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NEWS BRIEF

OVER 57,000 TEACHERS RETURN TO WORK TODAY

Muscat - A total of 57,033 teachers, including 39,637 female teachers (69.5 per cent) will return to work on Sunday as per Ministerial Decision No 146/2022, which specified vacation dates for faculty members and students for the school year 2021-2022.

Students will return to school on September 4, which will also mark the resumption of a normal academic year which was severely impacted during the last two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Ministry of Education opens five new schools in Liwa



Fitch upgrades OQ and Omantel ratings to 'BB'

Royal Orders settle loans of 1,169 SMEs, individuals

Muscat - Implementing Royal Orders of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Judicial Council, in coordination with the Ministry of Finance has paid debts of 1,169 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and individuals amounting to RO2.44mn.

The Royal Orders settled the outstanding claims against owners of some SMEs and individuals who were handed prison sentences in accordance with standard procedures. The orders also cancelled the related prison sentences and property seizure notices.

ONA



Oman supports OPEC+ to stabilise oil market

Oman crude prices closed 0.3% lower at US\$99.52 per barrel on Friday at Dubai Mercantile Exchange

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals has stated that the sultanate supports the efforts of OPEC+ in maintaining oil market stability amid volatility in global crude prices.

Oman is a member of the

OPEC+ alliance which includes 13 OPEC members and ten non-OPEC oil producing countries.

'Oman supports OPEC+ efforts to maintain market stability in the face of distortions and volatility,' the ministry said in a tweet posted on Friday.

'OPEC+ member countries participating in the Declaration of Cooperation (DoC) have demonstrated their relentless commitment, agility and flexibility to deal with the challenges that the global oil market has faced over the past several years, especially in 2020,' the ministry added.

Last week, OPEC leader Saudi Arabia's energy minister said that the oil cartel and its allies have the means to deal with market challenges - including by 'cutting production'.

"OPEC+ has the commitment, the flexibility and the means within the existing mechanisms... to deal with such challenges including cutting production at any time," Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman said in an interview with Bloomberg, according to Saudi state news agency SPA.

OPEC+ members agreed last month to raise oil production by 100,000 barrels per day (bpd) in September following Western calls for more output after Russia's war in Ukraine and a post-pandemic surge in demand sent crude prices soaring.

They had agreed to increases of almost 650,000 bpd in July and August, but the group has struggled to meet its quotas.

Oil prices have dropped from a peak in June due to growing

supplies as well as concerns over the deteriorating economic outlook. Brent crude prices are currently hovering around US\$100 a barrel.

Oman crude prices closed 0.3 per cent lower at US\$99.52 per barrel on Friday at the Dubai Mercantile Exchange.

"Volatility and thin liquidity send erroneous signals to markets at times when clarity is most needed. In OPEC+, we have experienced a much more challenging environment in the past and we have emerged stronger and more cohesive than ever," said Prince Abdulaziz, as per an AFP report.

"Soon we will start working on a new agreement beyond 2022," he added.

(With inputs from AFP)

Record growth in GCC, European guests sends hotel revenues soaring



Our Correspondent Muscat

Revenues of hotels rated from 3- to 5-stars in Oman witnessed a significant increase of 117.6 per cent - compared to the same period in 2021 - to RO95.32mn till the end of July 2022.

The monthly statistical bulletin of tourism indicators issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information shows that the number of guests in 3-5 star hotels increased 45.4 per cent to 903,000 till July 2022, compared to 620,979 guests in the same period in 2021. Occupancy rate in these hotels recorded a growth of 24.4 per cent.

The number of visitors from GCC states recorded the biggest growth - 1,187 per cent - reaching 88,479 guests, compared to 6,870 in 2021 till the end of July. This was followed by guests from Europe, whose number grew 703 per cent to 193,644 in July 2022 from 24,109 in July 2021.

The number of Omani guests decreased 7.1 per cent to 415,711 from 447,659.

Guests from the Americas increased 191.6 per cent to 30,210, while guests from the African continent increased to 4,682, a growth of 103.3 per cent. Asian guests increased 33.4 per cent to 111,703 until July 2022, from 83,736 in July 2021.

With hotels performing exceptionally well in 2022, the sec-

Number of guests in 3-5 star hotels increased 45.4% to 903,000 till July 2022

ond half looks promising too.

According to Alpen Capital's GCC Hospitality Industry Report, Oman's hospitality sector is expected to record a year-on-year growth of 90.9 per cent, the fastest in the region, to reach US\$700mn in 2022.

The increase can be primarily attributed to an estimated 49.5 per cent growth in tourist arrivals during the year and lower base of 2021 as the sultanate continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, Alpen Capital stated.

Consequently, average daily rate is expected to witness a 6.3 per cent growth in 2022 to reach US\$146, while revenue per available room is expected to surge 83.7 per cent to US\$68.

Oman government's initiatives to improve the country's tourism landscape is expected to be a driving force behind the sector's development, stated the report.

Between 2022 and 2026, Oman's hospitality industry is forecast to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 6.3 per cent to reach US\$900mn.

JABAL AKHDAR TOURISM FEST TO BECOME ANNUAL FEATURE

After successfully hosting the inaugural Al Jabal Al Akhdar Tourism Festival, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has decided to make it an annual feature to promote tourism in and around Jabal Akhdar. The first-of-its-kind five-day tourism festival concluded on Saturday

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Mexican officials take stock of facilities in Muscat for their World Cup fans

Our Correspondent Muscat

Omani officials hosted a high-level delegation from Mexico on Thursday visiting to look into the possibility of hosting Mexican fans in Oman expected to visit the region for the FIFA World Cup matches in Doha, Qatar, later this year.

H E Sheikh Khalifa Ali al Harthy, Undersecretary for

Diplomatic Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, received Alfonso Zegbe Camarena, Executive Director for Strategy and Public Diplomacy in the Foreign Ministry of Mexico.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed aspects of bilateral cooperation in various fields, 'especially the possibility of the sultanate hosting fans of the Mexican football team, which is going to participate in the World Cup in Doha,' the Foreign Min-

istry stated. Regional and international issues of common interest were also discussed. The meeting was attended by several officials from both sides.

H E Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, also received Camarena and his accompanying delegation on Thursday to review the facilities Oman has to offer fans attending World Cup matches in Doha.



H E Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi with Alfonso Zegbe Camarena and other Mexican officials on Thursday (ONA)

The two sides reviewed the arrangements Oman is making, including preparations to screen World Cup matches for fans at different locations on large screens, especially in Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, in addition to the availability of the hotel facilities.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has stated that the national carrier Oman Air will operate 48 Match Day Shuttle flights

between Muscat and Doha from November 21 to December 3 facilitating World Cup match ticket holders to fly to Doha and return to Muscat on the same day.

Return Match Day Shuttle flights can be booked via the Oman Air website with prices starting from RO49 for Economy Class and RO155 for Business Class. Fares include fees, taxes, airport charges and hand baggage allowance, a press release stated.

Jabal Akhdar fest to become annual feature

Our Correspondent
Muscat

After successfully hosting the first Al Jabal Al Akhdar Tourism Festival, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) has decided to make it an annual feature to promote tourism in and around Jabal Akhdar.

H E Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, confirmed that it will be turned into an annual event.

The first-of-its-kind five-day fest in the wilayat of Jabal Akhdar in Dakhliyah concluded on Saturday.

H E Ibrahim bin Saeed Al Kharousi, Undersecretary for Heritage in MHT, officially inaugurated the activities of the festival on Friday, including a parade of horses, and an exhibition of agricultural products, aromatic plant oils and handicrafts.

Commenting on the festival, H E Mahrouqi tweeted, "The festival will be an annual event aimed at creating a quality destination for all."

The decision evoked positive reactions from citizens and ex-



perts. Dr Khalid al Balushi said, "Well said Your Excellency. Hope such events are held all over the country."

Haitham al Farsi said such festivals are very important as these are outlets for families to

enjoy the outdoors. "We hope to see such events in various governorates. This tourism festival will also help young people innovate and be creative."

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Saif Ali al Rawahi, head of Oman



From Horseback, one of the organisers of the festival, said, "We, as organisers of the festival, always wanted to hold the festival annually. The ministry's approval has pleased us immensely."

The decision will activate domestic tourism, attract tourists from neighbouring countries, create job opportunities, and promote the products of productive families.

"More than 2,000 visitors vis-

ited the festival daily. The festival included many events held for the first time, including water games and a pomegranate festival," said Rawahi.

He informed that 20 riders participated in the horseback

trail ride of two-day duration covering about 50km.

Economy analyst Nasser al Hosni said there are many tourist sites, including castles and forts, in Oman that can be used to hold cultural and tourism events.

Citizen dead, another rescued after hiking accident

Our Correspondent
Muscat

One citizen died and another was rescued in a critical condition from Jabal Samhan in Dhofar on Saturday.

The two went on a hiking trip in Jabal Samhan in the wilayat of Sadah on Friday and fell from the mountaintop.

Rescue teams of Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) in Dhofar swung into action after receiving a report of two hikers falling from the top of the mountain on Friday. A Royal Air Force of Oman

(RAFO) helicopter and CDAA teams could not reach the site due to the difficult terrain on Friday.

'Rescue teams of CDAA in Dhofar, the Governorate Police Command, RAFO and citizens' teams were able to reach the injured hiker, who was transported by helicopter to Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah,' CDAA stated on Saturday.

'The fall resulted in critical injury to one citizen and death of another,' it added. It called on citizens and residents to follow safety procedures and avoid taking risks when hiking.

Private sector to manage Nakhal Fort

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) has signed an agreement with Nakhal Ahlia Investment Company to manage and operate Nakhal Fort in South Batinah, an important tourist attraction in the governorate.

An official of MHT said, "The agreement aims to empower the private sector to enrich tourism and revitalise cultural heritage sites in accordance with Oman Vision 2040 and the strategic programmes of the Tenth Five-Year Plan with added local value for the community."

According to the official, the



ministry is currently working on developing and restoring tourist sites in various governorates to contribute to the diversification

of the sultanate's tourism offerings, benefit from its cultural heritage and historical monuments, and highlight the ancient and au-

thentic Omani cultural heritage. Nakhal Fort is being handed over to the private company following major restoration work undertaken by the ministry at the site since last year.

'We followed a systematic plan in the restoration process, including maintenance work on all exterior facades, removing damaged outer layers, treating ceilings, floors and walls of internal rooms, preparing a water drainage system and general electrical connections in the fort,' the ministry stated.

'The restoration work aims to preserve the character and identity of the fort by using traditional materials and preserving all ar-

chitectural elements without any changes. The restoration process is being carried out with prudence and caution, using manual devices rather than heavy equipment that may affect the structure of the building.'

Dating back to the pre-Islamic era, Nakhal Fort is named after its wilayat and situated amidst a date palm plantation, rising above a rocky hill at the base of Mount Nakhal, northeast of Jabal Akhdar.

Built around an irregularly shaped rock, the fort's architecture does not follow any particular style. Rocks form part of the fort, including towers in the western side of the structure.

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BinSina Pharmacy opens flagship outlet in Mall of Oman



Our Correspondent
Muscat

UAE-based pharmacy BinSina has entered the Oman market with the launch of a flagship outlet in Mall of Oman.

The state-of-the-art pharmacy opened on Thursday following a ribbon-cutting ceremony by Dr Ibrahim bin Nasser al Rashdi, Assistant Director General of Medical Supplies in Oman's Ministry of Health. Officiated by Dr Doaa Marouf, CEO of Al Khayyat Investments - Pharma, the ceremony was followed by a presentation and tour of the pharmacy for invited guests and the media.

Speaking on the sidelines of the pharmacy's opening, Dr Marouf said, "Our ongoing success allows us to continue growing and expanding our network of pharmacies in the GCC, and with that opportunity we bring our innovative and modernised approach to managing pharmacies

and customer experiences to the people of Oman, particularly those residing and working in the vicinity of Mall of Oman."

The outlet offers a complete range of products and services. "We couple these products and service offerings with a strong team of experienced pharmacists, who will deliver personalised services and a more holistic approach to wellness to our customers in Oman," Dr Marouf.

Located on second floor of the mall in Bausher, BinSina is a trusted brand that promotes good health and wellness. The pharmacy dispenses a wide range of products, including healthcare, vitamins and supplements, over-the-counter medicines, personal care, baby care, skincare, cosmetics, fitness, homecare and health foods.

Established in 1965, as part of Ibn Sina Group Pharmacies and Al Khayyat Investments, BinSina has a network of more than 120 outlets.

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MoE opens five new schools in Liwa

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Education (MoE) has opened five schools in Liwa, North Batinah, at a cost of RO12mn in preparation of the new academic year.

The schools' project is in line with the expected growth in the number of students.

H E Dr Madiha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, accompanied by H E Dr Khalfan bin Saeed al Shuali, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, visited the new schools recently.

The visit included reviewing the readiness of the five schools for the new academic year.

In March 2022, MoE unveiled details of a plan to set up 76 new schools in different parts of the

sultanate. The new schools will lower student density in classrooms, besides reducing the number of evening classes.

Of the 76 schools, 19 will be set up in Muscat, 17 in North Batinah, 11 in South Batinah, nine each in South Sharqiyah and Dhofar, five in Dakhliyah, two each in Buraimi and Musandam, and one each in North Sharqiyah and Dhahirah.

'The new schools will accommodate about 80,000 male and female students, and will be built in light of the indicators of the current reality of the number of students in each governorate and the number of evening schools, as well as the expected increase in the number of students till the end of the Tenth Five-Year Plan in each governorate,' a statement from MoE said.



Red palm weevil infestation on the rise, increasing economic losses

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Infestation of date plantations with red palm weevil, a dreaded pest, is rising in Oman leading to an increase in economic losses caused to the agriculture sector.

In the first half of this year, red palm weevil infestation spread to 24 wilayats from 22 in H1 2021. The number of villages affected by the pest grew to 429, 47 more compared to the same period last year.

Last week, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources revealed results for the first half of 2022 of an integrated management programme to curb red palm weevil infestation in the sultanate.

The results showed that the pest infested 22,444 palm trees across Oman, an increase of 16.4 per cent over last year, when it was 19,278 trees.

Efforts of field teams and the



ministry's specialists led to treatment of 18,213 palm trees, or 81.2 per cent of the total affected palms in H1 2022. 'This is 14.3 per cent more than H1 2021, when 15,937 palm trees were treated,' the ministry stated.

In 2022, 4,231 infected date palms were felled, or 18.9 per cent of the total infected palms, compared to the removal of 3,341 palms in the same period of 2021, representing 17.3 per cent of the total infected palms.

Insect control field teams trapped 50,312 red palm weevil insects using 3,867 trapping devices in 2022, compared to 42,915 in 2021.

The ministry said economic losses to the date plantation sector were significant due to red palm weevil infestation this year. Infestation of 22,444 date palms led to a total loss of RO1.571mn, while treatment of 18,213 trees cost RO1.274mn, while removal of 4,231 infected palms cost the

ministry RO296,170.

The report released last week indicated Sohar is the most infected wilayat with 73 villages affected, while Ibbi suffered the most number of date palms infestations (5,187).

Since mid-1980s, the red palm weevil has been reported to cause serious damage to date palms in Oman and the Gulf region. The unique agroclimatic conditions prevailing in the Middle East and the nature of the crop, coupled with transportation of planting material, have led to the rapid spread of the pest in a short period of time.

The concealed pests bore through the soft tissues of date palms often leading to the death of the trees if timely curative measures are not adopted. However, treatment of infected date palms at an early stage of infection is often not possible as detection in early stages of infection is difficult.

Illegal well drilling thwarted

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) is carrying out inspections to check and limit drilling of random and unlicensed wells.

The Control Department of the Directorate General of Agriculture and Water Resources in Dhahirah Governorate on Wednesday seized equipment used for drilling wells without licence in the wilayat of Yanqul, while taking legal action against violators.

On August 17, the water control team of the Directorate Gen-



eral of Agriculture and Water Resources in North Batinah arrested citizens in the wilayats of Suwaiq and Saham who drilled wells in houses under construction without obtaining necessary licences from MAFWR. 'Equipment used for digging the wells were seized and legal proce-

dures are being completed against the offenders,' the directorate in North Batinah stated.

On the same day, an unlicensed automatic drilling machine and unlicensed manual well digger were seized in Dhahirah.

Digging unlicensed wells attract a fine of RO2,000 and imprisonment of one year, MAFWR has warned.

Rampant digging depletes ground water reserves, besides violating regulations and laws governing public property.

A total of 913 water licences were issued in May 2022, according to statistics issued by MAFWR.



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471 job vacancies in private sector

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) has announced 471 job vacancies in private sector institutions, under the wage support initiative.

Of the total, 183 jobs are for university degree holders, 58 for post-secondary diploma holders, 152 for general education diploma holders, and 78 for below general education diploma holders. 'Under the initiative, the wages of these employees will partly be reimbursed to the tune of RO200 for each employee for a period of two years, provided that the employer bears the difference; and employment is at least for a period equal to the period of government support.'

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Fitch upgrades OQ and Omantel ratings to 'BB'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Fitch Ratings on Friday upgraded the long-term issuer default ratings (IDRs) of the sultanate's international integrated energy group OQ and Omantel to 'BB' from 'BB-'. The rating agency's outlooks on both companies' ratings are stable.

The rating actions on OQ and Omantel follow the upgrade of Oman's sovereign rating to 'BB' from 'BB-' on August 15, 2022, Fitch said in its statement.

'We have upgraded OQ's long-term IDR and senior unsecured ratings to 'BB' from BB-. The outlook on the long-term IDR is stable. The recovery rating is RR4,' Fitch said. It said OQ's IDR is equalised with that of Oman (BB/stable), reflecting Fitch's view of strong links between OQ and the state.

Fitch said OQ's 'b+' stand-alone credit profile (SCP) reflects successful project execution in both the upstream and downstream segments, alongside stronger financial performance due to higher oil and gas prices as well as the refining and petrochemical margin leading to lower net leverage expectations.

'OQ's SCP also reflects its solid business profile with integrated operations spanning exploration and production, refining, marketing, chemical and petrochemical segments. OQ's SCP remains constrained by its complex group structure,' the



Fitch says its rating actions on OQ and Omantel follow the upgrade of Oman's sovereign rating to 'BB' from 'BB-' on August 15

rating agency said.

Fitch noted that OQ is ultimately fully owned by the government of Oman via Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and was established to strengthen and centralise Oman's oil and gas industry.

'OQ's rating is equalised with that of the sovereign under Fitch's government-related entities rating criteria. Therefore, the upgrade of Oman's rating drives

the upgrade of OQ's rating,' it said.

According to Fitch, Oman's government exerts significant influence on OQ's business and funding strategy via OIA. It said, 'OQ has received significant support from the government in the form of equity injections, asset transfers, shareholder loans and debt guarantees.'

Fitch believes large-scale support in the form of investment-

project funding or debt refinancing would be difficult to obtain due to the potential budgetary constraints on the Omani government, but support for OQ's short-term liquidity and interest payments would be provided, if needed.

As per Fitch's estimates, OQ's consolidated revenue accounted for 26 per cent of Oman's 2021 GDP. 'OQ is the main downstream company owning all do-

mestic refining assets producing all transport fuels for the Omani market and is tasked with increasing the value per barrel of extracted oil by further expanding refining and petrochemical assets. It is also the exclusive operator of Oman's domestic natural gas transportation infrastructure,' the rating agency said.

OQ's business profile, Fitch said, is supported by the large scale of its operations, business diversification with a presence in the oil and gas upstream, downstream and midstream sectors, quality of its exploration and production and its newly built refining and petrochemical assets as well as its favourable location with access to high-growth markets.

For Omantel, Fitch said the rating upgrade follows a recent similar rating action of the Oman sovereign's as Omantel's issuer default rating is capped by the rating of the sovereign.

'The cap reflects our assessment of strong links between Omantel and the state and is in accordance with Fitch's parent and subsidiary linkage and government-related entities criteria,' the rating agency said.

Fitch noted that Omantel is 51 per cent-owned by state-owned funds and it continues to view Omantel's standalone credit profile at 'bbb-'. Fitch has also upgraded Omantel's senior secured notes under Oztel Holdings SPC Limited to 'BB' from 'BB-'.

Al Maha Ceramics acquires 45% stake in Al Hael Ceramics



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Al Maha Ceramics Company on Thursday announced the acquisition of a 45 per cent stake in Al Hael Ceramics Company.

Al Maha Ceramics is one of the largest ceramic tiles manufacturers in Oman. The company produces around 6mn sqm of tiles annually and export its tiles to over 15 countries.

Al Hael Ceramics is the largest manufacturer of tiles and porcelain in Oman with a capacity to produce up to 18mn sqm of tiles annually.

Al Hael's manufacturing plant was completed in 2019 with an investment of around RO40mn. The factory has state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities and its equipment have been purchased from the leading Italian equipment manufacturer, SACMI.

Al Hael is able to produce tiles of a large variety of sizes including the largest sizes in demand by the market.

As part of the transaction Al Maha will also operate Al Hael for a period of five years, with a possibility of extending for another five years, thereby allowing

Al Hael to benefit from Al Maha's extensive experience in the production and sales of tiles, according to a press statement.

In return Al Maha will receive RO120,000 as a service fee in the first two years and in subsequent years it will be entitled to 10 per cent of the net profits.

The GCC market for floor and wall tiles is estimated to grow at an average annual growth rate of 6 per cent between 2022-2028 and reach 328mn sqm tiles and US\$4.1bn in revenues by 2028.

The market demand in Oman for tiles is currently estimated to be around 40mn sqm per annum and valued at around US\$550mn. Oman's tile market is expected to grow to 65.5mn sqm by 2028 and generate revenues of US\$1bn.

Al Maha and Al Hael will have a total combined capacity to produce over 24mn sqm in porcelain and ceramic tiles. The two companies together will become one of the largest tiles producers in the GCC and the only producer of porcelain tiles in Oman. It will therefore be in a favorable position to serve Oman and the GCC demand for ceramic and porcelain tiles.

EU to hold 'urgent' energy talks

Prague, Czech Republic - The Czech prime minister said Friday the EU presidency held by his country would convene urgent talks to deal with the current energy crisis following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The Czech presidency "will convene an urgent meeting of energy ministers to discuss specific emergency measures to address the energy situation," Prime Minister Petr Fiala said on Twitter.

Approved by European Commission head Ursula von der Leyen, the move comes as the 27-nation bloc is trying to shed dependence on supplies of Russian oil and gas following the Ukraine invasion that began

on February 24.

Reduced supplies and anxiety over the future have sparked rocket growth in energy prices across Europe.

Czech Industry and Trade Minister Jozef Sikela said the EU Energy Council should meet "at the earliest possible date".

"We are in an energy war with Russia and it is damaging the whole EU," he said on Twitter. On Friday, Germany and France reported record electricity prices for 2023 as the year-ahead contracts jumped to 850 euros per megawatt hour in Germany and to 1,000 euros in France from 85 euros in both countries last year.

The European Commission

is planning to cut EU dependency on Russian gas by two-thirds this year and end its reliance on Russian supplies of the fuel before 2030.

Heavily dependent on gas imports from Russia, the Czech Republic vowed to make energy security its priority during its EU presidency which started on July 1. Sikela said earlier the energy market had ceased to function properly amid the cut in Russian supplies.

"To some extent, the market has gotten out of control, market volatility no longer responds to good news, while the bad news is accumulating and it is pushing prices up," Sikela said.

AFP

Oil prices rise 5% during last week

Ankara, Turkey - Oil prices gained more than 5 per cent during the week ended August 26, over looming supply concerns as Saudi Arabia signalled possible output cuts due to extreme market volatility and with signs of rebounding oil demand in the US, the world's largest oil consumer.

Brent crude was trading at US\$101.02 per barrel in London on Friday, posting a 5.28 per cent rise from the Monday session that opened at US\$95.95 a barrel.

American benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) registered at US\$93.81 per barrel at the same time on Friday, increasing 4.64 per cent relative to the opening price of US\$89.65 a barrel on Monday.



Oil prices started the week on Monday, clawing back some of the previous week's gains over the double whammy of increasing demand woes and the rising dollar value, discouraging market investors trading in more expensive US dollar-indexed oil.

Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman warned on Monday that OPEC+ could cut production to ensure market clarity if needed "as has been clearly and repeatedly demonstrated in 2020 and 2021".

Prices increased on Tuesday

over looming supply concerns as Saudi Arabia signalled possible output cuts if required amid extreme market volatility. Later in the day, Brent crude rose to over US\$100 a barrel, while WTI traded over US\$94 per barrel.

As the extremely volatile paper oil market entered a vicious circle, Salman said it could negatively impact the operation of oil markets, energy commodities and other commodities creating new types of risks and insecurities.

He relayed that OPEC+ is working on a new agreement beyond 2022 and on production cuts, as part of the current deal is scheduled to end in September 2022.

Anadolu Agency

Majid Al Futtaim's revenues jump 15% to AED18bn in first half of 2022

Dubai, UAE - Majid Al Futtaim - the leading shopping malls, communities, retail and leisure pioneer across the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia - announced its audit reviewed operational and financial results for the first half of 2022. Following a steady economic recovery in retail and leisure sectors, the group reported a revenue of AED18bn, an increase of 15 per cent compared to the first half of 2021.

EBITDA rose 18 per cent to AED1.9bn, a result of the company's solid operational performance, driven by diversification efforts and a continued focus on cost efficiencies and scale. The group continues to maintain a strong balance sheet with total assets valued at around AED62.9bn. Net borrowings stood at AED11.2bn.

In a press release, Alain Bej-

jani, chief executive officer of Majid Al Futtaim - Holding, said, "A strong, customer-focused strategy supported by unrivalled data and analytics capabilities has enabled Majid Al Futtaim to deliver sustained growth through the first half of 2022. Our efforts have been further amplified by MENA's steady progress in moving beyond post-pandemic recovery as we collectively turn our efforts toward economic expansion and regional prosperity."

"The growth delivered in the first half of the year is encouraging. While our region is not immune to building global inflation and supply chain pressures, Majid Al Futtaim remains optimistic towards the broader economic outlook. Our prudent financial discipline and strong governance ensures our resilience in the face of any imme-



Alain Bejjani

diated impact while ensuring we are well-positioned to remain focused on sustainable value creation," he said.

The group continues to benefit from a sustained post-pandemic rebound in consumer confidence, as evidenced in increased shopping mall footfall, hotel occupancy rates, and admission to its cinemas and

leisure and entertainment venues.

Compared to 2021 figures, Majid Al Futtaim Properties' revenue rose 51 per cent to AED2.4bn, while EBITDA was up 27 per cent to AED1.4bn in the first half of 2022.

Shopping mall tenant sales increased by 21 per cent, while footfall increased 20 per cent to 100mn visitors compared to the previous year. Meanwhile, the hotel portfolio's revenue grew to AED333mn driven by a lower base of 2021 due to capacity restrictions.

Majid Al Futtaim - Retail recorded a 9 per cent increase in revenue, standing at AED14.4bn for 2022, while EBITDA fell 9 per cent to AED567mn. The growth in retail is driven by the AED268mn increases in revenue for LFL sites, and growth in digital

sales of AED453mn.

Continuing to expand its international footprint, Majid Al Futtaim also opened 18 new stores across its geographies. In line with the global transformation to digital retail services, the group invested in the development of express commerce, seeing a 73 per cent increase in digital sales. In addition, Majid Al Futtaim - Retail opened the UAE's first BIO store in January, featuring the retailer's first ever café and an in-store hydroponic farm.

Future investment

In its pursuit of being economically resilient during the second half of 2022, Majid Al Futtaim will continue to support sustainable economic development while adhering to a prudent financial management strategy.

Majid Al Futtaim is wholly committed to the markets in which it operates, working to deliver exceptional experience not just for its customers but tenants, employees and its key stakeholders. The business will also look at investing on corporate initiatives including digital transformation, data and analytics, customer experience and loyalty programmes.

Majid Futtaim Properties continues to make progress on its pipeline development projects, including Mall of the Emirates redevelopment and Mall of Saudi.

Majid Al Futtaim - Retail will reinforce its leadership position in core markets and will continue to invest and scale up its omnichannel presence, enhance its network of stores and grow its food and health businesses to meet consumers' evolving needs.

Financing

Majid Al Futtaim's robust balance sheet has allowed it to maintain a strong financial and liquidity position thanks to the steadily recovering market conditions. The company's debt maturity profile remains light with no material debt maturity until May 2024.

Despite challenging macro-economic conditions and volatile financial markets, in June 2022 the group tendered its US\$500mn outstanding hybrid notes with the first call date falling in September 2022 and replaced them with a new US\$500mn green hybrid notes with a first call date falling in September 2027. This was the group's first hybrid transaction in green format and the first green corporate hybrid from MENA.

Taming inflation will inflict 'pain' on Americans: Fed

Washington, US – Taming US inflation will inflict "pain" on American families and businesses, but failure to wrestle prices down from their current 40-year high would be even more harmful, Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell said Friday in a hotly-anticipated speech to global policy-makers.

Addressing the annual gathering of central bankers in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, Powell did not hold back or leave room for doubt about the Fed's plans, pledging to act "forcefully."

He warned that the world's largest economy is likely to slow for a sustained period, and the strong US job market will suffer in order to get prices down – consequences he called the "unfortunate costs of reducing inflation."

The Fed this year launched an aggressive campaign to raise interest rates – and in his unusually short, notably direct remarks, Powell made it clear that the fight against inflation is not over.

"Restoring price stability will take some time and requires using our tools forcefully to bring demand and supply into better balance," he told the gathering, held against the backdrop of the majestic Grand Teton mountains.

"While higher interest rates, slower growth and softer labour



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

market conditions will bring down inflation, they will also bring some pain to households and businesses," Powell said. "But a failure to restore price stability would mean far greater pain."

Modest signs of slowing in the US economy and easing price pressures spurred hope in financial markets that the central bank might ease up on its aggressive rate hikes, and perhaps even start to reverse course next year.

But Powell doused hopes of a policy pivot, making it clear that Fed policy and the benchmark borrowing rate would have to remain "sufficiently restrictive" to bring inflation back down to the two per cent target.

Improving data
The supply chain issues that have beleaguered the global economy have continued, worsened by a series of Covid lockdowns in China, which have combined with Russia's war in Ukraine to send prices soaring worldwide.

In the battle to contain red-hot US inflation, which topped nine per cent in June, the Fed has increased rates four times, including three-quarter-point increases in June and July – steep moves unheard of since the early 1980s – to the current level of a range of 2.25 to 2.5 per cent.

Powell repeated Friday that another "unusually large" 75 basis point hike could be appropriate at the September policy meeting.

But recent data has shown signs of a slowing in price increases. Annual consumer price inflation dipped to a still-high 8.5 per cent in July.

And data released Friday showed the Fed's preferred inflation measure, the personal consumption expenditures price index, actually fell 0.1 per cent in July – a dramatic slowdown from the 1.0 per cent surge in June, largely reflecting the recent sharp retreat in global oil prices. Over the last 12 months, the PCE price index slowed to 6.3 per cent, the Commerce Department reported. But Powell did not take much comfort in the figures.

"While the lower inflation readings for July are welcome, a single month's improvement falls far short of what (policy-makers) will need to see before we are confident that inflation is moving down," he said.

But President Joe Biden cheered the figures, saying, "The American people are starting to get some relief from high prices."

Still, he added, "We have more work to do. We have to help families who have been squeezed by decades living paycheck to paycheck."

AFP

Moderna sues Pfizer over COVID vaccine technology

Washington, US – Moderna said Friday it is suing rival vaccine makers Pfizer and BioNTech, alleging the partners infringed on its patents in developing their Covid-19 shot administered to hundreds of millions around the world.

The lawsuits set up a high-stakes showdown between the leading manufacturers of Covid-19 shots that are a key tool in the fight against the disease.

"Moderna believes that Pfizer and BioNTech's Covid-19 vaccine Comirnaty infringes patents Moderna filed between 2010 and 2016 covering Moderna's foundational mRNA technology," the US-based biotech firm said in a statement.

"Pfizer and BioNTech copied this technology, without Moderna's permission, to make Comirnaty," Moderna alleged.

Pfizer and BioNTech said they were aware of the litigation, and each issued statements denying any wrongdoing.

"BioNTech's work is original, and we will vigorously defend against all allegations of patent infringement," the firm said, adding it "respects valid and enforceable intellectual property rights of others."

Pfizer pledged to "vigorously defend against the allegations of the lawsuit."

The mRNA technology used in the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech shots differs from that in



traditional vaccines, which rely on injecting weakened or dead forms of a virus to allow the immune system to recognize it and build antibodies.

Instead, mRNA vaccines deliver instructions to cells to build a harmless piece of the spike protein found on the surface of the virus that causes Covid-19. After creating this spike protein, cells can recognize and fight the real virus, hailed as a major advancement in development of vaccines.

The shots have repeatedly been the subject of inaccurate claims that they are dangerous, but health authorities say they are safe and effective.

The lawsuits – in US district court in Massachusetts, and in regional court in Dusseldorf, Germany – are not seeking the removal of the rival vaccine or an injunction on future sales.

Moderna said it had begun building up the technology in 2010 and patented work on corona viruses in 2015 and 2016, which allowed for rollout of its shots in "record time" after the pandemic struck.

The virus has killed at least 6.48mn people worldwide since 2020 and made nearly 600mn ill, according to a Johns Hopkins University tracker.

In addition to death and suffering, the disease has led to a reshaping of life ranging from a change in norms on working from home to a scrambling of supply chains and workforces.

Moderna said it pledged in October 2020 not to enforce its Covid-19-related patents while the pandemic continued, but less than two years later changed that stance as the fight shifted gears.

AFP

US economy contracted 0.6%

Washington, US – The American economy contracted in the April-June quarter but not as much as initially reported, as revised data showed stronger US exports and spending, according to government data.

Second quarter GDP fell 0.6 per cent, annualized, less than the 0.9 per cent drop the Commerce Department announced in the initial estimate last month.

Coming after the steep 1.6 per cent contraction in the first quarter, the data still feeds concerns about a recession in the world's largest economy, which is often defined as two quarters of negative growth.

But many economists have

argued that definition does not apply to the current situation, given that the very strong labour market and resilient US consumer mean the downturn is not widespread throughout the economy.

Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics notes that incomes also increased in the latest quarter, which bodes well for continued upward revisions to the data.

"We are reasonably confident that when the comprehensive revisions are published in October, the declines in GDP in Q1 and Q2 will be revised away," he said.

AFP

SpaceX and T-Mobile unveil satellite plan

Los Angeles, US – Elon Musk's SpaceX satellites will connect directly to T-Mobile cellphones to provide service access even in the most remote places beyond the reach of cell towers from next year, the two companies announced Thursday.

The new service, which will work on existing cellphones and utilize SpaceX's network of thousands of Starlink satellites in Earth's orbit, will begin offering text messaging services from late 2023, with voice calls and data services expected to follow later.

"The important thing about this is that it means there's no dead zones anywhere in the world for your cell phone," said Musk, in an announcement event held at SpaceX's Starbase facility in Texas.



Elon Musk and T-Mobile CEO Mike Sievert on stage during a joint event in Boca Chica Beach, Texas (AFP)

Musk said the service will save lives, giving the example of hikers who get lost and are currently unable to call for help.

"We will no longer read about these tragedies that happened

where people get lost and if only they could have called for help they would be OK."

Though satellite internet has existed for years, users currently require specialized hardware, such as Starlink terminals.

"This won't have the kind of bandwidth that a Starlink terminal would have, but it will enable texting, it will enable images, and – if there aren't too many people in the cell zone – you can even potentially have a little bit of video," said Musk.

T-Mobile CEO Mike Sievert said he expects the new service to be free of charge on most cellphone plans, although there could be a fee for users on low-cost packages.

"It's a lot like putting a cellular tower in the sky. Just a lot harder," he said.

Competition in the satellite internet market is rapidly intensifying.

Amazon founder Jeff Bezos recently announced he intended to launch some 3,200 satellites. Public institutions are also looking to get in on the act.

China has a plan to launch a constellation of 13,000 satellites called Guowang and the European Union wants to deploy roughly 250 by 2024.

While next year's beta test launch will be restricted to the United States, Sievert said both the companies expect to expand to overseas markets with reciprocal roaming deals and widening the network coverage for dead zone areas in the US and other countries in the world.

AFP

California says new cars must be zero carbon emission by 2035

Los Angeles, US – California ruled Thursday that all new cars sold in America's most populous state must be zero emission from 2035, in what was billed as a nation-leading step to slash the pollutants that cause global warming.

The widely touted move has been hailed by environmentalists, who hope it will prod other parts of the United States to quicken the adoption of electric vehicles.

The rules demand an ever-increasing percentage of new cars sold to California's 40mn inhabitants produce no tailpipe pollutants, until their total ban in 13 years' time.

"The timeline is ambitious but achievable: by the time a child born this year is ready to enter middle school, only zero-emission vehicles or a limited number of plug-in hybrids (PHEVs) will be offered for sale new in California," the California Air Resources Board said.

The board, which was tasked with finding a way to implement

Governor Gavin Newsom's order to transition the state's automotive sector, said the health benefits would be significant.

"By 2037, the regulation delivers a 25 per cent reduction in smog-causing pollution from light-duty vehicles.

"This benefits all Californians but especially the state's most environmentally and economically burdened communities along freeways and other heavily traveled thoroughfares."

From 2026 through 2040 the regulation is expected to result in 1,290 fewer cardiopulmonary deaths, 460 fewer hospital admissions for cardiovascular or respiratory illness, and 650 fewer emergency room visits for asthma, it said.

Popularity
California already accounts for the lion's share of electric vehicles in the United States, with 1.13mn of them on the state's roads – 43 per cent of the nation's total.

Their popularity has mushroomed in the years since they were seen as little more than novelty golf carts for tree-huggers content to drive no more than a few dozen miles (kilometers).



Vehicles drive in traffic on the 405 freeway through the Sepulveda Pass in Los Angeles, California, on August 25 (AFP)

Ten years ago only two per cent of new cars sold in the state were electric; that figure is now 16 per cent, and Teslas and other premium offerings with a range of hundreds of miles are a common sight on roads around Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Still, the vehicles remain more expensive than their fossil fuel-powered equivalents and critics say only federal subsidies of up to US\$7,500 make them viable for many buyers.

But supporters say the incentives are necessary short-term supports that will fade away as increased adoption boosts economies of scale and drives down prices.

As the biggest auto market in the United States, one manufacturer cannot ignore, California has an outsized influence in effectively setting national standards.

Thursday's ruling comes on the heels of a climate law signed last week by US President Joe Biden, which sets aside hundreds of millions of dollars in incentives for clean energy programs.

Biden and his Democratic Party are rushing to make up climate policy ground they feel was lost under former president Donald Trump, who yanked the United States out of the Paris Climate Accord and reversed what many environmentalists viewed as already-weak progress in reducing the fossil fuel emissions that drive global warming.

Newsom, a leading light in the Democratic Party, who is rumoured to have presidential ambitions, welcomed the ruling.

"California now has a groundbreaking, world-leading... roadmap to reducing dangerous carbon emissions and moving away from fossil fuels," he said.

The reduction in the number of petrol and diesel-powered cars on the roads is equivalent to

"915mn oil barrels' worth of emissions that won't pollute our communities."

"With the historic US\$10bn we're investing to accelerate the transition... we're making it easier and cheaper for all Californians to purchase electric cars."

In recent years jurisdictions around the world, notably in Europe, have set their sights on the polluting automobile sector.

Norway is aiming to have all new cars produce zero tailpipe emissions by 2025.

The UK, Singapore and Israel are eyeing 2030, while the European Union wants to end the sale of new petrol and diesel cars by 2035.

Human-caused global warming has already raised average temperatures around the planet, affecting weather patterns and worsening natural hazards like wildfires and storms. Scientists say dramatic action is required to limit the damage, and point to curbing emissions from fossil fuels as key to the battle.

AFP

Bank Muscat’s special interest rates to first-time borrowers

In line with its customer-centric vision of offering the best services and facilities to benefit its customers, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, has announced the availability of financing options with special reduced rates for first time borrowers.

The special rates are meant for customers with salaries RO1,000 and over who have either recently opened an account with Bank Muscat or those Bank Muscat customers who have accounts but have not availed any loan facilities before. Customers should be employed in Government, Quasi-government or approved private sector (Tier 1) organisations to be eligible.

Bank Muscat launched the special offer after extensively analysing customer feedback and loan booking data, which is once again a demonstration of its commitment to customer-centricity. Available to employees of government and quasi-government institutions as well as select private-sector (Tier 1) companies, the special offer includes highly-competitive interest rates of 4.25 per cent for Baituna Home Loans and 4.5 per cent for Personal Finance for loan tenors over 48 months.



Eshraqa’s Stemazone holds camp on climate change



Committed to promoting a knowledge-based economy, Khimji Ramdas Eshraqa’s Stemazone initiative has continued to focus on promoting the culture of scientific thinking, problem-solving, and analytical decision-making amongst the youth.

Designed as a sustainable educational programme, Stemazone was conceptualised in partnership with the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Culture, Sports and Youth (MOCSY), to introduce Omani children between 6 to 16 years, to the world of Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Arts (STEAM).

KR Eshraqa Stemazone partnering with DAI’s Sustainable Business Group designed and implemented the ‘Green Innovation’ Summer Camp that highlighted ‘Climate Change’ as its central theme with the slogan ‘I can change the world’.

The ‘Green Innovation’ Stemazone Summer camp was geared at delving deeper into the concept of climate change by leveraging new technologies that utilise Big Data and other algorithms. The camp also illustrated the use and role of Big Data in tackling real-life problems. From August 1 to August 15, summer camp catered to 50 students between 13-16 years of age, the event was held at the Muscat STEM Centre and Khimji Ramdas Infrastructure campus at Ghala.

STARZPLAY’s DP World Asia Cup cricket live across MENA



STARZPLAY, ranked among the region’s top three subscription video on demand services, will stream live the upcoming 15th edition of the DP World Asia Cup 2022 across the MENA region.

The upcoming tournament will be available as part of STARZPLAY Sports, as well as a standalone package ‘Cricket’ (formerly ‘PowerPlay’), for those who only wish to watch the DP World Asia Cup 2022 and other cricket series. All the matches will be streamed LIVE along-with highlights, pre-shows and post-match analysis, with full match replays. evision, the entertainment streaming division of e& life, a business pillar of e& (previously known as Etisalat Group), and a majority stake holder in STARZPLAY, has acquired the exclusive broadcast and media rights across MENA. Cricket fans eagerly awaiting the much-anticipated game can now enjoy the cricket fiesta anytime, anywhere and from any device on STARZPLAY via evision’s flagship sports channel CricLife Max.

CCED enhances GSM services at Shahd camp



CC Energy Development (CCED), in collaboration with Omantel, has delivered 4G GSM Services through its most recent telecommunication infrastructure upgrade in its operating blocks.

This upgrade includes a 60m tall telecommunication tower and a fibre optic cable to camp facilities located in Eastern Central Oman. The construction of the tower also serves the local community by providing enhanced mobile services.

The Telecommunication infrastructure hosts various services from both major service providers in the sultanate, including the previously hosted Ooredoo 4G+ Service as well as the recent introduction of Omantel 4G services. This infrastructure utilises modern information processes to transfer real-time operational data which advances remote field management.

Muna al Badi, Head of Information and Communication Technology at CCED said, “Delivery of this major telecommunication infrastructure in our

Delivery of this major Telecommunication infrastructure (a 60m tall telecommunication tower) in our blocks, is part of our strategy to drive digital transformation; this infrastructure supported Omantel 4G Services at our camp facilities as well as other major upgrades of services

MUNA AL BADI

blocks, is part of our strategy to drive digital transformation; this infrastructure supported Omantel 4G Services at our camp facilities as well as other major upgrades of services.

“We believe that the telecom services have direct and indirect benefits to our operations and the community at large,” Badi said, adding: “For example, with Internet, mobile apps, VoIP and other means of communication, our team can exchange information in real time and stay connected to our partners and clients.”

“Having these technologies in place,

can also reduce operational costs, and increase productivity across all departments.”

Given the high demand on telecom services in the Sultanate, CCED previously built telecommunication infrastructure in its Blocks 3 and 4. This addition offers the local community improved connectivity, while also supporting the government’s efforts to ensure better access to information, encourage innovation and promote e-learning.

Since the beginning of its operations in 2007, CCED has been focused on community and people development by

utilizing the latest technologies and offering its team the best facilities and services to excel. The new telecommunication tower also contributes to the development of the area by optimizing network coverage, and providing opportunities for telecom operators to accelerate the rollout of new wireless technology. The company is committed to continue improving day-to-day operating processes, while also benefiting the local community.

CC Energy Development S A L (CCED) is a dynamic, independent international oil and gas operator with a growth mindset that thinks globally but acts locally. ‘We are a diverse, ethical and responsible organisation that believes people are key to our success and we ensure we benefit the communities we work in,’ it says.

‘Our successful exploration strategy has organically grown our business having produced at over 45,000 bbls/day. CCED has growth as a core mindset and we are developing our capability to increase our production significantly.’

ahlibank offers cashback at Shell Oman

In a continued effort to offer value-added benefits and services to its customers, ahlibank has once again teamed up with Shell Oman Marketing Company (Shell Oman) to provide all its credit card holders with an exciting cashback offer.

Scheduled to run for five days each month till the end of the year, the promotion offers all ahlibank credit cardholders 20 per cent cashback when fuelling or shopping in Shell Service Stations and Select Shops with a maximum cap of RO10 per customer, said a press statement.

Commenting on the promotion, Muneer al Balushi, AGM - Head of Retail Distribution of ahlibank said, “Our role as one of the sultanate’s leading banking institutions requires us to develop offers and services that



meet customer needs over time. This will enable us to fulfill their intention to utilise their credit cards in the best way possible. Such offers enhance our customers’ loyalty and give them added value.

“We are pleased to announce

this offer, which will help us strengthen relationships with existing clients and build relationships with new ones. With the launch of the latest promotional offer, ahlibank is demonstrating its leadership in providing innovative banking reward programs

and solutions that meet the diverse needs of its customers” he added.

The cashback campaign reflects the bank’s commitment to its growth strategy by creating products and services that offer value-added benefits to the customers and help consolidate its position in the market as one of Oman’s leading and most trusted banks.

The bank continues to offer a comprehensive suite of services, modern technology, and innovative solutions across its branches in Oman. All its product offerings and account types aim to achieve its customers’ targets and consolidate its position in the market. The bank offers top-class retail, commercial, and investment banking solutions in line with its vision of being a vibrant

ISG International students shine in maiden CAIE exams



Chitranggada S Chaturvedi

Students of ISG International showcased a stellar performance in the Cambridge Assessment International Education, June Series Examinations.

In the IGCSE Qualification batch of 2022 the students bagged 20 A* and 7 A Grades.

In the A Level the candidate from ISG International secured 1

A* and 2 A Grades.

Chitranggada Siddharth Chaturvedi bagged A* Grades in Business Studies, Economics, Environmental Management, Math, French, Information and Communication Technology; and A Grade in First Language English.

Simran Kawatra bagged A* Grade in Business Studies, Chemistry, Math, French Physics and First Language English.

Nithin Krishnan Muthukrishnan bagged A* in Economics, Environmental Management, Hindi and Math and A Grade in First Language English and Global Perspectives.

Asheesh Chaturvedi secured A* in Economics, Environmental Management, Math, Physics; and A Grade in First Language

English and Computer Science.

Ishita Sujett Shetty clinched A* in Computer Science and A Grade in Environmental Management.

In the A Levels, Anushka Unnit Mankodi bagged A* in Business and A Grade in Information Technology and Sociology.

The school takes pride in having 100 per cent A* in A level Business; in Chemistry, Economics, Information and Communication Technology and Physics in the IGCSE Qualification.

The management, principal, staff and students jointly expressed their delight and appreciation of the stupendous performance of the students and hence setting a mark in the annals of the history of the school.

KR Shipping granted three ‘prestigious’ ISO certifications



Khimji Ramdas (KR) Shipping, the trusted name for integrated cargo movement is now ISO certified for its management system. The three ISO standard certifications include ISO 9001:2015 certification for Quality Management systems, ISO 14001:2015 for Environmental Management systems, and ISO 45001:2018 for Occupational Health and Safety Management systems.

Commenting on the certifications, Malvika Pankaj Khimji, Director, Khimji Ramdas said, “The ISO certification is an important milestone for KR Shipping. It demonstrates our rigorous commitment to international standards and continually improving our business processes. Quality and timely delivery remain our highest priorities, and we are happy to say that we excel at both. This is reflected in our business growth and high customer satisfaction index.”

With over 35 plus years of industry expertise, KR Shipping operates at all major seaports as well as in-land logistics hubs and special economic zones serving customers across Oman and the UAE.

Samsung ties up with TOD to grant users access to TOD app

Samsung Electronics, the leading television manufacturer, joined forces with TOD, a rising streaming platform, to grant TV enthusiasts access to a broad spectrum of exclusive, live and on-demand entertainment and sports, including beIN’s unparalleled range of premium content.



Samsung is the first in the region to include the TOD app on its TVs, complementing the brand’s mission to enrich TV aficionados with outstanding content.

Ensuring a unique and unmatched experience for sports fans, TOD exclusively hosts beIN Sports’ unrivaled sports programming, including access to the region’s highly anticipated sporting events. Audiences across the MENA will also avail over 35,000 hours of premium entertainment content, including the latest Hollywood blockbusters; Arabic, Turkish, and international content; TOD Originals as well as children’s programmes.

TOD offers viewers three customised packages: ‘Entertainment,’ ‘Sports,’ and ‘All In,’ to choose from. Its sports content is offered up to 4K/UHD streaming with Dolby Audio, presenting vivid visuals coupled with rich, clear, and powerful sounds. Additionally, the platform comes with the ability to connect up to five devices and supports popular smartphones and big screens, enabling viewers to enjoy content anytime and anywhere.

Wizz Air announces major expansion in Saudi Arabia



Wizz Air, Europe’s fastest growing and most sustainable airline, is launching 20 exciting new routes from Bucharest, Budapest, Catania, Larnaca, Milan, Naples, Rome, Sofia, Tirana, Venice and Vienna to Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The airline introduces a new era of extended travel opportunities at ultra-low fares between Europe and the Kingdom to strengthen Saudi

Arabia’s global connectivity. Tickets for all routes are already on sale on wizzair.com and the airline’s mobile app, with fares starting from 54.99. The new routes will majorly enhance Wizz Air’s presence in the Kingdom that will boost the growing Saudi Arabian tourism sector and contribute to the Vision 2030 programme to triple the country’s passenger traffic by 2030. Just alone this expansion will bring over one million additional travellers to Saudi Arabia next year.



Renault Koleos owners say unique experience elevates their daily life

Renault Koleos effortlessly blends refined luxury with functionality offering business class comfort for everyday adventure. Owners say it is a vehicle that offers the discerning driver a unique experience that combines innovative technology, unequalled comfort and uncompromising safety to perfectly serve all of their top-end vehicle expectations, an SBA statement said.

The 2022 Renault Koleos SUV is engineered to demand attention and make heads turn. Offering off-road capability with its all-wheel drive transmission, Renault Koleos stands out with its assertive exterior design and enhanced interior comfort. With its athletic profile, robust front end, roomy seats, taut lines underscored with chrome, Renault Koleos allows owners to take their journey with confidence. Featuring a powerful and efficient new engine and more on-board technologies Renault Koleos fully embodies the values of the top of the Renault line-up.

The 2022 Renault Koleos also comes with additional features, such as rich acoustics with the BOSE audio system, lighting options, multimedia, navigation, Bluetooth and driving assistance systems in addition to easy park assist.

Renault Koleos has been capturing everyone’s attention in Oman with its charismatic, features rich and packed with safety attributes. If you are looking for a spacious SUV with elegant styling and unparalleled four-wheel drive technology, Renault Koleos is the car to buy.

Afrah al Kharusi from Nizwa is fascinated with the brand’s easy trunk access and hand-free function. She says, “The model features powerful, efficient engines, safety attributes and on-board technologies. The SUV is marked for its fuel efficiency and infotainment options too. With a sensor located under the bumper, all you need is a simple gesture with your foot to open the boot with ease. It is very practical when your hands are full when returning from office or shopping. I also like its 8.7” touchscreen navigation with R-Link2 system & Bose sound, 5 colour ambient lighting.”

The model’s spacious cabin inspired Taamir al Hinai from Muscat into buying a Renault Koleos. “Renault Koleos has a 2,705mm wheelbase - for a total vehicle length of 4,673mm - counts amongst the longest in the class and allows Koleos to boast record-breaking interior space to position itself as a D-segment SUV,” Taamir says.

Koleos extends a variety of features that are among the most capable in the market. I particularly like its blind spot warning

Sameer Zedjali

Sabeel al Mashari from Muscat says, “Renault Koleos stands out with its assertive exterior design and enhanced interior comfort. The wide-ranging suite of driver-assistance systems and infotainment options it offers make it a top brand.”

Sohail al Jabri, who loves to go on adventure drives, loves Renault Koleos All mode 4x4-i technology. “One can get off the beaten track with Renault Koleos any time. It’s all mode 4x4-i technology, swap between 2WD mode, Auto mode and 4x4 (lock) mode is really impressive. It offers an ideal balance of torque between the front and rear wheels for perfect grip in all circumstances,” he adds.

Sameer Zedjali from Rusayl likes Renault Koleos for its strong and high-end

design, comfort and outstanding performance. He says, “Koleos extends a variety of features that are among the most capable in the market. I particularly like its blind spot warning with flank protection warning, auto park assists and remote start engine with timer option.”

A spokesperson for Renault Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, said, “Well-defined edges make the overall profile of the 2022 Koleos appear solid and athletic and is one of the most prominent features in this new version. A great combination of power and refinement, the Koleos makes its presence felt with large shoulders and muscular side panels that are further enhanced by a robust front end; broad, smart-looking tires; and a distinctly large wheelbase.”

The all-mode 4x4-i transmission results in a car that promises owners all the power and comfort they would require on the road. The engine can be switched between two- and four-wheel driving giving drivers the liberty and flexibility to choose their own experience.

Renault Koleos particularly amazes car enthusiasts who value distinctive design, advanced technology, high reliability and superior performance.

INSEAD empowers Emirati women through various initiatives in UAE

INSEAD, one of the world’s leading and largest graduate business schools has rolled out a series of significant programmes and initiatives to empower Emirati women and celebrate the exceptional role these women have played across various sectors in the country.

The global business school is committed to achieving and promoting equality of opportunity in its learning, teaching, research and working environments, and to ensuring these environments support positive relations between people, and a culture of respect.

In line with this, INSEAD has launched the Women Leaders Programme, INSEAD Gender Initiative, Limitless Campaign, INSEAD Global Women in Business Club, and the INSEAD Global Executive MBA (GEMBA)

Programme.

The GEMBA Programme, taking place at INSEAD’s three campuses across three regions: Europe (France), Asia (Singapore), and the Middle East (United Arab Emirates), is one of the most prestigious Masters-level Executive Degree programme designed for senior executives. Through the programme, INSEAD continues to affirm its positioning as a key player to champion women in business, in both traditional and career paths by increasing the flow of women business executives into key educational gateways and business networks. Among more than 50 nationalities enrolled in this programme every year, 30 percent of the students are women.

“The global network offered by the INSEAD Programmes



through its alumni is phenomenal. This helps to develop more opportunities as we are all driven by a common purpose which is

to create more impact and become more rooted in the ecosystem we are all trying to shape,” said Natalie Sleiman

EMBA’14Dec, Managing Director – EMEA Head of Professional & Technology at ZRG Partners LLC and President of the INSEAD

National Alumni Association in the UAE.

The UAE is one of the several countries where women are endowed with boundless opportunities and we see the women of this nation wear many hats with their expertise showcased across several fields including astronomy, medicine, politics and education among others.

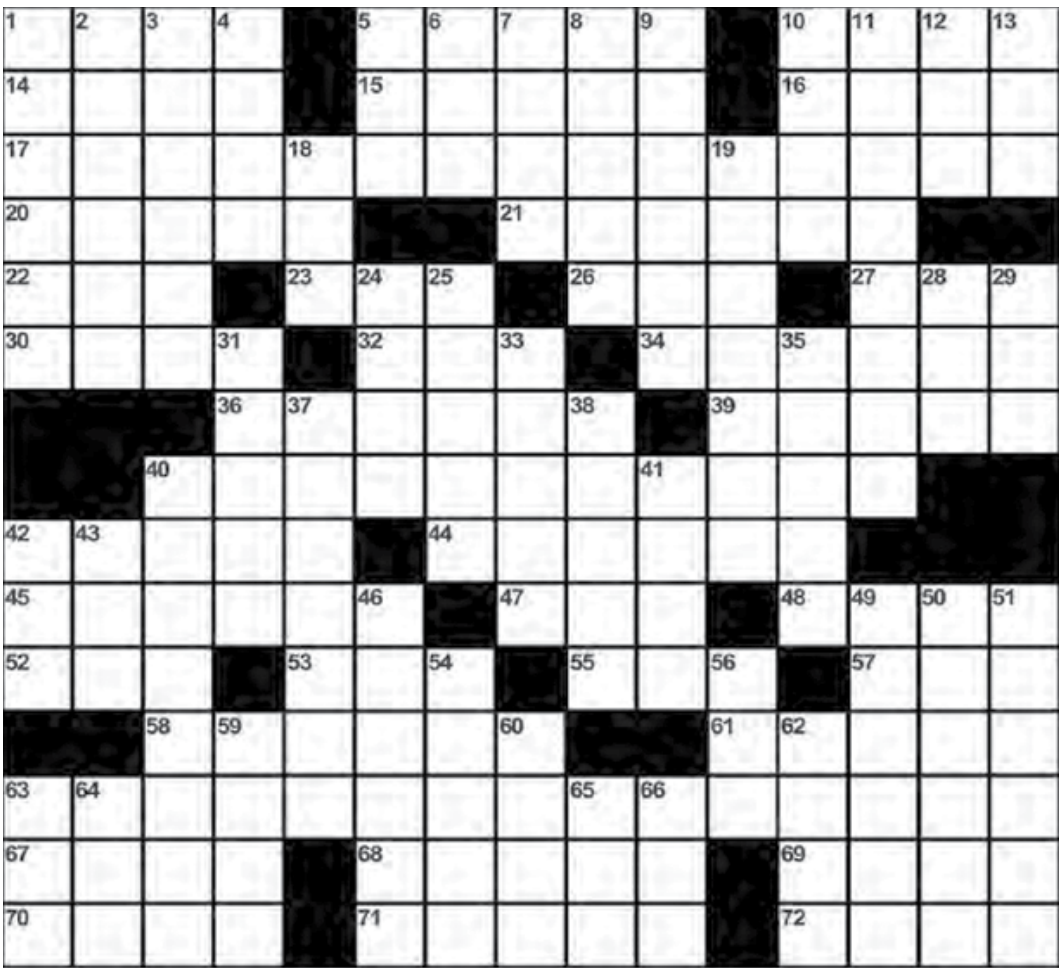
As diversity is a core element of the INSEAD culture, INSEAD has launched an Abu Dhabi scholarship for Emirati Nationals to attract the best talent from the UAE while at the same time cultivating a diverse classroom setting with a good mix of nationalities, academic and professional backgrounds, and gender.

Drawing on his own experience as a scholarship recipient, INSEAD Dean and Professor of Economics Ilian Mihov firmly be-

lieves that scholarships are key to attracting the best talent from all nationalities and backgrounds to create that unparalleled diversity in classrooms while driving equality and promoting economic development.

He said, “One of the biggest issues currently facing society is the tensions resulting from growing economic inequality, perpetuated by the disruptions arising from COVID-19 challenges. Business schools around the world have an important role to play in building the next generation of talented workforce and promote positive economic outcomes. Scholarships can help address this imbalance by offering equal opportunities to the best and brightest students and future business leaders, regardless of their background or financial situation.”

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**

 - 1) Carp like fish
 - 5) Hired thugs
 - 10) Recipe meas.
 - 14) Primo rating
 - 15) Judging group
 - 16) Miscellaneous med-ley
 - 17) Knocked out
 - 20) Crumble to the sea, as shoreline
 - 21) Tiger's rival, some-times
 - 22) Cigarette ingredient
 - 23) "Good..." (praise for a batter)
 - 26) "Yuck!"
 - 27) Org. of Wizards and Warriors
 - 30) Lip-... (mouth the words)
 - 32) Letters on an ambu-lance
 - 34) Light-headed?
 - 36) Have great respect for
 - 39) "... on a true story"
 - 40) Throwing a match, in the rmg
 - 42) Iranian language
 - 44) Give, as blood
 - 45) Raises cattle
- 47) Game, _ and match
 - 48) Cleaning cloths
 - 52) Drink refresher
 - 53) Letters on a tachometer
 - 55) Amniotic _
 - 57) '60s war zone, infor-nally
 - 58) Faunas' kin
 - 61) What cats and rats do?
 - 63) Give up
 - 67) Flue dirt
 - 68) Guided trips
 - 69) Bulb measure
 - 70) Identifies
 - 71) "Forest and Dove" painter Max
 - 72) Caustic materials

DOWN

 - 1) Middles' opponents
 - 2) Hip appendage?
 - 3) Like new clothes on the rack
 - 4) Assume a stooped posture
 - 5) Where IRS forms are made
 - 6) Small-boat mover
 - 7) Not fooled by
 - 8) 1960s jacket eponym
 - 9) Santa's vehicle
 - 10) Hammer, for one
 - 11) Puritanical person
 - 12) What God says not to do
 - 13) It may call the kettle black
 - 18) Professional payment
 - 19) Share an apartment
 - 24) Bigfoot's cousin
 - 25) Correct a manuscript
 - 28) Buzzing insect
 - 29) Stick in
 - 31) Stop
 - 33) Lily family members
 - 35) Four-time Wimble-don champ Rod
 - 37) Hard-luck area
 - 38) Currycombs comb them
 - 40) Arboreal amphibian
 - 41) Computer input or output
 - 42) "Most Wanted" org.
 - 43) Rainbow, e.g.
 - 46) Elfish one
 - 49) "As I was saying ..."
 - 50) Reproductive cell
 - 51) Runs a blast furnace
 - 54) Bruce Wayne's home, for one
 - 56) Old PC display part
 - 59) Land parcels
 - 60) Take aback
 - 62) Wolfs wail
 - 63) Little sister of 10-Across
 - 64) U nharden a garden
 - 65) Stats for sluggers (Abbr.)
 - 66) Fish story suffix?
- NOTE PAD**

A	T	O	P	T	O	A	D	C	L	A	I	M		
B	A	B	U	O	L	L	A	H	E	N	R	I		
E	X	I	T	N	E	A	R	A	C	T	O	N		
L	I	T	T	L	E	O	R	N	O	T	H	I	N	G
S	O	P	S	A	T									
C	A	B	G	O	E	R	T	I	P	P	E	T		
O	G	R	E	E	V	E	N	L	E	A	V	E		
S	H	O	R	T	M	E	M	O	R	Y	S	P	A	N
T	A	I	G	A	S	A	G	O	T	A	D	S		
A	S	L	O	P	E	P	O	O	L	L	E	E		
R	U	N	T	O	F	T	H	E	L	I	T	T	E	R
I	S	A	A	C	H	O	N	E	L	A	D	Y		
D	E	B	R	A	E	M	I	T	A	L	G	A		
E	S	S	E	S	R	E	D	S	S	E	E	N		

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

A game of follow-the-leader is in the works today, but you won't be too interested in playing it. Going along with someone else's plans and doing what someone else tells you to do isn't your idea of fun right now. Instead, you should strike out on your own. Even if that just means skipping out on a group lunch or refusing to send around the latest funny video. You aren't a sheep. You're unique, and reinforcing that truth today will ignite your sense of purpose.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

The authority figures you've been dealing with lately are quite happy with you, especially the ones you're related to. With what you've done for them, and with the reputable qualities you've displayed when they needed you, you're golden. However, they're not quite ready to show that to you just yet (as usual, you've got to earn it the old-fashioned way), so you'll need to be good and get some sleep. You'll need it.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Before you initiate any type of conversation today, take the time to formulate your goals clearly. Put together a plan detailing what you really want and another mapping out how you're going to get it. You're usually the one who adjusts to fit someone else's demands, but right now you need to ask someone else to bend to your schedule. To make it easier for them to say yes, let them know what's in it for them. Or figure out what you're willing to sacrifice in exchange for their cooperation.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Some criticism could be coming your way today, but don't worry. Your ego can handle it. In fact, your drive for success sort of demands this type of honest feedback from others, so it's good to build a reputation of being open to it. Thank the people who are giving you constructive criticism, and ignore the people who are just trying to cut you down to make themselves feel better. The difference will be obvious, so you won't have to worry about who you should listen to.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Opinionated? You? Not usually. That's not to say that you don't feel strongly about certain things, only that you're not ordinarily quite so adamant about them. Right now, though, you'll prefer to keep your feelings secret. Unless, of course, someone challenges a person you love. In that case, you won't stand for it for one second. Prepare to raise a few eyebrows. You absolutely won't back down either. Good for you, and lucky for them.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

This isn't a very good time for you to be squandering your precious resources. Your time and money are tight, and you'll need to watch out for any unexpected bills! Be careful about getting involved in any new schemes or opportunities that sound too good to be true. Hold off on signing any documents that could commit you to paying a certain amount of money on a regular basis. Watch out for people who want you to make a greater commitment than you can give.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Tell that person who's just asked you if you can keep a secret that if it were your secret, you'd have to refuse, but since it's theirs, it's a given that you'll take it to your grave. There's no way you'll allow it to be even tortured out of you. So sit down, listen to their story, and offer any advice you possibly can. With the array of experiences you've had throughout your life, you know you can help. They've definitely found the right person.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

If you thought you were having fun over the past few days and weeks, especially in the department of romance, well, you ain't seen nothing yet. The heavens are all on your side and giving your natural charm a boost and turning up the volume on your even more natural magnetism. What a great combination! Does this mean you'll once again be missing in action, from your friends' point of view? Maybe. But for such a great reason: it's "getting to know you" time.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You're tired of the secrets. You've had it with furtive glances, masked emotions, clandestine meetings, and anything else that even remotely smacks of behind-the-scenes dealings. Enough already. You want it all out in the open regardless of what the neighbors or anyone else has to say about it. In fact, the more public the announcement the better. Better warn all interested parties before you tap that water glass with your spoon.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You're not usually all that tough to talk into keeping the peace, even if you feel strongly about something, mainly because as a rule you'd rather be cooperative than contentious. The good news is that at this particular moment you won't be at all shy about standing your ground, and whether or not it causes conflict won't matter (this time). Your mission at the moment is to forget about keeping peace, making peace, or navigating peace between warring factions. Just be yourself.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Which plant is commonly used as a herbal treatment for depression?

A. St. Johns Wort
B. Eucalyptus
C. Slippery Elm
D. Aloe Vera

02. What is unusual about the dwelling of Baba Yaga, a fearsome character in Slavic folklore?

A. It is built of skulls
B. It is edible
C. It sits on bird's legs
D. It can only be seen when she permits

03. In water skiing as a competitive sport who, apart from the skier and a person to pull them, is needed?

A. Spare person available to drive whatever is pulling
B. Boat technician
C. Spotter
D. None

Answers: 1.A 2.C 3.C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

A	S	D	E
A	A	K	E
O	N	H	N
M	Y	S	E

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

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

Fresh shelling at Ukraine power plant as operator warns of radiation risk



This satellite image on August 19 shows the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, situated in the Russian-controlled area of Enerhodar, eastern Ukraine (AFP)

Kyiv, Ukraine - Ukraine and Russia traded fresh accusations of shelling at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant on Saturday, as its operator warned of a radioactive leak risk at the atomic facility.

The Zaporizhzhia plant in southern Ukraine has been occupied by Russian troops since the opening of the invasion.

Kyiv and Moscow have repeatedly swapped allegations over rocket attacks in the vicinity of the plant - Europe's largest - located in the city of Energodar.

On Saturday operator Energoatom said Russian troops 'repeatedly shelled' it over the past

day. Russia's defence ministry issued a counter-claim that Ukraine's troops were responsible for a salvo of 17 shells landing on the site.

"As a result of periodic shelling, the infrastructure of the station has been damaged, there are risks of hydrogen leakage and sputtering of radioactive substances, and the fire hazard is high," Energoatom said on Telegram. The agency said that as of midday on Saturday (0900 GMT) the plant 'operates with the risk of violating radiation and fire safety standards'.

Russia's defence ministry said

As a result of periodic shelling, the infrastructure of the station has been damaged. There are risks of hydrogen leakage and sputtering of radioactive substances

ENERGOATOM

Ukrainian forces 'shelled the territory of the station three times' from the town of Marganets across the Dnipro River.

In a communique the ministry accused Kyiv of 'nuclear terrorism' and said shells landed near areas storing fresh nuclear fuel and radioactive waste. Nevertheless radiation levels at the plant 'remain normal' the ministry said.

Power out

On Thursday, the plant was cut off from Ukraine's national power grid for the first time in its four-decade history due to 'actions of the invaders', Ener-

goatom said. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said the power cut was caused by Russian shelling of the last active power line linking the plant to the network.

It came back online on Friday afternoon but Zelensky warned 'the worst case scenario ... is constantly being provoked by Russian forces'.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is urging for a mission to the plant 'as soon as possible to help stabilise the nuclear safety and security situation there'.

AFP

Russia blocks UN adoption of nuclear disarmament text

United Nations, US - Russia on Friday prevented the adoption of a joint declaration following a four-week UN conference on a nuclear disarmament treaty, with Moscow denouncing what it said were 'political' aspects of the text.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which 191 signatories review every five years, aims to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, promote complete disarmament and promote cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

The nations had been gathered at UN headquarters in New York since August 1 participating in a month of negotiations, including a final session that was postponed for several hours on Friday.

In the end, the conference's president, Gustavo Zlauvinen of Argentina, said it was 'not in a position to achieve agreement' after Russia took issue with the text. Russian representative Igor Vishnevetsky said the draft final text, which was more than 30 pages long, lacked 'balance'.

"Our delegation has one key objection on some paragraphs which are blatantly political in nature," he said, adding Russia was not the only country to take issue with the text. According to sources close to the negotiations, Russia was opposed in particular to paragraphs concerning the Ukrainian nuclear power plant in Zaporizhzhia, which is occupied by the Russian military.

The latest draft text had expressed 'grave concern' over military activities around Ukrainian power plants, including Zaporizhzhia, as well as over Ukraine's loss of control of such sites and the negative impact on safety.

Neutral and non-nuclear Austria condemned on Saturday the attitude at the talks of major powers, and not just Russia. "While three-quarters of the 191 signatory states support credible progress for nuclear disarmament, it is mainly the nuclear-armed states, and above all Russia, which resisted," the government in Vienna said in a statement.

AFP

Macron calls for 'new pact' with Algeria in reconciliation visit

Algiers, Algeria - President Emmanuel Macron called on Friday for a 'new pact' with Algeria and 'truth and recognition' of the past, on day two of a visit to France's former colony aimed at mending troubled ties.

The trip follows months of tensions between Paris and the North African country, which earlier this year marked six decades of independence following 132 years of French rule.

The three-day visit also comes as European powers scramble to replace Russian energy imports - including with supplies from Algeria, Africa's top gas exporter, which in turn is seeking a greater regional role. Macron had proclaimed a 'new page' in relations on Thursday, after meeting President Abdelmadjid Tebboune and announcing the creation of a joint commission of historians to examine the colonial period and the



France's President Emmanuel Macron listen to explanations during a visit inside the chapel of the Santa Cruz fortress in Oran on Saturday (AFP)

devastating eight-year war that ended it, at a cost of hundreds of thousands of lives.

On Friday, Macron - the first French president to be born after Algerian independence in 1962, told journalists he wanted 'the truth, and recognition, otherwise

we'll never move forward'.

And on Saturday Macron and Tebboune are to sign 'a joint declaration for a renewed, concrete and ambitious partnership', the French presidency said.

Addressing members of the French community in Algeria

later on Friday, Macron spoke of his love for the North African country. "Many people want to promote the idea that France should hate Algeria, or Algeria should hate France," he said.

"But we are at a moment where we can build a new pact."

Macron earlier laid a wreath at a monument to those who 'died for France', in the mixed Christian-Jewish Saint Eugene cemetery which was a major burial ground for Europeans during colonial times.

Later in the day he met young Algerian entrepreneurs and visited the iconic Grand Mosque of Algiers before heading to second city Oran. In a visit his office says focuses on the future, Macron is set to meet young artists and sportspeople on Saturday and visit a famous record store, before returning to Algiers.

AFP



This file photo shows law enforcement officers in front of Donald Trump's home in Florida on August 9 (AFP)

Raid on Trump home sparked by recovery of top-secret info

Washington, US - The stunning FBI raid on Donald Trump's palatial Florida home was triggered by a review of 15 boxes of records previously surrendered by the former US president that contained top secret information - including about human intelligence sources.

The FBI, in the affidavit used to justify the August 8 raid of Mar-a-Lago, said it was conducting a criminal investigation into 'improper removal and storage of classified information' and 'unlawful concealment of government records'.

The heavily-redacted FBI affidavit released on Friday laid out the grounds for the authorisation by a Florida judge of an unprecedented raid on the home of a former president, a move which ignited a political firestorm in a bitterly divided nation.

The Republican Trump, who is weighing another White House run in 2024, accused the Justice Department under Democratic President Joe Biden

Classified records were unfolded, intermixed with other records and otherwise improperly identified

FBI AFFIDAVIT

67 documents marked as confidential, 92 as secret and 25 as top secret.

Among the documents was intelligence information received from 'clandestine human sources' a classification which can include spies and informants and is among the most tightly-held of government secrets.

"Highly classified records were unfolded, intermixed with other records and otherwise improperly identified," according to the affidavit. "Several of the documents also contained what appears to be (Trump's) handwritten notes."

In June, according to the affidavit, the Justice Department informed a Trump lawyer that Mar-a-Lago was 'not authorised to store classified information'.

When they raided Trump's estate in Palm Beach two months later, FBI agents seized a further stash of documents marked 'Top Secret', 'Secret' and 'Confidential'.

AFP

Tunisia recalls Morocco envoy in Polisario row

Tunis, Tunisia - Tunisia said on Saturday it would recall its ambassador from Morocco for consultations, a day after the kingdom did the same in response to Tunisia's president hosting the Polisario movement's head.

The Polisario wants an independent state in the Western Sahara, a vast stretch of mineral-rich desert which Morocco sees as a sovereign part of its own territory.

Tunisian President Kais Saied had on Friday hosted Polisario chief Brahim Ghali who arrived to attend the Japanese-African investment conference TICAD.

In response to what it called a 'hostile' and 'unnecessarily provocative' act, Morocco immediately



Morocco's seat is seen vacant during the opening session of TICAD in Tunisia's capital Tunis on Saturday (AFP)

withdrew its Tunis ambassador for consultations and cancelled its own participation in the high-profile conference.

On Saturday the Tunisian Foreign Ministry voiced its 'surprise' at Morocco's reaction. "Tunisia has maintained its total neutral-

ity on the Western Sahara issue in line with international law," it said in a statement. "This position will not change until the concerned parties find a peaceful solution acceptable to all."

Saied spent much of Friday welcoming African leaders arriv-

ing for the TICAD conference, including Ghali who is also president of the self-proclaimed Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). Morocco accused Tunisia of 'unilaterally' inviting the Polisario chief 'against the advice of Japan and in violation of the process of preparation and established rules'.

But Tunisia said on Saturday the African Union had issued a direct invitation to the SADR, a member state, to join the conference, noting that it had attended previous such gatherings - alongside Morocco. The move came as French President Emmanuel Macron visited Morocco's arch-rival and Polisario backer Algeria for a three-day visit.

AFP

UN slams Ethiopia strike on kindergarten

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - The UN on Saturday condemned an Ethiopian air strike on a kindergarten in rebel-held Tigray that killed at least four people, as diplomats urged that civilians not be targeted.

Addis Ababa denied bombing civilian areas in Friday's air raid on the city of Mekele, and accused the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) of staging deaths.

But the UN children's agency UNICEF said the strike 'hit a kindergarten, killing several children, and injuring others'.

"UNICEF strongly condemns the air strike," said UNICEF chief Catherine Russell.

"Yet again, an escalation of violence in northern Ethiopia has caused children to pay the heaviest price. For almost two years, children and their families in the region have endured the agony of this conflict. It must end."

The bombardment came just days after fighting erupted on Tigray's southern border between government forces and TPLF rebels, ending a five-month truce and dashing hopes of peace talks.



This file photo shows farmers walking next to a tank abandoned along the road in Dansa, in Tigray region, Ethiopia on June 20 last year (AFP)

The TPLF said the air strike, the first in many months on Tigray, demolished a kindergarten and hit a civilian residential area.

The government said only military sites were targeted and accused the TPLF of 'dumping fake body bags in civilian areas' to maximise outrage.

An official at Mekele's Ayder Referral Hospital told AFP four

people died in the strike, including two children, while nine others were injured.

Tigrai TV, a local network, put the death toll at seven, including three children.

be independently verified as access to northern Ethiopia is severely restricted.

'Appalling'- Vicky Ford, the UK's Minister for Africa, said the protection of civilians must be prioritised under international law.

"Reports of civilian casualties following airstrikes on #Tigray

"Civilians are #NotATarget," he said on Twitter.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, himself from Tigray, described the air strike as 'barbaric' and 'horrifying'.

"Children killed in a kindergarten in today's air strike on #Tigray, while the 21-month starvation, deprivation & death of children continue," he posted on Twitter.

In March, the UN said at least 304 civilians had been killed in the three months prior in airstrikes 'apparently carried out by the Ethiopian Air Force'.

The UN human rights office has documented aerial bombardments and drone strikes on refugee camps, a hotel and a market in the country's north, and warned that disproportionate attacks against non-military targets could amount to war crimes.

Ethiopia's air force operates the only known military aircraft over the country's skies.

Untold numbers have been killed in northern Ethiopia since the war began in November 2020.

AFP

UNICEF strongly condemns the air strike. For almost two years, children and their families in the region have endured the agony of this conflict. It must end

CATHERINE RUSSELL

are appalling," she said on Twitter on Saturday.

The EU commissioner for crisis management, Janez Lenarcic, echoed calls for international law to be respected.

Peak Tram back on track in Hong Kong

Hong Kong, China - The Peak Tram, Hong Kong's famed public transport and a popular tourist draw, reopened Saturday after a year-long US\$102mn facelift even as the city's coronavirus curbs continue to keep overseas visitors at bay.

The historic funicular, which dates back to 1888 and offers panoramic views of Hong Kong Island's famous skyline as it ascends to Victoria Peak, used to draw over six million visitors a year, according to its operator.

The latest makeover brought more spacious tramcars that accommodate 210 passengers, a full overhaul of its rail systems and a redesigned terminus at the heart of Hong Kong's central business district.

The Peak Tram closed for upgrades in June 2021, a period when the Chinese finance hub's strict border controls - in line with Beijing's zero-COVID strategy - all but wiped out its tourism industry.

The redevelopment went overbudget by around US\$15mn, which its operator attributed to



Passengers take pictures of the Hong Kong skyline as they ride the newly renovated sixth generation Peak Tram in Hong Kong on Saturday (AFP)

supply chain difficulties during the pandemic, such as bringing the custom Switzerland-made tramcars to Hong Kong.

An adult return ticket now costs HK\$88 (US\$11.20), a nearly 70 per cent jump from before the makeover.

"I hope all visitors will feel it's worth the price," May Tsang, general manager of tram operator the Peak Complex, said on Wednesday.

"We have to consider the increase in our operating costs and

"It's a bit pricey, but so is everything nowadays."

Tourists were mostly absent on Saturday as Hong Kong saw just a total of 134,000 visitors in the past four quarters - a mere fraction of the 65mn that came to the city in 2018.

The new sixth generation tramcars are a far cry from the sedan chairs that carried visitors to Victoria Peak during the early days of British colonial rule.

But they are now painted in a deep green colour, a nod to previous generation tramcars in service from 1948 until 1989 - when they were refurbished in a burgundy red.

At 396 metres above sea level, the Peak, once an exclusive enclave for Hong Kong's rich and powerful, remained off-limits to most of the local population until 1947.

It is now best known as an easy-to-access spot for residents and tourists to enjoy views of Hong Kong's sprawling cityscape, with Victoria Harbour in the distance.

AFP

Cuba asks for US help to rebuild destroyed fuel depot

Havana, Cuba - Cuba has asked the United States for help in restoring a major fuel storage plant devastated by a massive fire that left 16 people dead, the island nation's foreign ministry said on Friday.

The request was made during an online meeting on Wednesday between experts from the two countries exploring 'possible ways of cooperation to rehabilitate the worst-affected areas,' the ministry said.

The massive fire earlier this month started after lightning struck a tank at the depot outside the western city of Matanzas, some 100km from Havana.

Four of the eight tanks at the depot - each with the capacity to hold 52mn litres of fuel - collapsed during the blaze, which injured 132 people.

All 16 people killed were firefighters tackling the inferno.

The damage to Cuba's largest such storage facility has badly affected Cuba's ability to store



This file photo shows a firefighter helicopter dropping water on a massive fire at a fuel depot in Matanzas, Cuba, on August 8 (AFP)

crude. The Cuban delegation asked about 'the most innovative techniques and procedures' used by the US Environmental Protection Agency as well as by companies linked to the oil sector and other agencies, the foreign ministry said.

The United States had previously offered technical advice over the telephone.

But Cuban experts admitted to having 'limited experience' in these types of fires, the ministry said.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has already pledged to help rebuild the facility.

Built in the 1980s, the Matanzas depot is considered fundamental to Cuba's fuel logistics.

AFP

Civilians wounded in clashes in Tripoli

Tripoli, Libya - Rival Libyan groups exchanged gunfire in the Libyan capital on Saturday, wounding civilians and raising fears of all-out conflict in a country facing a grave political crisis.

With combat continuing, 'we are having difficulties moving around', Oussama Ali, spokesman for the Tripoli ambulance service, said on Libya's Al-Ahrar television.

He said there were 'injured among civilians', but did not give a number.

Local media reported fatalities but no official toll had been released.

Numerous images on social media purported to show cars burnt-out in the fighting and bullet-riddled buildings.

The fighting broke out in various districts of Tripoli between groups armed with both heavy and light weapons, as two rival governments yet again vie for power in the oil-rich but impoverished North African country.

Gunshots and explosions rang through the darkened streets of Tripoli throughout Friday night, an AFP correspondent said.

The crisis pits groups that back the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity (GNU), led by Abdulhamid Dbeibah, against supporters of a rival government led by former interior minister Fathi Bashagha.

According to local media, two influential armed groups faced off against one another in Tripoli, where divisions have deepened among militias on opposing sides of the political divide.

Bashagha was appointed in February by a parliament elected in 2014 and based in the eastern city of Tobruk, but has since been unable to impose his authority in Tripoli.

Initially ruling out the use of force, the former minister has since hinted that he could resort to armed force.

AFP

Session on high seas ends sans agreement

United Nations, US - UN member states ended two weeks of negotiations on Friday without a treaty to protect biodiversity in the high seas, an agreement that would have addressed growing environmental and economic challenges.

After 15 years, including four prior formal sessions, negotiators have yet to reach a legally binding text to address the multitude of issues facing international waters - a zone that encompasses almost half the planet.

"Although we did make excellent progress, we still do need a little bit more time to progress towards the finish line," said conference chair Rena Lee.

It will now be up to the UN General Assembly to resume the fifth session at a date still to be determined.

Many had hoped the session, which began on August 15 at the United Nations headquarters in New York, would be the last and yield a final text on 'the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction', or BBNJ for short.

"While it's disappointing that



Images by Greenpeace calling for action to finalise a strong Global Ocean Treaty at the United Nations are seen projected on the Brooklyn Bridge in New York City on August 14 (AFP)

the treaty wasn't finalised during the past two weeks of negotiations, we remain encouraged by the progress that was made," said Liz Karan of the NGO Pew Charitable Trusts, calling for a new session by the end of the year.

One of the most sensitive issues in the text revolved around the sharing of possible profits from the development of genetic

resources in international waters, where pharmaceutical, chemical and cosmetic companies hope to find miracle drugs, products or cures.

Such costly research at sea is largely the prerogative of rich nations, but developing countries do not want to be left out of potential windfall profits drawn from marine resources that belong to no one.

'Missed opportunity' Similar issues of equity arise in other international negotiations, such as on climate change, in which developing nations that feel outsized harm from global warming have tried in vain to get wealthier countries to help pay to offset those impacts.

The high seas begin at the border of a nation's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) - which by

international law reaches no more than 200 nautical miles (370km) from its coast - and are under no state's jurisdiction.

Sixty per cent of the world's oceans fall under this category.

One of the key pillars of an eventual BBNJ treaty is to allow the creation of marine protected areas, which many nations hope will cover 30 per cent of the Earth's ocean by 2030.

"Without establishing protections in this vast area, we will not be able to meet our ambitious and necessary 30 by 30 goal," US State Department official Maxine Burkett said at an earlier press conference.

But delegations still disagree on the process for creating these protected areas as well as how required environmental impact assessments will be implemented before new high seas activity begins.

"What a missed opportunity..." tweeted Klaudija Cremer, a researcher at the IDDRI think tank, which, like multiple other international organisations, has a seat with observer status at the negotiations.

AFP

INDIA

Illegal ‘twin tower’ to be blown up near Delhi in developer crackdown

Noida, India - Two illegally built residential high-rises are slated for demolition near India’s capital this weekend in a rare crackdown on developers who cut corners and swindle unsuspecting home-buyers.

A controlled implosion will bring down the 100-metre-high ‘Twin Towers’ on New Delhi’s outskirts after a Supreme Court ruling last year found the structures were built unlawfully in collusion with local authorities.

Thousands of anxious residents - along with dozens of stray dogs - are being evacuated from the vicinity, but the crew in charge of the knock-down said safety was assured.

“It’s a beautiful feat of engineering,” said demolition team leader Joe Brinkmann, according to the *Times of India* newspaper. “Just pack your bags and enjoy the day.”

The towers will be fitted with around 3,500kg of explosives and are expected to come down in a matter of seconds.

The world’s fastest-growing major economy has seen a construction boom in recent years but developers often cut cor-

ners with impunity.

Eyeing fat profits and capitalising on weak regulation, companies often build extra floors or towers and use sub-standard materials, while officials are bribed to keep quiet.

Middle-class home-buyers fall into the trap of investing their life savings in projects that often never see the light of day, and get drawn into protracted legal battles against powerful builders. In Delhi’s suburbs of Noida and Greater Noida, it is estimated that more than 100 residential high-rise towers have been abandoned by the builders, making these areas look like ghost cities.

‘Burning their fingers’

Uday Bhan Singh Teotia, one of a group of residents whose case against private developer Supertech led to the demolition order, said the destruction of the buildings will be a vindication of his legal battle.

“The two new towers that they constructed were blocking everything - our air and sunlight and all,” Teotia, who lives close



Police barricades cordon off a road near the residential twin tower which is slated for demolition on Sunday, in Noida on Saturday (AFP)

to the structures, told AFP.

No one had moved into the two towers before the demolition and Supertech was ordered by the court to refund buyers. The firm did not respond to calls from AFP.

Demolitions of residential buildings are rare in India, with builders often escaping with penalties or abandoning projects midway if they fall foul of

Builders must clean up their act to win back trust of home-buyers. Unless builders follow rules, it will be hapless buyers who will end up burning their fingers

JAYANT BHUSHAN

the law.

Four luxury high-rises in southern Kerala state were demolished for breaking environmental rules in 2020.

Lawyer Jayant Bhushan, who represented the complainants in the case against Supertech, said builders must clean up their act to win back the trust of home-buyers. “Unless builders follow rules, it will be hapless buyers who will end up burning their fingers again and again.”

AFP

India to play a key role in countering China, says US chief of naval operations

Tokyo, Japan - US Chief of Naval Operations Adm Mike Gilday said that India will be a crucial partner for America in the future, playing a key role in countering China.

America’s highest-ranking Navy officer, Gilday told an in-person seminar hosted by the Heritage Foundation in Washington on Thursday that India presents China with a two-front problem, reported Nikkei Asia.

“They now force China to not only look east, toward the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, but they now have to be looking over their shoulder at India,” he said.

“I’ve spent more time on a trip to India than I have with any other country because I consider them to be a strategic partner for us in the future,” added Gilday. Referring to his five-day visit to India last October, he said, “The Indian Ocean battlespace is becoming increasingly more important for us. The fact that India and China currently have a bit of a skirmish along their border ... it’s strategically important.”

The idea that the border clashes between India and China in the Himalayas pose a two-front problem for Beijing



This file photo shows US Chief of Naval Operations Mike Gilday with Indian navy chief Karambir Singh, in New Delhi last October (ANI)

has been gaining traction among US strategists, reported Nikkei Asia.

In June, as the leaders of the Quad - the US, Japan, India and Australia - were meeting in Japan, former Pentagon official Elbridge Colby told Nikkei Asia that while India would not directly contribute in a local battle over Taiwan, it could draw China’s attention to the Himalayan border.

“What the United States and Japan need India to do is to be

as strong as possible in South Asia and effectively draw Chinese attention so that they have a major second-front problem,” said Colby, the principal author of the 2018 National Defense Strategy under former President Donald Trump.

India, in the meantime, draws the same benefit from China’s difficulties in facing a strong US-Japan alliance around Taiwan, he said.

A planned joint mountaintop exercise between the US and

India in October is seen as underscoring the potential second front for China.

The annual joint exercise Yudh Abhyas, which translates to ‘War Practice’, will be held in the South Asian nation’s Uttarakhand state from October 18 to 31, reported Nikkei Asia.

While India has hosted the Yudh Abhyas exercise in Uttarakhand before, including in 2014, 2016 and 2018, those drills were all held in the foothills, over 300km from the China boundary.

Local Indian media reports have said that this year’s drills would take place at an altitude of over 3,000 meters in Uttarakhand’s Auli region, less than 100km from the Line of Actual Control - the de facto border between India and China, reported Nikkei Asia.

In an opinion piece titled ‘India has a stake in Taiwan’s defence’, columnist Brahma Chellaney wrote in Nikkei Asia that Indian activities in the Himalayas could help Taiwan’s defence. It would be ‘tying down a complete Chinese theatre force, which could otherwise be employed against the island’, he wrote.

ANI



Former Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad meets with other Jammu and Kashmir leaders among those who resigned from the party following him, in New Delhi on Saturday (ANI)

Gulam Nabi Azad meets J-K leaders; set to float his own national party

New Delhi, India - Several political leaders from Jammu and Kashmir on Saturday met veteran leader Ghulam Nabi Azad, who is planning to launch a new national party, a day after quitting Congress.

“MLAs (legislators) from Jammu and Kashmir are here. A few more-some senior leaders and ex-ministers will come in the evening. Azad Sa’ab said a national party will be formed, we’ll begin from J&K and the upcoming poll will be fought strongly. Don’t want to reply to comments, we’ll reply with a victory,” said former Congress leader Salman Nazami.

Political leaders in Jammu and Kashmir - who are either disillusioned by the Congress or are at the opposition camp - started rallying around their veteran leader Azad within 24 hours of his resignation from all posts in Congress. The series of meetings in the valley holds special significance following reports that elections in Kashmir are likely to be held later this year.

“Under the leadership of Azad ji we will launch a national party and the work will begin from Jammu and Kashmir. Azad ji will go to J&K and will form an alliance with like-

minded parties and leaders.

“All the criticism coming Azad Ji’s way will be answered by winning elections,” Nazami had earlier announced.

The decision to launch a new national party came just hours after the veteran Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad, in a letter to Congress President Sonia Gandhi resigned from all positions of the Congress party including the primary membership.

This latest high-profile exit from the Congress party comes after the polls for the Congress President were deferred.

ANI

Pakistan orders thousands to evacuate near flood-swollen rivers

Mingora, Pakistan - Thousands of people living near flood-swollen rivers in Pakistan’s north were ordered to evacuate on Saturday as the death toll from devastating monsoon rains neared 1,000 with no end in sight.

Many rivers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa - a picturesque province of rugged mountains and valleys - have burst their banks, demolishing scores of buildings including a 150-room hotel that crumbled into a raging torrent.

“The house which we built with years of hard work started sinking in front of our eyes,” said

Junaid Khan, 23, the owner of two fish farms in Chrasadda.

“We sat on the side of the road and watched our dream house sinking.”

The annual monsoon is essential for irrigating crops and replenishing lakes and dams across the Indian subcontinent, but each year it also brings a wave of destruction. Officials say this year’s monsoon flooding has affected more than 33mn people - one in seven Pakistanis - destroying or badly damaging nearly a million homes.

On Saturday, authorities ordered thousands of residents in



An aerial view of flooding in Mingora, a town in the Pakistan’s northern Swat Valley following heavy monsoon rainfall, on Saturday (AFP)

threatened areas to evacuate their homes as rivers had still not reached maximum capacity.

“Initially some people refused to leave, but when the water level increased they agreed,” Bilal Faizi, spokesman for the Rescue 1122 emergency service, told AFP.

Officials say this year’s floods are comparable to 2010 - the worst on record - when over 2,000 people died and nearly a fifth of the country was under water. Farmer Shah Faisal, camped by the side of a road in Chrasadda with his wife and two daughters, described how he saw his riverside home swal-

lowed by a river as the powerful current eroded the bank.

The Jindi, Swat and Kabul rivers flow through the town before joining the mighty Indus, which is also flooding downstream. “We escaped with our lives,” Faisal told AFP.

Climate change

Officials blame the devastation on man-made climate change, saying Pakistan is unfairly bearing the consequences of irresponsible environmental practices elsewhere in the world.

Pakistan is eighth on the Global Climate Risk Index, a list

compiled by the environmental NGO Germanwatch of countries deemed most vulnerable to extreme weather caused by climate change.

Still, local authorities must shoulder some of the blame for the devastation.

Corruption, poor planning and the flouting of local regulations mean thousands of buildings have been erected in areas prone to seasonal flooding - albeit not as bad as this year.

The government has declared an emergency and mobilised the military to deal with flooding.

AFP

SUPER NOAH

Noah Lyles trumps Michael Norman in 200m at Diamond League meet in Lausanne

Lausanne, Switzerland - World champion Noah Lyles notched up another victory in his rivalry with fellow American Michael Norman in the 200m at the Diamond League meet in Lausanne on Friday.

Lyles clocked 19.56 seconds, with world 400m champion Norman second in a season's best of 19.76sec.

"I would have taken anything under 19.60, so 19.56 is alright for tonight," said Lyles.

"I am in a good physical and mental space and very capable of producing some good times this year. I feel if I have a 19.30 in me."

Lyles' teammate Aleia Hobbs made up for the absence of Jamaican duo Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce and Elaine Thompson-Herah to win the women's 100m.

Five-time 100m world champion Fraser-Pryce, with six sub-10.70sec times to her credit this season, was a late withdrawal

due to a "muscle sprain" she experienced during her warm-up.

And four-time Olympic sprint gold medallist Thompson-Herah was disqualified for a false start in front of a sell-out 12,700-strong Stade olympique de la Pontaise.

Hobbs went on to clock 10.87sec for victory in a photo-finish ahead of a third Jamaican, world 200m champion Shericka Jackson.

Fraser-Pryce said she had been feeling "discomfort in my hamstring".

"Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to be getting any better," said the 35-year-old mother-of-one.

"As a precaution my coach decided not to risk racing at this point."

Hobbs added: "I had a good start today and I know that if I start well I can get great times. I'm happy with the 10.87, it's another sub-10.9 for me."

Double European champion



Noah Lyles of the US wins gold in the 200m, ahead of compatriot Michael Norman, at the Diamond League meeting in Lausanne on Friday (AFP)

I would have taken anything under 19.60, so 19.56 is alright for tonight. I am in a good physical and mental space and capable of producing some good times this year

NOAH LYLES

Jakob Ingebrigtsen set a world leading time of 3:29.05 as he won the 1500m ahead of Kenya's Abel Kipsang.

The Olympic gold medallist,

who had to settle for world silver behind Britain's Jake Wightman, was happy that he had kicked on after a strong pace was set.

Treble European champion

Femke Bol of the Netherlands smashed the meeting record in clocking 52.95sec to win the 400m hurdles.

Former world record-holder Dalilah Muhammad of the United States finished well off the pace in seventh.

"It's amazing to run a meet record here and run again in 52," said Bol. "The first 200m felt easy and I wasn't too close to the hurdles. The second part is my better part this year. I am getting tired.

"I was less tired than expected actually. In the last few days I've spent 11 hours a day in bed."

A loaded women's 100m hurdles featured all three medallists from Oregon: Tobi Amusan, Britany Anderson and Jasmine Camacho-Quinn. The latter claimed the win in Lausanne in a meet record of 12.34sec, with Amusan at 0.11sec.

And there was another meet record, by more than 5sec, for Burundi's Francine Niyonsaba,

who marked her return from injury with victory in the 3,000m in 8:26.80 ahead of American Alicia Monson and Kenya's Beatrice Chebet.

Dutchwoman Sifan Hassan came in fourth while Britain's Laura Muir finished seventh.

Jamaican Rasheed Broadbell pulled off a surprise win in the 100m hurdles, going sub-13sec for the first time in his career as he beat a strong field in 12.99sec.

AFP

Djokovic's US Open absence sad: Nadal

New York, United States - Rafael Nadal said Friday he is saddened by Novak Djokovic's absence from the US Open as he returns to the tournament for the first time in three years.

The Spanish legend has not played in New York since defeating Daniil Medvedev in five sets to lift the 2019 title.

Nadal has added three more Grand Slam singles titles to his haul since that victory, taking his total to 22 - the all-time men's record.

While the 36-year-old will be looking to add to that tally over the next fortnight in New York, Nadal admitted on Friday that the absence of Djokovic left him "very sad."

Djokovic confirmed on Thursday he will play no part in the tournament after refusing to get vaccinated against Covid-19 - placing him at odds with US government travel requirements for international visitors.

"From my personal perspective, it's very sad news," Nadal said.

"It's always a shame when



Rafael Nadal at a media conference before the start of the US Open at Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York on Friday (AFP)

the best players of the world are not able to play a tournament because of injuries or because of different reasons.

"In this case, not having one of the best players of the history in the draw of Grand Slam is always an important miss, no? Tough for the fans, tough for the tournament. In my opinion, tough for the players, too,

because we want to have the best field possible."

Yet despite Djokovic's absence, Nadal is adamant that the tournament will not be diminished by the non-participation of the Serbian great, who is just one behind the Spaniard in Grand Slam singles titles with 21.

"I repeat what I said plenty

of times: the sport in some ways is bigger than any player," Nadal said.

"I missed a lot of important events in my tennis career because of injuries, without a doubt. Last year I was not here. Two years ago I was not here. The tournament continues. The world of tennis keeps going.

"Even if is not good news for everyone, the world continues and the tennis will continue after me, after Novak, after Roger (Federer)."

Nadal started 2022 in blistering fashion, winning both the Australian and French Opens before an abdominal muscle injury forced him to scratch from the Wimbledon semi-finals.

He returned from that injury at the Cincinnati Masters this month but exited in the second round. Nadal said Friday he had been protecting the injury during his Cincinnati comeback.

"It's a tough injury because it's dangerous, it's risky," he said. "When you have a scar, it's a place that you put lot of effort when you are serving."

AFP

Kasatkina takes on Saville in WTA Granby final

Montreal, Canada - World number 10 Daria Kasatkina advanced to her 11th career WTA final by defeating France's Diane Parry 6-2, 6-0 in a US Open tune-up on Friday at Granby, Canada.

Kasatkina will play Saturday for the crown against Australia's Daria Saville, who advanced to her first WTA final since 2017 by walkover Thursday when Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk withdrew from the event.

Kasatkina, 25, is from Russia but cannot represent her homeland under rules imposed by the tour following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Kasatkina chases her sixth WTA crown three weeks after claiming her most recent at San Jose.

Kasatkina, the US Open 10th seed, will face Britain's 98th-ranked Harriet Dart in her first match on the New York hardcourts.

Sasnovich to take on Samsonova

Seventh seed Aliaksandra Sasnovich and 45th-ranked Liudmila



Daria Kasatkina

Samsonova advanced to the WTA Tennis in the Land final with victories on Friday in the US Open hardcourt tune-up.

Sasnovich outlasted French eighth seed Alize Cornet 6-7 (5/7), 7-5, 6-3 after two hours and 51 minutes while Samsonova

dispatched American Bernarda Pera 6-1, 6-2 after 52 minutes in semi-final matches.

World number 36 Sasnovich, a 28-year-old from Belarus, and Samsonova, a 23-year-old Russian, cannot represent their homelands due to tour rules imposed after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Mannarino meets Djere in final

France's Adrian Mannarino upset Dutch second seed Botic van de Zandschulp 6-0, 6-4 on Friday to reach the ATP Winston-Salem Open final against Serbian Laslo Djere.

World number 65 Mannarino won 21 of 26 first-serve points and never faced a break point in dispatching the 23rd-ranked Dutchman after 75 minutes.

In the other semi-final, 89th-ranked Djere needed nine match points but finally dispatched 102nd-ranked Swiss Marc-Andre Huesler 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (7/5) after two hours and 18 minutes.

AFP

Westwood blasts 'hypocrites', claims PGA changes only copy LIV Golf

Washington, United States - England's Lee Westwood says US PGA Tour changes announced for next season are simply copies of what the Saudi-backed LIV Golf circuit is doing.

PGA commissioner Jay Monahan said this week at the Tour Championship that tour players have agreed to compete in 20 events next season, included 12 "elevated" stops with \$20 million in prize money and minimum season pay amounts for fully exempt players.

Westwood, who jumped to LIV Golf for its record \$25 million purses and 54-hole events, told Golf Digest in an interview pub-

lished Friday that he sees the PGA as trying to duplicate what LIV Golf has already done.

"I laugh at what the PGA Tour players have come up with," Westwood told the magazine. "It's just a copy of what LIV is doing. There are a lot of hypocrites out there.

"They all say LIV is 'not competitive.' They all point at the no-cut aspect of LIV and the short fields. Now, funnily enough, they are proposing 20 events that look a lot like LIV.

"Hopefully, at some point they will all choke on their words. And hopefully, they will be held to account as we were in the early days."



Lee Westwood

They all say LIV is 'not competitive.' They all point at the no-cut aspect of LIV and the short fields. Now, funnily enough, they are proposing 20 events that look a lot like LIV

LEE WESTWOOD

Several reports say as many as seven more players will jump from the PGA to LIV Golf after this week's Tour Championship in Atlanta.

LIV Golf returns with events next month in Boston and Chicago.

Three-time major winner Jordan Spieth said LIV Golf's formation was a spark to the PGA's

changes, which will ensure top-ranked players face each other more often.

"It's impossible to not think that that was a catalyst for continuing to want to make sure the players that we have on the PGA Tour now stay on the PGA Tour," Spieth said.

"Would this have gone that direction this soon? Maybe not,

but to say that it wouldn't have happened in general, I'm not sure.

"But I think that that certainly has been a catalyst for looking at the product as a whole and figuring out how to make it the best it can possibly be."

The PGA Tour has issued indefinite bans to any player who departed and played in a LIV Golf event. Eleven LIV Golf players filed a lawsuit against the PGA Tour, although it is unlikely to be resolved before 2024.

Westwood, who turns 50 next April, sees the 54-hole format as more compatible to his life these days.

AFP

ON CLOUD NINE!

Liverpool hit nine against Bournemouth to equal Premier League record, Haaland hits treble in Man City’s win

London, United Kingdom - Liverpool equalled the Premier League’s record win with a 9-0 demolition of Bournemouth, while Erling Haaland’s hat-trick inspired Manchester City’s comeback 4-2 victory against Crystal Palace on Saturday.

On a remarkable day in the top-flight, 10-man Chelsea beat Leicester 2-1, while Manchester United’s revival continued with a 1-0 win at Southampton.

Liverpool stole the spotlight as they recovered from Monday’s lacklustre 2-1 loss at Manchester United in astonishing style.

After three games without a win, the Reds rebounded by equalling Manchester United’s 9-0 wins against Ipswich in 1995 and Southampton in 2021, as well as Leicester’s thrashing of Southampton in 2019.

It took just three minutes for Luis Diaz to strike at Anfield as the Colombia winger headed home Roberto Firmino’s cross.

Three minutes later, Liverpool moved further ahead as Harvey Elliott bagged his first Premier League goal with a 20-yard curler.

Trent Alexander-Arnold rifled into the top corner from 25 yards in the 28th minute.

After providing three assists, Firmino scored himself with close-range volley to put the result beyond doubt by the 31st minute.

Virgil Van Dijk headed in Andrew Robertson’s corner on the



Liverpool's Roberto Firmino celebrates with team-mates after scoring against Bournemouth in their English Premier League match at Anfield on Saturday (AFP)

stroke of half-time as Liverpool scored five in the first half of a Premier League game for the first time.

Chris Mepham’s own goal from Alexander-Arnold’s 46th minute cross was followed by Firmino grabbing the seventh in

the 62nd minute. Fabio Carvalho’s first goal since his summer move from Fulham made it eight in the 80th minute.

Diaz notched the historic ninth from Kostas Tsimikas’ corner with five minutes left as Liverpool equalled their biggest ever top-

flight margin of victory, set against Palace in 1989.

Champions Manchester City staged another impressive rally as they came from 2-0 down to beat Palace at the Etihad Stadium.

Palace went ahead in the

fourth minute as Eberechi Eze’s free-kick deflected off John Stones into the net for an own goal.

City fell further behind in the 21st minute when Palace defender Joachim Andersen was left unmarked to head in Eze’s

corner.

But the champions came from 3-1 down to draw at Newcastle last weekend and Bernardo Silva gave them hope of a repeat with a 53rd minute effort that deflected in off Jeffrey Schlupp.

City equalised in the 62nd

minute when Phil Foden’s cross reached Haaland and the former Borussia Dortmund striker headed his first home goal since joining in the close-season.

In the 70th minute, Haaland got his fifth in four games, prodding home from Stones’ pass after a flowing move. The Norwegian sealed his hat-trick from Silva’s pass in the 81st minute.

Raheem Sterling scored his first goals for Chelsea in a dramatic win over Leicester.

Chelsea midfielder Conor Gallagher was sent off in the 28th minute for a needless foul on Harvey Barnes just moments after being booked.

Sterling struck in the 47th minute, the former Manchester City forward’s shot deflecting off Daniel Amartey into the net.

Sterling doubled his tally in the 63rd minute as he tapped in from Reece James’ cross before Barnes squeezed in a low shot three minutes later.

Erik ten Hag said Manchester United have learned from their dismal start to the season after Bruno Fernandes clinched a hard-fought win against Southampton.

Fernandes netted in the 55th minute when he met Diogo Dalot’s cross with a volley from just inside the area.

“I think the players learnt some lessons from Brentford. We were more compact on the long balls. Of course we were really happy,” Ten Hag said.

AFP



The Champions League trophy is displayed during the draw ceremony

Real Madrid open Champions League defence at Celtic

Paris, France - Real Madrid open the defence of their Champions League title with an opening group match at Scottish champions Celtic after the fixtures were announced on Saturday.

The 14-time victors travel to Glasgow for their Group F clash on September 6, the same night that French champions Paris Saint Germain entertain Italian giants Juventus in Group H.

Real Madrid’s bitter rivals Barcelona are in the toughest looking group along with German champions Bayern Munich and Italian side Inter Milan.

Barca, though, open their Group C campaign against Czech outfit Viktoria Plzen whilst Bayern are away at Inter Milan on September 7. Those games serve as the appetizer before Barcelona host Bayern on September 13.

Liverpool, beaten by Real in last season’s final, travel to Napoli for their first Group A match on September 7.

Premier League rivals Chelsea and Manchester City are also both away.

Chelsea - who beat City in the 2021 final - travel to Dinamo Zagreb in Group E and Manchester

City are at Spanish side Sevilla in Group G on September 6.

Two other British clubs enter the fray on September 7 - Tottenham Hotspur host Marseille in Group D whilst Rangers, who are in the same section as Liverpool, play Ajax in Amsterdam.

The group stage has been compressed this season due to the World Cup kicking off in Qatar on November 20.

The last group stage games take place on 1 and 2 November.

The final will be held at the Ataturk Olympic Stadium in Istanbul, Turkey, on 10 June 2023.

Dortmund win at Herthaand, Union hit six against Schalke

Berlin, Germany - French striker Anthony Modeste headed in a first-half goal to get Borussia Dortmund’s season back on track with a narrow 1-0 win away at Hertha Berlin on Saturday.

Dortmund, who came under heavy criticism after throwing away a 2-0 lead in the 88th minute to lose 3-2 against Werder Bremen last Saturday, endured a nervy end to the match but held on to record their third win of the season.

Modeste headed in a cross from Salih Ozcan, who also arrived from Cologne this summer, in the 32nd minute to put Dortmund 1-0 up.

Modeste, who is better known for his theatrical celebrations which often involve dancing and even props, ran emotionally to Dortmund manager Edin Terzic and embraced him after scoring.

The goal was Modeste’s eighth against Hertha in 11 appearances.

Dortmund have now scored



Dortmund goal scorer Anthony Modeste (L) celebrates with Marco Reus

10 goals in competitive fixtures this season, each of which has come from a different scorer.

Elsewhere, Union Berlin sit alone on top of the table, at least until Saturday’s late game, after a 6-1 win away at Schalke.

Braces from Seraldo Becker and Sven Michel, along with strikes from Morten Thorsby and Janik Haberer saw Union record a dominant victory.

The Berlin club, who will begin

their first ever Europa League campaign in September, are unbeaten (four wins and a draw) after five competitive games in 2022-23.

RB Leipzig got their first Bundesliga win of the season with a 2-0 home victory over Wolfsburg. Bayer Leverkusen picked up their first points of the season with a dominant 3-0 win away at Mainz.

AFP

India under-17 Women’s World Cup back on as FIFA lift ban

Paris, France - The under-17 Women’s World Cup will go ahead in India from October 11 after world governing body FIFA lifted a suspension on the All India Football Federation (AIFF) on Friday.

The AIFF had been plagued by governance issues, and was subsequently suspended on August 19 by FIFA “due to undue influence from third parties” - member associations must be free from legal and political interference.

The ban impacted all football there from men and women, from professional down to grassroots, including the scrapping of the under-17 Women’s World Cup.

But Friday the FIFA Council decided to lift the suspension after a temporary mandate of administrators proved successful.

AIFF have now been handed back full control of daily affairs

pending fresh elections, FIFA said.

“FIFA will continue to monitor the situation and will support the AIFF in organising its elections in a timely manner,” FIFA said.

“As a consequence, the FIFA U-17 Women’s World Cup 2022 scheduled to take place on 11-30 October 2022 will be held in India as planned.”

The AIFF’s troubles saw former chief Praful Patel remain in office beyond his term without fresh elections.

FIFA ruled his presidency invalid and appointed administrators to stage fresh elections.

“The darkest hour of Indian football is finally over,” AIFF’s Acting General Secretary Sunando Dhar said in an AIFF statement. “We sincerely thank FIFA and AFC, especially the AFC General Secretary Windsor John for guiding us in such difficult times.”

Manager Inzaghi rues ‘bad loss’ as Lazio beat Inter



Lazio's Pedro (C) celebrates with team-mates after scoring against Inter Milan in their Italian Serie A match in Rome on Friday (AFP)

Milan, Italy - Inter Milan slumped to their first defeat of the season as Spanish duo Luis Alberto and Pedro Rodriguez struck late to guide Lazio to a 3-1 win on Friday which takes the Roman club to the top of Serie A.

It marked another disappointing evening for Inter manager Simone Inzaghi who has yet to pick up a point at the ground he graced as a player for over a decade and where he managed until 2021.

The former Italy striker, instead, had to play second fiddle, as he did last year when Inter were handed another 3-1 defeat, to Maurizio Sarri, the man who replaced him on the Lazio bench.

“It was a very bad loss,” Inzaghi told DAZN. “It was an even game. We had a good first half but Luis Alberto’s goal shifted the balance.”

Sarri brought on Luis Alberto and Pedro just before the hour mark, shortly after Inter’s Lautaro Martinez had cancelled out Felipe Anderson’s 40th minute opener.

Luis Alberto restored the

Lazio advantage in the 75th minute with a superb shot which left Samir Handanovic stranded in the Inter goal before Pedro wrapped things up four minutes from time.

“This victory is important for us, it’s the path we need to follow to progress,” said Pedro.

With two wins and a draw in three matches, Lazio take over top spot in the table, one point ahead of Inter, who won their first two matches.

In Friday’s other game, promoted Monza slipped to their third defeat of the season when they lost 2-1 at home to Udinese who collected their first win.

Andrea Colpani put the Silvio Berlusconi-owned side ahead just after the half-hour but the lead only lasted four minutes before Beto levelled for Udinese.

Monza were looking good for their first point of the season until 19-year-old defender Destiny Udogie, on loan from Tottenham, knocked in the winner 12 minutes from time.

AFP

SUNDAY BLOCKBUSTER

India captain Rohit Sharma says 'challenging' to play Pakistan as the arch-rivals meet in the T20 Asia Cup in Dubai

Dubai, United Arab Emirates - Skipper Rohit Sharma on Saturday said India have learnt from their previous loss to Pakistan but playing their arch-rivals in the hotly-anticipated Asia Cup match will be a challenge.

The two teams begin their campaign in the Twenty20 tournament on Sunday in Dubai, a venue where India suffered a 10-wicket thrashing to Babar Azam's Pakistan in last year's T20 World Cup.

"The mood in the camp is buzzing. It's a fresh tournament, a new start. Not to think about what has happened in the past and that's how the team moves forward," Rohit told reporters.

"It will be a challenge to play against Pakistan without a doubt, but for us what is important is what we are thinking as a group and what we want to achieve from this tournament."



India captain Rohit Sharma with Rishabh Pant and Avesh Khan

The two teams only play each other in multi-nation tournaments due to political tension and the result of their previous meeting has been a talking point in the lead-up to the six-nation Asia Cup.

It was Pakistan's first win over India in a World Cup, but Rohit said they have now put the loss behind them.

"We do talk about our losses, that's how we improve as a team. That loss did hurt us at that point,

but I think it's been a while since that game has been played," said Rohit.

"We learn from our mistakes. For now it's a fresh start for us and obviously the team is coming out of playing a lot of T20 cricket.

We will not think too much about what happened in October, that was a long time back."

Dubai has witnessed lot of warmth between the players of both the teams and on Friday Rohit went out of his way to meet

a group of cheering Pakistan fans at the practice venue.

Azam and Indian superstar Virat Kohli also exchanged pleasantries, a sight not very common between players of the two nations, which have fought three

wars, including two over the disputed region of Kashmir.

"This can be unusual to you, but not for us. We have been seeing this for so many years and whenever we go to the ground cricket fans come to watch the game and meet players," said Rohit.

"Lot of us have experienced this. This is normal.

"Regarding the rivalry, both are good teams and will produce a good quality match whenever they face each other and it will be a talking point. But I am sure it's just a match for both teams which they will try to win. You can hype it from outside, but here we will work and focus on our game."

Azam also played down the rivalry between the two teams after a journalist compared the heat of Dubai to the upcoming clash between the South Asian giants. "No heat at all," Azam said with a smile. "It's normal and we have to adjust to everything as a professional."

Azam remains the star performer with the bat for Pakistan and remains key to the team's success in the absence of pace spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi, who was forced out due to a knee injury.

AFP

Fast bowler Farooqi stars as Afghanistan hammer Sri Lanka in Asia Cup opener

Dubai, United Arab Emirates - Fast bowler Fazalhaq Farooqi returned bowling figures of 3-11 to help Afghanistan thrash Sri Lanka by eight wickets in the opening match of the Asia Cup Twenty20 tournament on Saturday.

Afghanistan elected to field and bundled out Sri Lanka for a paltry 105, a total their batsmen overhauled in 10.1 overs in Dubai.

Left-hander Hazratullah Zazai, unbeaten on 37, and wicketkeeper-batsman Rah-

manullah Gurbaz, who hit 40, put on 83 runs for the opening wicket to build on the dominance started by the bowlers.

Afghanistan, in Group B with Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, have made a thumping start to their campaign in the six-nation tour-

namment that acts as a tune-up to the T20 World Cup in October-November in Australia.

Farooqi, a left-arm quick, stood out for Afghanistan after he struck with successive deliveries in the first over of the innings to send Kusal Mendis and

Charith Asalanka trudging back to the pavilion for two and nought.

Naveen-ul-Haq then sent back Pathum Nissanka caught behind after the batsman reviewed the on-field call and the third-umpire upheld the deci-

sion despite no visible spike on the ultra-edge, leaving the batsman and dressing room stunned.

At that point Sri Lanka were struggling with just five runs on the board and three wickets down in the opening two overs.

Danushka Gunathilaka (17) and Bhanuka Rajapaksa (38) attempted to hit back with a flurry of boundaries in a 20-run sixth over before spinner Mujeeb Ur Rahman broke the 44-run stand.

AFP

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(LtoR) Ferrari's Carlos Sainz with Red Bull Racing's Max Verstappen and Sergio Perez after the qualifying session for the Belgian F1 Grand Prix (AFP)

Ferrari's Carlos Sainz claims pole for Belgian Grand Prix

Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium - Ferrari's Carlos Sainz claimed pole for the Belgian Grand Prix despite finishing behind Red Bull's world champion Max Verstappen in qualifying at Spa-Francorchamps on Saturday.

Sainz was the main beneficiary as a posse of drivers, including Verstappen, picked up penalties after fitting new power units to their cars for Sunday's 14th round of the season.

Verstappen's Red Bull teammate Sergio Perez starts alongside Sainz on the front row.

This was Spaniard Sainz's second career pole after July's British Grand Prix where he went

on to claim his maiden win.

"I'm happy to start from pole but not so happy when I see the gap we have to Max," said Sainz, 0.632seconds slower than Verstappen.

Sainz's Ferrari teammate Charles Leclerc, 80 points adrift of Verstappen in the title race, took fourth in qualifying but was also demoted.

With fifth-placed Esteban Ocon also among the sanctioned seven, Fernando Alonso and Lewis Hamilton fill the second row. Both are on the hunt for their first wins of the 22-race season.

AFP

England beat South Africa by innings and 85 runs in 2nd Test

Manchester, United Kingdom - England hammered South Africa by an innings and 85 runs to win the second Test at Old Trafford inside three days on Saturday.

The victory, which followed South Africa's almost as crushing innings and 12-run win in the first Test at Lord's, meant England levelled the three-match series at 1-1.

South Africa, 141-3 in their second innings at tea, then saw England captain Ben Stokes remove both Rassie van der Dussen (41) and Keegan Petersen (42) for their interval scores.

The Proteas, the World Test Championship leaders, then collapsed against the new ball as they lost their last five wickets for seven runs in 31 balls en route to being dismissed for 179.

Recalled seamer Ollie Robinson took 4-43 in 15.1 overs and 40-year-old England great James Anderson 3-30.

Anderson had earlier marked becoming the first man to play



England's captain Ben Stokes (C) celebrates the dismissal of South Africa's Rassie van der Dussen in the second Test at Old Trafford (AFP)

100 Tests on home soil (97 in England, three in Wales) by taking three wickets in South Africa's meagre first innings 151 after Proteas captain Dean Elgar surprisingly decided to bat first in bowler-friendly conditions.

This match was a personal triumph for player of the match Stokes, who made 103 -- his first century as England captain -- in

a total of 415-9 declared that also featured wicketkeeper Ben Foakes's Test-best 113 not out.

"I adapted to the pitch. Some balls were bouncing and some were skidding. But having that positive mindset makes it easier," said Stokes.

He has now won five of his six Tests as skipper since succeeding Joe Root as England's permanent captain.

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MODERN MASTERPIECES

TREASURE TROVE UNCOVERED

More than 20,000 people flocked to an Iranian museum showcasing renowned Western artists' works - some for the first time - part of a treasure trove amassed before the Islamic Revolution.

The museum's collection is reputed to be the greatest line-up of modern masterpieces outside Europe and the United States, and includes multi-million-dollar pieces, much of which has been kept under wraps since the 1979 revolution.

"The Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art surprises me every time," said visitor Shahin Rajabi, 35. "The current show is no exception."

The current 'Minimalism and Conceptual Art' exhibition features 132 works by 34 world-famous contemporary artists, museum director Ebadreza Eslami said, including Marcel Duchamp, Sol LeWitt, Donald Judd and the duo Christo and Jeanne-Claude.

"The reception has been marvellous," Eslami said, "particularly after long closures in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic." He said, one of the main factors for the increased footfall at this exhibition was that 38 masterpieces were being displayed for the first time.

Visitors at the museum were seen this week, some stopping to study details, others busy taking photos, as they made their way intently through the museum.

"I loved the last room of the exhibit in particular, where the artist had worked with fluorescent light," said visitor Rajabi, referring to American artist Dan Flavin's untitled work.

Very valuable

The museum was inaugurated in 1977 during the reign of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who was deposed by Islamic revolutionaries two years later. Its design was inspired by Iran's desert wind towers - an architectural element used to catch and circulate cool air in hot environments.

Most of the collection was built up by the Shah's wife, former queen Farah Pahlavi, who deployed a team of experts to tour Western auctions and snap up prestigious paintings and sculptures to boost the country's cultural profile.

The museum also holds an important collection of Iranian modern and contemporary art. But the international works went underground after the Islamic

republic's founder Ruhollah Khomeini rallied against 'West-oxification', deploring Western immorality which, he said, had infected the Islamic world.

The themes of many of the Western works have been considered too risqué to be publicly shown, and have spent much of the past decades languishing in storage. The museum counts some 3,500 works, hundreds of which are 'very valuable', head of public relations Hassan Noferesti said.

They include masterpieces by Western artists, from Paul Gauguin to Pablo Picasso, Rene Magritte, Jackson Pollock, Andy Warhol and Alberto Giacometti, according to Iran's culture ministry.

Visitors double

The current show, which runs until mid-September, includes a collage by Italian artist Michelangelo Pistoletto titled 'Green Curtains', and an untitled work made from hemp by Canadian-American sculptor Jacqueline Winsor.

Curator Behrang Samadzadeh said, some 20,000 people have visited since the show opened in late June - about twice the normal turnout.

Describing the theme of the show, he added, "When we are talking about minimalism, we are primarily talking about the environment not the work."

Standing in front of 'Rock Salt & Mirror' by American artist Robert Smithson, 28-year-old painter Solmaz Daneshvar said she greatly enjoyed the display.

The exhibition, however, was at the centre of controversy this month when an amateur video surfaced showing two silverfish insects underneath the frame of a rare image by the late German photographic duo of Bernd and Hilla Becher.

The museum later made a formal apology, assuring concerned art lovers that the work by the Bechers, who are known for their photos of industrial structures, was not damaged. It also closed its doors for two days for fumigation.

In 2015, the museum held an exhibition of 42 works by Western artists including Pollock's masterpiece 'Mural on Indian Red Ground', valued by Christie's auction house experts in 2010 at US\$250mn.

AFP



Visitors take delight in the Sinjerli Variations I-V, by American painter Frank Stella in 1977, during the 'Minimalism and Conceptual Art' exhibition. (Below) A visitor views the artworks by German artists Bernd and Hilla Becher at the exhibition



When we are talking about minimalism, we are primarily talking about the environment, not the work

BEHRANG SAMADZADEGAN, Curator



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ARTEMIS I



The 42-day Artemis I mission that will test the Orion spacecraft - a capsule that will orbit the moon and one day carry human crew members there - will blast off from Cape Canaveral, Florida, at 8.33am on August 29.

Artemis I will be the first in a series of increasingly complex missions to build a long-term human presence on the Moon for decades to come. The meticulously choreographed uncrewed flight is expected to yield spectacular images as well as valuable scientific data.

BLAST OFF

The giant Space Launch System rocket will make its maiden flight from Launch Complex 39B at Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

Its four RS-25 engines, with two white boosters on either side, will produce 8.8 million pounds (39 meganewtons) of thrust - 15 per cent more than the Apollo programme's Saturn V rocket. After two minutes, the thrusters will fall back into the Atlantic Ocean.

After eight minutes, the core stage, orange in colour, will fall away, in turn, leaving the Orion crew capsule attached to the interim cryogenic propulsion stage.

This stage will circle the Earth once, put Orion on course for the Moon, and drop away around 90 minutes after take off.

TRAJECTORY

All that remains is Orion, which will fly astronauts in the future and is powered by a service module built by the European Space Agency. It will take several days to reach the Moon, flying around 60 miles (100km) at closest approach.

"It's going to be spectacular. We'll be holding our breath," said mission flight director Rick LaBorde.

The capsule will fire its engines to get to a distant retrograde orbit (DRO) 40,000 miles beyond the Moon, a distance record for a spacecraft rated to

carry humans.

'Distant' relates to high altitude, while 'retro-grade' refers to the fact Orion will go around the Moon the opposite direction to the Moon's orbit around the Earth.

DRO is a stable orbit because objects are balanced between the gravitational pulls of two large masses. After passing by the Moon to take advantage of its gravitational assistance, Orion will begin the return journey.

JOURNEY HOME

The mission's primary objective is to test the capsule's heat shield, the largest ever built, 16 feet (5m) in diameter.

On its return to the Earth's atmosphere, it will have to withstand a speed of 25,000 miles per hour and a temperature of 5,000 degrees Fahrenheit (2,760 degrees Celsius).

Slowed by a series of parachutes until it is travelling at less than 20 miles per hour, Orion will splash-down off the coast of San Diego in the Pacific while divers will attach cables to tow it in a few hours to a US Navy ship.

THE CREW

The capsule will carry a mannequin called 'Moonikin Campos', named after a legendary NASA engineer who saved Apollo 13, in the commander's seat, wearing the agency's brand new uniform.

Campos will be equipped with sensors to record acceleration and vibrations, and will also be accompanied by two other dummies: Helga and Zohar, who are made of materials designed to mimic bones and organs.

One will wear a radiation vest while the other won't, to test the impacts of the radiation in deep space.

WHAT WILL PEOPLE SEE

Several on-board cameras will make it possible to follow the entire journey from multiple angles, including from the point of view of a passenger in the capsule. Cameras at the end of the solar panels will take selfies of the craft with the Moon and Earth in the background.

CUBESATS

Life will imitate art with a technology demonstration called Callisto, inspired by the Starship Enterprise's talking computer.

It is an improved version of Amazon's Alexa voice assistant, which will be requested from the control center to adjust the light in the capsule, or to read flight data. The idea is to make life easier for astronauts in the future.

In addition, a payload of 10 CubeSats, shoebox-sized microsatellites, will be deployed by the rocket's upper stage.

They have numerous goals - studying an asteroid, examining the effect of radiation on living organisms, searching for water on the Moon.

These projects, carried out independently by international companies or researchers, take advantage of the rare opportunity of a launch into deep space.

MISSION TO THE MOON

NASA's Artemis I mission, scheduled to take off on Monday, is a 42-day voyage beyond the far side of the Moon and back

KEEP TRACK

Here's how to follow NASA's Artemis I moon mission in real time after launch:

NASA launches an Artemis I tracking website on August 28 - the day before the mission is scheduled to lift off. The Artemis Real-time Orbit Website will be advertised on the NASA Orion Twitter feed a day before Artemis I's launch opportunity - Monday morning (August 29), NASA officials state.

The tracking website will pro-

vide live information from sensors on Orion that are sent to NASA's Mission Control center at JSC. Data will begin streaming roughly one minute after lift off, the agency says, through separation of the SLS Interim Cryogenic Propulsion Stage. Orion, once it separates from the rocket, will provide a stream of real-time information on its own.

That information will include plenty of mission milestones, the flight's trajectory and Orion data including temperature, distance travelled and mission elapsed time.

A selection of state vectors, which describe where Orion is at any moment in space and its movements, will be available for open-source data repurposing for tracking apps, data visualisations and other third-party creative uses, NASA added.

The Artemis I unmanned lunar rocket sits on the launch pad at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida, on August 26

