

NEWS BRIEF

OMAN TO PARTICIPATE IN WORLD HERITAGE MEETING IN RIYADH

Muscat - Oman will take part in the plenary meeting of the World Heritage Committee's 45th session, due to be held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia from September 10 to 25.

Oman's delegation will be led by Dr Hamad Saif al Hamami, Permanent Representative of the sultanate to UNESCO. The delegation will include experts in tangible cultural heritage representing the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Sultan Qaboos University, Environment Authority and Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science.

Oman will attend the meeting in its capacity as member of the World Heritage Committee since the 44th session in 2021.



Innovation awaits Matrah Fort - easy access for all

GCC states' GDP up 7.7%

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Standing Preparatory Committee of Ministers of the GCC Economic and Development Affairs Authority convened in Salalah on Wednesday under the chairmanship of H E Dr Said al Saqri, Minister of Economy.

Central to the committee's fifth meeting were discussions on enhancing economic integration, overcoming developmental challenges and scrutinising joint economic files.

H E Saqri highlighted the eagerness of GCC states to collaborate, coordinate and unite. Reflecting on the Economic and Development Affairs Authority's pivotal role, he acknowledged the commendable strides made by its various ministerial committees.

Recent data indicates a robust recovery and growth of GCC economies. According to the International Monetary Fund, real GDP of the GCC surged 7.7% in 2022, a marked rise from 3.5% in 2021.

While the global inflation rate rose to 8.7% in 2022, the GCC managed to stabilise at 3.3% - a marginal increase from the previous year's 2.2%, H E Saqri noted.

Trade within the GCC also witnessed an upswing. Intra-GCC exports rose 13.4% to US\$83.4bn in 2021 from US\$73.5bn in 2020. Similarly, intra-GCC imports increased 11% to US\$66.4bn in 2021, up from



While the global inflation rate rose to 8.7% in 2022, the GCC managed to stabilise at 3.3% - a marginal increase from the previous year's 2.2%

H E DR SAID AL SAQRI

US\$59.8bn in 2020.

H E Saqri emphasised the Standing Preparatory Committee meeting's mission stating, "Today, we convene to identify opportunities and challenges, seek solutions and formulate decisive recommendations. Our aim is to empower committees in sculpting solutions that bolster economic and developmental co-operation, thus achieving economic unity by 2025."

The meeting also discussed governance of joint Gulf economic ventures, progress of the Gulf Economic Model, the 2025 Economic Union project, integration of economic and developmental sectors, and the latest economic indicators of GCC states.

Unified platform planned to boost industry

Muscat - The 57th Preparatory Meeting of GCC Commerce Undersecretaries and 43rd Preparatory Meeting of GCC Industry Undersecretaries were held in Salalah on Wednesday.

On the agendas of both meetings were discussions on creating a unified electronic platform for the Gulf countries to support industrial sector projects, provide data for investors and review experiences of member states in the industrial sector. The meetings were chaired by H E Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Undersecretary for



H E Dr Saleh Said Masan

Commerce and Industry in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Other topics of discussion included addressing the challenges of intra-trade among GCC states, facilitating trade exchange and reviewing develop-

ments in commercial laws.

The meetings looked into the activities of small and medium enterprises, the Entrepreneurship Committee, the Internal Trade Committee and Foreign Trade Committee, while taking note of the latest developments in negotiations on free trade agreements with other countries and international blocs.

A uniform definition of the Gulf national product and its standards and executive regulations for the Unified Industrial Regulatory Law were also discussed.

OIA invests in US-based Our Next Energy

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has announced an investment in US-based Our Next Energy (ONE), which specialises in innovative battery technology for electric vehicles (EVs) and energy storage.

This investment continues the authority's efforts to diversify its international investment portfolio and achieve optimal benefit for Oman in terms of returns on investment and sustainable investments that align with the sultanate's commitment to net zero emissions by 2050.

As part of the investment, OIA and ONE signed a strategic collaboration agreement to explore potential areas of collaboration in energy storage and battery manufacturing in Oman.

ONE was founded in 2020 as a battery company with the aim of accelerating the world's progress towards net zero emissions by doubling the range of electric vehicles, using safer, more abundant materials, and establishing a local supply chain. The company is focused on high-density lithium iron phosphate-based batteries. LFP batteries are created from lower-cost, more abundant iron and are known for improving safety by avoiding thermal runaway. ONE's Aries LFP, Aries II and Gemini batteries all use safe, sustainable LFP chemistry and offer driving ranges between 500km and 1,000km.

"OIA is proud to be part of this pioneering technology and vision, which aligns with its strategy to focus on sustainable en-



ergy and is compatible with national strategies and commitments such as Oman Vision 2040 and the net zero emissions goal by 2050," said Ibrahim al Eisri, Director of Private Equity at OIA. "EVs are the future, and we are making sure to be a player in the transformation to ensure the growth and sustainability of the EVs' market as an environmentally responsible investor."

According to Mujeeb Ijaz, CEO and founder of ONE, having the support of investors like OIA will allow the company to scale its transportation and grid products into global markets and accelerate the progress towards a sustainable future.

This investment comes on the heels of other investments made by OIA in the energy transition field, including Ascend Elements, which specialises in recycling lithium-ion batteries, and Group14, which specialises in manufacturing innovative silicon-carbonate battery materials to replace traditional graphite materials used in lithium-ion batteries.



JUNE, JULY AND AUGUST - WARMEST IN 120,000 YEARS

2023 is likely to be the hottest year in human history, and global temperatures during the Northern Hemisphere summer were the warmest on record, the EU climate monitor said on Wednesday. Heat waves, droughts and wildfires (pictured - Yellowknife in Canada's Northwest Territories) struck Asia, Africa, Europe and North America over the last three months, with dramatic impact on economies, ecosystems and human health. The average global temperature in June, July and August was 16.77°C, surpassing the previous 2019 record of 16.48°C by a wide margin, the European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) said in a report. 'The three months that we've just had are the warmest in approximately 120,000 years, so effectively human history,' C3S stated (AFP)

Oman committed to eradicating illiteracy by 2024

Our Correspondent Muscat

On September 8, as part of International Literacy Day celebrations, Oman - led by the Ministry of Education - will joins UNESCO and global counterparts to emphasise its dedicated efforts against illiteracy.

National Centre for Statistics and Information's data for 2022 showed the sultanate's illiteracy rate dropped to 2.60% among individuals aged 15 and older.

This year's theme of International Literacy Day - 'Promoting

INTERNATIONAL LITERACY DAY



Literacy in Light of Global Transformation: Building the Foundation for Achieving a Sustainable and Safe Life for Communities' - aligns seamlessly with Oman's transformative education vision. Since 1973, Oman has worked to not only promote reading and writing but also ensure holistic education for everyone, irrespective of gender and age.

As global dynamics shift, Oman's approach to literacy evolved, transitioning from solely focusing on alphabetic literacy to championing continuous education and lifelong learning.

The ministry formulated strategic plans targeting a rapid decline in illiteracy rates. These efforts have been fruitful, with the illiteracy rate among the 15-and-older age group now at 2.60%. Regionally, Oman is also dedicated to the objectives of the Arab Decade for Eradication of Illiteracy (2015/2024), aiming to be completely illiterate-free by 2024. The focused attention on the productive age group of 15-44 has resulted in a significant drop in illiteracy, going from 2.2% in 2015 to an impressive 0.44% by the end of 2022.

To achieve these results, several collaborative projects involving public and private sectors, alongside civil society, were initiated. Noteworthy projects include the training bag project, enhancing teacher skills; the Educated Village Project, targeting entire villages; and cooperative school projects, leveraging existing school infrastructures.

New initiatives encompass efforts to extend literacy to special populations, including Omanis living on islands, those working in the private sector, and people with disabilities.

Rummana ushers in new agri-tourism era

The eagerly awaited pomegranate-picking season commenced on August 31

Muscat - Perched atop Jabal Akhdar lies Rummana - pomegranate in Arabic - marking Oman's foray into agri-tourism. Set against the serene backdrop of the town of Saiq, Rummana is situated amidst sprawling pomegranate orchards.

This pioneering venture is the brainchild of a unique collaboration - Teepee, a company dedicated to promoting culture through glamping; Al Balushi & Sons (ABS), an Omani food conglomerate; and Janaen, a strategic alliance between Oman Food Investment Holding Company and Omran Group focused on promoting agricultural tourism.

Commenting on the project's essence to *Muscat Daily*, Alaa al Balushi, CEO of ABS, said, "Rum-



mana provides a one-of-a-kind experience within an enclave of pomegranate trees. We envisioned a sanctuary for individuals to come together, bask in nature and truly engage with the surroundings."

The culinary offerings, carefully crafted by ABS, seamlessly blend high-grade ingredients to local flavours, all in harmony with

the majestic pomegranate trees of Jabal Akhdar, Alaa added.

Emphasising on the unique nature of the project, Mazin al Raisi of Janaen said, "This initiative gives visitors the opportunity to be in a unique environment. Presented with Teepee's vision of an educative and delightful pomegranate-centric experience, we were eager to transform this con-

A FRUITFUL JOURNEY

Rummana provides a one-of-a-kind experience. We envisioned a sanctuary for individuals to come together, bask in nature and truly engage with the surroundings

ALAA AL BALUSHI



(Supplied photos)

cept into an attractive destination."

According to Umayma al Hinai, co-founder of Teepee, visitors can unravel the mysteries of the pomegranate at Rummana. "Through workshops, art and guided hikes, they'll experience the splendour of Jabal Akhdar."

The transformation from concept to reality spanned three

months. "Once Janaen gave us the nod in late April, we initiated the project in May," Hinai noted.

Highlighting Rummana's dynamic activity roster, Marion Fernandez, ABS's marketing manager, said, "Every weekend brings a fresh array of workshops and activities, ranging from stargazing and cooking to art sessions. Our goal is to offer a di-

verse palette of experiences."

Starting in September, Rummana has extended its hospitality to Oman-based corporations, creating an unparalleled setting for events aimed at fostering team camaraderie, Fernandez informed *Muscat Daily*.

The eagerly awaited pomegranate-picking season commenced on August 31.

Enthusiasts can now indulge in picking their own fruits, priced at RO2.2 per kg.

Rummana welcomes guests daily from 9am to 12pm and 4pm to 9pm until September 23, 2023. An entry fee of RO1 applies, with children under six enjoying complimentary access.

(Contributed by Deeba Parween)

TRA to launch cybersecurity programme for jobseekers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) will launch a training programme in cybersecurity this month as part of its efforts to develop skills of jobseekers.

A TRA official said, "The programme aims to develop the potential and skills of graduates and jobseekers and prepare them for the labour market and participate in specialised projects in the field of cybersecurity."

Urging jobseekers to register via TRA's website, he informed that the programme will run starting this month till June



2024 under the supervision of specialists in the field of cybersecurity. It will be held at the authority's headquarters and registration is open till September 12.

In its annual cybersecurity report for 2021, Trend Micro Incorporated, a global leader in cybersecurity solutions, stated that it detected and blocked over 4.1mn email threats,

700,607 malware attacks, and over 4.6mn URL attacks in Oman.

The report added that Trend Micro solutions stopped over 94.2bn threats in 2021 globally, a 42 per cent increase in the number of detections recorded in 2020.

Attacks surged to over 53bn in the second half of 2021, blocking 41bn threats in H1 2021.

According to the report, better readiness for security teams against emerging threats is necessary across sectors. With these insights, Oman seeks preparedness and awareness in its young citizens on the threshold of new careers.

S Batinah film camp nurtures tomorrow's filmmakers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In partnership with Oman Film Society, the Office of Governor of South Batinah held a filmmakers' camp in Musannah on Wednesday. This initiative complements the activities of the upcoming second edition of Batinah International Film Festival slated for November 12 to 15.

With 28 budding filmmakers participating, the camp was conducted with the objective of refining their craft in making short films. Seasoned professionals guided the participants, equipping them with innovative skills and bolstering their confidence in filmmaking.

The camp's diverse activities included a workshop focused on fostering creative thought. Fatima al Hanai, Director of Media and Marketing for Batinah International Film Festival, and Anwar al Ruzaiqi of Oman Film Society, conducted this session with the aim of sparking innovative ideas for short film narratives.

A standout event of the camp



(Supplied photo)

This camp complements the activities of the upcoming second edition of Batinah International Film Festival slated for November 12 to 15

was a workshop on screenplay writing, steered by Qaisar al Hinai. This session aimed to translate unique ideas into compelling short film scripts.

Additionally, Bahraini director Jan al Balushi will conduct a workshop on photography and cinematography on September 17 and 18 as part of the camp.

Participants will engage in hands-on sessions, crafting short film sequences.

The camp's programme includes sessions on film editing and harnessing cutting-edge technology. Led by Muhammad al Ruqaishi on September 20 and 21, these segments will teach video editing techniques, focus-

ing on visual effects.

Mohammed al Ajmi, Director of Batinah International Film Festival, emphasised its role in Oman's cinematic landscape. "It serves as a cradle for budding filmmakers across the sultanate, fostering talent and enhancing their global outreach. The camp, encompassing every aspect of filmmaking, embodies this mission, guiding participants towards cinematic excellence."

Films emerging from the camp will feature in the festival.



Bahwan Electronics honours its long time channel partner

Mr. Khemu Khanwani, the owner of Al Raud Trading LLC in Salalah has been a dealer of Bahwan Electronics for over 30 years showing significant business growth year on year. In recognition for his unparalleled support and dedication to help grow Bahwan Electronics' business in Salalah all these years, he was facilitated recently.

Mr. Chandra Mouli, General Manager and Mr. Ramakrishnan, Assistant General Manager met with Mr. Khemu Khanwani and facilitated him with a special award.

The recognition marks Bahwan Electronics and Suhail Bahwan Group's reciprocation and firm commitment to support and work with channel partners across the Sultanate of Oman.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Loneliness in the Gulf: A Personal Reflection

After reading the thought-provoking article 'Home Alone' in *Muscat Daily's* issue dated August 5, 2023, I couldn't help but feel the weight of loneliness that many Gulf residents experience.

For many, living alone is an inevitable reality, stemming from work, family complications or other factors. Having lived single in Oman for years, I can personally attest to the emotional strains it imposes.

Since the 1990s, when I first set foot in Oman, living conditions and societal concerns have evolved significantly. Earlier, in my bachelorhood, Oman lacked many of the psychological stresses prevalent today. Especially post-pandemic, health worries have magnified for those residing alone, particularly for expatriates.

Ramachandran Nair, Ruwi

Omani converts over 12 hectares of desert land into lush mango farm

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In the wilayat of Musanaa, North Batinah, Omani farmer Hamood al Mahrizi is pioneering a shift in agricultural practices. Having cultivated over 12 hectares with mango trees, he now boasts of an impressive yield of over 37 tonnes per hectare annually, illustrating the potential of diversifying crops.

Initiating his farming journey in 2020, Mahrizi's objective remains diversification. Speaking to the *Muscat Daily*, he shared, "After retirement, I was drawn to farming. My research indicated the profitability of mango cultivation. Plus, I have a personal fondness for mangoes."

Detailing his innovative approach, Mahrizi mentioned, "Out of my five farms spanning over 20 hectares, 12 hectares of land is dedicated to mangoes. I have adopted the UHDP (Ultra High Density Plantation) method, planting over 7,800 trees per hectare."

Mango cultivation is not without challenges. Mahrizi pointed out the necessity of managing heat and ensuring adequate sunlight for photosyn-



I chose mangoes to diversify from conventional farming and boost Return on Investment, thereby supporting the national economy and food security

HAMOOD AL MAHRIZI

thesis.

"In addition to primary fertilisers like nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium; mangoes need micronutrients like zinc, iron, manganese, calcium, and boron. Their precise administration, aligned with the weather, determines the quality of production, appearance, and taste."

He further highlighted the importance of managing diseases and pests.

On his choice of mango farming, Mahrizi said, "Considering the favourable climate we share with major producers like Egypt and Israel, Oman holds an advantage, particularly given our lack of winter frost."

"I chose mangoes to diversify from conventional farming and boost Return on Investment (ROI), thereby supporting the national economy and food security."

Highlighting water conservation, Mahrizi explained, "Mango farming is more water-efficient than the less profitable hay farming, known to exacerbate water scarcity in Oman."

Mahrizi's vision extends beyond his own farm. "While I look forward to support from

MAFWR initiates mango farming through RO1.25mn project

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman, a nation reliant on imported mangoes, is steering its attention toward sustainable farming of mangoes locally.

The Ministry of Agricultural Wealth, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has initiated a RO1.25mn mango cultivation project over 80 hectares of land in Barka, South Batinah.

This endeavour through Mango Production and Marketing company stems from the Food Security Laboratory supervised by the ministry. Its core objective is to increase domestic mango production and diversify the local market's agricultural offerings.



Company CEO Nasser bin Hamad al Sibai said that the integrated mango cultivation farm has been set up to produce diverse high-quality mango variants.

Initial stages saw the establishment of the farm's infrastructure: Fencing, well-digging, a state-of-the-art irrigation system, and electricity provisions.

With 5,000 mango

saplings already planted and another 5,000 slated to be planted by the year-end, the company is working towards a total of 17,000 saplings across the designated area.

By 2028, the farm is projected to yield approximately 3,600 tonnes of mangoes annually. Furthermore, this agricultural initiative promises job opportunities for the Omani citizens.

The project integrates the latest methodologies in mango cultivation, adhering to the global standards and best practices such as optimal fertiliser use and pruning. High standard of farming would ensure an environment conducive to bumper production, the company stated.

others to expand my project, I - at the same time - would like to motivate other farmers to adopt similar practices. I am keen on creating a mango farmers' community to offer technical and

marketing support."

Encouraging Omani youth to engage in agriculture, Mahrizi emphasised its profitability.

"Our land is a legacy for our upcoming generations. Many

nations count agriculture as their primary income source. Our endeavours towards that direction can play a significant role in reducing unemployment," he concluded.

Pact inked to establish Sur innovation hub

Muscat - The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) and the Oman-Indian Fertilizer Company (OMIFCO) on Wednesday signed an agreement to establish a centre in Sur to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship in the city.

The agreement was signed by Eng Nasser Hamoud al Mabsali, Director General of Sur Industrial City, and Khalid Sulaiman al Farsi, General Manager of Supply Chain at OMIFCO.

The OMIFCO Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Sur Industrial City is the outcome of the city's plan to support innovation and entrepreneurship in Oman in general, and the Governorate of South Sharqiyah in particular.

The agreement offers an opportunity to enhance the role of entrepreneurship and innovation and embrace emerging companies in various sectors.

The centre will work as a pioneering hub to provide a whole lot of services that include shared work spaces, private offices, consulting services, training programmes and seminars, and technical support for the entrepreneurs. 'This will enhance the culture of entrepreneurship in the governorate and provide owners with ideas and projects for the labour market', both the parties believe.

The centre is expected to be operational within 24 months.

REGIONAL WEATHER

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	44	29
Doha	41	29
Manama	39	31
Riyadh	44	25

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4.34am
Duhr	12.10pm
Asr	3.38pm
Maghrib	6.25pm
Isha	7.36pm

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ANNOUNCEMENT

The Directorate General of Khoula Hospital invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tenders Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 10:00 am Sunday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/DGKH-36/3338/2023	Unit Price Contract for Supply of Biomedical Spare Parts & Accessories for a Period of Two Years at Directorate General of Khoula Hospital	17/Sep/2023	15/ Oct /2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	R.O 25,000

- Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> .
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via **Telephone: 24402200** , Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

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*Rates as on September 06

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Germany to put 15mn electric cars on road by 2030

The German chancellor has said that his country is sticking to its goal of putting 15mn electric cars on the roads by 2030.

In his opening speech at the International Motor Show in Munich (IAA), Olaf Scholz appealed to automakers to offer more affordable cars. He also announced a push to expand charging stations for e-cars.

"The goal is not new - what is new is that we are also implementing it," the chancellor said.

With regard to the competition from China, which was very present at the IAA, Scholz firmly rejected any fears that the German automotive industry could be left behind.

"Competition should spur us on, not scare us," Scholz said.

Oman crude jumps above \$90 for first time since November

Our Correspondent

Muscat

The price of the Oman crude oil contract rose above \$90 per barrel for the first time since November 2022 on Wednesday, as Saudi Arabia and Russia announced a day earlier that they were extending their respective production and export cuts.

The official selling price of Oman crude (for November delivery) jumped 1.3% to reach \$90.41 per barrel at the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) on Wednesday, following a 1.4% rise in the international benchmark Brent crude and a 1.9% increase in the US benchmark Western Texas Intermediate (WTI) the previous day.

However, Brent and WTI crude prices slightly decreased on Wednesday after rising sharply in the previous session, with Brent trading at \$89.6 a barrel by 0740 GMT.

The monthly average price of Oman crude for September delivery arrived at \$80.54 per barrel, an increase of \$5.76 per barrel compared to the price for August delivery, according to a DME statement.

On Tuesday, Saudi Arabia and



Russia announced that they would extend voluntary oil cuts until the end of the year, sending the price of Brent crude to a 10-month high.

The Saudi production cut of one million barrels per day, which first took effect in July, will continue "for another three months until the end of December 2023," the kingdom's energy ministry said in a statement.

Russia said it would extend its oil export cuts of 300,000 barrels per day until the end of the year.

"This was flagged last week to some extent, but crude is fetching strong bids on the announcement," said Finalto analyst Neil Wilson.

Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest crude exporter, first announced its cut after a June meeting of the 23-nation OPEC+ alliance, which also includes Russia and Oman.

A statement in early August revealing the cut would last through September included a warning that it could be "deepened," but Tuesday's announcement has kept it at the same level for now. The unilateral Saudi cut followed a decision in April by several OPEC+ members to

slash production voluntarily by more than one million barrels per day—a surprise move that briefly buttressed prices but failed to bring about a lasting recovery.

In coordination with countries participating in the OPEC+ agreement, Oman in April announced a voluntarily production cut of 40,000 barrels of crude oil per day, starting from May until the end of 2023. In June, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals announced to extend Oman's voluntary cut of 40,000 barrels of oil per day until the end of December 2024.

Justin Alexander, director of the consultancy Khalij Economics, said, "The additional cuts [by Saudi Arabia] do appear to have boosted prices, and the supply is looking tight in the fourth quarter despite rising output from Iran and some other countries.

"However, the effort has come at a cost to the kingdom, with the reduction of its supply by 10% (on top of the 10% in cuts coming from the October and April OPEC+ meetings)." Saudi daily production is at approximately 9mn barrels per day, far below its reported daily capacity of 12mn barrels per day.

(With inputs from AFP)



Omantel awards RO3mn worth of contracts to SMEs

Our Correspondent

Muscat

Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) has awarded RO3mn worth of business contracts to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by the end of the second quarter of 2023.

As many as 17 SMEs will benefit from the contracts awarded by Omantel, according to an Oman News Agency report.

As part of their cooperation, the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) and Omantel recently conducted four workshops

OABC, Al Tamimi & Company host session on Oman's new Labour Law

Muscat - The Oman American Business Council (OABC) - the sultanate's largest international business networking group and the official affiliate of the US Chamber of Commerce in Oman - in partnership with Al Tamimi & Company, the region's leading law firm, hosted an informatinal session on the Omani Labour Law.

The event took place on Tuesday at the Intercontinental Hotel Muscat, and brought together over 200 esteemed legal professionals, executives and business leaders to discuss the significant changes introduced by the new labour law, according to a press release.

The experts provided valuable insights and guidance on the implementation of the newly announced labour law, ensuring that employers and employees left well-informed and equipped to navigate the evolving legal landscape.

The session included a dynamic Q&A session that provided participants with the opportunity to seek clarification on specific aspects of the labour



law.

"OABC gathered over 200 professionals from every business sector in Oman, to receive clear, highly beneficial advice on a very important aspect; the new labour law, which impacts all businesses in Oman," said Ali Daud, president and chairman emeritus of OABC. "These sorts of experiences and events set the organisation apart here in Oman, and add incredible value for our members."

"Reforms such as this new labour law show the government's support of the country's workforce and its ongoing drive towards continued development," said Fouad Eid, vice president of OABC and VP of Champion X, an American company.

"At OABC, our membership consists of both local and foreign companies, and individuals from the

legal framework. The new law seeks to address changes in the work environment, align Oman labor relations with international best practices, and it is the most significant amendment to the Oman labour legislation since 2003."

He said, "The new law provides employers with additional rights for terminating employment relationships and introduces new and additional obligations on employers and employees alike. Employers should be aware that they are required to comply with the new law by January 25, 2024."

Rebecca Olson, chief executive officer of OABC, said, "Since the day the labour law was announced, OABC members have been asking for this session to clarify aspects regarding its implementation, and we are proud to present the topic with our corporate member, Al Tamimi & Company. This is part of OABC's mission, to keep member companies in the know about changes, opportunities, and developments that impact their business in Oman."

UAE's ADNOC announces new carbon capture project

Dubai, UAE - The United Arab Emirates' state oil company ADNOC announced a major new carbon capture project on Wednesday, less than three months before it hosts UN climate talks in Dubai.

The new initiative will siphon planet-heating carbon dioxide emissions from the Habshan gas processing plant in Abu Dhabi and store them permanently underground, a

statement said.

The project, described as one of the biggest in the Middle East and North Africa, will be able to capture up to 1.5mn tonnes of CO2 a year, tripling ADNOC's carbon capture capacity, it said.

"As ADNOC continues its transformation towards a lower carbon future, it is our intention to make further investments to significantly reduce our emis-

sions, including in carbon capture and storage," said Musabbeh al Kaabi, executive director of Low Carbon Solutions and International Growth.

No cost or timeline was announced for the venture, which will be built and operated by ADNOC subsidiary ADNOC Gas and include carbon capture units, pipelines and a network of wells for CO2 injection.

AFP

Russia to step up support for sagging ruble

Moscow, Russia - Russia's central bank announced Wednesday it plans to sharply step up support for the ruble, which has weakened considerably after 18 months of Western sanctions following Moscow's military intervention in Ukraine.

The Bank of Russia said that between September 14 and 22 it would sell each day 21.4bn rubles (\$218.5mn) of foreign currency on the market, about 10 times the current volume it is selling on a daily basis.

The central bank tied the move to an upcoming payment



A woman walks past the Russian Central Bank in Moscow (AFP)

of foreign currency bonds issued by the government, known as eurobonds.

"Holders of eurobonds will be paid by the Finance Ministry in rubles in accordance with the established procedure, and therefore a portion of these bondholders may create additional demand for foreign currency," the Bank of Russia said.

The Russian government instituted the payment of these bonds in rubles instead of the foreign currency they are formally denominated in following the imposition of Western sanctions.

The additional volume by the central bank "will help respond to possible additional demand for foreign currency and reduce volatility on the market during this period."

While the value of the ruble recovered after a fall after the start of Russia's military campaign in Ukraine thanks to measures taken by the authorities, it has been sliding for the past year.

To stabilise the ruble and contain rising inflation the Bank of Russia hiked its key interest rate from 8.5% to 12%.

AFP

Africa demands global finance reforms to unleash green growth

Nairobi, Kenya – African leaders on Wednesday demanded sweeping changes to the global financial system and urged the international community to back a surge in renewable energy as they wrapped up a landmark climate summit in Kenya.

Africa is acutely vulnerable to the growing impacts of climate change, but leaders at the three-day meeting in Nairobi were eager to cast the continent not as a victim but a long-ignored ally in the fight against global warming.

"Africa possesses both the potential and the ambition to be a vital component of the global solution to climate change," said the final declaration from the meeting, on behalf of the African Union.

But, it warned, unlocking green growth across the continent "on a scale that can contribute meaningfully to decarbonisation of the global economy" required a massive scaleup in funding.

It called on the international community to ease Africa's crushing debt burden and reform the global financial system to unlock investment in clean energy.

Consensus is hard-won across Africa, a diverse continent of 1.4bn people where some governments are championing a renewable-powered future while others defend their reserves of fossil fuels.

"At the summit, our shared understanding became clear: that Africa is not only the cradle of humanity, it is indeed the future," said Kenyan President William Ruto, host of the inaugural Africa Climate Summit.



President of Kenya William Ruto (center) surrounded by other African leaders delivers his closing speech during the closure of the Africa Climate Summit 2023 at the KICC in Nairobi (AFP)

African countries have called for a complete overhaul of global financial architecture, adding to pressure on the IMF and World Bank to unlock investment and climate finance

Analysts say a united African voice could generate momentum for a series of key gatherings, including the G20 meeting in New Delhi this weekend, ahead of a crunch UN climate summit starting in November.

But it said the continent would need a "tenfold increase in the finance capital flowing" into re-

newables in the next seven years, some \$600bn, to achieve the aim of boosting renewables from 56GW in 2022 to at least 300GW by 2030.

Ruto said a tally of funding pledges for the continent had reached \$23bn at the summit, but he did not provide a detailed breakdown.

Africa attracted only two percent of global spending on renewables over the last decade, according to the leaders' statement.

But it said the continent would need a "tenfold increase in the finance capital flowing" into re-

African potential

Competing visions of the world's energy future are likely to play out at the COP28 talks in the oil-rich UAE, where the world will take stock of the as-yet-inadequate efforts to slash

planet-heating emissions.

Ruto has said Africa is well placed to take advantage of the need to move away from carbon-spewing fossil fuels, boasting a young population, vast renewable potential and natural resources.

This includes a large proportion of global reserves of cobalt, manganese and platinum crucial for batteries and hydrogen fuel cells.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) says Africa hosts 60% of the world's best solar resources. But there are daunting challenges for a continent where

hundreds of millions lack access to electricity.

African countries, facing mounting debt costs and a dearth of funds, have called for a complete overhaul of the global financial architecture, adding to pressure on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank to unlock investment and climate finance.

The declaration called for "concrete action" on reforms that lead to "a new financing architecture that is responsive to Africa's needs", including debt restructuring and relief.

AFP

US trade deficit widens on rise in imports

Washington, US – A rise in imports widened the US trade deficit in July, government data showed Wednesday, although the increase was smaller than analysts had expected.

The country's trade gap grew to \$65bn in July, up from June's revised \$63.7bn figure, the Commerce Department said.

But this remained below the average for the second quarter according to analyst estimates.

In the latest figures, imports picked up 1.7% to \$316.7bn while exports rose 1.6% to \$251.7bn.

In particular, imports of consumer goods such as mobile phones and pharmaceutical preparations increased, alongside semiconductors, Wednesday's report showed. While the US economy has showed signs of slowing, resilient consumer spending has helped boost US trade.

But this could weaken as rapid interest rate hikes by the central bank – aimed at lowering inflation and cooling demand – ripple through the world's biggest economy.

Among exports of goods in July, those of automotive vehicles, parts and engines picked up, as did industrial supplies. The trade deficit in goods with China rose \$1.2bn to \$24bn in July.

AFP

EU hits tech giants with tougher market restraints

Brussels, Belgium – The European Union on Wednesday unveiled a list of digital giants – including Apple, Facebook owner Meta and TikTok parent ByteDance – that will face tough new curbs on how they do business, but the move could trigger a wave of legal battles.

Brussels is working through a dense legislative agenda to build tougher regulation of big tech, arguing it needs to protect European consumers online and to encourage competition in an industry dominated by US giants.

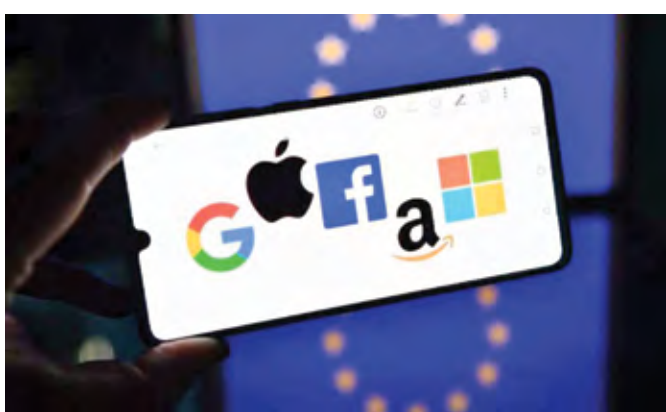
The latest announcement is a milestone in the application of the Digital Markets Act (DMA), which will force the largest firms to change their ways under a checklist of dos and don'ts and, regulators hope, create a fairer market.

Observers say the law could open a new battlefield between digital titans and the European Union as some companies consider legal challenges.

The European Commission, the EU's powerful antitrust body, named 22 "core platform" services belonging to five US tech behemoths identified as "gatekeepers": Google parent Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Meta, Microsoft, and China's ByteDance.

Apple was quick to slam the law, claiming it posed risks to users' privacy while TikTok said "we... fundamentally disagree" with the EU's inclusion of it on the list.

Services caught up in the law include Apple's App Store; Meta's Facebook, Instagram and



EU is working through a dense legislative agenda to build tougher regulation of big tech, arguing it needs to protect consumers online and to encourage competition

WhatsApp; Google's YouTube video platform and Chrome browser; as well as Apple's Safari. Operating systems from Apple, Microsoft and Google as well as Alphabet's Google Maps, Play and Shopping are also affected.

They must fully comply with the DMA by March 6, 2024.

There will be fines of up to 10 percent of a company's global revenues for breaking some of the most serious competition rules – and even up to 20% for repeat offenders.

One major change under the DMA is a rule forcing interoperability between messaging apps, to make it easier for users to share links and images.

"With today's designation we are finally reining in the economic power of six gatekeepers, giving more choice to consumers and creating new opportunities for smaller innovative tech companies," said the EU's top tech enforcer, industry commissioner Thierry Breton.

Taking bite of Apple

Apple and Microsoft argue parts of their businesses should not be classified as a "core" service. The commission said it has launched probes to assess Apple's claims regarding iMessage, and Microsoft for Bing, Edge and its advertising platform.

A Microsoft spokesperson welcomed investigation into its three services, which the company said "operate as challengers in the market".

Apple said it would set out "why iMessage is outside the scope of the DMA".

AFP

Erdogan pledges support for higher interest rates to fight high inflation

Istanbul, Turkey – Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday confirmed a major policy reversal by backing his new economic team's decision to drastically hike interest rates to fight runaway inflation.

Erdogan has been a lifelong opponent of high borrowing costs and pushed past central bank governors to fight inflation with lower interest rates.

Conventional economics says high interest rates help bring down prices by tamping down demand and raising the cost of doing business.

Analysts believe that Erdogan's past policies helped spark a currency crisis that saw annual inflation hit 85% last year.



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan

But he appointed a handful of Wall Street-trained veterans to steer the economy after nearly losing a May election because of Turkey's dire economic malaise.

The central bank has since roughly tripled its policy rate to

25%. Analysts believe it will need to raise the rate much higher at the next meeting on September 21 because the inflation has shot back up to nearly 60%.

Erdogan signalled clearly on Wednesday that he now sup-

ports higher interest rates.

"We will reduce inflation to single digits with the support of tight monetary policy," he said in a nationally televised address announcing Turkey's new medium-term economic programme. "We have no doubt about achieving our goals."

Some analysts felt that the central bank was refraining from raising its key rate faster out of fear of drawing Erdogan's wrath.

Erdogan sparked a brief market panic by firing one central banker who tried to raise interest rates in late 2020 and early 2021.

He dismissed two others before then for fighting his unorthodox approach.

AFP

TSMC says US plant making 'fast progress'

Taipei, Taiwan – Taiwan chip giant TSMC's planned factory in the United States was making "fast progress", the company's chairman said Wednesday, despite it facing a delayed start due to worker shortages and reported union disputes.

Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) controls more than half of the world's output of microchips – the lifeblood of the modern economy and found in everything from coffee machines to cars and missiles.

Global worries about Taipei's plummeting relations with Beijing – which claims the self-ruled island as its territory – have fuelled a US push to successfully woo the Taiwanese



TSMC controls more than half of the world's output of microchips

company into building a chip-making factory in Arizona.

But the plant, one of the largest foreign investments in the United States, has been delayed until 2025, which TSMC attributed to a shortage of skilled workers, with technicians to be flown in to train the US

foundry's staff.

"We don't need to fuss – in a new place and at infrastructure built early, it won't be running as smoothly as in Taiwan," conceded chairman Mark Liu, speaking on the sidelines of SemiCon Taiwan, a three-day gathering of the semiconductor

industry in Taipei.

"But the morale of our Arizona colleagues is very high and they have made fast progress in the past few months."

He attributed it to Arizona state and city officials "unanimously supporting and helping TSMC resolve all issues including the labour issue".

The company's comments on skilled worker shortages had incited ire from Arizona's unions, leading to scathing op-eds in local outlets alleging that TSMC was trying to justify bringing in Taiwanese workers. Liu acknowledged the company has been "boosting our communication recently" with the local union and community.

AFP

Global Fintech Awards: Adeeb Ahamed wins Leading Fintech Personality of the Year Award

It was an evening to remember at the prestigious Global Fintech Awards (GFA) 2023, held annually as part of the Global Fintech Fest (GFF) 2023 in Mumbai, India.

This year, the coveted global award for 'Leading Fintech Personality of the Year' from the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) region was awarded to Adeeb Ahamed, Managing Director of the Abu Dhabi based Lulu Financial Holdings.

A visionary entrepreneur in the financial services world, Adeeb has been instrumental in revolutionising cross-border payments between the GCC and India. His company operates a network of 300+ customer engagement centres and digital payment solutions in 10 countries across the Middle East, Asia Pacific and GCC regions.



Accepting the award, Adeeb Ahamed said, "I am deeply honoured to receive this year's 'Leading Fintech Personality of the Year Award - GCC'. The GCC payments landscape is among the fastest evolving globally, and this award is a testament to the collective efforts of the LuLu Financial Holdings team to revolutionise cross-border payments.

"I am also immensely grateful for the regulatory support that has accelerated our progress in the region and beyond. This award isn't just my win; it reflects the tireless efforts of those working towards a shared vision: of enhancing lives through an inclusive financial system."

Recognising outstanding accomplishments of individuals and entities in the fintech ecosystem around the globe,

GFA award are given in three categories, divided into 15 sub-categories.

Other winners of the night include Bhavesh Gupta, President & COO, One97 Communications Ltd., for 'Fintech Leader of the Year', Mr. Tom Greenwood, Founder & CEO, Volt, for 'Leading Fintech Personality of the Year - Europe', and Kailash Nadh, CTO, Zerodha, for 'Fintech CTO of the Year'.

Among various enterprises that received GFA in different categories, the 'Fintech Company of the Year' award was given to the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC).

The winners were selected from a large number of nominations, through meticulous adjudication by a jury comprising 15 members, all leading captains of the fintech industry.



Bank Muscat extends zero annual fee offer for platinum credit cards

Bank Muscat's Al Jawhar Privilege Banking is an ideal choice for customers and opens a world of opportunities and unrivalled benefits, making it one of the most popular premier banking options in Oman. Recently, the bank launched a special offer for customers, whereby those who apply for the Al Jawhar Visa Platinum Credit Card will get a waiver of annual fees for the first year for primary and supplementary cards.

The offer continues until September 30, said a press release.

Al Jawhar Visa Platinum Credit Cards offer an array of benefits including: 1% cashback on all local and international spends, and access to 25 premium lounges around the world in addition to lounges at Muscat and Salalah airports.

Al Jawhar Visa Platinum Credit Card holders can also enjoy the 'best in class' complimentary travel insurance, which includes travel accident insurance as well as insurance for lost baggage and money, cancella-

tion, travel delay, delayed baggage, personal liability, legal expenses and loss of passport and access to free medical and legal referral services worldwide.

Al Jawhar Visa Platinum Credit cardholders can also enjoy numerous discounts across a variety of categories including Dining, Lifestyle, Health & Beauty through 'xperience with Entertainer' app.

Al Jawhar Privilege Banking provides customers with an exceptional banking experience and opens a world of opportunities for them. Customers are also eligible for a higher ATM withdrawal limit of RO800. Al Jawhar customers can access services through a number of e-channels including Internet and Mobile banking, ATMs/CDMs and the contact centre 24/7 for their various banking needs.

Al Jawhar Privilege Banking customers can apply for the Al Jawhar Visa Platinum Credit Card through Bank Muscat mBanking and Internet Banking in a few simple steps.

MGD promises 100% exchange value of diamonds

Spending versus saving has always been a dilemma for customers when it comes to buying jewellery. For years now, gold jewellery was the only article that served both as a value-appreciating adornment and a reliable investment.

Even though diamond jewellery remained as attractive as ever, questions about its exchange value held customers back from considering it a reliable investment. That has all changed with the new policy introduction from Malabar Gold & Diamonds, one of the world's leading jewellery retailers, that gives customers 100% Value on Diamond Exchange.

Now, customers wishing to exchange their diamond jewellery for either gold or diamond jewellery can do so at full value of diamonds, without any loss, making it as lucrative an investment option as gold.

"Diamond jewellery has always been aspirational. Over the



years, there has been an increasing preference for diamond jewellery as a gift, especially amongst Gen Z and Millennial customers," said Shamlal Ahamed, managing director - International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

However, the one thing that was always a concern regarding diamond jewellery was its value

as an investment compared to gold jewellery.

"Providing 100% value for diamond jewellery, upon exchange, is our way of negating these concerns to make diamond jewellery the perfect gift as well as a reliable investment that holds value," Ahamed added.

Malabar Group vice chairman Abdul Salam KP said that the

company wants to revolutionise the diamond jewellery retail, taking into consideration the concerns "we identified during the research conducted on jewellery lovers and their resistance to buying diamond jewellery".

Giving new meaning to the phrase, 'A Diamond is Forever', this policy change was crafted to protect the value of the diamond

jewellery among the new era of jewellery lovers, he explained.

"Ever since our inception in 1993, Malabar Gold & Diamonds has always been at the forefront of introducing customer-centric and transparent policies aimed at protecting customer interests and this new policy on diamonds further testifies this," Abdul Salam further commented.

The new policy comes in addition to the unique and customer centric policies named 'Malabar Promises' offering customers complete peace of mind with initiatives like transparent price tag indicating gold weight, stone weight, net weight and stone charges of the respective jewellery; tested and certified diamonds ensuring 28-point quality check of global standards; guaranteed buyback; 100% value on gold exchange; 100% 916 hallmarked jewellery; assured lifetime maintenance; ethical and responsible sourcing; fair price policy and fair labour practices.

New India Assurance bids adieu to COO V V Raghavan

New India Assurance Company Oman has announced a significant transition in the company with Gaurav Sharma taking charge as the chief operating officer (COO) from the incumbent V V Raghavan.

The company expressed its sincere gratitude to Raghavan for his invaluable leadership during the last four years. He has attained various milestones during his service in the Sultanate of Oman, the company said.



Gaurav Sharma brings with him a wealth of experience, and his knowledge and fresh perspective will undoubtedly contribute to the continued growth and success of New India Assurance in Oman.

Sharma is a distinguished Fellow of the Insurance Institute of India. He has worked in major metro cities in various capacities with exposure to retail clients as Branch in charge in Delhi and large/mega clients during his

tenure at Mumbai. His journey is a testament to dedication and expertise.

V V Raghavan thanked and conveyed his sincere gratitude for all the support he had got from various stakeholders, and regulator 'The Capital Market Authority, Sultanate of Oman'.

He also expressed his gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the people of Oman for their warmth, generosity and genuine spirit.

BEC Carrier Stableford event at Ras Al Hamra witnesses spirited golfing

Regarded as an exemplary golf destination in the sultanate, the picturesque Ras Al Hamra Golf Club welcomed golf enthusiasts once again to its friendly fairways and rolling greens for the BEC Carrier Stableford event on August 25.

The occasion saw the participation of 37 players which included both Ras Al Hamra Golf Club members and guests.

Commencing with a synchronised 'shotgun start', the golfers swung their irons to engage in a dynamic display of remarkable skill and competitive spirit.

Organised as a monthly competition sponsored by BEC Carrier, the event holds special significance within the golfing fraternity. It offers an opportunity for golfers with varying skill lev-



els to unite and showcase their talent in an engaging and amicable environment.

Featuring three distinct handicap divisions, the competition is thoughtfully structured to estab-

lish a balanced and equitable arena, ensuring an impartial stage for participants with diverse levels of expertise.

Exhibiting a stellar performance on the course, Rajesh Mal-

hotra not only secured the Division 3 title but also clinched the prestigious BEC Carrier Crown with an impressive score of 39 points.

Though Krish Pawani pre-

sented a formidable competition, Malhotra's remarkable prowess during the countback phase cemented his triumph, granting him the ultimate recognition as the golfer who achieved the

highest Stableford score across all three divisions.

Krish Pawani showcased his skills in Division 1, emerging as the winner of that category, while James Shaw's score of 37 points secured his victory in Division 2. The exceptional display of skills underscores the intense level of competition consistently nurtured by the BEC Carrier golf events at Ras Al Hamra.

Designed by Graham Marsh Golf Design, Ras Al Hamra features an 18-hole floodlit golf course with a dedicated practice area. Positioned to overlook the Gulf of Oman, this desert-style, semi-private facility is lined with trees, native shrubs, and plants that blend seamlessly into the adjoining landscape. Originally established as a sand course in

1969, it has evolved into a lush grass course with strategic tees, double greens, and alternative locations. Boasting a par 71 layout spanning 5,400 to 6,500 yards, it provides an unparalleled golfing experience.

Moreover, Ras Al Hamra takes pride in its Golf Academy, offering an array of coaching options overseen by seasoned PGA-qualified instructors. This facet further amplifies the comprehensive experience, exemplifying the club's commitment to fostering skill and amusement for all golf aficionados.

With a premium location, top-tier amenities, and ongoing tournaments, Ras Al Hamra plays an active role in solidifying Oman's position as a leading regional destination for the sport.

16 killed in east Ukraine market

Kyiv, Ukraine - A Russian strike killed more than a dozen people, including a child, in a market in the frontline in east Ukraine, in an attack that President Volodymyr Zelensky described as ‘heinous evil’.

The projectiles ripped into the centre of Kostiantynivka, a town of nearly 70,000 people in the Donetsk region hours after America’s top diplomat arrived in Kyiv to announce new aid.

Ukraine’s newly appointed defence minister meanwhile vowed to liberate ‘every centimetre’ of territory occupied by Russia in his first comments in the post on Wednesday.

Rescue workers picked through the debris and carried some of the nearly 30 wounded for treatment past charred vehicles and kiosks torn to pieces in the blast, according to images distributed by officials.

“Sixteen people have been killed, including one child,” Prime Minister Denys Shmygal said on social media following the strike in the market about 20km (12 miles) from the front line.

The industrial Donetsk region has been partially controlled by Kremlin-backed separatists since 2014 and Russia claimed to have annexed in late last year.

“Anyone in the world who is still dealing with anything Russian simply ignores this reality. Heinous evil. Brazen wickedness. Utter inhumanity,” Zelensky said.

The attack came as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s vis-



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Ukraine’s PM Denys Shmyhal shake hands prior to their meeting in Kyiv on Wednesday (AFP)

Anyone in the world who is still dealing with anything Russian simply ignores this reality. Heinous evil. Brazen wickedness. Utter inhumanity

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY

ited Ukraine, with Washington set to unveil more than US\$1bn in fresh aid to battle Russia.

During a meeting with Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, Blinken

reiterated Washington’s support for Kyiv in its fight to liberate territory in the south and east.

“We want to make sure that Ukraine has what it needs, not

only to succeed in the counteroffensive, but has what it needs for the long term, to make sure that it has a strong deterrent,” he told Kuleba.

Blinken is expected to announce ‘more than a billion dollars in new US funding for Ukraine’, according to a senior State Department official.

The Kremlin dismissed Blinken’s Kyiv visit, arguing US aid would not ‘influence the course of the special military operation’ -

Moscow’s term for its offensive.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov accused Washington of wanting to ‘keep Ukraine in a state of war, to wage this war till the last Ukrainian’.

Kyiv’s army has said it is pressing on with ‘offensive operations’ towards eastern Ukraine’s war-battered town of Bakhmut - which fell to Russian forces in May - and the southern Moscow-occupied city of Melitopol.

It said troops had been ‘successful’ near the southern villages of Robotyne and Novoprokopivka.

Blinken told Kuleba that ‘we’ve seen some good progress’.

The US has supplied key weaponry to Ukraine that allowed it to go on the advance this summer.

But Ukraine has in recent weeks become increasingly frustrated with criticism that the counter-offensive has been too slow.

Russia, meanwhile, said on Wednesday it had ‘improved its tactical position’ near the north-western city of Kupiansk, where it has led a local offensive for weeks.

It also hit Ukraine’s south-western Odesa region, near the border with Romania, with drone attacks overnight, killing one person.

In what was hailed as a historic move, Ukrainian lawmakers approved the nomination of Crimean Tatar Rustem Umerov as Kyiv’s new wartime defence minister on Wednesday.

Crimean Tatars are an ethnic minority hailing from the Black Sea peninsula, which was annexed by Russia in 2014.

“I will do everything possible and impossible for the victory of Ukraine - when we liberate every centimetre of our country and every one of our people,” he said in a post on social media.

AFP

Cancer surging among under-50s worldwide, study says

Paris, France - The number of people under 50 diagnosed with cancer has surged worldwide in the last three decades but it is not fully clear why, a study said on Wednesday.

Cases of cancer among people aged 14 to 49 rose by nearly 80 per cent, from 1.82mn to 3.26mn, between 1990 to 2019, according to the study published in the journal BMJ Oncology.

While experts cautioned that some of that increase was explained by population growth, previous research has also indicated that cancer is becoming more commonly diagnosed among under-50s. The team of researchers behind the new study pointed to poor diet, smoking and alcohol as major risk factors underlying cancer in the age group.

But ‘the increasing trend of early-onset cancer burden is still unclear’, they added.

A little over one million people under 50 died of cancer in 2019, up 28 per cent from 1990, the study said.

The deadliest cancers were breast, windpipe, lung, bowel and stomach cancers, according to the study.

AFP

Kurdish forces ‘end military operations’ in Syria’s east

Beirut, Lebanon - US-backed, Kurdish-led forces in Syria declared the ‘end of military operations’ in the country’s east on Wednesday after days of clashes with local Arab tribes left at least 90 people dead.

The violence started when the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on August 27 detained the Arab chief Ahmad al-Khabil, who headed the affiliated Deir Ezzor Military Council.

SDF spokesman Farhad Shami told AFP on Wednesday that ‘military operations in Dhiban have ended’, although SDF forces were still searching districts of the town for remaining enemy fighters.

“Neighbourhoods are being searched for armed groups coming from the western bank of the Euphrates,” Shami added.

The clashes had rocked Kurdish-controlled areas of Deir Ezzor province, killing mostly fighters but also nine civilians, said the war monitor Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Control of the province is split



A fighter of the SDF stands guard along a road in the town of al-Busayrah in Syria’s northeastern Deir Ezzor province on Monday (AFP)

between the SDF to the east of the Euphrates river and Iran-backed Syrian government forces and their proxies to the west.

The violence had pitted the SDF against loyalists of Khabil, who is also known as Abu Khawla, and local Arab fighters.

But the tribes are divided in

their loyalties, added the Britain-based Observatory, which has a vast network of sources inside Syria. Arab-majority Deir Ezzor, a resource-rich region which borders Iraq, is bisected by the Euphrates and is home to dozens of tribal communities.

AFP

Hundreds to abandon the sinking island

Cartí Sugtupu, Panama - On a tiny Caribbean island, hundreds of people are preparing to pack up and move to escape the rising waters threatening to engulf their already precarious homes.

Surrounded by idyllic clear waters, the densely populated island of Carti Sugtupu off Panama’s north coast has barely an inch to spare with houses crammed together - some jutting out into the sea on stilts.

The island’s Indigenous community of fewer than 2,000 souls scrapes by without potable water or sanitation.

They live off fishing, the harvesting of starchy crops like cassava and plantain, traditional textile production and a bit of tourism.

It is not an easy life, with intense heat and a lack of public services adding to the discomfort of overcrowded conditions on an island the size of five football fields.

And now, climate change-induced sea level rise is threatening to make life even more difficult.

With homes already flooded on a regular basis, experts say the



A Guna Indigenous man paddles his canoe as he fishes in the island of Carti Sugdupu, Panama, on August 29 (AFP)

sea will engulf Carti Sugtupu and dozens of neighbouring islands in the Guna Yala region by the end of the century.

Forty-nine of the isles are populated, and rest just a few feet (less than one meter) above sea level.

“We have noticed that the tide has risen,” retired teacher Magdalena Martinez, 73, told AFP as she sat embroidering a brightly coloured toucan onto a ‘mola’

cloth traditional to the Guna people on Carti Sugtupu.

“We think we’re going to sink, we know it’s going to happen,” she said.

Martinez is one of hundreds of inhabitants of the island expecting to move soon to a settlement on mainland Panama newly built by the government - a move that may save the islanders, but puts at risk their culture and way of life. “This will change our lifestyle

quite a bit,” said Martinez. But, she added, ‘it won’t change our spirit, it won’t change our habits’.

“The fact is that with sea levels rising as a direct cause of climate change, almost all the islands are going to be abandoned by the end of this century,” said Steven Paton, a scientist at the Panama-based Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute.

AFP

Football warriors: Ukrainian amputees get back on the ball

Kyiv, Ukraine - Goalkeeper Yevgen Nazarenko laughed as he warmed up on a football pitch in Kyiv. He had been asked to stretch his hands, but he only has one.

Nearby Oleg, who has only one foot, groaned and lost balance as he did press-ups.

Both men lost limbs fighting for Ukraine.

Once or twice a week, a dozen or so amputees get together in the Ukrainian capital for football training.

Most played regularly before their injuries, now prosthetic legs are propped up on the side of the small artificial pitch in central Kyiv.

Oleg, 46, was an officer in the 46th Air Assault Brigade, which

is now playing a leading role in Ukraine’s counteroffensive in the southern town of Robotyne.

But last December ‘an enemy shot at me with a grenade launcher attached to a rifle from about seven metres’ as he fought near Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine.

But the Russian ‘got scared’, Oleg told AFP, his face beaded with sweat as he gripped his crutches.

“If he had held the rifle more firmly, he would have hit me somewhere in the middle of my chest and I would not be playing here now,” he added.

‘It’s not easy to withstand’

“I’ve seen with my own eyes many guys who lost their limbs,



Ukrainian amputee soldiers with others attend a football training session in Kyiv, on August 31 (AFP)

how people just broke down, could not stand this terrible tragedy and started doing bad things, drugs or something else,” said the former policeman and father of two.

“It’s not easy to withstand this, believe me,” Oleg said.

“I remember the first time when I came to from the morphine. I lifted up the thermal blanket and looked and my foot wasn’t there... I felt like my life was over, but I’m still here,” he said smiling broadly.

Before losing his right foot, Oleg was twice wounded but returned to the fighting each time.

He even asked a doctor to give him a fake medical certificate after his second shrapnel wound, when he should have been dis-

charged from the front line.

“I went back to my lads, although I could have not gone there at all, to that hell,” he said.

But after he lost his foot, ‘I realised that I was already afraid... not even of losing my life but of becoming even more disabled’, he said.

In the five-a-side game, goalkeeper Nazarenko was a whirl of energy, his T-shirt soaked with sweat, its left sleeve hanging empty.

The 31-year-old sergeant used to pilot reconnaissance drones. In May 2022 in the southern Kherson region, he was guiding mortar fire. A faulty shell exploded in the mortar tube 10 metres from him and he lost his arm.

AFP



This file photo shows families paying their respects at a makeshift memorial in London, Ontario, Canada, on June 8, 2021, (AFP)

Canada man accused of running over Muslim family pleads not guilty

Montreal, Canada - A Canadian man accused of slamming his pick-up truck into a Muslim family, killing four people in an alleged terrorist attack, pleaded not guilty to murder on Tuesday.

Nathaniel Veltman, 20 at the time of his arrest, appeared in court in Windsor, southern Ontario province, during the opening of the jury selection.

"(He pleaded) not guilty to five counts, and we chose the jury," his lawyer, Christopher Hicks, told AFP.

Veltman was charged with four counts of murder, which prosecutors say were premeditated, as well as one count of attempted murder over a June 2021 incident. He faces up to life in prison.

Three generations of the Afzaal family were out on a Sunday evening stroll in London, Ontario when a Dodge Ram truck 'mounted the curb and struck' them, according to police.

The parents, their 15-year-old daughter and her grand-

mother were killed. A nine-year-old boy orphaned in the ramming suffered serious but non-life-threatening injuries.

London police allege that Veltman deliberately ran over the family in 'a planned, premeditated act, motivated by hate'. At the time, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called it a 'terrorist attack'.

"The unthinkable violence that the family faced should be a marker for the entire country," said Aasiyah Khan, of the National Council of Canadian Muslims.

"We look forward to seeing how our court system will send a message that all Canadians should be protected from terrorism, no matter the ethnicity or ideology of the attacker."

The trial will likely last three months, Veltman's lawyer said.

The London killings followed a shooting at a mosque in Quebec City in 2017, which left six dead. The perpetrator of that shooting was not charged with terrorism.

AFP

Brazil: Awkwardness abounds for Lula, army on national day

Rio De Janeiro, Brazil - Hammering home his message that Brazil is 'back to normal', President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will set aside bad blood and mutual suspicion with the military to mark the country's independence day on Thursday.

Things are awkward between the commander-in-chief and the armed forces, which were heavily involved in the government of Lula's predecessor and nemesis, far-right ex-army captain Jair Bolsonaro. Many of the military's 350,000 active-duty members backed Bolsonaro in his divisive election loss to veteran leftist Lula last year.

And uncomfortable questions linger over whether armed forces members had a role in events surrounding the riots by Bolsonaro supporters who invaded the presidential palace, Congress and Supreme Court on January 8, calling for the military to oust Lula. But Lula, riding strong approval ratings, is settling that aside for September 7, Brazil's national day, when he will preside over what his office bills as a celebration of 'democracy' and 'union', including the traditional military parade.

He called on Tuesday to make it a 'September 7 for all', not just the military.

It will be a low-key affair compared to Bolsonaro, who marked the 200th anniversary of Brazil's independence from Portugal last year by rallying frenzied supporters, presiding over multiple military parades and trotting out the embalmed heart of independence hero Dom Pedro I. "We've returned to a more civilized climate," said political scientist Marco Antonio Carvalho Teix-



Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva hugs his Minister of Indigenous Peoples Sonia Guajajara, during the celebration of Amazon Day in Brasilia on Tuesday (AFP)

eira of the Getulio Vargas Foundation.

"The build-up to September 7 is proof. We haven't seen any explosion of tension, threats of institutional rupture or verbal aggression from the president," he told AFP.

But Lula's relationship with the military remains 'very delicate', he added. Brazil's armed forces were perceived as exceptionally close to Bolsonaro, who waxed nostalgic on Brazil's 1964-1985 military dictatorship and tapped thousands of service members to work in his administration. "The vast majority of

We haven't seen any explosion of tension, threats of institutional rupture or verbal aggression from the president

MARCO ANTONIO CARVALHO TEIXEIRA

armed service personnel would have preferred another president instead of Lula," retired brigadier general Paulo Chagas told AFP.

Many in the reserve forces in particular 'idolise' Bolsonaro, he said.

Lula, a one-time anti-dictatorship union leader who was previously president from 2003 to

2010, has had some tense moments with the military since returning to office on January 1.

He fired the army commander in the aftermath of the January 8 riots, and his administration is pushing legislation to bar active-duty service members from politics. But the leftist icon has also extended an olive branch in his

trademark style, allocating a whopping 52.8bn reais (US\$10.6bn) for defense projects when he unveiled a 1.7tn-reais infrastructure investment programme last month.

Lula, 77, is currently riding a high. The economy has outperformed expectations, and he has a 60-per cent approval rating.

The opposition has meanwhile been largely silenced, with Bolsonaro hit by various police investigations and a ruling by electoral authorities barring him from running for office for eight years.

AFP

Cyclone leaves 21 dead in southern Brazil

Brasilia, Brazil - Torrential rain and winds caused by an extratropical cyclone have left at least 21 people dead in southern Brazil, officials said on Tuesday, warning more flooding may be coming.

The latest in a string of weather disasters to hit Brazil, it is the deadliest ever in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Governor Eduardo Leite told a news conference. "We were deeply saddened to get the news that as the water recedes... 15 more bodies were found in the town of Mucum, bringing the death toll to 21," he said.

Close to 6,000 people were forced from their homes by the storms, which started on Monday, dumping hail and more than 300mm (nearly 12 inches) of



An aerial view of the area affected by cyclone in MuAum, Rio Grande do Sul State, Brazil, on Tuesday (AFP)

rain on the state in less than 24 hours and triggering floods and landslides, officials said.

In Mucum, a small town of 5,000 people, hundreds had to be rescued from their rooftops as

the Taquari river flooded more than 85 per cent of the city, according to local news site GZH.

"There are still people missing. The death toll might climb higher," Mayor Mateus Trojan told Radio Gaucha.

"The town of Mucum as we knew it no longer exists." President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva sent a message of solidarity with those affected, saying the federal government is 'ready to help'.

Swept away

The victims included a man killed by an electrical shock in the town of Passo Fundo and a couple whose car was swept away by a river as they tried to cross a bridge in the town of Ibiraiaras.

The storms hit 67 municipalities in all, affecting more than 52,000 people, authorities said.

The neighbouring state of Santa Catarina also recorded one

death, according to news site G1.

Hundreds of firefighters as well as military police and civil defense personnel were dispatched as part of rescue operations, with helicopters sent to reach areas cut off by flooding.

"There are many isolated families, many people still at risk," said Communications Minister Paulo Pimenta, who is planning to travel to the region with a government delegation on Wednesday.

With more rain forecast from Thursday, authorities warn more flooding is possible.

It is the latest in a string of deadly weather events to hit Brazil, which experts say are likely being made worse by climate change.

AFP

Evidence clears US man of rape charge 47 years later

New York, US - A US man who served seven and a half years in prison for a rape he did not commit has been cleared nearly five decades later thanks to new DNA evidence, authorities said on Tuesday.

Leonard Mack, now 72, was arrested in 1975, in Greenburgh, New York state, after the rape of a teenage girl, who had been walking home from school with another girl.

Police announced a search for a Black suspect in the mostly white neighbourhood and shortly after picked up Mack, who is African American.

After a campaign by the Innocence Project, DNA evidence not available at the time has 'conclusively excluded 72-year-old Mr Mack as the perpetrator and identified a convicted sex offender, who has now confessed to the rape', the Westchester County prosecutor's office said in a statement.

"This is the longest wrongful conviction in US history known to the Innocence Project to be overturned by DNA evidence," the district attorney's office said, citing Mack's 'unwavering strength fighting to clear his name for almost 50 years'.

AFP

Proud Boys leader gets 22 years for US Congress attack

Washington, US - Enrique Tarrio, the former leader of the far-right Proud Boys militia, was sentenced to 22 years in prison on Tuesday for his role in the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol, the stiffest sentence handed out so far.

"That day broke our previously unbroken tradition of peacefully transferring power," US District Judge Timothy Kelly said of the attempt to stop the congressional certification of Democrat Joe Biden's 2020 election victory over Donald Trump. "Mr Tarrio was the ultimate leader of the conspiracy," Kelly said during a nearly four-hour sentencing hearing in the nation's capital.

Prosecutors had sought a 33-

year prison term for Tarrio, who was not in Washington on January 6 but was accused of directing the military-style assault on the Capitol by members of the Proud Boys and other supporters of the former president.

The 39-year-old Tarrio and several other members of the Proud Boys were convicted of seditious conspiracy in May for their roles in the attack.

Another member of the Proud Boys, Ethan Nordean, 32, received an 18-year prison sentence from Kelly last week.

Stewart Rhodes, the founder of another far-right militia central to the Capitol siege, the Oath Keepers, was also sentenced to 18 years in prison earlier this year.



Enrique Tarrio (AFP)

Tarrio addressed the court before the sentence was handed down and said January 6 was a 'national embarrassment'. "My candidate lost," he said. "I persisted when I should have calmed."

Tarrio, who appeared to

choke up on several occasions, apologised to members of law enforcement who were attacked by rioters on what he called a 'horrible day'.

"I failed miserably," he said. "This trial has humbled me."

Prosecutor Conor Mulroe, arguing for the 33-year prison term, said Tarrio and the other members of the Proud Boys 'tried to use force and violence to try and impose their view of what was right for the country'.

"It was Mr Tarrio with the assistance of his codefendants who put this group together," Mulroe said.

In a sentencing memorandum, prosecutors described Tarrio as a 'savvy propagandist' and said that while he was not

physically present in Washington on January 6 he 'did far more harm than he could have as an individual rioter'.

Tarrio had acted as a 'general rather than a soldier', they said.

"The only reason Tarrio did not march alongside the others is because he was arrested upon his arrival in Washington DC and placed under a court order to leave the District," they added.

The assault on Congress left at least five people dead and 140 police officers injured and followed a fiery speech by Trump to tens of thousands of his supporters near the White House in which he repeated his false claims that he won the election.

Trump is to go on trial in Washington in March on charges of conspiring to overturn the November 2020 election results. He faces similar charges in a separate case in the southern state of Georgia.

The 77-year-old Trump was impeached for a second time by the House of Representatives after the Capitol riot - he was charged with inciting an insurrection - but was acquitted by the Senate.

More than 1,100 people have been charged by the Justice Department in the Capitol attack.

Some 630 of them have pleaded guilty to various charges, and 110 have been found guilty at trial.

AFP

G20 SUMMIT

Biden heads to divided G20 with China and Russia leaders absent

New Delhi, India - US President Joe Biden heads to India for the G20 summit this weekend aiming to capitalise on the glaring absence of China's and Russia's leaders to bolster alliances in the sharply divided bloc.

Deep disagreements on Russia's war in Ukraine, the phasing out of fossil fuels and debt restructuring will dominate talks and likely hamper agreements at the two-day meeting in New Delhi.

Biden will discuss 'a range of joint efforts to tackle global issues' including climate change and 'mitigating the economic and social impacts of Russia's war in Ukraine', National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said ahead of the summit.

China's Xi Jinping, president of the world's second-largest economy, will miss the meeting at a time of heightened trade and geopolitical tensions with the United States and India, with which it shares a long and disputed border.



Students work on paintings of world leaders at an art school in Mumbai on Tuesday, ahead of the two-day G20 summit in New Delhi (AFP)

Without China being on board... issues may not really see the light of day or reach any logical conclusion

HAPPYMON JACOB

Beijing also bristles at India's membership in the so-called Quad, a security partnership with Australia, Japan and the United States that China views as an effort to contain its influence in Asia.

China has given no reason why Xi will not attend the September 9-10 summit, confirming only that Premier Li Qiang would join the leaders of the world's biggest economies, which account for about 85 per cent of global GDP and greenhouse gas emissions.

Xi's absence will impact Washington's bid to keep the G20 the main forum of global economic cooperation and efforts to make a financing push for developing countries.

"Without China being on board... issues may not really see the light of day or reach any logical conclusion," said Happymon Jacob, a politics professor at India's Jawaharlal Nehru University.

The ongoing war in Ukraine also overshadows the event, with Russian President Vladimir Putin set to miss the meeting and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov taking his place at the table.

In March, the International Criminal Court announced an arrest warrant for Putin over the war crime accusation of unlawfully deporting Ukrainian children, allegations the Kremlin insists are 'void'.

AFP

In the global spotlight: India capital readies for summit

New Delhi, India - Special forces, bulletproof cars and men hired to chase away monkeys are among India's elaborate G20 preparations as Prime Minister Narendra Modi readies for a weekend in the global spotlight.

Photos of a beaming Modi are lining streets across the capital New Delhi to welcome world leaders to the summit, the most powerful gathering India has ever hosted.

Modi has used the G20 presidency to burnish his image at home and abroad as a steward of national power and prosperity, a powerful branding exercise to assert India's place in the world ahead of general elections next year.

India overtook former colonial ruler Britain last year to become the world's fifth-largest economy, and this year surpassed China to become the most populous country.

Rooftop snipers and 'Black Cats'

Security operations involve tens of thousands of security personnel, including rooftop snipers and anti-drone technology. India's counter-terrorism 'Black Cats' guards have been practising rapid deployments from helicopters, rappelling down ropes onto hotel roofs where presidents will be staying.

Traffic police have promised

'elaborate regulations' with a huge restricted zone slapped across much of the city centre, and bullet-proof limousines will ferry visiting leaders.

Businesses have been ordered shut and a holiday declared - meaning normally jam-packed streets and their ubiquitous honking motorised rickshaws will fall silent.

The summit takes place in Bharat Mandapam, a recently revamped conference centre.

The riverside site lies close to the towers of the 16th century Mughal-era Purana Qila fort, as well to Raj Ghat, the memorial to Mahatma Gandhi at the spot he was cremated - and where G20 leaders are expected to plant trees.

Clean-up drive

The Delhi metropolitan area has been on an intense beautification drive since India assumed the G20 presidency.

City authorities are hoping to dispel the city's reputation for chaotic roads and pollution.

More than 4,000 homeless people living under bridges and on roadsides in the city centre have been moved into 'shelter homes' ahead of the summit, according to municipal officials.

Several long-closed fountains are running again, while roadside markings that faded years ago are gleaming with a fresh lick of paint.

Some 70,000 flower pots have been set out across the city. Maintaining and monitoring the foliage has become a major task in itself, with 35 water tankers deployed to keep the plants green, the *Times of India* reported.

Statues have popped up across the city centre, including a 28-foot-tall figure of the Hindu god Shiva at the G20 summit venue entrance.

AFP

YOUNG DEVOTEES



School children take part in the Janmashtami festival, which marks the birth of Lord Krishna, in Amritsar, India, on Wednesday (AFP)

Border gunfight shuts crossing between Afghanistan, Pakistan

Peshawar, Pakistan - A gun battle erupted on Wednesday between Pakistan and Afghan border forces, officials said, with each side blaming the other for starting the firefight that shut their busiest trade crossing.

Afghanistan and Pakistan have had frosty relations since the Taliban returned to power in Kabul two years ago, with Islamabad accusing its neighbour of harbouring militants carrying out strikes on its soil.

Diplomatic tensions have been stoked by frequent flare-ups along their mostly mountainous border, which Kabul has long disputed, including

sporadic gunfights and crossing closures.

"Afghan forces tried to establish a check post in an area where it is agreed... that both sides will not establish a check post," said Pakistan local administration official Irshad Mohmand, who also said the crossing remains closed.

"After an objection from the Pakistan side, the Afghan forces opened fire," he said, adding that Pakistan border forces responded with 'retaliatory fire'.

The Taliban government in turn blamed Pakistan.

"Pakistani forces attacked the Afghan side when Afghan

forces wanted to reactivate their old outpost with an excavator," said Quraishi Badloon, an official for the information and culture directorate in Afghanistan's eastern Nangarhar province.

"The attack has resulted in casualties, but the exact figures are not known yet."

A local Pakistan police official, who was not authorised to speak to the media, said gunshots started at around 1:00 pm (0800 GMT) at the Torkham border crossing, halfway between Islamabad and Kabul, with an evacuation ordered.

AFP

China warns against 'new Cold War' as big powers meet in SE Asia

Jakarta, Indonesia - China's premier said on Wednesday major powers must keep their differences under control and avoid 'a new Cold War', in a thinly veiled reference to Washington, as top Asian and US officials gathered for talks in Indonesia.

Beijing has expressed concern about US-backed blocs forming on its doorstep, while facing disputes with other powers in the region over the South China Sea and other issues. "Disagreements and disputes may arise between countries due to misperceptions, diverging interests or external in-

terferences," Li Qiang said at the start of an ASEAN-plus-three meeting with Japan and South Korea in Jakarta.

"To keep differences under control, what is essential now is to oppose picking sides, to oppose bloc confrontation and to oppose a new Cold War."

The 10-member Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) is holding separate summits with China, Japan, South Korea, the United States and Canada on Wednesday, providing an arena for big powers to lobby the bloc and their rivalries



China's Premier Li Qiang attends the 26th ASEAN-China Summit in Jakarta on Wednesday (AFP)

to play out. US Vice President Kamala Harris is attending in place of President Joe Biden, while Li was taking part instead of President Xi Jinping.

The Chinese premier's comments came after Beijing's Defence Minister Li Shangfu in June warned against establishing NATO-like alliances in the Asia-Pacific region, calling for 'inclusive cooperation' instead of 'small cliques' at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore.

Washington is a member of the AUKUS defence partnership with Australia and Britain, and

the Quad, a strategic alliance that includes Australia, India and Japan.

Wednesday's meetings come before an 18-member East Asia Summit on Thursday to be attended by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and the G20 summit in New Delhi at the weekend, where broader geopolitical issues are expected to top the agenda. Harris met ASEAN leaders, praising them for their 'shared commitment to international rules and norms... and regional issues'.

AFP

From rain to miscalculations: A snapshot of Asia Cup so far

Colombo, Sri Lanka - The 50-over Asia Cup in Sri Lanka and Pakistan entered the Super Four stage on Wednesday.

AFP Sport takes a snapshot of the tournament - which comes a month before the ODI World Cup - so far.

India-Pakistan washout

The hotly anticipated clash between fierce rivals India and Pakistan had to be abandoned because of rain at Pallekele.

Pakistan pace spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi bowled a devastating first spell to put India on the backfoot before the batting team bounced back to post 266 all out.

But rain had the final say with players from both sides shaking hands in the dressing room and fans at the stadium - largely from India - returning home disappointed.

The two nations will meet again in Colombo in the Super Four stage on Sunday. Holders Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are also still involved.

Rain threat

The Sri Lankan rain refused to relent and threatened to wash out India's match against minnows Nepal, but the game at Pallekele had a result after a reduction of overs.

India chased down a revised target of 145 in 23 overs to win by 10 wickets with 17 balls to spare.

Rain in Colombo is still a threat to the tournament.

The September 17 final and all five remaining Super Four games



India's Virat Kohli (2L) talks with Pakistan players after their match was abandoned due to rain, in Kandy on Saturday (AFP)

after Wednesday are in the capital, where rain is forecast all week.

That had organisers plotting a venue shift as a contingency plan and some TV broadcast crews had already departed for the southern coastal city of Hambantota.

Organisers have decided to stick with Colombo -- at least for now.

Afghan miscalculation

The final group-stage match between Sri Lanka and Afghanistan

in Lahore had plenty of drama before the island nation sneaked into the next stage with a two-run win. Afghanistan believed they needed to chase down their target of 292 in 37.1 overs to lift their net run-rate enough to edge Sri Lanka out of the Super Four race.

Mohammad Nabi put the Afghans on course with 65 from 32 balls and Rashid Khan, 27 not out, nearly took them over the line before Sri Lanka's bowlers hit back with late strikes.

Afghanistan looked down and out at 289-9 in 37.1 overs, but

analysts pointed out that they could still sneak through if they hit some big shots in the next six balls.

The batsmen, however, had no idea that was the case, and Fazalhaq Farooqi blocked the next two balls, before getting out on the third.

"We were never communicated (by the officials or organisers) those calculations," coach Jonathan Trott said afterwards.

Impressive Shaheen

Babar Azam's Pakistan came into the tournament as the

world's number one ODI team and have played to their billing so far, with their fast bowlers looking extremely threatening.

Shaheen, a left-arm quick, and fellow quicks Naseem Shah and Haris Rauf were only warming up in the tournament opener when the hosts bundled out Nepal for 104, after Babar hit 151 in Pakistan's 342-6.

Against India, the Pakistani pace attack was once again all over the opposition, with Shaheen taking four and Naseem and Haris taking three wickets each.



Pakistan's Haris Rauf celebrates after taking the wicket of Bangladesh's Towhid Hridoy during their Asia Cup match in Lahore on Wednesday

Rauf leads Pakistan's rout of Bangladesh in Asia Cup

Lahore, Pakistan - Haris Rauf led Pakistan's pace trio with four wickets to thump Bangladesh by seven wickets in the Super Four stage of the Asia Cup in Lahore on Wednesday.

Rauf picked up 4-19 while pace partner Naseem Shah finished with 3-34 to bundle Bangladesh out for 193 runs in 38.4 overs to set up an easy win.

Opener Imam-ul-Haq struck a brilliant 78 and Mohammad Rizwan an unbeaten 63 to help Pakistan chase down the target for three wickets in 39.3 overs.

The win gives Pakistan an

ideal start ahead of their highly charged match against India in Colombo on Sunday after the first game between the arch-rivals was abandoned due to rain last week.

Haq built the innings after fellow opener Fakhar Zaman (20) and skipper Babar Azam (17) fell early, hitting four sixes and five boundaries in his 84-ball innings.

Haq, who now has 19 ODI half centuries, added 85 for the third wicket with Rizwan before he was bowled by Mehidy Hasan Miraz with just 35 needed for victory.

Australia include injured quartet in World Cup squad

Sydney, Australia - Australia on Wednesday named the injured quartet of Pat Cummins, Steve Smith, Glenn Maxwell and Mitchell Starc in a provisional 15-man squad for next month's 50-over cricket World Cup in India.

They face a race to be fit with Australia playing their opening game against the hosts in Chennai on October 8.

Australia's final 15-player squad is due to be confirmed to the ICC by September 28.

Australia's chief selector George Bailey said the quartet were recovering well.

Australia squad: Pat Cummins (capt), Sean Abbott, Ashton Agar, Alex Carey, Cameron Green, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Mitchell Marsh, Glenn Maxwell, Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc, Marcus Stoinis, David Warner, Adam Zampa

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CHASING HISTORY

Djokovic into record 47th Grand Slam semi-final at US Open

New York, United States - Novak Djokovic powered into a record 47th Grand Slam semi-final on Tuesday with a 6-1, 6-4, 6-4 win over American ninth seed Taylor Fritz at the US Open.

Djokovic continues his push for a record-extending men's 24th Grand Slam title in the last four against the up-and-coming Ben Shelton.

The 36-year-old Djokovic is through to the semi-finals in New York for the 13th time and is now 12-0 against Americans at the US Open.

"It's a huge opportunity every single time I step out onto the court at this age, at this stage of my life," said Djokovic, who broke the mark he shared with Roger Federer for most major semi-final appearances.

"I don't know how many more opportunities I'll get so I'm trying to enjoy it as much as I can."

"I've played so many times on this court, so many epic matches. I can't wait for another in a few days' time," added the three-time US Open champion. Djokovic defeated Fritz for the eighth time in a row, weathering stifling conditions as the temperature topped 90 degrees Fahrenheit (32 Celsius) and humidity rose above 55%.



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates a point against Taylor Fritz of the US during their US Open quarter-final match on Tuesday (AFP)

"It was very humid conditions. Difficult to play but that is why we train and try to get ourselves in the best conditions to deliver. Not easy but you have to fight," said Djokovic.

Djokovic, who will reclaim the number one ranking from Carlos Alcaraz next week, is one win away from reaching the final at all four majors in the same year for the third time in his career.

He has yet to face the 20-year-old Shelton.

Djokovic keeps cool

Djokovic made it eight wins in as many matches with Fritz, who had pushed him to five sets in

May reached the last eight here in 1978, finally held to start the second set, only briefly slowing Djokovic's charge.

Djokovic again broke for a 2-1 cushion and foiled Fritz the following game when the American generated four break points but was unable to penetrate his rival's ironclad defences.

The early break sufficed for Djokovic to surge two sets in front as he hammered an ace on set point.

Fritz had another whiff at 15-40 on Djokovic's serve in the sixth game of the third set, his inability to capitalise growing even costlier when the Serbian broke

I don't know how many more opportunities I'll get so I'm trying to enjoy it as much as I can. I've played so many times on this court, so many epic matches

NOVAK DJOKOVIC

their previous Grand Slam meeting at the 2021 Australian Open but barely made a dent in the Serbian star's armoury Tuesday.

Djokovic saved a break point in the first game but swiftly gained control on a sweltering afternoon, with the roof partially closed on Arthur Ashe Stadium to shield the players from the sun.

Fritz had lost just serve just once through four rounds en route to his first US Open quarter-final, but Djokovic broke him three times in succession to pocket the first set with ease.

Fritz, whose mother Kathy

to edge closer to the finish line.

Fritz hit right back when an agitated Djokovic speared a forehand wide, but a woefully loose next game from the American spelled the end of the road as Djokovic eventually served out for victory.

"I didn't take my chances," said Fritz, who converted only two of 12 break points.

"I didn't think that he played any of those points I guess exceptionally, raised his level. He was solid, and I didn't perform well enough on a lot of the big points."

AFP

Smiling Coco Gauff demolishes Ostapenko to enter semis

New York, United States - Coco Gauff said learning how to smile more often is behind her dazzling run at the US Open after she stormed into the semi-finals with a straight sets thrashing of Jelena Ostapenko on Tuesday.

The 19-year-old sixth seed became the first American teenager to reach the last four of the US Open since Serena Williams in 2001 after demolishing Latvia's Ostapenko 6-0, 6-2 in just 1hr 8min.

It was another polished performance that suggested Gauff is finally ready to land a breakthrough Grand Slam title, four years after she announced herself to the world with a magical run to the fourth round at

Wimbledon in 2019.

Gauff's season has been transformed since she began working with veteran coach Brad Gilbert in July, weeks after she was left distraught by a first-round exit at Wimbledon.

Since Gilbert's arrival, Gauff has won titles in Washington and Cincinnati, where she also defeated outgoing world number one Iga Swiatek for the first time.

Gauff says one of the biggest changes Gilbert has made is to her mindset.

"I thought to play and win you have to be ultra serious and ultra focused, which is true, but also you still have to enjoy it," Gauff said after Tuesday's win.

"Honestly, the first meeting



Coco Gauff of the US serves to Latvia's Jelena Ostapenko during their US Open quarter-final on Tuesday (AFP)

that I had with Brad before he started coaching with me, one of the first things he said is 'You need to smile more'. It wasn't really anything with my game or anything. "I really took that, and when he said that I was a little bit surprised. I started to think and I was like, 'Yeah, I do.' That's something I'm trying to work on and continuing to do, and obviously I think it's helping my results."

Gauff meanwhile says she is flattered by comparisons to Serena Williams after matching the 23-time Grand Slam champion's feat in reaching the US Open last four as a teenager.

"I mean, being in any sentence with her is great. She's the greatest player of all time," she said.

"I'm nothing close to that yet. I'm just really honored to be in the same sentence as her."

"She's my idol. I think if you told me when I was younger that I would be in these same stat lines as her, I would freak out."

Gauff will face Czech 10th seed Karolina Muchova in the last four on Thursday.

On Tuesday's evidence, Gauff will head into the last four brimming with confidence after producing a superb display to overwhelm Ostapenko.

Ostapenko had produced the shock of the tournament in the last 16 on Sunday, ousting world number one and reigning women's champion Iga Swiatek in three sets.

'Tough cookie' Muchova downs Cirstea in straight sets to march into semi-finals

New York, United States - Karolina Muchova defeated Romania's Sorana Cirstea in straight sets to reach the semi-finals of the US Open on Tuesday.

Czech 10th seed Muchova advanced to the last four of a Grand Slam tournament for the second time this season with a 6-0, 6-3 victory in 1hr 38min on the Arthur Ashe Stadium court.

Muchova, who reached the final of the French Open in June, will play sixth seed Coco Gauff of the United States in the last four.

"I felt very good actually from the start till the end," Muchova said of Tuesday's win.

"I felt I had a good feeling with the ball from the baseline, I felt good on the net, slicing, and with my whole game," added Muchova, who is relishing her upcoming semi-final date with Gauff.

"She's very athletic. She never gives up. Runs for every ball.



Czech Republic's Karolina Muchova celebrates her win against Romania's Sorana Cirstea (AFP)

Doesn't do many mistakes," Muchova said of the American teenager.

"So she has kind of all the strokes. So very, very good player from all the aspects."

Muchova said her relaxed mental approach had helped her into the last four.

"I'm just trying to keep things actually pretty easy and don't put much expectations on me," she said.

"I'm pretty, I would say, a tough cookie in life as well. That helps with tennis. Some days are better; some days not."

"But I always try to keep the

clear mind and to be relaxed and enjoy the sport, just the basics."

The 33-year-old Cirstea had been playing in the quarter-finals of a Grand Slam for only the second time in a professional career that began in 2006. The Romanian appeared to be caught cold early by Muchova, who punished every mistake ruthlessly to go up a double break for a 3-0 lead in the first set.

Cirstea attempted to rally in the fourth game but despite earning nine break points was unable to convert any of them as Muchova held serve for 4-0.

Cirstea was broken again in the fifth game and Muchova held once more to take the first set.

Cirstea made a better fist of the second set, holding and earning a break to go 2-0 up.

But she was unable to build on that early momentum and was broken in the third game to put the set back on serve.

Unseeded American Shelton beats compatriot Tiafoe to reach last four

New York, United States - Unseeded Ben Shelton took down Frances Tiafoe in four sets in an all-American US Open clash Tuesday to book a semi-final date with 23-time Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic.

World number 47 Shelton defeated Tiafoe 6-2, 3-6, 7-6 (9/7), 6-2 to make the last four of a major for the first time and become the youngest American man to do so in New York since Michael Chang in 1992.

"It doesn't get much better than that," the 20-year-old Shelton said of a first-time meeting with Djokovic that awaits him on Friday. "I feel like I left it all out here tonight. It was an emotional battle."

Shelton saved a set point as he won a crucial third-set tie-break and pulled away in the fourth to settle a historic first Grand Slam quarter-final in the Open era featuring two African-American men.



Ben Shelton of the US celebrates after beating compatriot Frances Tiafoe in their US Open quarter-final on Tuesday (AFP)

"Sometimes you've got to shut off the brain, close your eyes and just swing, and maybe it was a little bit of that down set point and it end up working out," said Shelton. "Some may say clutch but I don't know about that."

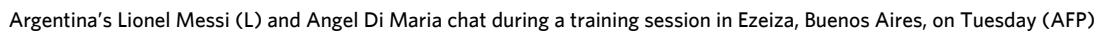
The former college champion, who is coached by his father and

former professional Bryan Shelton, arrived at his second US Open with a tour-level record of 12-20 this season.

He had failed to win multiple matches at any of the 18 ATP Tour events he had played since advancing to the quarter-finals in his Australian Open debut.

Messi back in Argentina fold as 2026 World Cup qualifiers kick off

Inter coach Gerard "Tata" Martino, the former Argentina and Barcelona player, says Messi has been "liberated" by finally leading Argentina to the World Cup last year after several ago-



LIONEL SCALONI

But the question hanging in the air as South America's qualifying campaign gets under way this week, is whether Messi will be around when Argentina aim to defend their title in 2026, when the tournament is co-

However he later admitted in an interview in July he had no

Argentina's World Cup-winning manager Lionel Scaloni is certainly in no mood to force the issue. Scaloni is on record as saying that a place in the 2026

Messi and Argentina's qualifying journey gets under way with a home fixture against Ecuador at the Estadio Monumental in Buenos Aires on Thursday, before the team face Bolivia in La Paz next Tuesday.

Brendan Rodgers

"It's their profession, it's their life so they have to do what's best for them," Rodgers told talk-SPORT radio on Wednesday. "There are so many morality officers around the world nowadays that are judging people."

But, with England white-ball captain Jos Buttler officially rested from the game, New Zealand took four wickets for 35 runs - with left-arm spinner Santner returning fine figures of 3-30.

The first two matches of the T20 series witnessed two dominant England wins, by seven wickets and 95 runs, before New Zealand hit back with an equally emphatic 74-run success at Edgbaston on Sunday.

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14

CRAZY CARB
Au Gratin, Grilled Salad, Scalloped Taters, Savoury Skins...what's your take?



15

ONAM FANFARE
Badr al Samaa Hospital, Ruwi, and Palakkad Friends celebrate Onam



16

ENTERTAINMENT
A peek into tinsel town in Hollywood and Bollywood

Heritage heights

INNOVATION AWAITS MATRAH FORT – THE 16TH CENTURY MILITARY GARRISON ONCE BUILT BY THE PORTUGUESE IN OLD MUSCAT – WHEREIN AN ELEVATOR WILL SOON BE INSTALLED FOR EASY ACCESS

MATRAH FORT



A steep, winding stone staircase currently leads upto the main entrance of the fort. (Inset) Sketch of a the proposed elevator

Hubert Vaz

The view from atop is stupendous, the rugged interiors are steeped in illustrious history, and with a vast stretch of the Arabian Sea playing in its lap, the iconic 16th century Matrah Fort on Al Bahri Road (Matrah cornice) is indeed the crown of the capital. But there's one hitch to enjoying its glory.

To access the historic military garrison once built by the Portuguese on a hillock in Old Muscat, one has to climb up a steep flight of stairs that might not be an easy task for senior citizens/disabled persons or tourists well past their prime. Nevertheless, spirited visitors can be seen frequently visiting the fort on weekends and holidays ever since it was renovated and access allowed to the public in 2016.

The good news now, however, is the announcement from the fort management that they are in consultation with Doppler, a Greek company specialising in bespoke lift designs, to provide an elevator that allows comfortable access for visitors of all ages. In fact, the idea had been floated shortly after the renovation was complete around eight years ago, as part of the redevelopment master-plan for Matrah district.

The renovation work of Matrah Fort had been undertaken by the Department of Renovation and Maintenance, Ministry of Heritage and Culture, which is responsible for conservation projects concerning castles, forts and other historical buildings, about a decade ago.

The renovation was carried out as per the UNESCO code of practice for restoration of heritage structures. It included structural consolidation and refurbishment of the whole body of the fort, besides reinforcement of the stairways leading to it.

FACILITIES AT THE FORT

- DESIGNATED PARKING
- FORTIFIED STAIRCASE
- FORT CAFE
- ACCESSIBLE TOILETS
- DRINKING WATER

TIMING: 8AM TO 11PM



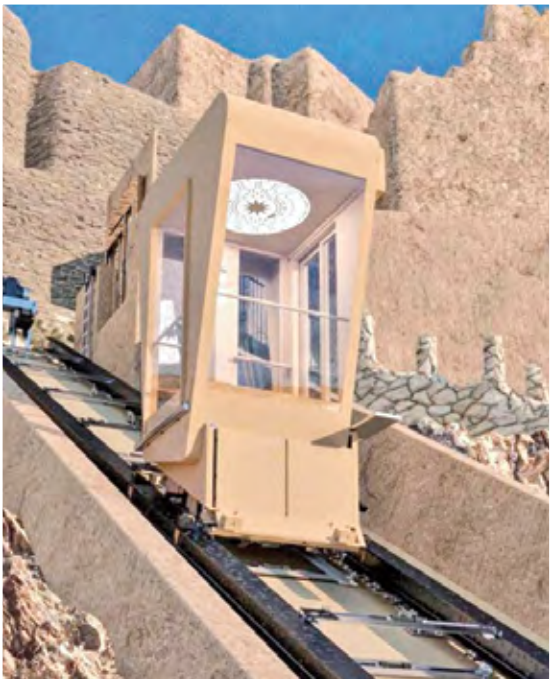
A section of the adjacent road, near the entrance at the rear end of the fort complex, has been cordoned off to facilitate works

The exhibits inside the fort premises include ancient cannons including an English 12 pounder manufactured around 1720 and mounted on a close replica of wooden carriage of a 1710 pattern, nine pounder cast iron English cannons of the 18th century, an 18th century eight pounder Swedish cannon known as a finbanker, six pounder and 12 pounder French post-revolutionary cannons and a 12 pounder English Armstrong pattern cannon with a corroded insignia of George III (1160-1820).

People residing in the area have hailed the decision to install an elevator

as it would facilitate access for different types of visitor – residents and tourists of all ages. While some were skeptical about the feasibility of blending modern equipment alongside a heritage structure, most said it was the need of the hour.

Retired director of Bait al Baranda, Malik al Hinai said, “Accessibility, including public services and assistive devices for people with disabilities is a fundamental requirement and a ‘prerequisite for participation in society. All buildings, new or old, including recreational sites should be required to make



Photos: V K Shafer

reasonable adjustments to a building to ensure that a disabled or an elderly person gets comfortable access. I'm glad Matrah Fort is installing this lift.”

Another long time resident, hailing from Gujarat (India), at Matrah cornice, who have a family home facing the seafront since a few generations, said, “It's a very good decision to install an elevator at this fort as it will help older persons to enjoy the good view from top without worrying about climbing the stairs. I hope they start work on this project soon.”

Nadeem al Balushi, a popular singer and vintage car aficionado, who had his family home in Matrah for nearly a century, since his great grand father lived there, said, “It will be a good service to provide easy access to the fort but it should not be used by children and able persons who can climb up to the top. It should be reserved for senior citizens who cannot walk/climb due to age or health problems. This is a place where tourists come in large numbers, since Oman is famous for its forts, and all tourists will want to visit this monument if an elevator is available to easily get to the top.”

cook-up

POTATOES



Savoury Potato Skins

Ingredients
4 large baking potatoes,
3tbsp butter - melted
1tsp salt, 1tsp garlic powder,
1tsp paprika
Optional: Sour cream and chives

Method
Preheat oven to 200°C. Scrub potatoes, pierce several times with a fork. Place on a greased baking sheet, bake until tender. Cool slightly.
Cut each potato lengthwise in half. Scoop out pulp, leaving ½cm thick skins (save pulp for another use).
Cut each half shell lengthwise into quarters, return to baking sheet. Brush insides with butter. Mix seasonings, sprinkle over butter. Broil until golden brown - 5-8 minutes. If desired, mix sour cream and chives and serve with potato skins.

Spicy Baby Potatoes

(Chatpata Aloo)

Ingredients
500g baby potatoes - boiled and peeled
2tbsp vegetable oil
2-3 sprigs of coriander – chopped
Salt – 1tsp
1tsp amchur (dried mango powder)

Spice mix
2-3 dried red chillies
1tsp cumin seeds
2tsp coriander seeds
1tsp black pepper
2-3 cardamoms
2-3 cloves

Method
Boil and peel the potatoes and set aside. Dry roast all the spices and grind to a coarse consistency. Heat oil in a pan and add the mustard seeds. When the mustard seeds splutter, add the potatoes and fry them till they get slightly golden brown.
Switch off heat and sprinkle amchur powder and the ground spices generously. Toss till the potatoes are well coated.
Garnish with some chopped coriander.



Crazy carb

The humble potato can be transformed into some of the most delectable dishes on your dinner table. Start peeling and discover the potential of this crazy carb



Simple Au Gratin

Ingredients
3tbsp butter
3tbsp all-purpose flour
1½tsp salt, 1/8tsp pepper
2 cups milk
1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
5 cups thinly sliced peeled potatoes (about 6 medium)
½ cup chopped onion
Additional pepper, optional

Method
Preheat oven to 200° C. In a large saucepan, melt butter over low heat. Stir in flour, salt, and pepper until smooth. Gradually add milk. Bring to a boil, cook and stir 2 minutes or until thickened. Remove from heat, stir in cheese until melted. Add potatoes and onion. Transfer to a greased baking dish. Cover and bake for 1 hour. Uncover, bake 30-40 minutes or until the potatoes are tender. If desired, top with additional pepper.



Scalloped Taters

Ingredients
750g frozen cubed hash brown potatoes
1 can condensed cream of chicken soup - undiluted
1½ cups milk
1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
½ cup plus 1tbsp butter - melted, divided
¼ cup dried minced onion
½tsp salt
1/8tsp pepper
¾ cup crushed cornflakes

Method
In a large bowl, combine the hash browns, soup, milk, cheese, ½ cup butter, onion, salt, and pepper. Pour into a greased slow cooker. Cover and cook on low until potatoes are tender, 3-4 hours. Just before serving, combine the cornflake crumbs and remaining butter in a pie plate. Bake at 200°C until golden brown, 4-6 minutes. Stir the potatoes, sprinkle with crumb topping.



Grilled Three Potato Salad

Ingredients
250g golden potatoes
250g red potatoes
1 medium sweet potato - peeled
½ cup thinly sliced green onions
¼ cup canola oil
2-3tbsp white wine vinegar
1tbsp Dijon mustard
1tsp salt, ½tsp celery seed
¼tsp pepper

Method
Place potatoes and sweet potato in a Dutch oven, cover with water. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for 15-20 minutes or until tender. Drain and cool. Cut into chunks. Place potato mixture in an oiled grill wok or basket. Grill, uncovered, over medium heat for 8-12 minutes or until browned, stirring frequently. Transfer to a large salad bowl, add onions.
Whisk the oil, vinegar, mustard, salt, celery seed, and pepper. Drizzle over potato mixture and toss to coat. Serve warm or at room temperature.

take a break

IN TOWN

BADR AL SAMAA ONAM FESTIVITIES



Badr al Samaa Hospital, Ruwi organised an Onam celebration last weekend



Photos: V K Shafeer



Palakkad Onam celebrations



Palakkad Friends held a cultural programme on the occasion of Onam to mark their 10th anniversary



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Today some important people could pay attention to you. Are you ready? Whenever the spotlight is aimed right at you, it's important to take your time. Plan your actions ahead. Knowing that eyes are on you might get your nerves pulsing, but don't try to rush ahead and show them something just for the sake of showing them something.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You can finally reach a compromise in an ongoing power struggle with a friend today if you just choose the path of least resistance. So what if you have to give in to what you think are their unreasonable demands? For right now, it's the correct strategy to follow. If you keep pushing back, you run the risk of derailing everything.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

When you have an intellectual discussion today (and you probably will), try to see things from the other person's perspective. Be more compassionate about where they're coming from and what they've been dealing with. They could be coming from a very emotional perspective and not using logic to their advantage.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

There is an exciting surprise coming your way right about now, so get ready to have your daily routine knocked on its ear! You've been waiting for an excuse to ditch your plans for the day, and now you've got it. You have learned to be flexible in the face of chaos, and you'll have a great time zigging and zagging throughout this day. People will be impressed.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

In order to build up your ego, you need to stop focusing so much on what other people think about you, especially when the people you're surrounded by don't have any business criticizing others. They're more insecure than you are, so you're only wasting your time by caring about their opinions. Just make the choices and actions that will make you proud of yourself and don't worry about anyone else.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Your daily routine could be slightly disrupted by someone who doesn't know the first thing about how to be flexible. They can't bring themselves to see things from any other perspective but their own. Luckily, you have enough flexibility for the both of you, so it won't take any time at all for you to come up with a plan that will make them happy and make you happy at the same time.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You have more curiosity that the average cat right now, and if you follow it, you'll end up having a very good time! Is there a person you've always wanted to talk to? Today, you could have a chance to pick their brain and find out what's up with them. Is there a sport or hobby you've always found interesting? Give it a whirl today. Is there a food you've always wanted to try?



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Travel is on your mind right now, so much so that it might be causing some real problems with your older relatives. They want you to stick around in one place a little longer, but you need to stretch your legs! You need to follow your own urges, and you need to figure out a way to communicate that to them.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Like it or not, you have to share the people you love with other people. You don't own your friends, and you can't have a monopoly on all of their free time. If you're getting worried that one of your best friends is spending too much time with someone else, relax. You have nothing to worry about! Keep an open mind about this new relationship of theirs.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

This isn't a good time to strategize your life based on how much money you want to make. Your career advancement should be structured around what you want to learn, what you want to gain experience doing, and the types of people you want to interact with. Doing something just because it will earn you more money is way too short-sighted.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Odd and unusual things could be very attractive to you today. You're more interested in what sticks out like a sore thumb than in what fits right in, and this mood of yours is especially strong in terms of people. When someone makes waves today, you won't get frustrated or annoyed. You'll be intrigued.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

When was the last time you had an honest-to-goodness daydream? You know, the kind you used to have in school that were so engrossing and distracting that you didn't hear when the teacher called on you. If the answer is anything other than yesterday, you need to pick a fantasy today and go for it!

BOGGLER

L	H	I	R
L	O	T	F
L	H	R	L
G	E	I	I

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

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

TRIVIA QUIZ - FOR TEENS

1. Which sport has a pommel horse?

- A Polo
B Hockey
C Gymnastics
D Javelin

2. Using only addition, how can you use eight eights to get the number 1,000?

- A 888+88+8+8+8
B 88+88+888+8
C 8+88+888+88
D 8+88+88+888



3. A cowboy rode into town on Friday. He stayed in town for three days and rode back out on Friday. How is this possible?

3. The horse's name was Friday

Answer:

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

entertainment

Kashmir to host Miss World 2023



Miss World 2022 Karolina Bielawska (C) and Miss India World 2022 Sini Shetty (L) ride a boat in the Dal lake in Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir. The Miss World 2023 beauty contest will be held in restive Indian-administered Kashmir as part of a month-long series of events across India, Miss World beauty contest organisers said.

Miss World Organisation chair Julia Morley said that India will host a month-long series of events for the annual international beauty pageant from November to December, with hopes to host part of the schedule in Kashmir.

"This is a blessed place for tourism," Morley said while on a visit to Srinagar on Monday, the region's main city.



HOW TAYLOR SWIFT FILMED HER 'ERAS TOUR' MOVIE

If you missed out on Taylor Swift's Eras Tour during the record-shattering 52-date US swing, the good news is that you can play catch-up next month when the Taylor Swift - The Eras Tour concert film opens in every AMC Theatre in the US, Mexico and Canada on October 13. Swift announced the 2 hour, 45 minute film on her socials on August 31, posting an 80-second trailer and writing, 'The Eras Tour has been the most meaningful, electric experience of my life so far.'

The immediate question, though, was: How was Swift able to film and promote the documentary in the midst of the ongoing Hollywood strike. SAG-AFTRA had struck an interim agreement to cover individual non-AMPTP productions that meet the same standards the unions are seeking. A source confirmed that the Eras doc had obtained clearance under that agreement before shooting the movie.

SEAN 'DIDDY' COMBS TO BE HONOURED WITH GLOBAL ICON AWARD

Sean 'Diddy' Combs has been tapped to receive the Global Icon Award at the 2023 Video Music Awards, where he'll also perform. Combs will be honoured for his unparalleled career and continued influence that has achieved unrivaled global success in music and beyond, MTV said Tuesday. He's also vying for four competitive awards this

year for his work on *Creepin'* (Remix) and *Gotta Move On*, including two for best collaboration along with noms for best rap and best R&B.



Fassbender returns to movies as Fincher's 'Killer'

Michael Fassbender returned to the big screen at the Venice Film Festival Sunday after years away as a racing driver, playing a cold-blooded assassin in David Fincher's Netflix film *The Killer*.

The German-Irish actor took up professional motor racing in 2017, joining the Ferrari Challenge and later the European Le Mans Series.

He stepped away from an acting career that had seen him mix blockbusters like the *X-Men* franchise with hard-hitting roles in *12 Years a Slave* and *Hunger*.



Sunny Deol's 'Gadar 2' makes it big

Sunny Deol has struck gold after over 22 years of lying on the sidelines. However, while *Gadar 2* chases the all-time record posted by *Pathaan* earlier this year, another SRK-starrer is about to throw a wrench in the works this week. *Gadar 2* is currently only around Rs 40 crore shy of overtaking *Pathaan* to become the biggest Hindi-language hit of all time, but this week's *Jawan* might prove to be a hurdle.

On its 25th day in theatres, *Gadar 2* is said to have made Rs2.5 crore across India. This takes the film's nett domestic total to Rs503 crore. *Pathaan*'s all-time record collections stand at around Rs543 crore. Combined, both movie have now made more than Rs 1,000 crore, indicating pre-pandemic glory.

WHAT'S ON

Genre: **Horror**
Starring: **Taissa Farmiga, Jonas Bloquet, Bonnie Aarons, Anna Popplewell, Storm Reid**
Language: **English**

THE NUN 2

The sequel to the worldwide smash hit "The Nun," which follows Sister Irene as she once again comes face to face with the demonic force Valak—The Demon Nun.

'DIDN'T MAKE A DIME ON BANGERZ TOUR'

Miley Cyrus is revealing what went into making 2014's Bangerz Tour come to life as well as why it 'was an investment in myself.'

During a recent edition of her *Used to Be Young* TikTok series, in support of her latest single of the same name, the pop star admitted that she 'didn't make a dime on this tour because I wanted the tour to be excellent.'

Cyrus explained that she struggled to find people who saw her creative vision, adding, "A lot of these ideas were kind of so outlandish that no one really wanted to support me in making these pieces, so I had big puppets, oversized beds, I came out of my own



face on my tongue."She said people kept questioning her, asking, "Why are you doing this? You're going to do like 100 shows and not going to make any money." But for Cyrus, the tour was much more than that. "There's no one I would rather invest in. So I paid for it to make exactly as I thought," she said.

BANG, BANG, CRASH!



HOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW:
EQUALIZER 3
Genre: Action Starring: Denzel Washington, Dakota Fanning, David Denman, Sonia Ammar, Remo Girone

The *Equalizer 3* is a 2023 American vigilante action film directed by Antoine Fuqua. It is a sequel to *The Equalizer 2* and the final installment of *The Equalizer* trilogy, which is loosely based on the television series of the same name. The film stars Denzel Washington, reprising his role as re-

tired US Marine and DIA officer Robert McCall, with Dakota Fanning, David Denman, Sonia Ammar, and Remo Girone in supporting roles. In the film, McCall discovers that his new friends of a small town in South Italy are intimidated by members of the Camorra, where he sets out to free them from their control.



At a secluded winery in Sicily, crime enforcer Lorenzo Vitale finds that many henchmen have been brutally killed by retired US Marine and DIA operative Robert McCall, who is waiting in the basement, held at gunpoint by two of Vitale's bodyguards. McCall kills him and the rest of the gangsters to obtain a key to the winery's vault and recoup money stolen in a cyber-heist.

You won't guess what mundane package McCall has just murdered an army of killers to get. But it doesn't really matter. While the ham-fisted McGuffin doesn't serve the rest of the film, this opening scene - from its stomach-churning violence to the reliance on impractical effects - indi-

cates where this once enjoyable nuts-and-bolts action franchise has gone wrong.

Fuqua and cinematographer Robert Richardson provide further Western details through chiaroscuro lighting. Washington's silhouette spells danger, while his weary frame expresses a close run with death.

Richardson also captures the actor from extreme low angles, a la John Ford, painting heroic compositions. The problem, however, is they've made McCall so vicious we're not quite sure if we should be rooting for him to kill.

Watch it if you are an action buff.

Rating ★★☆☆☆

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