the region, our collaboration with Ooredoo represents the beginning of a strategic alignment that has the potential to open new doors for Oman's tech industry.

"With our ICT expertise and Ooredoo's leadership in the communications sector, we will be able to deliver innovative and value-added solutions that both empower customers to fulfil their business objectives and accelerate their digital transformation."

Starlink is part of the Ooredoo Group of companies established back in 2006. Beginning as the first retailer for mobile and accessories, they have branched out to become one of the largest outsource-managed services providers in multiple areas such as IT, installations, maintenance and contact centres.

As a data experience leader, Ooredoo continues to offer businesses smart solutions to enhance their IT infrastructure, while keeping them connected, working and engaged every day. Capitalising on its seamless network and customer-centric approach, its innovative products include cloud services, video conferencing, email collaboration suite, cloud storage and contact centre solutions.

Serving customers across a multitude of economic sectors, the company's tailored solutions are shaped to transform businesses of all sizes to help them achieve growth and contribute to Oman's development.



TRA chief visits Huawei regional ICT training centre in Omantel

His Excellency Omar bin Hamdan al Ismaili, the CEO of Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA) visited Huawei Regional ICT Training Centre that was established last year in collaboration with Omantel.

During the official visit, TRA and Huawei reiterated commitment to develop local talents and explored ways of collaboration to support achieving Oman's digital transformation and Oman Vision 2040, in which building a sustainable knowledge-based economy is a key pillar.

The official visit of H E Ismaili coincides with one week training being conducted at the center for Huawei locally hired experts coming from all Middle East region counties.

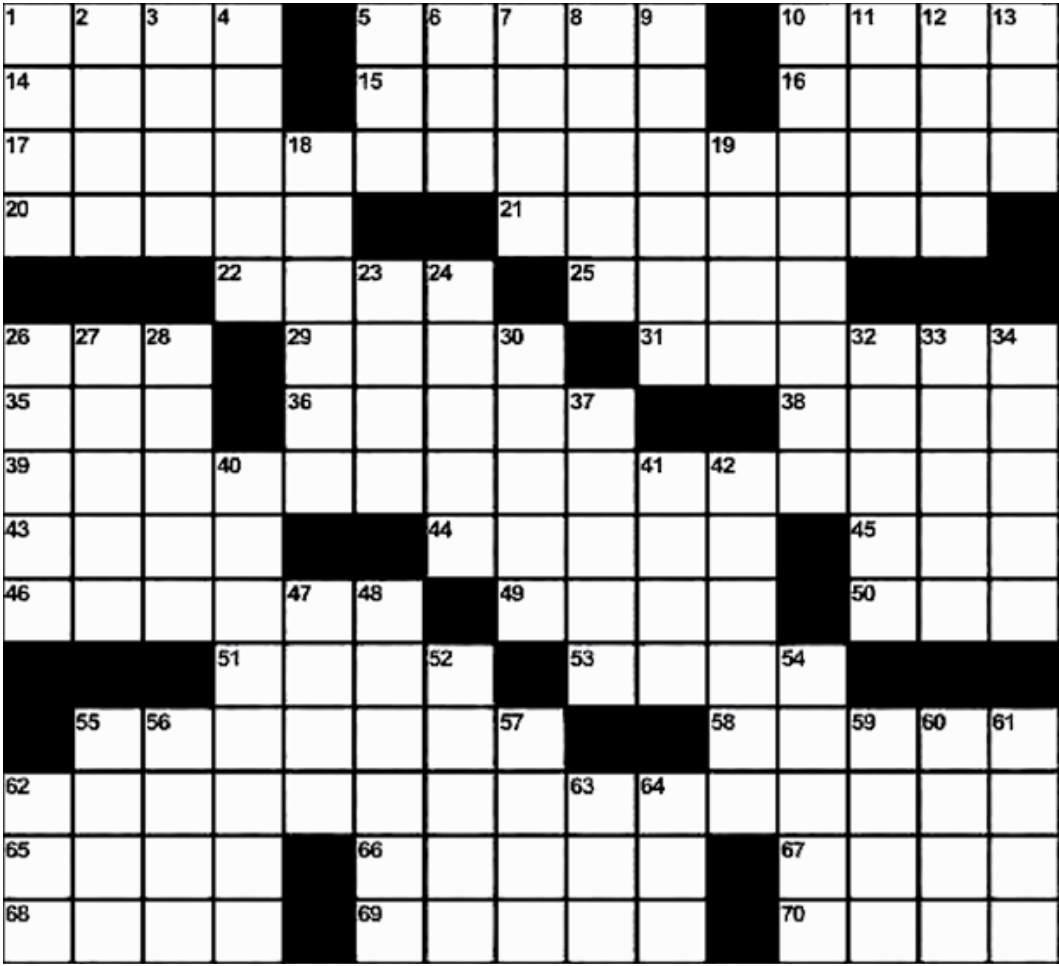
During the visit, the TRA chief had a tour in the various facilities of the training centre and was introduced by Huawei Oman CEO Chen Jianhan to the ICT training programmes portfolio that the centre provides for students, job seekers, local enterprise customers, and partners with the aim to motivate innovation, advance new technologies deployment for the benefit of all sectors and industries, and support talent development across Oman and the wider Middle East and Africa region.

The Huawei Regional ICT training centre leverages various

facilities including the 5G exhibition hall, Huawei HQ online exhibition hall and the Huawei ICT academy in Oman to provide ICT training services not only to local enterprise customers and talents but also to partners, customers and staff in the Middle East region and Africa.

"As Oman's official telecommunications authority, we take pride in initiatives that help advance our country's capabilities in the ICT domain. We are glad to collaborate with Huawei, and support their efforts in developing skillful ICT talents capable of leading the future as we continue to support Oman's digital transformation," H E Ismaili said.

DAILY CROSSWORD



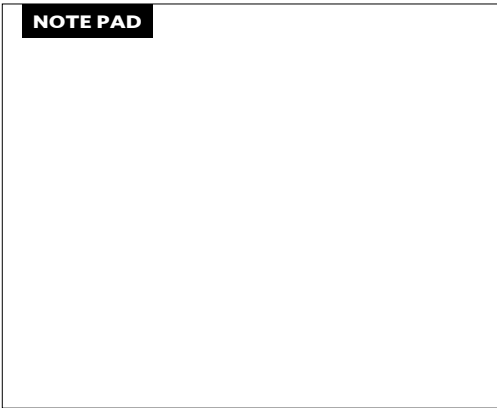
ACROSS

- 1) Knocks over, so to speak
- 5) Genesis tower locale
- 10) Famous Bear?
- 14) Hop or jump alternative
- 15) Really silly
- 16) In the same place, in footnotes (Abbr.)
- 17) Four grape things
- 20) Peter, in Pamplona
- 21) Voiced bits of speech
- 22) "... obliged!"
- 25) Indian exercise method
- 26) '50s crop spray
- 29) Rubber cement, e.g.
- 31) Alcoves
- 35) Always, poetically
- 36) Dromedary features
- 38) Lake, in Scotland
- 39) Three grape things
- 43) Black cat, to some
- 44) Biscuit at teatime
- 45) Suffix for "arbor" or "ether"
- 46) Use mouthwash

- 49) Air polluter
 - 50) Hog heaven, to a hog
 - 51) Litter castoff, often
 - 53) "Do you want to hear a secret?"
 - 55) Nutritional necessity
 - 58) "File not found," for example
 - 62) Three grape things
 - 65) Brewer's equipment
 - 66) Doom's partner
 - 67) Plate scrapings
 - 68) Chinese nanny
 - 69) "Fiddler on the Roof" role
 - 70) Aphid, to a fruit tree
- DOWN**
- 1) Answer an invitation
 - 2) "The Grapes of Wrath" extra
 - 3) Tough situation
 - 4) Whale type
 - 5) Life story, in brief
 - 6) "Go on"
 - 7) Utters, like a sheep
 - 8) "Have a good time!"
 - 9) Use for support
 - 10) Acme
 - 11) Be adjacent to

- 12) Cherry or peach seeds
- 13) TV interruptions
- 18) Looked high and low for
- 19) Gift-bearing kings
- 23) _-Napoca, Romania
- 24) Organic component of soil
- 26) Clear, as a windshield
- 27) Stuffed beef casing
- 28) More authentic
- 30) Grand-scale films
- 32) Golf course features
- 33) Brilliant display
- 34) Coyle
- 37) Ice cream unit
- 40) Painful toenail, sometimes
- 41) "The Dukes of Hazard" spin-off
- 42) High-flying elite
- 47) Sitar, e.g.
- 48) Pep
- 52) Book-jacket info
- 54) Group of Boy Scouts
- 55) Brit's baby buggy
- 56) Santa _ Calif.
- 57) "High" time
- 59) Undercooked, as

- meat
- 60) _ for (picks)
- 61) Take a breather
- 62) _ few rounds (box)
- 63) Clever remark
- 64) "Do no harm" org.



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

If your patience with someone who's heavy on promises but light on delivery is wearing thin, today is the day to have a little heart-to-heart talk with this person. It's not quite time for an ultimatum, but it is definitely time to tell this person to get real. The difficulty of your discussion will be in direct proportion to the relationship's closeness, so keep this in mind. Try not to mix business with friendship or both could suffer in the long run.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

A short, casual conversation could evolve into a lengthy discussion that goes around in circles today, but you and your curious mind will love every minute of it. Dig into some complex, multifarious issues and explore their many facets and subtle nuances. No two people experience the same reality, and when two people try to explain their realities to each other, the resulting conversation can be quite fascinating. Listen carefully. You might hear something that blows your mind.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You may think that there is a little too much on your plate right now, but the Universe is confident that you can handle it all without any problem. Some recent events have dented your self-esteem a little bit, but today offers you a wonderful opportunity to smooth out those dents and get yourself feeling shiny and new again. All you have to do is take any opportunity you're given, and you'll plow through everything on your to-do list one item at a time.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

A new possession is bringing up some weird old feelings, and you are starting to wonder why such significance is put on material goods. Give yourself time to integrate this new item into your life, and don't worry if it just doesn't feel right yet. You will have to adapt, and it might not be comfortable at first, but it will teach you a valuable lesson. If you can deal with some short-term discomfort now, you will enjoy a huge improvement in your standard of living later.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

When was the last time you experienced something that was truly foreign to you? Today, explore an aspect of an unfamiliar religion or culture. You should welcome with open arms the new ideas you find today. Some ideas will be too confusing to pay attention to, but quite a few will be intriguing enough to warrant a greater portion of your time in the future. And a couple of them could change your life. Today is a day to make plans and aim high.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Today, pattern your behavior after some of the children in your life, and let go of some of your self-conscious assumptions about how you "should" act. This doesn't mean you need to be immature. No food fights or temper tantrums! Rather, try to let go of a few hang-ups for good. It's time you realized that life is a crazy ride, and you want to make sure that you have at least a few minutes of playtime each day. Being productive isn't as important today.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You know that saying about good fences making good neighbors? It will ring very true to you today, when the more distance you keep between yourself and a friend the likelier it is that you two will remain friends. Your lives are becoming a bit too intertwined, and a bit of separation will do you both good. Disregard some "secrets" you've recently been told. You should not assume that you've heard the truth. Remove yourself from an imbroglio that's just beginning. Stay neutral.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

When someone starts a heavy conversation today, it might be an attempt to get closer to you. Don't shut down or be afraid to share, but don't let yourself be forced to say more than you want to either. Many new people could soon be showing up in your life, and their attention might surprise you. Get ready for big demands on your time from many different directions. Think about the type of energy you want in your life and then cozy up to the people who can give it to you.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Someone who thinks that stories from their past apply to your life needs a reality check. This person truly wants to help you, so keep that in mind when you explain that you're not interested in listening to any more tactless reminiscing or unsuitable advice. Some people just aren't able to see that their "insight" isn't helping or is, in fact, hurting. (Remember this the next time you want to use stories from your personal history as a way to give someone else guidance!)



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You've got the sweet disposition that makes any medicine palatable right now, so don't be afraid to push for something you want. Your charm combined with genuine enthusiasm will encourage other people to be very receptive to your ideas. It looks as though something that you have been wanting to take off will finally get some lift today. Powerful movers and shakers are on board, and you could be looking at a bona fide success very soon!



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Your flexibility will help you win a fun battle today. In a contest to see who is willing to do more, you will easily come out on top. The way you always make things work out perfectly, even in very difficult conditions, is something that many powerful people admire in you. Someone in particular is trying to emulate you (perhaps a little too closely for your comfort), but keep in mind that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

When something is troubling you, it can be helpful to try to live in an illusion, to keep yourself so distracted that you don't have to deal with unpleasant thoughts. This is an acceptable short-term solution, but it's a very bad long-term strategy. Today, you need to face the reality of where you are and what has been going on. Reality is never as awful as you fear. Plus, you can't get control of your life if you don't see it accurately.

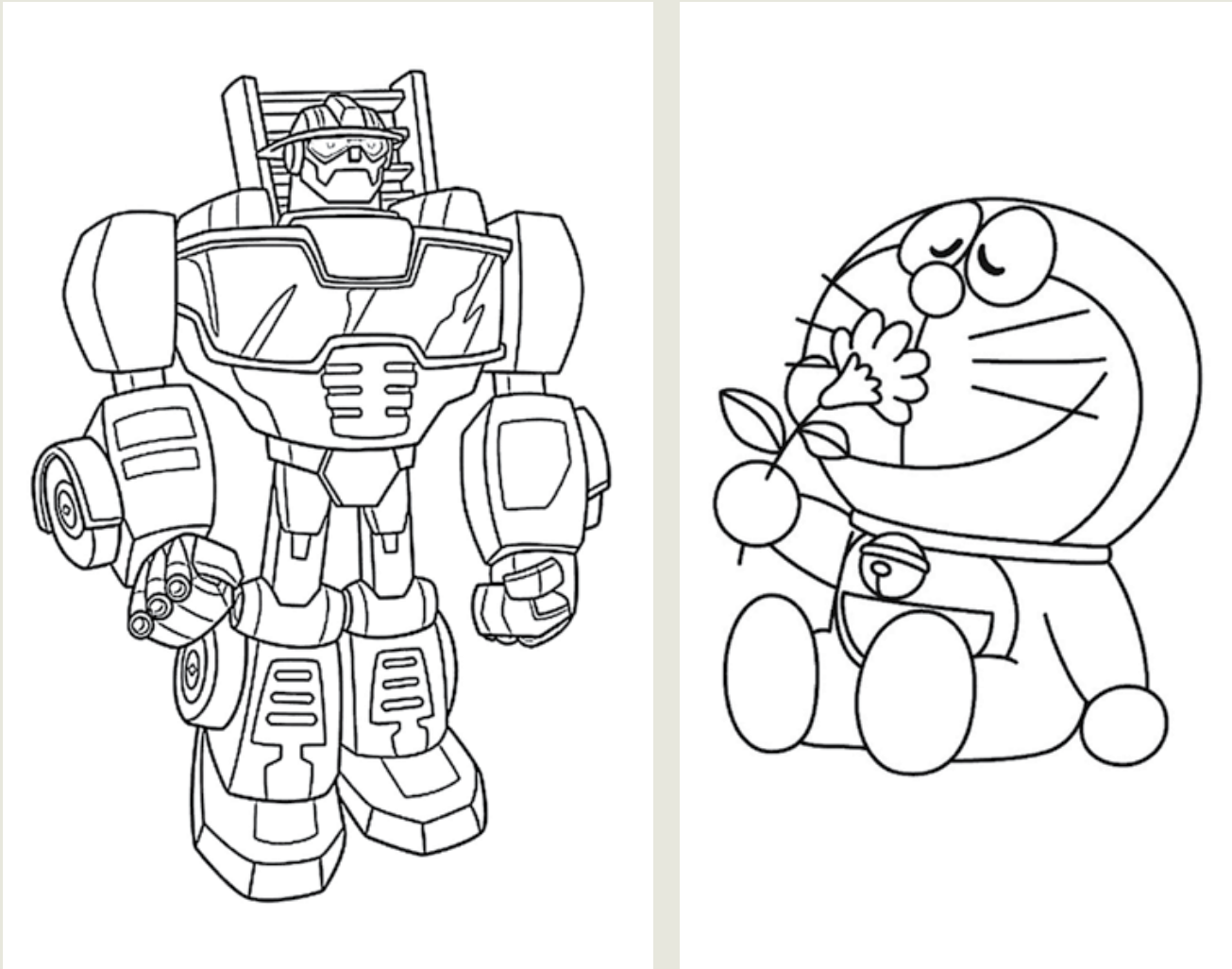


TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- 01. Which of these are creatures from Greek mythology that had the head and body of a woman and the wings and feet of a bird?**
- A. Lutenists
 - B. Pianists
 - C. Trumpeters
 - D. Harpies
- 02. Where would you hear the word "chukka" used?**
- A. In a chicken coop
 - B. At the door of a night club
 - C. To describe someone who has had too much to drink
 - D. At a polo match
- 03. Which author, poet, playwright, actor, Shintoist and nationalist committed seppuku in 1970 after declaring "Long live the Emperor"?**
- A. Yukio Mishima
 - B. George Takei
 - C. Noriyuki "Pat" Morita
 - D. Shūji Terayama

Answers: 1.D 2.D 3.A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

Y	U	L	S
S	S	T	O
S	W	H	A
U	B	P	N

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

UN condemns ban on Afghan girls' education

The agency urged Taliban to reopen high schools for girls, and termed the ban ‘tragic and shameful’

Kabul, Afghanistan - The United Nations urged the Taliban on Sunday to reopen high schools for girls across Afghanistan, condemning the ban that began exactly a year ago as ‘tragic and shameful’.

Weeks after the hardline Islamists seized power in August last year, they reopened high schools for boys on September 18 but banned secondary school-girls from attending classes.

Months later on March 23, the education ministry opened secondary schools for girls, but within hours the Taliban leadership ordered them shut again.

Since then, more than a million teenage girls have been deprived of education across the country, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said.

“This is a tragic, shameful, and entirely avoidable anniversary,” Markus Potzel, the acting head of UNAMA, said in a statement.

“It is profoundly damaging to a generation of girls and to the future of Afghanistan itself,” he said, adding the ban had no parallel in the world. UN chief Antonio Guterres urged the Taliban to



Afghan burqa-clad women take an entrance test at Mamon Tahiri institute in Kandahar last week (AFP)

revoke the ban.

“A year of lost knowledge and opportunity that they will never get back,” Guterres said on Twitter. “Girls belong in school. The Taliban must let them back in.”

Several Taliban officials say the ban is only temporary, but

they have also wheeled out a litany of excuses for the closures - from a lack of funds to time needed to remodel the syllabus along Islamic lines.

Earlier this month, the education minister, Noorullah Munir, was quoted by local media as

saying it was a cultural issue, as many rural people did not want their teenage daughters to attend school.

‘Year of disappointment’

Grade 12 student, Kawsar, who

gave a fictitious name to protect her identity, said she was frustrated that her high school has been shut for a year now.

“It’s been a dark year, a year full of stress and disappointment,” she said.

“It’s our primary right to have

an education. The society needs female doctors and teachers, only boys cannot meet all needs of the society.”

Many conservative Afghan clerics within the Taliban are sceptical of modern education.

Last month, the authorities said they were increasing compulsory religious classes in government universities, though no subjects from the current cur-

riculum would be dropped. Reacting to the education minister’s comments in local media, Kainat, a school teacher, said parents and families across Afghanistan were keen to educate their daughters.

“They want their girls to achieve what they aim, every family wants their kids, including girls, to serve the nation,” said Kainat, who also gave a fictitious name. “It’s wrong to say that people in Afghanistan do not want their girls to be educated.”

After seizing power on August 15 last year during the chaotic withdrawal of foreign forces, the Taliban promised a softer version of their harsh Islamist regime in Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001.

But within days, they began imposing severe restrictions on girls and women to comply with their austere vision of Islam - effectively squeezing them out of public life.

Apart from closing high schools for girls, the Taliban have barred women from many government jobs and also ordered them to cover up in public, preferably with an all-encompassing burqa.

Some high schools for girls have remained open in provinces away from the central power bases of Kabul and Kandahar because of pressure from families and tribal leaders.

AFP

It (education ban) is profoundly damaging to a generation of girls and to the future of Afghanistan itself

MARKUS POTZEL



Armenia’s Head of the Parliament Alen Simonyan (right) speaks with US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in Yerevan on Sunday (AFP)

Pelosi condemns ‘illegal’ Azerbaijan attack on Armenia

Yerevan, Armenia - US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on Sunday condemned what she described as an ‘illegal’ attack by Azerbaijan on Armenia that sparked the worst fighting since their 2020 war.

Baku and Yerevan have accused each other of initiating the border clashes on Tuesday, which claimed the lives of more than 200 people.

“We strongly condemn those attacks - on behalf of Congress - which threaten (the) prospects of the much-needed peace agreement,” Pelosi told a news conference in Yerevan.

“Armenia has particular importance to us because of the focus on security following an illegal and deadly attack by Azerbaijan on the Armenian territory.”

Pelosi said the attack was an ‘assault on (the) sovereignty of Armenia’.

Hostilities between the Caucasus arch foes ended overnight on Thursday thanks to mediation by the United States, Armenian parliament speaker Alen Simonyan said.

Earlier attempts by Russia to broker a truce failed.

“We are grateful to the United States for the agreement of the fragile ceasefire reached by their mediation,” he told a news conference alongside Pelosi.

US-Armenia rapprochement

Pelosi’s visit marks a growing closeness between Washington and Yerevan where frustration is brewing over the lack of support from Armenia’s traditional ally Moscow which is distracted by

its nearly seven-month war in Ukraine. Russia - which has a treaty obligation to defend Armenia in the event of foreign invasion, but which also has close ties with Baku - did not rush to help Yerevan despite a formal demand for military help.

“We asked for military help and our demand was not accepted. Obviously, we are not happy,” Armenia’s security council chairman, Artyom Grigoryan, said on Friday.

Pelosi, who arrived in Yerevan on Saturday for a three-day visit, is the highest-ranking US official to travel to Armenia since the tiny nation gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

On Sunday morning, a tearful Pelosi laid flowers at Yerevan’s hilltop memorial of the 1.5mn Armenians killed in the Ottoman Empire during World War I.

Armenia has long sought international recognition of the bloodletting as genocide - a claim fiercely rejected by Turkey but supported by many other countries. Pelosi said she was ‘proud’ to travel to Yerevan after US President Joe Biden formally acknowledged the Armenian genocide last year.

“It is the moral duty of all to never forget: an obligation that has taken on heightened urgency as atrocities are perpetrated around the globe, including by Russia against Ukraine,” Pelosi said on Saturday.

Armenia and Azerbaijan have fought two wars - in the 1990s and in 2020 - over the contested region of Nagorno-Karabakh an Armenian-populated enclave of Azerbaijan.

AFP

Eritrea calls up armed forces after Ethiopia clashes

Nairobi, Kenya - Eritrean authorities have called on their armed forces to mobilise in response to the renewed fighting in northern Ethiopia, the British and Canadian governments said.

The return to combat last month shattered a March truce and dashed hopes of peacefully resolving the nearly two-year war between Ethiopian authorities and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF).

Tigrayan authorities have since expressed readiness to hold talks led by the African Union, but the Ethiopian government has not responded publicly to the overtures, other than saying it remains ‘committed’ to the AU-led peace process.

Both sides have accused the other of firing first, and fighting has spread from around southern Tigray to other fronts farther north and west, while also drawing in Eritrean troops who backed Ethiopian forces during the early phase of the war.

In travel advisories published late on Friday, the Canadian and British governments warned their nationals in Eritrea to limit their movements following the mobilisation call.

“Local authorities have issued a general call for mobilisation of armed forces in response to the conflict in northern Ethiopia,” the Canadian government said.

“Additional security measures could be imposed on short notice across the country,” it

said.

The British advisory said the Eritrean announcement was made on Wednesday.

“You should be extra vigilant at this time,” the advisory said.

Eritrea, which is one of the world’s most closed states, has not commented on the reports.

Since the latest clashes broke out, Tigray has been bombed several times, with an official at Ayder Referral Hospital, the region’s biggest, saying that 16 people had died in air strikes.

AFP was not able to independently verify the claims. Access to northern Ethiopia is severely restricted and Tigray has been under a communications blackout for more than a year.

The TPLF ruled Ethiopia for decades before Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took office in 2018.

Abiy Ahmed’s government has declared the TPLF a terrorist group, and considers the group’s claim to authority in Tigray illegitimate.

Abiy - a Nobel Peace Prize laureate - sent troops into Tigray in November 2020 to topple the TPLF, in response to what he said were attacks on federal army camps.

But the TPLF recaptured most of Tigray in a surprise comeback in June 2021.

It then expanded into the neighbouring regions of Afar and Amhara before the fighting reached a stalemate.

AFP

3 killed in strikes on Syria regime outposts

Beirut, Lebanon - Turkish raids in northern Syria on Sunday struck outposts operated by the Syrian army and Kurdish-led forces, killing three, a Britain-based war monitor said.

The raids near the Kurdish-held border town of Kobane targeted positions of the Syrian army and the Syrian Democratic Forces, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The three casualties were wearing Syrian army uniform, according to the monitor.

Several other fighters were wounded, some in critical condition, the Observatory said.

AFP

Tunisian ‘hanging garden’ farms put to drought test

Djebba, Tunisia - High in the hills of northwestern Tunisia, farmers are tending thousands of fig trees with a unique system of terracing they hope will protect them from ever-harsher droughts.

But the ‘hanging gardens’ of Djebba El Olia have been put to the test this year as the North African country sweltered through its hottest July since the 1950s.

That has exacerbated a long drought that has left Tunisia’s reservoirs at just a third of their capacity.

The gardens are supplied with water from two springs high in the mountains.

The water is fed into the orchards by a network of canals that are opened and shut at set times, according to the size of the orchard.

Crucially, a wide variety of crops provides resilience and in-built pest control, unlike the monocultures that dominate modern agriculture and require huge inputs of pesticides to survive. “We grow figs but also other trees like quinces, olives and pomegranates, and beneath them we plant a wide range of greens and legumes,” said activist Farida Djebbi as insects buzzed between thyme, mint and rosemary flowers.

Djebbi pointed out some of the channels, which irrigate the



Farmers sort figs for export in the Tunisian town of Djebba, southwest of the capital Tunis (AFP)

area’s 300 hectares (740 acres) of steeply sloping orchards.

In 2020, the Food and Agriculture Organization recognised the system as an example of ‘innovative and resilient agroforestry’, adding it to an elite list of just 67 ‘Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems’.

The system ‘has been able to adapt and take advantage of an inhospitable topography’, the UN agency said.

“Through the use of natural geological formations and the

use of stones, local communities have been able to transform the landscape into fertile and productive lands.”

The FAO praised the diversity of local crop varieties grown by the area’s farmers, as well as their use of wild plants to repel potential pests and of livestock to ‘plough’ and fertilise the soil.

Growing up with figs

While nobody knows exactly how old the system is, human habitation in the area predates

the Carthaginian civilisation founded in the ninth century BC.

But while it may have endured for generations, the system is under threat as climate change kicks in.

Activist Tawfiq El Rajehi, 60, says the flow of water from springs irrigating the area has dropped off noticeably, particularly in the past two years.

Unlike in previous years, the surrounding peaks no longer get covered in snow each winter, and the leaves of many of the trees in

the lower part of Djebba are yellowing and sick.

Rajehi, a teacher at the local school, said climate change and low rainfall were compounded by another factor: farmers favouring cash crops.

“Some farmers have moved to growing more figs instead of less water-intensive crops because figs have become more profitable in recent years,” he said.

“We need to keep a good balance and variety of plants.”

Nevertheless, residents say they are proud of their heritage.

Farmer Lotfi El Zarmani, 52, said there was also growing demand for Djebba figs, which were given a protected designation of origin by the agriculture ministry in 2012 - still the only Tunisian fruit to enjoy the certification. “They’re getting a reputation, plus exporting them has become easier, plus they bring higher prices,” Zarmani said, adding that most exports go to the Gulf or neighbouring Libya.

Rajehi’s daughter, university student Chaïma, put on protective gloves as she set out to harvest the fruit from her family’s small lot. “Figs are more than a fruit for us. We’re born here among the fig trees and we grow up with them, we learn from a young age how to look after them,” the 20-year-old said.

AFP

‘Very dangerous’ Typhoon Nanmadol slams into Japan

Izumi, Japan - Typhoon Nanmadol made landfall in south-western Japan on Sunday night, as authorities urged millions of people to take shelter from the powerful storm's high winds and torrential rain.

The storm officially made landfall around 7pm local time (1000 GMT) as its eyewall arrived near Kagoshima city, the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) said.

It was packing gusts of up to 234km per hour and had already dumped up to 500 mm of rain in less than 24 hours on parts of southwestern Kyushu region.

At least 20,000 people were spending the night in shelters in Kyushu's Kagoshima and Miyazaki prefectures, where the JMA has issued a rare 'special warning' - an alert that is issued only when it forecasts conditions seen once in several decades.

National broadcaster NHK, which collates information from local authorities, said more than seven million people had been told to move to shelters or take refuge in sturdy buildings to ride out the storm.

The evacuation warnings are not mandatory, and authorities have at times struggled to convince people to move to shelters before extreme weather.

They sought to drive home their concerns about the weather system throughout the weekend.

"Please stay away from dangerous places, and please evacuate if you feel even the slightest



High waves from weather patterns brought about by Typhoon Nanmadol hit the coastline in Minamata, Kumamoto prefecture on Sunday (AFP)

hint of danger,' Prime Minister Fumio Kishida tweeted after convening a government meeting on the storm.

"It will be dangerous to evac-

Areas affected by the storm are seeing the sort of rain that has never been experienced before

HIRO KATO

uate at night. Please move to safety while it's still light outside."

The JMA has warned the re-

gion could face 'unprecedented' danger from high winds, storm surges and torrential rain and called the storm 'very dangerous.' "Areas affected by the storm are seeing the sort of rain that has never been experienced before," Hiro Kato, the head of the Weather Monitoring and Warning Centre, told reporters on Sunday.

"Especially in areas under landslide warnings, it is extremely probable that some kinds of landslides are already happening." He urged 'maximum caution even in areas where disasters do not usually happen.'

By Sunday evening, utility companies said nearly 200,000 homes across the region were

without power. Trains, flights and ferry runs were cancelled until the passage of the storm, and even some convenience stores - generally open all hours and considered a lifeline in disasters - were shutting their doors.

'Highest caution possible'

"The southern part of the Kyushu region may see the sort of violent wind, high waves and high tides that have never been experienced before," the JMA said on Sunday, urging residents to exercise 'the highest caution possible'. On the ground, an official in Kagoshima's Izumi city said conditions were deteriorating rapidly by Sunday afternoon.

"The wind has become extremely strong. Rain is falling hard too," he told AFP. "It's a total white-out outside. Visibility is almost zero."

In Kyushu's Minamata city, fishing boats tied up for safety bobbed on the waves, as spray from the sea and bands of rain sluiced the boardwalk.

The storm, which has weakened slightly as it approached land, is expected to turn north-east and sweep up across Japan's main island through early Wednesday. Japan is currently in typhoon season and faces around 20 such storms a year, routinely seeing heavy rains that cause landslides or flash floods.

AFP

Strong quake strikes eastern Taiwan; tsunami threat lifted

Taipei, Taiwan - A strong earthquake struck southeastern Taiwan, bringing at least three buildings down in a small town and tearing up roads - but forecasters said the threat of a regional tsunami had passed.

The quake hit at 2:44pm (0644 GMT) about 50km north of the city of Taitung at a depth of 10km, the United States Geological Survey said.

Its initial strength was given as magnitude 7.2 but the USGS later downgraded it to 6.9. Multiple aftershocks were also recorded.

Japan's Meteorological Agency and the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center issued tsunami advisories shortly after the quake, but both later said there was no longer a threat of high waves.

In the Taiwanese town of Yuli, a two-storey building that had a 7-Eleven convenience store on the ground floor collapsed. Video footage posted by Taiwan's Central News Agency showed panicked residents running towards the building, which sent up a thick cloud of dust as it caved in.

The Hualien fire department said four people who were trapped in the building were rescued.

Two other buildings in the town collapsed but no one was inside them, the department added. Two nearby bridges collapsed while two

others were damaged.

The Taiwan Railways Administration (TRA) said a train derailed at Dongli station in Hualien after it was hit by concrete from an overhead canopy that came loose during the quake.

Photos released by CNA showed the train's six carriages leaning at an angle in the station.

TRA said the 20 passengers on board were evacuated and no injuries were reported.

Shaking was also felt in the capital Taipei and the southwestern city of Kaohsiung, with residents posting videos of chandeliers and paintings swaying on social media.

Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen urged people to be vigilant for further aftershocks in the coming hours.

"Water and electricity supplies in some areas are also affected by the earthquake," she wrote on Facebook. "The related disaster relief work is in full swing."

Many expressed the kind of resilience that comes with living on an island that frequently experiences earthquakes.

In one video posted online, a man said he was trapped on a bridge where the road at either end had collapsed into a twisted mess of tarmac and concrete.

"This is troublesome," he could be heard saying. "The whole bridge is broken'.

AFP

27 people killed in China bus accident

Beijing, China - A bus crash killed 27 people in southwest China on Sunday, police said, the country's deadliest road accident so far this year. The accident took place on a highway in rural Guizhou province when the vehicle carrying a total of 47 people 'flipped onto its side', Sandu county police said in a statement published on social media.

The other 20 people were being treated for injuries and emergency responders were dispatched to the scene, police said, without providing details. The accident happened in Qiannan prefecture - a poor, remote and mountainous part of Guizhou, home to several ethnic minorities. Two social media posts by the China Road Network monitoring service, that have since

been deleted, said the accident occurred at around 2:40am (1840 GMT on Saturday), according to screenshots circulating on the Twitter-like Weibo. Social media users angrily demanded why a passenger bus was travelling down a highway in the early hours of the morning, when many major roads in the province have been closed to regular traffic.

"This feeling can't simply be represented by lighting a candle and saying RIP," read one Weibo post with more than 15,000 likes. One hundred toll stations are shuttered in Guizhou because of COVID-19 restrictions and long-distance passenger journeys across China are banned from running between 2am and 5am.

AFP

Kyrgyz-Tajik clashes death toll rises to 36: Kyrgyz ministry

Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan - The Kyrgyz health ministry said on Sunday that at least 36 people had been killed in recent border clashes with Tajikistan, increasing its earlier figure of the latest violence between the Central Asian neighbours.

'The total number of dead as a result of the armed conflict in the (Kyrgyz) Batken region is 36,' and another 134 have been injured, the ministry said in a statement.

The previous toll given by the ministry stood at 24 killed.

The Tajik interior ministry said on Saturday civilians had been killed in the clashes, but did not provide a figure.

The two sides agreed to a ceasefire on Friday but since then traded accusation of breaching it.

After more clashes on Satur-



Volunteers carry humanitarian aid for people evacuated from town of Batken in Bishkek on Saturday (AFP)

day, the night passed 'quietly, without incidents' the Kyrgyz border authorities said on Sun-

day morning.

"The country's leadership is taking all measures to stabilise

the situation, prevent attempts of escalation... in a peaceful way," the border authorities said.

On Saturday, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on the leadership of both sides 'to engage in dialogue for a lasting ceasefire', said a spokesman.

Border disputes have dogged the ex-Soviet republics through their three-decade independence, with around half of their 970km border still to be demarcated. Both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are part of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) but they regularly clash.

Russia has urged the two countries to de-escalate and said it was ready to help them find a 'long term' solution to the border issues.

In 2021, unprecedented clashes between the two sides killed at least 50 people and raised fears of a larger conflict.

AFP

‘Crowns of the forest’: Indonesian helps orchids bloom again

Yogyakarta, Indonesia - Orchids in hand and a bamboo ladder on his shoulder, farmer Musimin scans the forest at the foot of Indonesia's most active volcano to point out clusters of the indigenous flowers he has been salvaging for years.

The 56-year-old, who goes by one name like many Indonesians, is a self-taught conservationist with no formal background in botanics.

He has dedicated his career to cultivating plants he compares to gemstones, and has been on a one-man mission to save the exotic blooms unique to the land on the outskirts of Yogyakarta on Java island.

His work began after lava and ash ripped through the area from the powerful eruptions of Mount Merapi, the last major one in 2010.

"I remember orchids used to

be abundant in the forest," he said.

"Locals from surrounding villages could take any orchids they wanted, and they sold the flowers at nearby tourist destinations," he added.

But many were destroyed by the ash clouds that fell on the land below the volcano.

So Musimin set about saving their wilting fortunes, over the years building two bamboo greenhouses where he could preserve the most special kinds of orchids.

The volcano killed about 60 people when it erupted in 1994, destroying thousands of hectares of forest.

Another eruption in 2010 left more than 300 dead, while also wreaking havoc on the land.

"The forest near my house was burnt dry and the orchids I used to easily find were gone. I



Musimin planting orchids on a tree in the forest at the foot of Mount Merapi in Sleman, Yogyakarta (AFP)

regretted not keeping one or two of them," said Musimin of the 1994 tragedy.

That encouraged him to join the local government's effort to find the surviving orchids as he and his neighbours explored what remained.

They managed to revive at least 90 varieties of orchids that would also end up surviving the 2010 eruption, he said.

'Pioneer of orchid conservation'

Now Musimin mostly works alone and wants those who enter the forest to leave the orchids to blossom instead of trying to profit from them.

"A lot of people now choose to pick and sell orchids from the forest. I personally think the orchids are better off in their habitat, where they can live as the crowns of the forest," he said.

Other orchid centres run by locals who learned about conservation from Musimin have sprung up in the forest around the volcano, said Mount Merapi National Park spokesperson Akhmadi.

"He is, indeed, the pioneer of orchid conservation in Mount Merapi. His work has become an example for other groups we are working with, that have emulated and further developed his programmes," he said.

With others now taking Musimin's lead, the father of two wants to continue his orchid-saving legacy by passing down his self-taught botanical knowledge to his grandchild, whom he often takes into the forest.

"I am showing him orchids as early as possible," he said.

"Who knows, he could be my successor."

AFP

INDIA

NIA raids PFI at 40 places in Telangana, Andhra; detains 4

New Delhi, India - The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Sunday carried out searches at 40 locations in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh against Popular Front of India (PFI) cadres and detained four persons.

The agency conducted searches at 38 locations in Telangana (23 in Nizamabad, four in Hyderabad, seven in Jagtital, two in Nirmal, one each in Adilabad and Karimnagar districts) and at two locations in Andhra Pradesh (one each in Kurnool and Nellore districts) in the case relating to Abdul Khader of Nizamabad district in Telangana and 26 other persons. In these raids being conducted since Sunday morning, the NIA said, it has seized incriminating materials, including digital devices, documents, two daggers and cash Rs 8,31,500.

"Four persons have been detained for questioning," said the anti-terror agency.

As per NIA, the accused were 'organising camps for imparting training to commit terrorist acts and to promote enmity between different groups on the basis of religion'.

During investigations by the Nizamabad Police Station in Telangana, four accused namely, Abdul Kader, Sheikh Sahadulla, Md Imran and Md Abdul Mobin were arrested by Telangana Police. Later, the case was re-registered by the NIA on August 26.

One Abdul Khadar, 52, a resident of Autonagar, Nizamabad, along with 26 persons were accused in the NIA First Information Report (FIR) which mentions that they along with others conspired to wage war against the Government of India.



NIA conducted raids in various locations in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, in connection with the PFI case on Sunday (ANI)

"In pursuance of the criminal conspiracy, they recruited the members of Popular Front of India (PFI), organised camps for imparting training for committing terrorist acts. They formed an unlawful assembly and promoted enmity between different groups on the basis of religion and were involved in activities disrupting sovereignty and territorial integrity of India," the FIR mentions.

The case was earlier registered by Nizamabad Police Station in Telangana under various sections of the Indian Penal Code and section 13(1)(b) of Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act against Abdul Khader and 26 persons and others relating to some anti-national activities in a house located at Auto Nagar near Osmania Masjid, Nizamabad.

"On searching the house, one Flexi with the name of Popular Front of India (PFI), bamboo sticks, whiteboard, non-chaks, one podium, note-books, handbooks and other materials were seized by Telangana Police. This amounts to a conspiracy to wage war against the Government of India," the FIR reads.

During the further inquiry, official sources said, the owner of the house, Abdul Khader admitted that in lieu of financial assistance of Rs 6 lakh promised by some accused persons belonging to PFI, he had constructed a portion on the roof of his house and allowed the premises to be used for imparting training to the cadres of PFI and the meeting of the organisation.

"The PFI members started coaching and physical exercises for the youth in the name of Karate classes and used to provoke them against a particular community with their hated speeches etc. They recruited the members of the Popular Front of India (PFI), and organised camps for imparting training for committing terrorist acts. They formed an unlawful assembly and promoted enmity between different groups on the basis of religion and were involved in activities disrupting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India," The Telangana Police, later, added sections 18A and 18(B) of UA(P) Act in the case.'

Ministry of Home Affairs later handed over the case to the NIA with the opinion that a Scheduled Offence under the National Investigation Agency Act, 2008, has been committed and having regard to the gravity of the offence and its repercussions on

national security, it is required to be investigated by the agency in accordance with the National Investigation Act, 2008.

The PFI was launched in Kerala in 2006 after merging three Muslim organisations floated after the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992 - the National Development Front of Kerala, Karnataka Forum for Dignity and Manitha Neethi Pasari of Tamil Nadu. After the demolition of the Babri mosque, many fringe outfits had surfaced in south India and PFI was formed after merging some of them.

Now the PFI claims it has units in 22 states. Its growth is phenomenal, admit intelligence agencies, saying it successfully exploited a growing vacuum in the community donning the role of a saviour.

The successful portrayal of the image helps PFI to mobilise funds, especially from the rich middle-eastern countries. The PFI's earlier headquarters was in Kozhikode, but after broadening of its base, it was shifted to Delhi.

PFI's state president Nasaruddin Elamarom is one of the founding leaders of the outfit. And its all-India president E Abubaker also hails from Kerala.

The PFI describes itself as a neo-social movement committed to empower people belonging to minority communities, Dalits and other weaker sections of society.

ANI



Amarinder Singh (ANI)

Former Punjab CM to join BJP today

New Delhi, India - Former Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh will join the Bharatiya Janata Party on Monday.

According to Punjab Lok Congress (PLC) spokesperson Pritpal Singh Baliawal, Amarinder Singh is also likely to merge his party PLC with the BJP in the national capital on September 19. The development comes days after Singh met Union Home Minister Amit Shah in Delhi.

"Had a very productive meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah Ji. Discussed various issues pertaining to National security, the rising cases of narco-terrorism in Punjab and the future roadmap for the overall holistic development of Punjab," Singh had tweeted.

Amarinder Singh who broke ties with Congress ahead of the Punjab Assembly elections had fought the polls in alliance with BJP.

ANI

President Droupadi Murmu offers tributes to Queen Elizabeth II

London, UK - President Droupadi Murmu on Sunday signed the condolence book for Queen Elizabeth II, at the Lancaster House near Buckingham Palace in London.

"President Droupadi Murmu signed the Condolence Book in the memory of Her Majesty the Queen Elizabeth II at Lancaster House, London," Rashtrapati Bhawan tweeted. Besides, the president also offered tributes to Queen Elizabeth II at Westminster Hall in London where the queen's coffin is lying-in-State.

"President Droupadi Murmu

visited Westminster Hall London where the body of Her Majesty the Queen Elizabeth II is lying in state. The President offered tributes to the departed soul on her own behalf and on behalf of the people of India," Rashtrapati Bhawan tweeted earlier.

The President is on an official tour to the United Kingdom till Monday to attend the queen's funeral and offer condolences on behalf of the Government of India.

She arrived at Gatwick Airport in London at London's Westminster Abbey on Saturday.



President Droupadi Murmu signing the Condolence Book at Lancaster House in London on Sunday (ANI)

day. The presidential aircraft carrying Murmu and her entourage members, including foreign secretary Vinay Kwatra

President Murmu is on an official tour to the UK till Monday to attend the queen's funeral and offer condolences

landed at London's Gatwick Airport at 20:50 IST from where she left for the hotel where she will be staying during this tour.

On her arrival at the airport, the president was received by the High Commissioner of India to the United Kingdom.

According to official reports, President Murmu will further attend a reception hosted by King Charles III for the overseas leaders at Buckingham Palace in London before the funeral service on Monday at 11am local time.

The next day, she will attend

the state funeral service at West Gate of Westminster Abbey. And in the afternoon, she will attend the reception hosted by James Cleverly, UK's Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs.

Queen Elizabeth II, 96, the former head of state of the UK and Head of the Commonwealth of Nations passed away on September 8.

One-day state mourning was observed across India on September 11 as a mark of respect to the departed queen.

ANI

Dented plaque, creaking hospital and Queen's legacy in Aden

Aden, Yemen - A battered plaque in a rundown hospital and a crackly, black-and-white newsreel are all that remain of Queen Elizabeth II's 1954 visit to Aden, the war-torn Yemeni city whose troubles are a reminder of Britain's complicated legacy in the Middle East.

The plaque, scratched and dented and inscribed in English and Arabic, testifies that the queen, then 28, laid the foundation stone for the Al-Joumhouria hospital on April 27, 1954, less than a year after her coronation.

Visiting the hospital earlier this year, AFP recorded disturbing scenes: mildew, emaciated children and the stench of urine, as the under-equipped facility grapples with an impossible workload in the face of a long-running conflict.

It was far from the brief but triumphant visit depicted in a Pathe newsreel nearly seven decades earlier, showing the queen and a smiling Prince Philip touring Aden in an open-top car



This file photo shows Yemen's councillor Sayyid Abubakr bin Shaikh Alkaff kneeling before Queen Elizabeth II to be knighted during the Sovereign visit to Aden, on April 29, 1954 (AFP)

and watching camel-mounted troops in a military parade.

British colonialism is inextricably linked with the Middle East partly because of the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement, when Britain and France carved up much of the region between them amid

the collapse of Ottoman rule during World War I.

Many Arab leaders remain close to British royalty, however. After the queen's death this month at 96, sombre tributes were offered by monarchies that thrived under British protection.

'Colonialism undermines rights'

Saudi Arabia's King Salman said her 'model of leadership' will be 'immortalised'. The United Arab Emirates, whose president trained at Britain's Sandhurst military academy, de-

clared three days of mourning and displayed the queen's image on Dubai's Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building.

The royal rulers of Qatar, Bahrain and Oman ordered flags to be flown at half-mast, and Jordan's King Abdullah II, whose mother was British, also sent his condolences.

A lesser-noticed tribute also arrived from the separatist leader of Aden, the southwestern port city and the seat of the British colony that later became South Yemen until unification with North Yemen in 1990.

Aidarus al-Zubaidi, president of the Southern Transitional Council, tweeted that he was 'deeply saddened' by the queen's death and extended his 'heartfelt condolences'.

The sentiments were incongruous in a city that, nine years after the young queen's visit, orchestrated an armed revolution that eventually won independence in 1967, an uprising that is celebrated each October 14.

Mohammad Qassem Numan, president of the Yemen Center for Human Rights Studies and an activist against British rule in the 1960s, said any nostalgia for imperial rule was misplaced.

"Those who glorify the period where the British were in Aden, either are young and are unaware of the reality of what was happening in Aden and in the south back then, or are old people reacting to the reality we are living right now which is very tiring," the 72-year-old told AFP.

"Colonialism in all its forms undermines a person's rights, freedom and life. There was never a form of colonialism that respected humanity," he added, stressing that it can 'only ever seek to protect its own interests'.

Asmahan al-Alas, secretary general of the Yemeni Society for History and Archaeology said the colonisers modernised the city and introduced a range of 'planning, education, economic and social' changes.

AFP

Rains kill around 50 in Nepal, India

Kathmandu, Nepal - Heavy monsoon rains and landslides have killed almost 50 people in Nepal and India in recent days, authorities said on Sunday.

In western Nepal at least 22 people died after landslides buried more than 100 houses on Friday, police official Narayan Dangi said. Eleven people were injured, including three airlifted to hospital by army helicopter.

"Rescue teams are still searching for one missing." A major relief operation was underway with the police and army clearing debris and distributing food, tents and clothes.

AFP

Time to push the limit

India captain Rohit Sharma wants his players to experiment with their game in matches against Aussies and Proteas

Mohali, India - With the T20 World Cup squad already picked, India skipper Rohit Sharma wants his players to get out of their comfort zone and explore new things about their game in the six home games against Australia and South Africa ahead of the ICC showpiece next month.

Rohit feels players can now afford to extend their 'limits' without the pressure of selection.

The management will be giving rest to the likes of Hardik Pandya, Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Arshdeep Singh over the six games but by and large it will have a full squad at its disposal.

Rohit's comments come in the backdrop of its Asia Cup campaign in which the team management experimented quite a bit and copped criticism for that.

"I wanted to bring security in the team that is why we announced the team for both the series before the World Cup (Australia and South Africa). In Asia Cup also we more less had the same team," said Rohit ahead of Tuesday's series opener against Australia.

"In these six games we want to keep trying what we can achieve with different styles. It is all about going out and trying to find ways of exploring ourselves but there is no limit to trying new things. You can extend yourself in so many directions to achieve so many things for the team."

Virat Kohli went out of his comfort zone during the Asia Cup and played a rare sweep shot and Rohit wants even the



India's captain Rohit Sharma (R) with teammates during a practice session at the Punjab Cricket Association Stadium in Mohali on Sunday (AFP)

bowlers to push their limits.

"We will keep encouraging people to be more expressive. For example, someone who doesn't play reverse sweep, can he play that and see if he can do

it right. Someone can hit down the ground, things you are not comfortable doing, you do that and see what happens.

"When you go into the World Cup you should have all these

answers. For bowlers, they can try opening the spell with a yorker or a bouncer," said the skipper.

After the early exit from the T20 World Cup last year, India

were forced to change their batting approach and Rohit said the team will continue to play aggressive and in case it loses early wickets, the back-up plan is in place.

"We will continue to play like that. That is something we spoke quite clearly at the start of my (captaincy tenure) and everyone is comfortable with that. At the same time we know our second

line of defence if we are in trouble. We spend a lot of time talking about these things," he said.

"Guys are very clear if we are 10 for three how we need to bat. If we are 50 for no loss, how we need to bat. These have been discussed at length, it is just about executing now."

India had beaten Pakistan and Hong Kong in the first two matches but lost to their arch-rivals when the teams met again in the Super Four stage and Sri Lanka to crash out of the Asia Cup.

"If you see our Asia Cup performance as well we posted par plus or par scores in every game except the one game against Sri

We will keep encouraging people to be more expressive. For example, someone who doesn't play reverse sweep, can he play that and see if he can do it right.

ROHIT SHARMA



Lanka where we got 173 which was also a good score," Rohit said.

"In Super 4s we had close games against Pakistan and Sri Lanka, it could have gone either way. You need a bit of luck as well. Hopefully we will get that in the World Cup."

Talking more about the batting style, Rohit said: "This approach of ours has given us a lot of trust that we can go out and play like that. It is a great sign."

Shami out of Australia T20 series with COVID

New Delhi, India - India pace bowler Mohammed Shami has been ruled out of next week's Twenty20 series against Australia after testing positive for coronavirus, the cricket board said on Sunday.

Umesh Yadav has been called up as a replacement for the three-match series, an important warm-up for next month's World Cup in Australia, the Board of



Mohammed Shami

Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said.

Captain Rohit Sharma said Umesh was a simple selection considering his rich experience and ability to swing the ball in the powerplay.

The series begins in Mohali on Tuesday followed by games in Nagpur on September 23 and Hyderabad two days later.

India will face South Africa in

a further three-match Twenty20 series on September 28, October 2 and October 4 ahead of the global showpiece.

Shami's recovery and fitness will be assessed before a decision can be made on whether he can play against South Africa.

Shami, 32, is a standby for India's T20 World Cup squad. He last played a T20 international in November 2021.

England, Pakistan build for T20 World Cup in long-awaited series

Karachi, Pakistan - Pakistan and England continue their build-up for next month's T20 World Cup in Australia when they begin a seven-match series in Karachi on Tuesday - the tourists' first visit since 2005.

The long-awaited return of England comes five months after a trouble-free tour by Australia, their first in 24 years, which helped Pakistan's rehabilitation as a safe place to play cricket.

International cricket has gradually returned to Pakistan following years where they were forced to play home matches in neutral venues after a deadly attack on the Sri Lanka team bus in 2009.

England had been originally scheduled to arrive in October last year but cancelled at short notice after New Zealand pulled out of a tour citing safety concerns.

England's withdrawal infuriated the Pakistan Cricket Board, who called it "disrespectful" as they made strides to show the country was a secure destination.

England, the current 50-over world champions, are also scheduled to play a Test series in Pakistan in December followed by the return of New Zealand.

The tourists are looking to



Pakistani Babar Azam bats at the nets during a training session at the National Cricket Stadium in Karachi on Saturday (AFP)

bounce back from recent Twenty20 series defeats to the West Indies (3-2), South Africa and India (both 2-1).

Pakistan are looking to recover after losing the T20 Asia Cup

final to Sri Lanka in the UAE last week.

'Tough challenge'

New England skipper Jos Buttler, who took over after the retire-

ment of long-time captain Eoin Morgan this year, is nursing a calf injury that could keep him out of the series.

"It's an important series for the build-up towards that World Cup," said Buttler, who felt it was vital to travel with his side despite only having a chance of being fit for the final two matches.

Moeen Ali will lead the side in his absence.

The return of explosive opener Alex Hales from three years in the wilderness after testing positive for a recreational drug will bolster England batting, according to Pakistan's top order batsman Shan Masood.

"I think England are one of the best white-ball teams," said Masood, who will make his Twenty20 debut for Pakistan as a reward for scoring heavily for Derbyshire in the English T20 Blitz. "England will pose a very good challenge for us and it's probably the ideal preparation to play one of the best sides before the World Cup."

The first four matches are in Karachi on September 20, 22, 23 and 25 with the final three in Lahore on September 28, 30 and October 2.

AFP



Saul 'Canelo' Alvarez (R) lands a punch on Gennady Golovkin during their fight in Las Vegas on Saturday (AFP)

Alvarez sees off Golovkin to retain super-middleweight crown

Las Vegas, United States - Saul 'Canelo' Alvarez retained his undisputed super-middleweight world title on Saturday, seeing off Gennady Golovkin to complete their epic fight trilogy in Las Vegas.

Mexico's Alvarez was in charge for most of an electric 12 rounds at the T-Mobile Arena, winning a unanimous decision to spark wild scenes of celebration among the Mexican fans who made up most of the sell-out crowd.

One judge scored the bout 116-112 while the two others had it 115-113.

"Thank you so much, my friend," Alvarez said to Golovkin in the ring after a bout whose build-up was marked by some bitter rhetoric.

It was a welcome return to form for Alvarez, who suffered the second defeat of his career earlier this year after moving up to light-heavyweight to face Dmitry Bivol.

"You have to continue to move forward, I have shown

He is a good fighter, a real fighter. I am glad to share the ring with him

SAUL ALVAREZ



that defeats can be great and you can regain your humility," he said.

"He is a good fighter, a real fighter," he added of Golovkin. "I am glad to share the ring with him."

This return to 168 pounds clearly suited Alvarez, but Golovkin will be rueing a slow start in a performance which only sparked into life when it was too late.

This highly anticipated third tussle between two of the hardest hitting fighters in the world came a whole four years after their last meeting.

Back in 2018, it was Alvarez whose hand was raised at the

end of 12 frenetic, quality rounds which saw Golovkin suffer defeat for the very first time after coming out on the wrong end of a narrow majority decision.

Their first fight the year before ended in a draw and the outcome of the second bout was tough on the Kazakh warrior, who has little time for Alvarez and made no bones about it during the build-up here this week.

The bad blood has boiled ever since the Mexican failed a drugs test and was banned for six months which held up this edge-of-your-seat trilogy.

Alvarez came to the ring roared on by his adoring public, many of whom were still in the mood for a party after Mexican Independence day celebrations in Sin City.

GGG has been on the road for almost a decade, so taking on Alvarez - and the pumped up crowd - was nothing new, unlike fighting at super-middleweight which was a first for the 40 year-old.

AFP

LAST-GASP BASTIANINI

Enea Bastianini beats Francesco Bagnaia in the last lap to nail Aragon MotoGP



Enea Bastianini (L), on a Ducati satellite bike, leads Ducati's Francesco Bagnaia at the Aragon Moto GP in Alcaniz, Spain, on Sunday (AFP)

Alcañiz, Spain - Enea Bastianini won the Aragon MotoGP with a last lap overtake after mayhem at the start as world champion Fabio Quartararo crashed out to put a severe dent in his hopes of retaining the title.

Bastianini shaded Francesco Bagnaia following a nerve-jangling duel over the closing laps to deny the factory Ducati rider a fifth straight win by four-tenths of a second.

With Quartararo the victim of first lap drama pole-sitter Bagnaia moved to within 10 points of Yamaha's defending champion with five races remaining.

"Enea did an incredible job all weekend, he was very competitive," said Bagnaia, who will have the race winner as his temamate next season.



"Fabio (Quartararo) was unlucky. I tried to do my best, but on the last lap I didn't feel I was able to retake Enea as these 10 points are important so I did okay."

"It was a really nice race for me," said Bastianini, on a Ducati satellite bike.

"I made some mistakes but on the last lap I was in a position to attack this time to win. Amazing!"

Aprilia's Aleix Espargaro took third at the end of a breathless 15th round of the championship

It was a really nice race for me I made some mistakes but on the last lap I was in a position to attack this time to win. Amazing!

ENEA BASTIANINI

which saw six-time world champion Marc Marquez's hopes of a dream return after 112 days out turn into a nightmare.

It was Marquez's Honda that Quartararo clipped, sending the Frenchman slithering across the track as his Aragon curse continued at the Motorland circuit where he has never made the podium.

Seconds later Honda's Japanese rider Takaaki Nakagami also hit the deck, after contact again with Marquez, who was forced to

retire with damage to his bike.

Yamaha boss Lin Jarvis reported his star man Quartararo had escaped without serious injury.

"Obviously a really bad day for Fabio," he said. "The good news is he's okay. He'll be fine for the next race in Japan."

"Unfortunately in the middle of the bunch he clipped the rear of Marquez's bike. Fabio is angry, upset, but from what we can see it appears a racing incident."

Quartararo, whose miserable

day ended with another fall from a scooter leaving the track, said: "I feel bad. For once we had the pace to fight for a good result here, unfortunately that wasn't possible."

Marquez was back for the first time since the Italian MotoGP after further surgery on the right arm he injured in 2020.

"It was really unlucky," Marquez told motoGP.com of his disastrous opening lap.

"On turn three I had a moment, when Fabio was really close and there was contact."

"I felt something strange in turn five, turn 7 was ok, but coming out of it the bike started to lock and go on the left side. I had a piece of, Fabio's bike attached to mine," he said.

AFP



Team Captain Cameron Smith of Punch GC in action at the LIV Golf Invitational in Chicago (AFP)

Smith outshoots Johnson to seize three-stroke lead in LIV Golf

Chicago, United States - Reigning British Open champion Cam Smith of Australia closed with back-to-back birdies to grab a three-stroke lead after Saturday's second round of the LIV Golf Chicago Invitational.

World number three Smith fired a four-under par 68 to stand on 10-under 134 after 36 holes in the 54-hole shotgun start event at Rich Harvest Farms.

Two-time major winner Dustin Johnson fired his worst of 14 rounds since jumping to LIV Golf, a 74, to share second on 137 with fellow American Peter Uihlein, who fired a 66.

England's Laurie Canter and South African Charl Schwartzel shared fourth on 138 in quest of a \$4 million top prize from a \$25 million purse.

The Saudi-backed upstart series has caused turmoil in the golf world as several big-name stars have defected from the US PGA Tour to the rival circuit, prompting the PGA to issue indefinite bans on former members.

Smith, who captured his first major title in July at St. Andrews before jumping to LIV Golf after the PGA Tour playoffs, began the day three back of playing partner Johnson but charged into the lead.

"It was tricky out there," Smith said. "I got a couple of breaks and DJ didn't quite make the putts he usually does."

"Game is feeling good. I'm looking forward to a great round tomorrow."

Johnson opened with a bogey at the first hole and both birdied the par-5 second.

Smith curled in a long breaking birdie putt at the fourth while Johnson lipped out, settling for par.

Both birdied the eighth but Smith missed an eight-footer for par at the par-5 11th to stumble two adrift.

Johnson sent his approach

over the green at the par-3 13th and lipped out on a six-foot par putt. Johnson also made bogey at the par-3 16th.

Smith sank six-foot birdie putts at the 17th and par-5 18th while Johnson went over the 18th green and made bogey to leave the Aussie ahead by three.

Phil Mickelson, among the first to break from the PGA for LIV Golf, says the two sides need to unite after hard-line remarks against such a move by PGA playoff winner Rory McIlroy, PGA commissioner Jay Monahan and LIV Golf commissioner Greg Norman.

"The PGA Tour for the last 20

The PGA Tour for the last 20 or 30 years have had all the best players in the world. That will never be the case again

PHIL MICKELSON

or 30 years have had all the best players in the world. That will never be the case again," Mickelson said.

"LIV Golf is here to stay, and this type of divisive talk is doing nobody good. The best solution is for us to come together."

Mickelson, a six-time major winner, and LIV Golf have filed an anti-trust lawsuit against the PGA that is set to go to trial in 2024.

The 52-year-old US left-hander said LIV appeals to a younger fan base but golf also needs the "historical" base the PGA provides, declaring, "The inclusion of LIV Golf in the ecosystem of the golf world is necessary."

AFP

MacIntyre wins Italian Open in play-off

Rome, Italy - Robert MacIntyre won the Italian Open on Sunday after seeing off Matthew Fitzpatrick in a play-off at the Marco Simone Golf and Country Club in Rome.

Scotland's MacIntyre claimed his second win on the European PGA tour with a birdie on the first play-off hole.

US Open champion Fitzpatrick, who had a one-shot lead heading into the final round, had joined MacIntyre in the playoff after birdieing the 18th but missed a similar putt on the same hole to allow MacIntyre to win the title.



Robert MacIntyre celebrates with the trophy

"This means everything... I've hit two of the perfect golf shots into the last there. So much hard work went into this," said MacIntyre to Sky. "I've got a dogged attitude, never give up, I get punched but I punch back."

"At the start of the week I didn't think this was going to be the one, the style of the golf course the way it was playing... but I felt so in control of my golf ball this week."

Rory McIlroy was Fitzpatrick's closest challenger after the third round but the Northern Irishman finished two shots off the pace after shooting three-under.

MacIntyre is hoping to be in next year's Ryder Cup which will be played at the same course and a superb seven-under round on the final day helped him to victory. He made six birdies and no bogies while shooting a remarkable 29 on the front nine which gave him a two-shot lead.

But from there his form dipped and that allowed Fitzpatrick to take the lead on the 16th.

England's Fitzpatrick then allowed MacIntyre to lead going into the clubhouse and once the pair went into the playoff the Scot replayed the 18th to perfection to claim the win.

Auger-Aliassime helps Canada make Davis Cup quarter-finals

Paris, France - Canada clinched their place in the Davis Cup quarter-finals on Saturday thanks to Felix Auger-Aliassime's win in singles, while Croatia improved their chances of reaching the last eight with a 3-0 sweep of Argentina.

Auger-Aliassime backed up his defeat of new world number one Carlos Alcaraz with a 6-3, 6-4 victory against Serbia's Miomir Kecmanovic, although Serbia won the tie 2-1 in Valencia to keep their own hopes alive.

Serbia's Laslo Djere downed

Gabriel Diallo 6-2, 6-2 in the opening singles match before Auger-Aliassime's win guaranteed Canada a top-two finish in Group B.

"I feel this whole event my level has been really good," said Auger-Aliassime, the world number 13.

"I'm really happy where my game is at. To come out and play this way, get the win, it's very good for me personally. I'm just really happy for the team."

"I'm really happy that I came and played with the level I did to

get Canada through the quarters," he added.

Kecmanovic and Filip Krajinovic led Vasek Pospisil and Alexis Galarneau 2-1 in the first set of the doubles before a knee injury forced Pospisil to retire.

Serbia need South Korea to beat Spain on Sunday in order to pip the hosts to a knockout spot in Malaga in November.

The Spaniards swept Serbia before losing 2-1 to Canada, while the Koreans have lost their first two ties.

Last year's runners-up Croatia

whitewashed Argentina to boost their prospects of reaching the quarter-finals from Group A, where they have won two of their three ties.

Borna Gojo edged Sebastian Baez in three sets before Cincinnati Masters champion Borna Coric got the better of Francisco Cerundolo, 6-4, 7-6 (8/6) in Bologna.

Mate Pavic and Nikola Mektic eased past Maximo Gonzalez and Horacio Zeballos in the doubles.

AFP



Felix Auger-Aliassime, who defeated Spain's Carlos Alcaraz, got the better of Serbia's Miomir Kecmanovic (AFP)



Christian Gytkjaer's goal handed Monza their first Serie A victory, while also ending the unbeaten start of Juventus (AFP)

Monza stun Juve for first Serie A victory, Udinese top the pile

Monza, Italy - Monza won their first ever match in Serie A on Sunday, stunning 10-man Juventus 1-0 to pile more pressure on under-fire Massimiliano Allegri.

Christian Gytkjaer netted a historic goal 15 minutes from the end at the U-Power Stadium to move the club owned by Silvio Berlusconi off the bottom of the table and end Juve's unbeaten start to the season.

Monza took their first three points of the campaign in their first match under Raffaele Palladino, who replaced sacked Giovanni Stroppa on Tuesday.

They are still in the relegation zone but a single point behind 17th-placed Verona, who lost 2-0 at Fiorentina.

"Today was incredible and unexpected," said Palladino.

"They showed themselves to be real men... they gave everything, I shouldn't get any of the credit because it was all down to them."

Troubled Juve, who lost Angel Di Maria to a straight red card five minutes before half-time, sit in eighth after winning just two of their opening seven matches.

They are six points behind provisional league leaders Udinese following their 3-1 win over Inter Milan earlier on Sunday.

Before the match Juve CEO said it would be "crazy" to sack Allegri, under contract until 2025 on a reported salary of eight million euros a year.

But a poor start in Italy and two defeats in their opening two Champions League matches have put Allegri in the firing line for supporters, criticised not only for bad results but also for the uninspiring football his team is playing.

Allegri has not been helped by an injury crisis which on Sunday denied him five potential starters.

AFP



Arsenal's Fabio Vieira (L) celebrates with team-mates after scoring against Brentford in their English Premier League match at the Gtech Community Stadium in London on Sunday (AFP)

ALL GUNS BLAZING

Saliba, Jesus, Vieira on target as Arsenal beat Brentford to regain top spot

London, United Kingdom - Arsenal moved back to the top of the Premier League with a dominant 3-0 win at Brentford, while Everton beat West Ham 1-0 to get their first victory of the season on Sunday.

Injuries to captain Martin Odegaard and Oleksandr Zinchenko had stretched Arsenal's squad to the extent that 15-year-old Ethan Nwaneri came off the bench late to become the youngest player in Premier League history.

However, the Gunners showed no sign of weakness at a ground where they were beaten 2-0 last season to move back one point above Manchester City and

We have a different mentality this season. We are training like we play and have class with the players that can make a difference

GRANIT XHAKA

Tottenham at the top of the table.

William Saliba and Gabriel Jesus headed in before half-time and Fabio Vieira marked his first Premier League start with a stunning strike after the break.

Brentford boss Thomas Frank said he believes Arsenal will be title contenders and they played like it to blow away the Bees in the first 45 minutes.

"We have a different mentality

this season," said Arsenal midfielder Granit Xhaka. "We are training like we play and have class with the players that can make a difference."

The match had been moved forward two hours to help ease police pressures around Queen Elizabeth II's funeral and Britain's longest serving monarch was remembered in a minute's silence before kick-off.

Once the action did get underway, it was one way traffic as Arsenal bounced back in style from their sole defeat of the season away to Manchester United two weeks ago.

It took just 17 minutes for Mikel Arteta's men to make the breakthrough when Saliba flicked Bukayo Saka's corner in off the far post.

Jesus also used his head to score his fourth goal in seven Premier League games since joining from Manchester City as he powered home an enticing delivery from Xhaka.

The absence of Odegaard also made room for Vieira and the Portuguese midfielder made his

mark with a sumptuous strike from outside the box to kill off any doubt over the outcome four minutes into the second half.

An easy day for Arsenal was rounded off a minute from time when Arteta was able to hand Nwaneri his debut as just 15 years and 181 days, breaking Harvey Elliott's record as the youngest player in Premier League history when he appeared for Fulham as a 16-year-old.

At the other end of the table, West Ham will spend the upcoming international break in the bottom three after Neal Maupay's first Everton goal gave the Toffees a much-needed win.

AFP

Dortmund captain Reus escapes serious injury

Berlin, Germany - Borussia Dortmund captain Marco Reus is set to miss just three to four weeks, with scans confirming that the forward's injury is not as bad as initially expected.

Reus went down in the 28th minute of his side's 1-0 win over derby rivals Schalke on Saturday, leaving the field in tears on a stretcher.

Speaking on Germany's Sport1 Doppelpass on Sunday, Dortmund Sporting Director Sebastian Kehl said the captain will be fit again in time for the World Cup, which starts in November.

"It was a shock for us on the sidelines (but) I can give the all-clear this morning," Kehl said.

"The examination did not show any breakage. It's an ankle lateral ligament injury.



Dortmund's Marco Reus is stretchered off after sustaining an injury in the match against Schalke on Saturday

"But it is not so serious that the World Cup may be in jeopardy. Marco will be out for three or four weeks."

Reus, who has played 48 times for Germany, missed the 2014 World Cup triumph and his side's 2016 European Championships campaign due to injury.

Writing on Instagram on Sunday morning, Reus - who has scored 15 goals for Germany - promised to be back in on the pitch soon.

"Thank you for your recovery wishes," Reus said. "I will never give up."

Reus was nominated as part of the 24-man Germany squad for the upcoming Nations League fixtures against Hungary and England.

AFP

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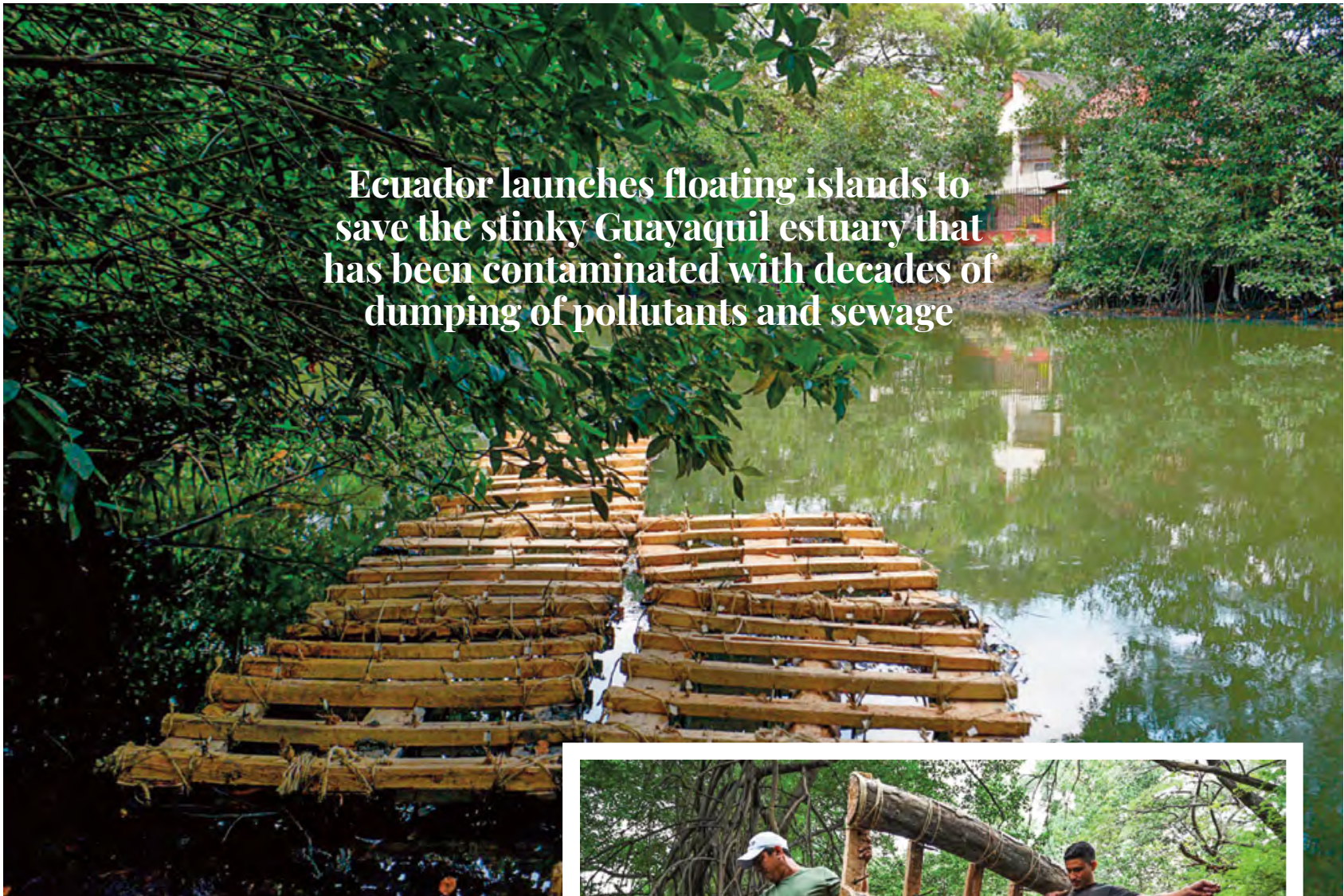
GUAYAQUIL ESTUARY



Environmental engineering student Angela Cevallos, plants mangrove seedlings as part of a project to reforest the mangrove at the Salado estuary



Each 'island' is stuffed with 23 red mangrove seedlings



Volunteers carry a floating devise to plant mangrove seedlings as part of a project to reforest the mangrove at the Salado estuary

Floating islands

On the banks of the dark and murky waters of the Guayaquil estuary, volunteers trudge through mud as they slide wooden platforms. Onboard are crucial seedlings that could save the 70km long polluted artery outside Ecuador's main port city.

Environmental engineer Angela Cevallos is leading efforts to save the estuary with these 'floating islands', which are embedded with red mangrove seedlings. The plant is known for its long roots which can absorb pollutants while helping establish an aquatic ecosystem, allowing other plants and animals to thrive.

"These islands are the transportation mode and the propagules (seedlings) do the work," said Cevallos, who leads the project run by Holy Spirit University, her alma mater.

For decades, tonnes of rubbish, excrement and heavy metals have been dumped into the water around Guayaquil - home to 2.8 million people. But despite several previous conservation efforts and millions of dol-

These islands are the transportation mode and the propagules (seedlings) do the work

ANGELA CEVALLOS

lars of investment, the estuary continues to be threatened by pollution.

"Guayaquil has grown at the feet of this estuary and we cannot let it die," said architect Patricio Rosero, who designed the biodegradable wooden platforms.

Volunteers carry the two-metre long platforms on their backs one by one to the water's edge. Ten platforms are tied together using rope made from banana skins.

Wearing a long-sleeve shirt and white boots, Cevallos, 23, wades into the green mud to slowly push the platforms into place.

Each 'island' is stuffed with 23 red mangrove seedlings, which within four months should form thin trunks.

"The mangrove is a noble habitat, it can be regenerated and absorb pollutants," said Cevallos. "I will come back to test the water to see if there is less pollution."

Half a century ago, fishermen would catch snook and corvina in the estuary, while children would frolic in its natural pools.

"My father took my three siblings and myself to Puerto Liza and there he taught us to swim. The water was crystal clear and fresh," reminisced 75-year-old Lucenia Haro, a retired school teacher.

Then large scale constructions began, sparked by politicians seeking to win new voters. Entire neighbourhoods were built at breakneck speed, but without a connected sewage system.

Even today, the pipes that transport sewage empty directly into the estuary, where 300,000 people live along the coast, many in extreme poverty.

Between May 2019 and July 2022, almost

35,000 tonnes of rubbish were collected from the estuary, according to figures from the Guayaquil mayoral office. The largest source of pollution is sewage.

"Secret connections have been closed and redirected to the sewage system," said Maria Fernanda Rumbea, head of the local environment body.

According to Cevallos's analysis, in the area where the floating islands have been placed, there is 1,000 times the authorised amount of coliform bacteria, which lives in feces and can contaminate water.

It is not the first time such platforms have been sent into the estuary.

In 2014, the environment ministry installed some metal platforms but they failed due to a lack of maintenance.

Earlier this year, the Higher Polytechnic School of the Coast launched an ambitious

initiative to reforest the estuary with marine algae.

"We want to know whether the algae can improve the mangroves' germination rate," said Edwin Jimenez, a researcher at the university.

The Guayaquil municipality is implementing its own conservation project as well, starting with the construction of its sewage treatment plant, according to Rumbea.

When night falls and the tide goes out, the smell is nauseating. And yet the estuary and its vegetation continue to resist the contamination. It remains the only drainage system for rain water, thus, preventing potentially catastrophic flooding during the country's rainy season.

"If it wasn't for the estuary and its smelly trees, dozens of homes and buildings would have disappeared some time ago," said Jimenez.

AFP

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In this file photo taken on September 19, 2021, the Cumbre Vieja volcano erupts in El Paso, spewing out columns of smoke, ash and lava

When the volcano erupted in La Palma last year, Teodoro Gonzalez Perez rushed to the Spanish island to see the lava flows with his own eyes - now he's back for another look. This time, he's here to see the volcano closer up, now that it has quieted down. "It's like walking on the surface of a new planet," said the 54-year-old nurse from the nearby island of Tenerife while hiking through a lush pine forest carpeted with black ash to reach the site. "Visiting a volcano which recently erupted is an opportunity that only arises once in a lifetime," he said. Since the volcano erupted on September 19, 2021, spewing rivers of molten rock and ash plumes into the air, interest in visiting La Palma is booming. The island is normally one of the less visited ones of Spain's tourism-dependent Canary Islands off Africa's north-western coast. In August, the average hotel occupancy on the island hit 90.9 per cent, well above expectations, with visitors from the rest of Spain accounting for the bulk of the overnight stays, according to local hotel lobby group Ashotel. "Before the eruption, we struggled to make the island known," Ashotel's vice president Carlos Garcia Sicilia said. "On the one hand, the volcano has been a misfortune, a huge blow to the island's economy. On the other, I think, half the planet has now heard of La Palma." While the images beamed around the world during the 85-day eruption fo-

LAVA

A volcano draws visitors to Spanish isle La Isla Bonita - The Beautiful Island - a UNESCO-recognised biosphere reserve replete with verdant forests, rocky peaks and a desert

cused on the destruction caused by the volcano, news reports also highlighted the tiny island's charms - which has helped whet the appetite for travel to La Palma. Nicknamed 'La Isla Bonita' or The Beautiful Island, La Palma is a UNESCO-recognised biosphere reserve replete with verdant forests, rocky peaks and desert. Since the eruption, the number of cruise ships stopping at the island has increased, as has the number of direct flights from mainland Spain and elsewhere in Europe. Irish low-cost airline Ryanair opened its first base in La Palma in March and offers several direct flights per week to three Spanish cities as well as Milan.

Visiting a volcano which recently erupted is an opportunity that only arises once in a lifetime. It's like walking on the surface of a new planet

TEODORO GONZALEZ PEREZ

Business is also booming for tour companies offering day trips by ferry from Tenerife, the largest and most visited island of the Canaries.

Excursiones Jesus, based in Tenerife, runs its 135-euro (US\$135) 11-hour tour of La Palma three days a week now, up from just one before the eruption. "People want to get as close as possible to where the eruption happened," company founder Jesus Molina disclosed. The ash and rivers of lava spewing from the volcano swallowed up more than 1,000 homes, cut off highways and suffocated lush banana plantations. On a recent weekday, small groups of tourists could often be seen snapping pictures of excavators removing giant chunks of solidified lava from the centre of La Laguna, a town where the molten rock swallowed up a gas station and a supermarket. Among those flocking to the island are regular visitors, one of whom is Rita

Ley, a retired German woman who said she wanted to see what it looked like after the eruption. "It is terrible to see that everything is destroyed, but it's interesting to see how the earth is alive," said the 59-year-old.

Travel vouchers The government now sees tourism as key to the recovery of the island's economy. It has spent heavily to promote travel to La Palma and has given away 20,000 travel vouchers worth 250 euros to residents of Spain that can be used in hotels and restaurants on the island. To help draw more tourists, the authorities have inaugurated a new zip-line and a visitors' centre at the Roque de los Muchachos astronomical observatory. It is also helping restore the tourism infrastructure. Around 3,000 of La Palma's 8,000 tourist beds were either destroyed in the eruption, or are located in areas that remain off limits due to dangerous levels of volcanic gases, mainly in Puerto Naos on the southwestern coast. Hawaii and Iceland saw a similar increase in tourists after they experienced volcanic eruptions but visitor interest eventually waned and some tourism operators in La Palma expect the same to happen. Jonas Perez, founder of Isla Bonita Tours, predicted the volcanic eruption 'won't be as fresh in people's memory' in a few years. "La Palma will no longer be as popular," he said. AFP

Trees emerging from ash on a hill near the Tajogaite volcano, in the Cumbre Vieja mountain range, on the Canary island of La Palma



CUMBRE VEIJA VOLCANO

The Cumbre Vieja volcanic eruption on the island of La Palma, that began on September 19, 2021, ended in December that year, after 85 days of anguish, authorities on the island declared. The announcement was made on Christmas Day after authorities on the Canary Island confirmed they had observed no lava flow, seismic activity or significant sulphur dioxide emissions from the volcano for 10 days. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez had called the eruption's end 'the best Christmas present'.

The lava flows and molten rock that spewed from the Cumbre Vieja volcano had destroyed 3,000 of La Palma's buildings and ruined vital roads, irrigation systems and farmland. Black ash had covered homes and plantations as it continued to flare throughout October and November. The eruption was estimated to have caused over £760mn of damage to the island's infrastructure. Authorities, however, said no deaths or injuries had been linked to the eruption.

