

Sultan Haitham City launched

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik presided over the launch ceremony of Sultan Haitham City held at Al Baraka Palace on Wednesday.

Upon arrival at the launch ceremony hall, His Majesty the Sultan was received by Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shu'aili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning.

During the ceremony, His Majesty witnessed a descriptive account of the smart and futuristic city. The presentation showcased a model of the city, which will be developed in the wilayat of Seeb.

Sultan Haitham City represents a new model for development of sustainable cities, and fulfilling the aspirations of Oman's youth.

His Majesty the Sultan took note of the remarkable facilities within Sultan Haitham City. He viewed display panels outlining a diverse range of structures, including prototypes of residences that harmoniously blend with a modern setting, while epitomising the cultural heritage of the country.

Furthermore, His Majesty the Sultan was briefed on the brand identity and message of Sultan Haitham City, billed as 'Treasure the Future'. This brand identity reflects a visionary approach to building a unique and dazzling city in the sultanate. The logo of the city draws inspiration from the purity of nature, accentuated by golden flourishes symbolising luxury and power.

A visual presentation on the model of the city's masterplan, residential quarters, facilities and amenities captivated His Majesty's attention. The presentation included details of the various structures within the city, such as schools, hospitals and mosques.

To conclude the ceremony, His Majesty the Sultan perused a book describing the project of Sultan Haitham City, which is set to become an icon for smart cities. The event was attended by members of the Royal family and high-ranking officials.

During the ceremony, His Majesty the Sultan affirmed that what he has seen of the modern planning of the city is heartening. His Majesty saw it as the foundation for future initiatives, and congratulated the talented young minds of Oman, including designers and thinkers, and encouraged them to make their mark in every corner of the sultanate.

His Majesty regarded this occasion as just the beginning of a series of visionary developments, as more cities will emerge, keeping pace with the ever-evolving world.

ONA
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TOTAL AREA	LANDSCAPE AREA	ACCOMMODATION FOR	HOUSING UNITS
14,800,000 SQM	2,900,000 SQM	100,000	20,000
▶ 39 SCHOOLS	▶ 25 MOSQUES	▶ 19 INTEGRATED NEIGHBOURHOODS	▶ 11 HEALTHCARE FACILITIES



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His Majesty chairs Council of Ministers meeting

Our Correspondent
Muscat

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik presided over a meeting of the Council of Ministers at Al Baraka Palace on Wednesday.

His Majesty the Sultan reviewed local, regional and international developments.

On the domestic front, His Majesty the Sultan spoke about the ongoing government initiatives aimed at achieving rapid economic growth and finalising a comprehensive financial and investment system.

In this context, His Majesty the Sultan gave directives to establish an investment fund, to be named Oman Future Fund, that will have a capital of RO2bn.

The fund is aimed at enhancing economic activities and encouraging the private sector to enter into partnerships or finance feasible investment projects in the sectors of economic diversification targeted by Oman Vision 2040.

His Majesty gave directives to allocate part of the fund's capital to stimulate bold investments in



SMEs and startups registered with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development.

Speaking about the inauguration of the Sultan Haitham City in the wilayat of Seeb, His Majesty the Sultan affirmed that the inception of the project stemmed from a trend to set up modern cities with international planning standards, integrated and interconnected facilities, and equipped with all services that

meet the needs of residents. The city seeks to ensure the stability of families and spearhead model development in building sustainable cities, His Majesty affirmed.

As a result of its keenness to provide proper health cover and manage it in modern ways, the council approved the establishment of a National Centre for Women and Children's Health at Sultan Haitham City.

In line with the attention accorded by His Majesty to national

competencies' development, the Council of Ministers approved the consolidation of the 2023-2027 External Scholarships Programme by introducing a scheme for grooming graduates who are capable of playing leading roles in various economic sectors. The candidates will be dispatched to major in important future specialisations at top international universities.

The scheme provides for 150 such scholarships over a period

of five years, starting from this year (2023) to the tune of RO36mn.

To encourage private higher education institutions to play a greater role in boosting the educational process, the Council of Ministers decided that private higher education institutions which were given land (lease-based) will get ownership of the land, while at the same time exempting them from prescribed fees. This applies to the institu-

tions that meet the terms and conditions set for private higher education establishments.

To mitigate the cost of high electricity bills for citizens, particularly low-income segments, during the summer season, His Majesty the Sultan gave directives to maintain a 15% discount on the total sum of the electricity bill for all residential units' subscribers during summer months from May to August 2023.

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- ▶ Set up Oman Future Fund with RO2bn capital
- ▶ Establish National Centre for Women and Children's Health
- ▶ 150 post-graduation scholarships worth RO36mn
- ▶ 15% discount on electricity bills during summer months



World's 1st commercial CO₂ removal project kicks off

Muscat – 44.01 - a company engaged in removing CO₂ from the atmosphere safely, efficiently and permanently by turning it into rock deep inside the earth - and the Ministry of Energy and Minerals have signed a concession agreement for the world's first commercial-scale peridotite mineralisation project.

The project, which will begin in 2024 in the Hajar Mountains, will be the largest peridotite mineralisation activity in the world, and the first commercial demonstration to mineralise multiple tonnes of CO₂ per day.

The project will take place at a site in Al Qabil, where 44.01 has already completed a successful pilot project to prove that its process is effective, safe and permanent. The company will take CO₂ captured from the atmosphere or from industrial



We are delighted to have agreed this concession with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals. We hope this project paves the way for Oman to become a world leader in permanent CO₂ removal

TALAL HASAN

processes, dissolve it in water and then inject it into peridotite formations deep underground, where it will mineralise, or turn into rock, meaning it can never escape back into the atmosphere.

Peridotite, an ultramafic rock found in abundance across Oman, mineralises CO₂ naturally, but this usually takes decades. 44.01's technology accelerates the process, offering a safe, permanent and scalable way of eliminating CO₂ in less than a year.

On the occasion, H E Salim bin

Nasser bin Said al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, said, "44.01's mineralisation technology, developed here in Oman, has the potential to help our country meet its net zero targets and decarbonise vital Omani industries in line with Oman Vision 2040. We are pleased to support 44.01 in its largest project so far and we look forward to seeing what this technology can achieve in the future."

Talal Hasan, founder and CEO of 44.01, said, "We are delighted to have agreed this concession

with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals. We hope this project paves the way for Oman to become a world leader in permanent CO₂ removal."

Peridotite mineralisation is a natural process, which 44.01 accelerates by injecting carbonated fluid into peridotite formations deep underground.

44.01 won the Earthshot Prize and an XPrize Milestone Award in 2022. The company's technology has also been recognised by Stripe, Shopify and Watershed, among others.

WHO recognises Masirah as 'Healthy Island'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Masirah Island has been recognised as the first 'Healthy Island' in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, the World Health Organization announced on Wednesday.

WHO will hand over the certificate of international recognition to the Ministry of Health at an official ceremony to be held on Sunday in Masirah Island under the auspices of H E Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health.

In Oman, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are responsible for 72% of all deaths with nearly one in five adults dying from NCDs before the age of 70.

To combat risk factors for NCDs, including tobacco use, physical inactivity and unhealthy diets, the Government of Oman launched the Healthy Island initiative on Masirah Island in 2022 in collaboration with WHO.

The initiative is the first of its kind in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region aimed to address social determinants of health by empowering commu-



The first of its kind in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, 'Healthy Island' seeks to create healthier environments for people to live, work and play

nities to adopt healthier lifestyles.

Despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Healthy Island Initiative has had a positive impact through activities such as co-funding and constructing a harbour for local

fishermen, developing a small market area for economically disadvantaged women, and constructing playgrounds to promote physical activity in children, WHO stated.

WHO's Healthy Island initiative seeks to create healthier environments for people to live, work and play through evidence-based advocacy, policy development, leadership, multisectoral planning, partnerships, and community participation.

"While the vision has served as a unifying theme for health protection and health promotion in the Pacific, it had not previously been implemented in the East Mediterranean Region," WHO stated.

Oman, China explore investment scope in energy, minerals sectors

Muscat – H E Mohsin Hamad al Hadrami, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, met the National Development and Reform Commission of the People's Republic of China on Wednesday.

The meeting aimed at exploring opportunities of enhancing economic cooperation and partnership in the fields of energy and minerals.

During the meeting, Chinese companies with expertise and technologies in energy and minerals industries were invited to invest in the sultanate. The meeting also underscored the importance of the 10th Arab-China Business Conference, which will be held next month in Saudi Arabia.

The Omani delegation discussed ways of localising industries related to renewable

energy and green hydrogen.

The meeting was held within the framework of the visit of representatives of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Oman Investment Authority and the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones to highlight various opportunities.

China imports more than 80% of Oman's total crude oil production.

إعلان مناقصة

TENDERERS ANNOUNCEMENT

SOHAR Port and Freezone invites Tenderers to the following tenders

تدعو شركة ميناء صحر والمنطقة الحرة الموردين للمشاركة في المناقصات أدناه

No رقم	Tender Ref الرقم المرجعي	Tender Title عنوان المناقصة	Tender Fee OMR الرسوم
1	SIPC 2023-096	Potential Measurements of Cathodic Protection in Vale, Aggregate & SIP Area	26.250
2	SIPC 2023-082	Material Sampling and Testing Works for OOTO berths	26.250
3	SIPC 2023-030	HSE Software	26.250

- The above-mentioned tender fees including the VAT 5%.
- Tenderers can request to receive the electronic tender documents from 9:00 am on Tuesday, 04/06/2023 until 4:00 pm on Thursday 08/06/2023.
- Tenderers to follow the below procedures and steps to obtain the electronic tender documents:

- تشمل رسوم المناقصة المذكورة أعلاه ضريبة القيمة المضافة ومقرها 5%
- يؤرخان لمقدمي العطاءات طلب استلام وثائق المناقصة إلكترونياً ابتداء من يوم الخميس ١ يونيو ٢٠٢٣ (الساعة ٩ صباحاً) وحتى يوم الخميس الموافق ٨ يونيو ٢٠٢٣ (الساعة ٤ مساءً).
- على مقدمي العطاءات اتباع الإجراءات والخطوات التالية للحصول على مستندات المناقصة إلكترونياً.

الخطوة الأولى: يجب على مقدمي العطاءات سداد رسوم المناقصة وفقاً للتفاصيل أدناه:

Account Name اسم الحساب	Sohar Industrial Port Co شركة ميناء صحر الصناعي
Account Number رقم الحساب	3101-007970-500
Bank Name اسم البنك	Oman Arab bank SAOC – Main Br الرئيسي بنك عمان العربي ش.م.ع. – الفرع
SWIT رمز السويت كود	OMABOMRUXXX

Note: Bank transfers is the only mode of payment accepted
ملاحظة: التحويل البنكي هي الطريقة الوحيدة المقبولة للدفع

الخطوة الثانية:
تفعين على مقدمي العطاءات تقديم المستندات التالية:

- طلب الحصول على النسخة الإلكترونية من مستندات المناقصة
- نسخة من إيصالي التحويل البنكي
- أوراق السجل التجاري للشركة
- على أن يتم إرسالها إلى: sincprocurement@soharpportandfreezone.om

الخطوة الثالثة:
سوف يستلم مقدمي العطاءات نسخة إلكترونية من مستندات المناقصة عبر البريد الإلكتروني.

- يحق لشركة ميناء صحر والمنطقة الحرة قبول أو رفض أي مورد بدون الإصغاء عن الأسباب.
- يتوجب على جميع المؤسسات الصغيرة والمتوسطة تقديم بطاقة زيادة إلى جانب مستندات الشركة
- في حال وجود أي أسئلة أو استفسارات تتعلق بالمناقصة الرجاء التواصل معنا عبر البريد الإلكتروني: sincprocurement@soharpportandfreezone.om

الخطوة الرابعة:
تدعو الشركة على مقدمي العطاءات تقديم المستندات التالية:

- طلب الحصول على النسخة الإلكترونية من مستندات المناقصة
- نسخة من إيصالي التحويل البنكي
- أوراق السجل التجاري للشركة
- على أن يتم إرسالها إلى: sincprocurement@soharpportandfreezone.om

Step 2:
Tenderers to send the following documents:

- A request for the electronic tender documents Scanned bank transfer
- The firm's commercial registration documents
- All shall be communicated to the following e-mail address: sincprocurement@soharpportandfreezone.om

الخطوة الخامسة:
سوف يستلم مقدمي العطاءات نسخة إلكترونية من مستندات المناقصة عبر البريد الإلكتروني.

- يحق لشركة ميناء صحر والمنطقة الحرة قبول أو رفض أي مورد بدون الإصغاء عن الأسباب.
- يتوجب على جميع المؤسسات الصغيرة والمتوسطة تقديم بطاقة زيادة إلى جانب مستندات الشركة
- في حال وجود أي أسئلة أو استفسارات تتعلق بالمناقصة الرجاء التواصل معنا عبر البريد الإلكتروني: sincprocurement@soharpportandfreezone.om

Step 3:
Tenderers will receive the electronic Tender Document by e-mail.

- SOHAR reserves the right to accept or reject any tender without assigning any reasons
- All SMES are requested to provide their RIYADAH Card along with the required documents
- For any clarification regarding the tenders please send an e-mail to: sincprocurement@soharpportandfreezone.om

الخطوة السادسة:
سوف يستلم مقدمي العطاءات نسخة إلكترونية من مستندات المناقصة عبر البريد الإلكتروني.

- يحق لشركة ميناء صحر والمنطقة الحرة قبول أو رفض أي مورد بدون الإصغاء عن الأسباب.
- يتوجب على جميع المؤسسات الصغيرة والمتوسطة تقديم بطاقة زيادة إلى جانب مستندات الشركة
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“CASIO Math Challenge 2023 Celebrates Exceptional Talents in Oman”

CASIO Middle East and Africa FZE, the regional subsidiary of CASIO Computer Co. Ltd., the leading education technology company, in collaboration with the German University of Technology in Oman, successfully organized the CASIO Math Challenge 2023 on 8th and 9th May. The event showcased the exceptional problem-solving, strategic thinking, and mathematical proficiency of participants from renowned educational institutions.

The competition brought together 78 participants from prestigious educational institutions, including the German University of Technology in Oman, Muscat University, Modern College, Sultan Qaboos University, and the Military Technological College - Muscat. Divided into 22 teams, the students displayed

their passion for mathematics. The competition comprised three phases, with the jury committee consisting of esteemed professors from the German University of Technology in Oman and representatives from CASIO Middle East and Africa to evaluate the participants' mathematical skills.

The German University of Technology claimed both the first and second prizes, while Sultan Qaboos University secured the third prize. Prizes were distributed by Prof. Dr. Michael Braun, Rector of the German University of Technology, and representatives from CASIO Middle East and Africa.

Takashi Seimiya, the Managing Director of CASIO Middle East and Africa, said, "This partnership has been a testament to our shared commitment to fostering academic

excellence and nurturing young mathematical talent. The competition showcased the incredible potential and ingenuity of the participants, and we are immensely proud to have played a role in their journey. We firmly believe in the power of education and the importance of mathematics in shaping future generations. Collaborating with GUTech has not only allowed us to promote the advancement of mathematical skills but also to inspire young minds to explore limitless possibilities."

Al-Nahar International Company will continue to collaborate with CASIO Middle East and Africa and partner with renowned educational institutions like GUTech in Oman to empower students with innovative tools for mathematical success in Oman.

Sultan Haitham City: Treasure for the future

Sultanate’s new city under the patronage of His Majesty the Sultan promises to be futuristic urban icon

Muscat - The plan for the ‘Sultan Haitham City’, which was unveiled on Wednesday under the patronage of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, constitutes a futuristic urban icon, a treasure for the future and a sustainable gift from His Majesty to future generations and all segments of society.

The proposed Sultan Haitham City is the fruitful outcome of the comprehensive transformation approach espoused by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning. It envisages transition into sustainable urban development that benefits thriving communities through the implementation of national strategic projects for urban development in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Sultan Haitham City represents the cornerstone of upcoming projects and a new model for building sustainable cities. It simulates modern life and epitomises the aspirations of young people in Oman.

The city, on an area of 14,800,000 square metres, has been designed to reflect sound and sustainable urban planning based on the utilisation of green spaces on an area of 2,900,000 square metres.

It targets to house 100,000 people in 20,000 housing units ranging between separate villas, semi-attached villas, town-houses and flats.

The housing units will be distributed over 19 integrated residential neighbourhoods, supplied with various facilities and services to meet the needs of the residents. It will have 24 mosques and a grand mosque.

The city will also have 11 health facilities, including two health centres to cater to the needs of 20,000 patients and another set of six health centres with a capacity to serve 10,000 patients.

The city will have a referral hospital with a capacity of 1,200 beds, a private hospital and a centre to serve persons with disability and elderly people.



There city will have 39 government and private schools covering all levels of education.

The ambition behind this new city is to have 12 international criteria of luxury and welfare - ranging between affordable cost,

integrated utilities and sustainable systems. All of these played a role in drawing out the city's masterplan.

The city will have an internal transport network whose distances are carefully calculated to

provide access to the largest possible number of facilities. The network will be suitable for public and private transport vehicles that smoothly crisscross the roads from the centre to the periphery.

The city, on an area of 14.8sqkm, has been designed to reflect sound and sustainable urban planning based on the utilisation of green spaces on an area of 2.9sqkm and creation of 11 health facilities including one referral hospital

like pedestrian passages and bicycle paths to help diversify the traffic system, healthy lifestyles and sustainability of the environment. These include options for the use of renewable energy and measures for water conservation.

The city's overall configuration enhances interaction and communication among various segments of society that benefit from common spaces and designs of neighbourhoods.

The design of the city's residential quarters also provides privacy with a range of options that combines high and low densities to accommodate all income groups.

The city's design also addresses the issue of climatic change and cater to future developments, with its infrastructure tailored to adapt to the needs of population growth and the cost of maintenance.

The city welcomes all seg-

ments of society, with their diverse social and cultural backgrounds. It offers all segments an easy access to its social and recreational facilities, thereby consolidating the bonds of belonging and cultural diversity.

In Sultan Haitham City, strategic locations for community facilities have been carefully selected to allow residents access them with complete ease. The strategy allows residents to jointly use public facilities, such as parking lots, playgrounds and parks, and contributes to achieving optimal use of spaces and amenities in the heart of the metropolis.

The design of the new city's external areas is inspired by the natural surroundings, with options for utilising the natural shade of trees during the daytime, which will be much in harmony with the urban structures. The overall idea is to provide natural outdoor spaces in the vicinity of buildings and well-designed streets.

The city has also been designed to raise the quality of life by optimising the use of solar energy as a sustainable source. In this setup, waste energy production systems and wastewater outputs will act as key factors in the protection of natural resources. The outcome will be the control of waste and the recycling of materials.

With its fascinating and captivating designs, the city promises transition into a future of happiness and prosperity. Yet, its concepts will never miss out on the country's heritage. While it builds a vision for the future of generations that celebrate modern life, it will also build solid grounds for harmony among cultural groups.

It is more than a city. It is a thriving ecosystem, a welcoming community and a unified society built on the notion that real generosity towards the future lies in giving all to the present. Tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today.

OQ to train 800 employees in leadership skills over 3 years

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's integrated energy group OQ signed a three-year agreement with Competence HR - Oman's leading HR consultancy firm - to help its leaders hone their skills in a systematic way.

Masar Programme has been launched as part of OQ's ongoing commitment to empower its national employees to keep pace with supervisory developments as per the group's vision.

The agreement - signed by Talal bin Hamed al Awfi, Group CEO of OQ; and Amer Fadhel, CEO of Competence HR - will play a significant role in realising OQ's energy transition strategy in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Following the agreement, the first cohort - comprising 265 employees - has embarked on their training and development journey in the areas of leadership and supervision.

The programme was designed according to international standards by the Chartered Management Institute, UK to refine leadership skills and empower OQ personnel in middle and senior roles.

This is achieved through the implementation of customised programmes developed in collaboration with Competence HR, a trusted partner with extensive connections to international and local centres renowned for ex-



pertise in leadership skills training, stated a press release.

By partnering with a local company having links to its international counterparts, OQ offered itself as a catalyst for fostering valuable collaborations between local and international entities specialised in training and extending support to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the Sultanate of Oman.

This collaboration empowers SMEs by providing access to essential experience, facilitating knowledge exchange, and enabling participation in continuous qualification programmes that adhere to international standards. This comprehensive support system ensures that SMEs in Oman receive the necessary resources to thrive and excel in their respective fields.

"Signing this agreement to qualify 800 of our people is a vital step that reflects the effort

put by OQ in human resources development. This significant endeavour will contribute to our operations' progress and ensure that we remain abreast of the latest developments and requirements in our field," said Ashraf bin Hamad al Mamari, Chief Executive People, Technology, and Culture at OQ.

"OQ places great emphasis on the development of human resources through a comprehensive system of training programmes. These programmes encompass a wide range of technical, leadership, and business skills, as well as personal attributes that align with our aspirations and the diverse needs of our employees. By offering these training opportunities, we foster personal and professional growth in various roles, enhancing technical expertise and cultivating valuable interpersonal skills," he added.

Oman Embassy hosts photo exhibition in Tokyo

Tokyo- The Oman Embassy in Tokyo hosted an exhibition of photos taken by various Japanese diplomats during their stint in the Arab world.

The photo exhibition titled 'Arabs Through the Eyes of Japanese Diplomats' was held in Tokyo last week as one of the events to commemorate Arab Week in Japan. It was organised by the Council of Arab Ambassadors in Japan.

The opening ceremony was attended by a number of government officials, excellencies, representatives of the Japanese parliament, and heads of Arab diplomatic missions in Japan.

H E Dr Mohammed bin Saeed

al Busaidi, Oman's Ambassador to Japan, appreciated the cultural cooperation between Oman and Japan, hoping that the exhibition would convey the ancient cultural aspects of the Arab countries.

The exhibition was inspired by the 'Japan through Diplomats' Eyes' exhibition that celebrated its 25th-anniversary last year.

The exhibition aims to promote the charm of the Arab world among Japanese people.

The photos on display reflect everyday life in the Arab world as captured by diplomats, government officials and their families living in the region.

Tunisian Ambassador Mohamed Elloumi expressed his

gratitude to the organisers of the event calling it a 'wonderful cultural show', which promises to consolidate the bonds of friendship and cooperation between Japan and the Arab world.

Elloumi found the exhibition appropriately shedding light on the beauty, richness and diversity of the Arab countries.

Princess Takamado agreed to be the Honorary President of the exhibition and said it represented true diplomacy. "I really cannot imagine anything better than to have respective ambassadors from both sides seeing what is so beautiful about the countries to which they are posted," she was quoted as saying.

Japan's Parliamentary Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Takagi Kei was also of the opinion that the photographs reflected the appeal of the Arab society and its people as seen from a Japanese perspective.

"I sincerely hope that more Japanese people will discover the beauty of the Arab world. We believe this exchange will strengthen the friendly relations between Japan and the Arab world," Kei was reported as saying.

Omani Ambassador highlighted the Arab historical, civilisational and cultural ties and the strength of the connection between the Arab countries.

His Majesty chairs Council of Ministers meeting

Continued from Page 01
The Council of Ministers also approved an increase in financial allocations in the housing assistance programme of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning to RO26.4mn for the remaining years of the 10th Five Year Plan. The sum is allocated to construct housing units for people in villages, relocate them from their impacted areas of residence to safer places, provide areas with public services or to establish service projects in them.

The council lauded the efforts made by the authorities concerned in cooperation with farmers in various governorates to encourage them to grow improved varieties of Omani wheat.

The council also approved a plan to support local wheat production by allocating RO5mn till 2027, in addition to usufruct land contracts in certain governorates for wheat cultivation.

With the aim of operating more direct flights to and from Salalah Airport at competitive prices during khareef, His Majesty the Sultan gave directives to the concerned authorities to provide direct subsidies in fuel at Salalah Airport on a par with fuel prices at Muscat International Airport.

The Council of Ministers heard a briefing on the progress made in initiatives of the National Employment Programme and the efforts made by the authorities

concerned to improve economic growth in general and to develop economic sectors. Accordingly, His Majesty the Sultan gave directives to extend the disbursement of benefits from the Job Security System, for citizens whose services were terminated at private sector establishments, until December 2023.

The Council of Ministers agreed to exempt small and medium enterprises (SMEs) from certain fees prescribed by the Tender Board. This was made in pursuance of the support accorded to the SME sector, being a basic pillar in the national economy and is hoped to have a major role in contributing to the gross domestic product and employ-

ment of Omani citizens.

His Majesty the Sultan also spoke about regional and international affairs. He reviewed bilateral relations of the sultanate with a number of Arab and foreign countries. He underlined Oman's continuing efforts to espouse its permanent positive neutrality, as well as the country's persistent endeavours to achieve security and stability in the region and to extend bridges of cooperation with all countries.

At the end of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan touched on various aspects of concern to the country and the citizens. He wished citizens continued success in all that realises the good of the nation.

MARKET WATCH

MSX30 4,626.39
SENSEX 62,622.24

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)	
Indian	214.81
Pakistan	741.17
Bangladesh	278.44
Philippines	146.37
Sri Lanka	749.96

*Rates as on May 31
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

China factory activity declines further in May

China's manufacturing activity shrank in May for the second successive month, official figures showed Wednesday, the latest sign that the country's economic recovery is losing steam. The official manufacturing purchasing managers' index (PMI) - a key measure of factory output - fell to 48.8 this month, below the 50-point mark that separates expansion and contraction, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

The figure followed an unexpected fall to 49.2 in April, which reversed three consecutive months of growth. It was lower than the median estimate of 49.5 in a Bloomberg survey of economists.

China's economy expanded 4.5% in the first quarter of the year as the country rapidly reopened after ditching years of strict health controls that hammered businesses and international supply chains.

OQ Chemicals launches cost reduction plan in Germany

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As one of the world's leading manufacturers of oxo chemicals, OQ Chemicals, a part of OQ Group, faces the challenges of high raw material and energy prices, as well as inflation rates, particularly in Europe.

"To maintain its competitiveness in the rapidly changing economic and geopolitical environment of today, the company is implementing a two-year cost-saving programme that includes organisational realignment and workforce reductions in Germany," OQ Chemicals said in a statement.

OQ Chemicals, in Germany, plans to outsource service areas like technical workshops and logistics to external partners and reduce up to ten per cent of jobs in non-production areas in a socially responsible manner. These measures will result in long-term annual cost savings in the double-digit million Euro range, the company said.

The goal of the organisational changes is to concentrate on the core business and establish a more efficient structure that meets the current and future requirements of a successful medium-sized chemical com-



pany. OQ Chemicals will strengthen its digitalisation initiatives and further develop its product portfolio. The company's sustainability program 'reduce' will play a significant role, aiming to make OQ Chemicals climate-neutral by mid-century.

"We are addressing the challenges posed by the changing conditions in Germany to ensure the future readiness of our company. The cost pressure is substantial - in the previous year alone, we incurred additional en-

ergy costs amounting to a high three-digit million Euro figure," said Dr Oliver Borgmeier, CEO of OQ Chemicals.

"We will take all necessary steps to make the reorganisation socially responsible and preserve as many jobs as possible. Through a leaner, yet carefully redesigned and more efficient structure, we are securing our German locations and will continue to reliably supply our global customers with essential components for their production needs," he added.

OQ Chemicals is a global manufacturer of oxo intermediates and oxo performance chemicals such as alcohols, polyols, carboxylic acids, specialty esters, and amines.

These are used to produce high-quality coatings, lubricants, cosmetic and pharmaceutical products, flavours and fragrances, printing inks, and plastics.

OQ Chemicals employs more than 1,400 people worldwide and markets its chemicals in more than 60 countries.



CBO issues RO57mn treasury bills

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) this week announced the issuance of two tenders of treasury bills worth RO57mn.

In the first tender, the value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO10mn, for a maturity period of 28 days. The average accepted price reached RO99.655 for every RO100 bill while the minimum accepted price arrived at RO99.655. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 4.4973 per cent and 4.5128 per cent, respectively.

Through the second tender, the central bank allotted RO47mn worth of treasury bills, for a maturity period of 91 days. The average accepted price reached RO98.765 for every RO100 bill while the minimum accepted price arrived at RO98.765. The average discount

rate and the average yield reached 4.9535 per cent and 5.0155 per cent, respectively.

The interest rate on the repo operations with the CBO is 5.75 per cent while the discount rate on the treasury bills discounting facility with CBO is 6.25 per cent.

Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds. The Central Bank of Oman acts as the issue manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (repo).

Treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. The government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures.



The city skyline is seen beside a construction site of a coastal road project near Haji Ali mosque in Mumbai on Wednesday (AFP)

India records strong 7.2% annual GDP growth

Mumbai, India - India's GDP grew by 7.2% in the year to March, official figures showed Wednesday, boosted by services and consumption, putting it among the world's fastest-expanding major economies.

The South Asian nation is the world's fifth-largest economy, and recently surpassed China to become the most populous country.

Its growth has rebounded since the pandemic - the economy rocketed 9.1% in the 2021-22 financial year.

But like other countries, it has been buffeted by global headwinds including tightening global financial conditions, the war in Ukraine and geopolitical tensions. India imports more than 80% of its crude, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine driving up oil costs.

But its economy grew by 6.1% in the fourth fiscal quarter from January to March compared with the same period last year, according to National Statistical Office data.

In the same period, China's economy expanded 4.5% year-on-year according to its National Bureau of Statistics, while Washington's Commerce Department said the United States grew by an anaemic 1.1%.

China is rebounding after the end of zero-Covid measures that

battered business and supply chains, but is bedeviled by a host of other headaches.

Meanwhile the United States is battling persistently elevated inflation, Germany is in a technical recession amid an energy crisis triggered by the Ukraine war, and Japan expanded by just 0.4% in the first quarter.

In India, growth in financial, real estate and other services strengthened from the previous year, while the manufacturing sector expanded at a much slower pace.

The quarterly and annual figures were slightly above market expectations of around 5.5% for the quarter and 7.0% for the 2022-23 financial year.

The robust growth is expected to bolster Prime Minister Narendra Modi's economic credentials ahead of 2024 general elections, where he is expected to lead his party to a third term in office.

'Bright spot'

Analysts said government spending and domestic consumption have also helped India's economy remain robust.

The World Bank's India country director, Auguste Tano Kouame, said in April that the economy "continues to show strong resilience to external shocks". "Notwithstanding ex-

ternal pressures, India's service exports have continued to increase, and the current-account deficit is narrowing."

Economists said softening crude oil prices at the start of this year, coupled with a flourishing services sector, had driven growth for the quarter.

India's services sector jumped to its highest level in nearly 13 years in April on the back of strong finance and insurance output, according to the S&P Global India Services Purchasing Managers' Index, a private survey.

Inflationary pressures, which had led the Reserve Bank of India to lift interest rates from 4.0% to 6.50% between May last year and February before pausing in April, have eased in recent months.

Retail inflation fell to 4.70% in April, within the central bank's target band of 2.0% to 6.0%, from 5.66% in March and down from a peak of 7.79% in April last year. Looking forward, the Reserve Bank projected GDP growth of 6.5% in the 2023-24 financial year in its annual report published Tuesday, citing easing inflation risks.

The International Monetary Fund forecasts India's economy to grow by 5.9% in the 2023-24 financial year.

AFP

AI tools threaten to upend ad industry

Paris, France - Data-driven algorithms supercharged the advertising industry by enabling precisely targeted campaigns, but new AI tools may be about to shake the sector once again.

Some brands are dipping their toes in the AI waters, like Coca-Cola, which has invited people to create AI works using "iconic creative assets from the Coca-Cola digital archives".

Others are using it to create a social media buzz - fashion firm Stradivarius recently pushed out AI images based on one of its collections.

But the full force of the AI revolution may be felt most keenly in the engine room of the ad industry - the agencies who conceive and design the campaigns.

"We're only at the beginning," said Fernando Pascual, vice-president of design at Spanish company Seedtag.

His firm specialises in "contextual" advertising, which they claim will enable digital ads to blend in with the website where they appear.

So a car ad might show the vehicle driving through a glass and steel cityscape on a business-orientated website, but the same car might be seen cruising past peaceful suburban gardens on a family-friendly website.

"The main element of advertising is still anchored in reality,"



he told AFP.

"We're just helping our clients to be more relevant."

Seedtag is far from the only ad agency promoting its AI chops.

But photographers and models are among those left wondering about their future livelihoods. French lingerie firm Undiz recently found itself at the centre of the debate.

Billboards in brilliant blue with eerily beautiful models gliding underwater in the firm's swimwear have appeared across France in recent weeks.

Only, there were no real people in these posters.

The models were created by an ad agency using image generator Midjourney, with real images of the swimming costumes added later.

"We wanted to achieve a slightly dreamlike, intriguing re-

sult," Undiz director Isolde Andouard told AFP.

Andouard admitted that the campaign had caused "uproar" among models and photographers.

Thomas Serer, a popular French content creator and photographer, wrote on Twitter that he was a fan of AI but in this case "using AI adds zero value" apart from allowing the firm to save money.

Andouard was quick to deny the approach was simply about cutting costs, saying the AI campaign was rolled out alongside traditional photos.

The reaction to the Undiz campaign suggests the path to AI domination will be far from smooth. And they are not the only company to have received criticism.

Jeans brand Levi's trumpeted

a partnership with Dutch studio Lalalandia in March with the promise of using AI models to boost diversity on its online shop.

After an outcry, the firm put out another statement saying its announcement "did not properly represent certain aspects of the programme" and promised to continue working with models and photographers.

There are plenty who doubt that such upfront uses will ever really go industry-wide.

Olivier Bomsel, an economist specialising in intellectual property and advertising, said the arrival of AI-manipulated images was a "non-event" and amounted to just a new kind of digital editing.

And as AI tools get more widespread, he said, the people whose images provide the training data will be able to claim fees that will eventually "cost as much as using a model".

And the arrival of AI behemoths Meta and Google into the space is sending heads spinning.

Both firms announced in May a series of simplified AI tools that promise to allow anyone to design ad campaigns just using simple phrases as prompts.

It remains to be seen whether this will give ad agencies a shiny new plaything - or torpedo their business models entirely.

AFP

Chip company Nvidia tops \$1tn in market value

New York, US - Chip company Nvidia exceeded \$1tn in market value Wednesday as Wall Street stocks mostly rose, following an agreement between President Joe Biden and Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy to avoid a US debt default.

All three major indices were in positive territory, while Nvidia jumped more than seven percent on bullish sentiment over its role in artificial intelligence breakthrough technology.

About 20 minutes into trading, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was down 0.2% at 33,021.07. The broad-based S&P



500 climbed 0.4% to 4,223.64, while the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index gained 1.1% to 13,116.93.

The weekend deal, reached

after weeks of frantic negotiations, faces opposition from the progressive and hard-right wings of Biden and McCarthy's respective parties.

The basic framework of the deal lifts the debt ceiling, currently at \$31.4tn, for two years - enough to get past the next presidential election in 2024.

In return, Republicans secured some limits on federal spending over the same period.

Biden and McCarthy both say they believe the bill will pass the House and then move swiftly to the Senate.

Meanwhile, most large tech

companies advanced early Tuesday, with shares of Facebook parent Meta and Apple both up more than one percent while Netflix rose nearly four percent.

The surge in Nvidia shares comes amid rising confidence in new generative AI breakthroughs, capable of delivering the computing heft needed to churn out complex content in just seconds from data centers around the world.

In topping \$1tn in valuation, Nvidia joins a group of just five other companies, all US tech giants except Saudi Aramco.

AFP

MoH joins celebration of WHO's 75th anniversary

The Ministry of Health (MoH) joined the World Health Organization (WHO) in its seventy-fifth-anniversary celebration at Grand Hormuz Hotel on Wednesday.

The celebration was held under the patronage of Sayyida Sana bint Hamad bin Saud al Busaidi, Advisor of the Minister of Education, with the presence of Dr Jean Jabbour, WHO representative to the Sultanate of Oman, and a number of ambassadors, Directors General, heads of school health departments in the governorates, and a number of officials from MoE and WHO.

The event saw visual presentations on the WHO history, the schools' celebration of World Health Day, and the student activities and events organised by the school health nurses to celebrate World Health Day, along with a play that highlighted tobacco control.

In addition, the celebration addressed the achievements of the joint committee between MoE, MoH, and WHO to promote the healthy environment in the school community.

WHO representative Dr Jabbour praised the achievements and successes achieved by the



WHO over the last seven decades in promoting public health and preventing diseases to improve the social and health conditions, and human care.

Dr Jabbour added that the world has experienced many serious challenges, conflicts, and health emergencies that affected the societies in all countries of the world.

Over decades, the WHO has been working on tackling the main challenges including smallpox eradication, combating many infectious diseases such as polio, developing International Health Regulations, and working with the member states to strengthen the public emergency preparedness and response systems.

The WHO representative pointed out that the Sultanate of Oman has taken the first steps to

implement the 'One Health' concept in line with the global concern in this field since the launch of the 'Muscat Declaration' on antimicrobial resistance and the promotion of healthy cities programs.

Dr Nasser Suleiman al Salmani, Director of School and University Health at MoH, indicated that the joint committee between MoE, MoH and WHO aims to promote the health environment in the school community through developing policies and strategies to provide a healthy educational environment for all, proposing and implementing initiatives that will improve school health, and student nutrition, as well as enhancing joint work between the three parties.

Moreover, Salmani added that there are many projects that the committee worked on such as developing a protocol for health precautions for the COVID-19 pandemic in the school environment to ensure student health and safety.

The committee also worked to document the health-promoting school's initiative, by creating a website for the initiative and digital transformation to cope with Oman Vision 2040.

Cashback on ahlibank credit card use at Oman Oil stations

In line with its efforts to provide its customers with a holistic and rewarding experience, ahlibank has announced its partnership with Oman Oil Marketing Company (Oman Oil) to offer exciting cash rewards to its credit card holders.

The exciting reward programme will run for five days every month for three months, giving credit card holders the opportunity to enjoy 20 per cent cashback when refueling at any Oman Oil Fuel Station.

Commenting on the promotion, Muneer al Balushi - AGM - head of Retail Distribution, ahlibank, said, "Through this offer, we aim to enrich our customers' day-to-day lives by providing a comprehensive and rewarding experience."

By offering cashback on refueling at Oman Oil Fuel Stations, Balushi said the bank demonstrated its commitment to provide the best to its customers. "This initiative is aligned with our customer-centric approach and further strengthens our dedication to growing alongside them."

"We aim to meet the demands and growing needs of our customers. And, with this offer to credit card holders, we will fulfill such endeavours. Through innovative and diverse reward programmes, we will pave our way and continue our path towards excellence and growth," he added.

This cashback campaign reflects ahlibank's continuous efforts to offer a comprehensive suite of products and services, through modern technological and innovative means across all of Oman.

The bank offers top-class retail, commercial, and investment banking solutions.



Omantel's mobile app, cloud offering bag awards at COMEX

Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecommunication services in the Sultanate of Oman, walked away with three top awards at COMEX - Best Mobile Application, Cloud Technology, and Best of Best.

Omantel Mobile App was awarded for going well beyond the standard telecom services by delivering enhanced digital experience. Besides, the App offers services like checking usage, topping up, paying bills, and subscribing to bundles, self-activating SIMs as well as lifestyle benefits such as weekly buy-one-get-one offers from over 45 shops and partner service providers.

In addition, the App offers services provided by local partners; enabling customers to pay their utility bills, check and pay ROP traffic fines, and buy car insurance.

Omantel's impressive strides in implementing cloud technology through its integrated ecosystem and its subsidiary company Oman Data Park were recognised in the second award. To cap it all, Omantel was declared winner of the Best of Best award, which is given to entities that win the highest number of awards at COMEX.

Ammar al Lawati, senior manager of Digital Channels at Omantel, said, "Winning three awards certainly represents brilliant endorsement of Omantel's frontline position as a telecom and technology provider that is keeping pace with latest technologies and lifestyle needs. They also represent recognition of Omantel as an agile company that puts innovative solutions for businesses and individuals at their fingertips."

Wadee al Lawati, senior manager of ICT Business Development at Omantel, commented, "We are delighted with the COMEX awards. They are a testimony to our leadership in digital transformation and cloud technology. Our innovation-driven solutions are designed to empower all sizes of enterprises to accelerate their digital transformation as part of Oman Vision 2040 which is focused on spurring the transition to a knowledge-rich, ICT-friendly economy and society."

Omantel's stand in COMEX highlighted the Company's strength in its ability to offer multiple cloud offering to customers through its subsidiaries and partners, which have placed Oman among the countries that have smartly deployed Cloud to offer next-gen services.

ODP to provide cloud, cyber security services in Dakhiliyah



The Governorate of Dakhiliyah signed an agreement with Oman Data Park (ODP) Company, for the provision of cloud services, hosting e-mail, monitoring, follow-up services and cyber security services to the governorate within the frame work of the digital transformation process, and in line with efforts to achieve the Oman Vision 2040's objectives.

The agreement also includes the pursuit to find new opportunities for cooperation between the two sides, providing modern systems and technologies, and communication solutions to meet the requirements of Dakhiliyah, in addition to encouraging the exchange of experiences in various fields.

In accordance with this agreement, ODP will create and host the domain name (domain) and e-mail IDs for the governorate. ODP will provide an official electronic address for the governorate to be used by visitors and beneficiaries of electronic services, while an e-mail ID will also be available for each.

This will be done in addition to providing secure hosting, cyber security services and technical support, to raise the effectiveness of government work and ensuring the smooth flowing of work.

The agreement was signed by Sheikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Dakhiliyah, and Khalid bin Nasser al Abri, general manager Corporate Services in Oman Data Park.

Bank Nizwa opens Oman's first hybrid branch in Mawaleh

Bank Nizwa, Oman's leading Islamic bank, proudly inaugurated its latest branch in Mawaleh, becoming the first bank in the country to introduce a hybrid branch that combines traditional banking services with cutting-edge digital services.

Held under the auspices of Hilal bin Hamed al Sarmi, member of the Majlis A'Shura for the wilayat of Seeb, and the presence of Bank Nizwa CEO Khaled al Kayed, and members of the executive management of the bank.

"As we officially inaugurate our branch in Mawaleh, we are proud to expand our network and portfolio, whilst remaining committed to digitalisation and innovation," said Kayed.

"The Mawaleh branch is a



prime example of our dedication to providing our customers with a seamless and secure banking experience. Our goal with this branch was to create a space

where our customers can easily manage their finances on their own terms," he further said.

"At Bank Nizwa, we are always exploring new ways to

make banking more accessible as well as convenient for our customers and the Mawaleh branch is a testament to our ongoing commitment to this goal," the

bank CEO added.

The Mawaleh branch is strategically located in the heart of Muscat's bustling business district, surrounded by residential areas, shopping malls and other key commercial establishments. Its prime location makes it easily accessible for customers who are looking for a one-stop shop for their banking needs. The branch is equipped with ramps for easy access, wide doorways to accommodate wheelchair users and designated parking spaces close to the entrance.

Bank Nizwa takes pride in its commitment to diversity and inclusivity.

The Islamic bank has made a commitment to continue its nationwide initiatives aimed at promoting accessibility to Islamic

finance for all segments of the community, whilst also empowering the public with the knowledge and skills necessary to make sound financial decisions in line with their values and beliefs.

As Oman's first and leading full-fledged Islamic bank, Bank Nizwa has established a robust network of branches and ATMs across the Sultanate, which enables the bank to cater to the diverse needs of its customers and support their financial growth and prosperity.

Through innovative, sharia-compliant financial solutions and a focus on promoting financial literacy, Bank Nizwa seeks to contribute to the development of a more equitable and sustainable economy in Oman.

Sudan army quits talks with paramilitary foes

The mediators of the talks have acknowledged repeated violations of the truce by both sides

Khartoum, Sudan - The Sudanese army suspended its participation in US- and Saudi-brokered ceasefire talks on Wednesday accusing its paramilitary foes of failing to honour their commitments.

The mediators of the talks in the Saudi Red Sea city of Jeddah have acknowledged repeated violations of the truce by both sides but have so far held off imposing any sanctions in the hope of keeping the warring parties at the negotiating table.

The army walked out 'because the rebels have never implemented a single one of the provisions of a short-term ceasefire which required their withdrawal from hospitals and residential buildings', a Sudanese government official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The army said the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) had also 'repeatedly violated the truce', the official added.

US and Saudi mediators said late on Monday that the warring parties had agreed to extend by five days a

humanitarian truce they had frequently violated over the previous week.

The mediators admitted the truce had been 'imperfectly observed' but said the extension 'will permit further humanitarian efforts'.

But despite the pledges of both sides, fighting flared again on Tuesday both in greater Khartoum and in the flashpoint western region of Darfur.

"The army is ready to fight until victory," army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan declared during a visit to troops in the capital. The RSF, led by Burhan's deputy-turned-foe Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, said they will 'exercise their right to defend themselves' and accused the army of violating the truce.

Fears of breakdown

Sudan specialist Aly Verjee said the mediators were eager to avoid a complete breakdown of the talks, for fear of a major escalation on the ground.

"The mediators know that the situation is bad but they do not want to state that a cease-



People shop for fresh produce at a market in southern Khartoum, during a lull amid ongoing fighting between two rival Sudanese generals, on Wednesday (AFP)

fire is gone for fear that the situation would then become even worse," said Verjee, a researcher at Sweden's University of Gothenburg.

"The hope is that by keeping the parties talking, the prospects of arrangements that are better respected will even-

tually improve."

Since fighting erupted between the rival security forces on April 15, more than 1,800 people have been killed, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

The United Nations says more than a million people have

been internally displaced and nearly 350,000 have fled abroad, including over 170,000 to Egypt. More than half the population - 25mn people - are now in need of aid and protection, the UN says.

Entire districts of Khartoum no longer have running water,

electricity is only available for a few hours a week, and three quarters of hospitals in combat zones are out of service.

Many families have contin-

tinued fighting 'blatantly disregards ceasefire commitments', said Toby Harward, of the UN refugee agency.

The persistent fighting has impeded delivery of the aid and protection needed by a record 25mn people, more than half the population, according to the UN. Despite the increasing needs, it says it has only received 13 per cent of the US\$2.6bn it requires.

The UN has warned for weeks that fighting in Darfur's major cities has also drawn in former rebel and militia fighters recruited along ethnic lines during the region's devastating conflict in the mid-2000s.

Darfur's pro-army governor Mini Minawi, a former rebel leader, has urged citizens to 'take up arms' to defend their property.

Sudan could descend into 'total civil war', warned the Forces for Freedom and Change, the main civilian bloc ousted from power by Burhan and Daglo in a 2021 coup before the two men fell out.

AFP

The mediators know that the situation is bad but they do not want to state that a ceasefire is gone for fear that the situation would then become even worse

ALY VERJEE

NATO-led peacekeepers step up security after clashes in Kosovo

Zvecan, Kosovo - NATO-led peacekeepers stepped up security around a town hall in northern Kosovo on Wednesday, where hundreds of ethnic Serbs gathered again at the scene of clashes earlier this week that left more than 80 people injured.

NATO has decided to deploy hundreds of reinforcements to strengthen Kosovo's international peacekeeping mission (KFOR) after Monday's violence in the town of Zvecan.

Hundreds of ethnic Serbs rallied outside Zvecan's town hall on Wednesday for a third consecutive day and held aloft a huge Serbian flag that stretched over 200 metres (660 feet) from the municipal building to the town centre.

KFOR soldiers encircled the town hall, additionally securing the building with a metal fence and barbed wire, an AFP journalist said.

Kosovo's ethnic Serb minority boycotted local elections in the north last month, allowing ethnic



Hundreds of ethnic Serbs carry a giant Serbian flag through the town of Zvecan, in northern Kosovo, on Wednesday (AFP)

Albanians to take control of local councils despite a turnout of less than 3.5 per cent. Many Serbs are demanding the withdrawal of Kosovo special police forces, as well as the ethnic Albanian mayors they do not consider their true representatives.

The demonstrators decorated the fence - erected by KFOR soldiers - with Serbian flags.

They also carried a flag dedicated to Belgrade-born tennis

star Novak Djokovic, who wrote a message on a TV camera at the French Open on Monday calling Kosovo the 'heart of Serbia'.

Three vehicles of ethnic Albanian Kosovo special police - whose presence sparks controversy in Serb-majority northern areas - remained parked outside the town hall.

On Monday, NATO-led peacekeepers used shields and batons in a bid to disperse the

crowd but were met by a hail of rocks, bottles and Molotov cocktails.

'700 more troops'

A total of 30 peacekeepers - 11 Italians and 19 Hungarians - were wounded in Monday's clashes, according to KFOR.

Fifty-two protesters were also injured, three of them 'seriously', while five Serbs were arrested for taking part in the clashes.

On Tuesday, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg condemned attacks on the alliance's forces in Kosovo, saying they were 'unacceptable and must stop'.

"We have decided to deploy 700 more troops from the operational reserve force for Western Balkans and to put an additional battalion of reserve forces on high alertness so that they can also be deployed if needed," Stoltenberg said.

"Violence sets back Kosovo and the entire region."

AFP

UAE withdraws from United States-led maritime coalition

Abu Dhabi, UAE - The United Arab Emirates has withdrawn from a US-led maritime coalition tasked with securing tense Gulf waterways that are vital to the global oil trade, it said on Wednesday.

The UAE 'withdrew its participation' in the 38-nation Combined Maritime Forces two months ago, a foreign ministry statement said, without giving reasons for the move.

"As a result of our ongoing evaluation of effective security cooperation with all partners, two months ago, the UAE withdrew its participation in the Combined Maritime Forces," said the statement carried by the official WAM news agency.

The Bahrain-headquartered CMF was established in 2001, initially as a partnership between 12 nations. It is active in crucial but troubled Gulf waters where tankers have been seized and attacked in recent months.

A spokesperson for the Combined Maritime Forces said the UAE remains a partner nation, despite putting its participation on hold.

"The CMF still includes 38

UAE 'withdrew its participation in the 38-nation Combined Maritime Forces two months ago

partner nations, of which the UAE is one," Commander Timothy Hawkins told AFP.

Iran seized two tankers in a week in late April and early May, including one empty ship that was travelling between the UAE ports of Dubai and Fujairah. Iran was also accused of launching a drone attack against an Israeli-owned tanker

in November 2022, stoking tensions with the United States. Earlier this month, the US said it was sending reinforcements to the Gulf, which carries at least a third of the world's sea-borne oil, after what it called increasing harassment by Iran.

The commander of the US Navy's Fifth Fleet, Vice-Admiral Brad Cooper, later transited through the Strait of Hormuz in a guided-missile destroyer along with British and French naval commanders.

Iran responded by saying it is capable of ensuring the safety of Gulf waters in cooperation with neighbouring countries. "The UAE remains committed to responsibly ensuring the safety of navigation in its seas," the UAE statement said, adding that the major oil exporter is 'committed to peaceful dialogue and diplomatic engagement'.

AFP

TYPHOON LOOMS



A woman uses an umbrella to shield herself from the rain as she walks along a suspension bridge in New Taipei City as typhoon Mawar approaches on the east coast of Taiwan on Wednesday (AFP)

Crown prince's wedding: Royal fever sweeps Jordan

Amman, Jordan - Jordan is gearing up for Crown Prince Hussein's wedding on Thursday, an event already greeted with fireworks, concerts and social media frenzy in the usually quiet desert kingdom. The eldest son of King Abdullah II will marry Saudi fiancée Rajwa Al Saif at the grand royal wedding with regional monarchs, US First Lady Jill Biden and the king of the Netherlands among the guests.

On the big day for the Hashemite kingdom, a key Western ally, the royal red motorcade, reserved for special occasions, will cross the capital Amman to celebrate the bride and groom who are both 28 years old.

In the lead-up to the wedding of the next in line to Jordan's throne, the country has been gripped by royal fever.

Photos of Saif's henna bridal party took the internet by storm last week as she donned a white gown with an Arabic poetry verse embroidered in gold: "When I see you, life becomes sweet".



A man holds up a pre-wedding poster showing Jordan's Crown Prince Hussein and his fiancée Rajwa al-Saif, during a free concert to celebrate the upcoming wedding at Amman International Stadium on Monday (AFP)

The Royal Hashemite Court published a YouTube video of Prince Hussein's mother Queen Rania and his sisters, Princesses Salma and Iman, singing and dancing with guests at the party.

"Like any mother, I have long dreamt of his wedding day," the queen said in a speech, telling her subjects that 'Hussein is your

son, and you are his family, and this is your wedding'.

After the party, drones hovering over Amman formed the shape of a crown in the sky.

'Like a family party'

Such highly public displays may be common for Western royals, but they are a rarity in the Arab

world where conservative monarchies seldom share any details of their private lives.

"Everyone took pictures and posted them on social media - this perhaps wouldn't be possible with other royal families," said one bridal party attendee, Lara al-Laty, a 35-year-old travel agency employee.

She shared pictures of the party on her Facebook page, with guests seen wearing traditional abayas embroidered with Arabic inscriptions. "The atmosphere, the decor, the ululations all had a humble Jordanian character that made you feel like you were at a family party," she said.

The Western-educated crown prince, officially became heir apparent at the age of 15, has long grown accustomed to the spotlight. Hussein has amassed four million followers on his Instagram account where he shares eclectic photographs of hiking trips, military training and royal functions.

On Monday, famous musicians from across the Arab world flocked to the Jordanian capital to perform at a free concert to honour the couple, among them Lebanese star Ragheb Alama and Egyptian singer and actor Tamer Hosny.

Among the concertgoers, Suhad al-Ildrisi, her sister and her niece all wore T-shirts that read: "We are happy for Hussein."

AFP

IN BRIEF

Japan allows nuclear plants to operate beyond 60 years

Tokyo, Japan - Japan on Wednesday passed a law allowing nuclear reactors to operate beyond 60 years, as it tries to reinvigorate the sector to meet energy challenges and climate targets.

The bill intends to 'establish an electricity supply system that will achieve a carbon-free society', a parliament spokesman told AFP.

Under the new rules, the age cap technically remains 60 years but exceptions are allowed for reactors that have had to pause operations for 'unforeseeable' reasons.

Those might include changes to safety guidelines, or provisional injunctions by a court.

The new rules allow operators to exclude periods of shutdown when calculating the total years of operation.

However, operators require approval from Japan's nuclear safety watchdog for the exemption, and the law also includes measures intended to strengthen safety checks at ageing reactors.

UN weather agency to choose next chief

Geneva, Switzerland - The World Meteorological Organization, which plays a critical global role in tracking climate change, chooses a new leader this week to turbocharge that work over the next four years.

The Geneva-based WMO's role in climate change has become increasingly prominent and the new secretary-general will likely become a well-known advocate on this pressing world issue.

Four senior figures from within the WMO have put themselves forward for Thursday's vote, including two seeking to become the first woman to run the United Nations agency for weather, water and the climate.

One is the WMO's current number two, the Russian-Swiss deputy secretary-general Elena Manaenkova; the other is first vice-president Celeste Saulo, the director of the Argentinian National Meteorological Service.

They are up against the WMO number three, assistant secretary-general Zhang Wenjian, as Beijing seeks to increase the number of Chinese running UN agencies; and second vice-president Albert Martis of Curacao.

Radio broadcaster killed in the Philippines

Manila, Philippines - A radio broadcaster was shot dead outside his home in the central Philippines on Wednesday, police said, the latest in a long list of journalists killed in the country.

Crescenciano Bundoquin, 50, was killed by motorcycle-riding gunmen in Calapan City in Oriental Mindoro province, police Colonel Samuel Delorino told AFP. One of the assailants died after Bundoquin's son hit the gunman with his vehicle as they fled the scene of the pre-dawn attack.

"The remaining suspect was able to run off. The hot pursuit operation is still ongoing," said Delorino.

The archipelago nation is one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists, and most of the killers often go unpunished.

Radio broadcasters outside the capital were often the target.

Bundoquin hosted a programme on radio station 101.7 DWXR as well as on Facebook, said station manager Jester Joaquin, who described the broadcaster as 'hard-hitting' on local issues.

AFP

North Korea spy satellite crashes into sea, Seoul salvages wreckage

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea attempted to launch a spy satellite on Wednesday but it crashed into the sea after a rocket failure, with the South Korean military retrieving part of the likely wreckage in a potential intelligence bonanza.

North Korea does not have a functioning satellite in space and leader Kim Jong Un has made developing a military spy satellite a top priority for his regime, despite UN resolutions banning its use of such technology.

Pyongyang had said in the build-up to the launch attempt that the satellite would be vital to monitoring the military movements of the United States and its allies.

But the rocket lost thrust and plunged into the sea with its satellite payload, the official Korean Central News Agency reported. It added that authorities would investigate the 'serious defects' revealed by the launch and conduct another test as soon as possible.

South Korea's military said it had managed to locate and salvage a portion of the suspected



An object presumed to be part of North Korea's claimed 'Space Launch Vehicle' being salvaged by South Korea's military in waters 200km west of Eocheong Island in the Yellow Sea on Wednesday (AFP)

debris.

It released images showing a large barrel-like metal structure with thin pipes and wires at the bottom, which experts said might be a liquid fuel tank.

"Technical experts will be able to gain tremendous insight into North Korea's proficiency with large, multi-stage boosters from the recovered debris," US-based analyst Ankit Panda told AFP.

Panic, confusion

The launch prompted confusion and panic in Seoul, as city authorities sent an early morning emergency evacuation alert to residents and blasted an air raid siren across the downtown area.

This sparked widespread consternation online, before the interior ministry clarified minutes later the alert had been 'incorrectly issued'.

"I was taking my two young children to a basement parking lot as advised, in shock," a 37-year-old father who asked to be identified by his surname Yoon, told AFP.

The correction left him 'speechless and outraged', he said.

Japan briefly activated its missile alert warning system for the Okinawa region early on

High winds halt Spanish rocket launch

Paris, France - The maiden flight of the Spanish-built Miura 1 rocket was cancelled on Wednesday due to high winds, startup PLD Space said, in a setback for development of the small-scale space launcher.

"We have no green light, there are gusts of wind at high altitude above our limits. That means we don't have sufficiently safe conditions to launch," a commentator said on PLD Space's livestream of the lift-off, which was to be Spain's first.

It will be several days before a new launch window opens, the commentator added.

Standing just 12 metres (40 feet) tall, the small rocket was to fly 100km (62 miles) above the



Enthusiasts and journalists gather on a beach to watch the planned launch of the PLD Space's MIURA 1 rocket, in Huelva early on Wednesday (AFP)

Earth's surface from a military base in southern Spain.

While that distance would put it in outer space, the rocket is not powerful enough to reach orbit.

Wednesday's sub-orbital

launch had been slated to bring a payload with micro-gravity experiments, as well as setting up PLD Space's plans for future rockets.

"The idea is to learn and to minimise risks for the first flights

of the Miura 5," said PLD Space cofounder Raul Verdu, referring to a launcher the firm hopes will place satellites into orbit from 2025.

Although far larger at 35 metres and boasting two separate launch stages, that rocket uses around 70 per cent of the components developed for the Miura 1.

Companies are rushing to develop launchers to address a growing satellite market.

Around 18,500 small orbiters weighing less than 500kg (1,100 pounds) are projected to be launched in the coming decade, according to analysts from Euroconsult.

AFP

At Lula's South American unity summit, Venezuela turns divisive

Brasília, Brazil - Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva called for South American unity on Tuesday as he hosted fellow leaders for a regional 'retreat', but drew barbs for his warm welcome of Venezuelan socialist Nicolas Maduro.

Veteran leftist Lula, who returned to office in January after leading Brazil from 2003 to 2010, is looking to strengthen diplomatic ties in a region where left-wing governments are newly back in style.

But he faced criticism for hosting Maduro, a pariah in some quarters for his government's alleged human-rights violations and crackdown on political dissent - a depiction Lula questioned Monday as a hostile 'narrative'.

The issue exposed fissures at what was meant to be a display of South American diplomatic goodwill and cooperation.

"I was surprised to hear what's happening in Venezuela described as a 'narrative,'" said Uruguay's center-right President Luis Lacalle Pou, who has labeled Maduro a 'dictator'.

"The worst thing we can do is try to sweep that under the rug," he told the summit.

"Human rights must be respected everywhere, always, no



Leaders of South American countries pose for a photo at the Itamaraty palace in Brasilia on Tuesday (AFP)

Human rights must be respected everywhere, always, no matter the political colours of the leader in power

GABRIEL BORIC

matter the political colours of the leader in power," said Chile's left-wing President Gabriel Boric.

However, Boric backed the Venezuelan government's call for Washington and the European Union to lift sanctions on Maduro and his inner circle.

Maduro responded by saying Chile and Uruguay 'have one vision' and Venezuela, 'another'.

"The most important thing is that there has been a debate," he

said, announcing 'a new stage' of South American integration.

Lula defended Maduro, whose country he said was experiencing a period of 'tranquility'.

"The same demands that the democratic world makes for Venezuela it does not make for Saudi Arabia," Lula said later at a press conference.

He had warmly welcomed Maduro to Brasilia on Monday, reversing the policy of his far-right predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022), who had cut ties with Venezuela's socialist government and joined a US-led group of more than 50 countries in recognising opposition leader Juan Guaido instead. Lula, who greeted Maduro with a hug, hailed it as a 'new moment' in the countries' relations.

Eleven of South America's 12 heads of state attended the Brasilia summit, the first of its

kind in nearly a decade, which Lula said turned the page on an era of divisions.

The only absence was Peruvian President Dina Boluarte.

"We let ideology divide us and interrupt our efforts to integrate. We abandoned our channels of dialogue and our mechanisms of cooperation, and we all lost because of it," Lula said in his opening remarks.

The 77-year-old took a jab at Bolsonaro, saying his predecessor - who closely allied himself with US ex-president Donald Trump - had 'closed our doors to historic partners'.

This is the first summit of regional leaders since 2014 in Ecuador, at a gathering of UNASUR, a continental bloc launched in 2008 by Lula and Maduro's mentor, late Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez.

AFP

Wednesday, lifting it after about 30 minutes.

Condemnation

Seoul, Tokyo and Washington all slammed the launch, which they said violated a raft of UN resolutions barring Pyongyang from any tests using ballistic missile technology.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for North Korea to cease 'such acts' and return to the negotiating table.

"Any launch using ballistic missile technology is contrary to the relevant Security Council resolutions," he said in a statement.

Because long-range missiles and rockets used for space launches share the same technology, analysts say developing the ability to put a satellite in orbit would provide Pyongyang with cover for testing its banned intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

In 2012 and 2016, Pyongyang tested ballistic missiles that it called satellite launches. Both flew over Japan's southern Okinawa region.

Prior to Wednesday's launch, Pyongyang had launched five satellites since 1998, three of which failed immediately and two of which appeared to have been put into orbit.

Signals from those launches have never been independently detected, indicating they may have malfunctioned.

North Korea said on Tuesday its new spy satellite would be 'indispensable to tracking, monitoring... and coping with in advance in real time the dangerous military acts of the US and its vassal forces'.

South Korea this month launched its own homegrown Nuri satellite and put a working satellite into orbit for the first time, with this success likely prompting the North to conduct a rapid launch of their own satellite, Seoul's spy agency told lawmakers. "They shortened the launch period from the normal 20 days to just a few days," MP Yoo Sang-bum told reporters after a National Intelligence Service parliamentary briefing on Wednesday.

AFP



A J-16 fighter pilot from China flying in front of the nose of a US Air Force RC-135 aircraft over the South China Sea on May 26 (AFP)

Beijing blames US 'provocation' for South China Sea jet incident

Beijing, China - Beijing blamed US 'provocation' on Wednesday for an incident last week in which a Chinese plane crossed in front of an American surveillance aircraft over the South China Sea.

The incident comes at a time of frayed ties between Washington and Beijing over issues including Taiwan, which China regards as its territory, and the shooting down of an alleged Chinese spy balloon that flew over the United States this year.

"The United States' long-term and frequent sending of ships and planes to conduct close surveillance on China seriously harms China's national sovereignty and security," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said when asked about the latest incident.

"This kind of provocative, dangerous activity is the cause of the security issues on the seas," Mao said, calling on Washington to 'immediately stop this form of dangerous provocation'.

"China will continue to take all necessary steps to resolutely protect its own sovereignty and security," she said.

The US military said on Tuesday a Chinese fighter pilot had performed an 'unnecessarily aggressive manoeuvre' near an American surveillance aircraft operating over the South China Sea last week.

Video footage released by the US military shows a Chinese fighter plane crossing in front of the American aircraft, which can be seen shaking from the result-

ing turbulence.

The Chinese plane 'flew directly in front of and within 400 feet of the nose of the RC-135, forcing the US aircraft to fly through its wake turbulence' on Friday, the Indo-Pacific Command said in a statement.

"The RC-135 was conducting safe and routine operations over the South China Sea in international airspace, in accordance with international law," it said.

The Pentagon said the incident was part of a pattern of behaviour by China.

A senior US defence official said there has been an 'alarming increase in the number of risky aerial intercepts and confrontations at sea' by Chinese aircraft and ships - actions that 'have the potential to create an unsafe incident or miscalculation'.

The announcement of the latest incident came a day after the Pentagon said Beijing had refused a US invitation for Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin to meet his Chinese counterpart in Singapore this week. The senior US defence official said the timing of the announcement of the South China Sea incident was unrelated to China's refusal of the invitation, explaining that information 'was subject to the US military declassification process and US diplomatic communication process'.

Beijing said in response to reports of the Singapore cancellation that the United States was 'entirely responsible for the current difficulties in exchanges between the two militaries'.

AFP

INDIA

Minorities, Dalits feel attacked: RaGa

What is happening to Muslims in India today happened to Dalits in the 1980s, said Rahul Gandhi

San Francisco, US - Targeting the BJP-led government, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said, 'what is happening to Muslims in India today, happened to Dalits in the 1980s' and it has 'to be fought with affection'.

Speaking at the 'Mohabbat Ki Dukaan' event in San Francisco in the United States, Rahul Gandhi alleged that the impact of some actions of the BJP-led government was being felt by minorities and people from the Dalit and tribal community. "It is being felt by the Muslims most directly because it is done most directly to them. But in fact, it is done to all communities. The way you (Muslims) are feeling attacked, I can guarantee Sikhs, Christians, Dalits, and tribals are feeling the same. You can't cut hatred with hatred, but only with love and affection," Gandhi said.

"Also, this is a periodical thing. What is happening to Muslims in India today happened to Dalits in the 1980s. If you went to UP in the 1980s, this was happening with Dalits...We have to challenge it, fight it and do it with love and affection and not with hatred and we will do that," he added. The Congress leader was re-



Congress Party leader Rahul Gandhi being welcomed by the Indian diaspora during an event in San Francisco, California on Wednesday (ANI)

sponding to a question concerning Muslims in India from 'Bay Area Muslim community' and the steps Congress will take to tackle the issues faced by them. Rahul Gandhi is on a six-day visit to the United States to interact with the Indian diaspora and express the Congress party's 'commitment to democratic values in India and across

the world'. During the event, Rahul Gandhi also spoke about 'economic inequality' and said that while some people were finding it difficult to make ends meet, about 'five people have lakhs of crores' of rupees. The Congress leader talked about the caste census conducted during the Congress-led

UPA government, MNREGA and the NYAY (Nyuntam Aay Yojana) proposed by the Congress. "When we were in power, we had carried out the caste census. The idea was to take an X-Ray of society. Because without understanding the exact demographic and who is who, it is very difficult to distribute power effectively. We

have been asking the BJP to release the numbers of the caste census and they are of course not doing it. When we will come to power we will do that," he said. "We are committed to making India a fair place. We understand deeply that India today in terms of its treatment of Dalits, tribals, the poor and minorities

Rahul Gandhi insults India abroad, says I&B minister

New Delhi - Slamming Rahul Gandhi over his remarks in the United States, Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur on Wednesday accused him of 'insulting' the country and said the Congress leader is unable to digest praise of Prime Minister Narendra Modi from foreign leaders. "Rahul Gandhi always insults India during his foreign visits. PM Modi met almost 24 PMs and presidents of the world and held over 50 meetings during his foreign visit. Recently, the Australian PM said that 'PM Modi is the Boss', the PM of Italy said

that PM Modi is the most popular leader in the world and the prime minister of a country greeted him by touching his feet," he said. "Today, the world sees hope in the leadership of India. This never happened in 75 years. The fact is that because of our leader, the respect of 140 crore countrymen is increasing. Rahul Gandhi and the Congress party are unable to digest this," he added. Thakur said that Rahul Gandhi raises questions about India's progress when the country's stature is rising. ANI

Rajasthan rally: PM Modi lashes out at Congress

Ajmer, Rajasthan - Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday attacked Congress saying it had followed a policy of 'misguiding and depriving' the poor and noted that the nine years of BJP-led government have been dedicated to service to citizens and good governance. Addressing a public meeting here, PM Modi said India's achievements today were being praised across the world and alleged that people suffered before 2014 during the rule of Congress-led government. "Congress has cheated even the heroes. It is Congress that has been betraying our ex-servicemen in the name of 'One Rank One Pension'. The BJP government not only implemented 'One Rank One Pension' but also gave arrears to ex-servicemen," the prime minister said.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses a public meeting in Ajmer on Wednesday (ANI)

"Before 2014, people of the country were protesting against corruption, terrorist attacks used to take place, the Congress government was afraid to build roads on the border, there was a superpower above the PM and Congress government was functioning through remote control. However, you changed everything with your one vote in 2014. The entire world is talking about the devel-

opment of India now," he added. He alleged that the Congress policy has been to 'misguide the poor, make them suffer'. The rally in Ajmer district was the first major programme of BJP's campaign to reach out to people to mark nine years in the government at the Centre. Modi visited Pushkar Before coming to Ajmer. "In our scriptures, Lord Brahma has been called the creator of the universe. With Lord Brahma's blessings, an era of new creation is going on in India. BJP-led NDA government in the Centre has completed nine years. These nine years have been dedicated to service to citizens, good governance and the welfare of the poor," Modi said. This was his sixth programme in Rajasthan in the last eight months. ANI

ON A RAINY DAY IN DAL



People row boats in Dal Lake amid rainfall in Srinagar on Wednesday (AFP)

Pakistan's Khan in court as rights watchdog issues warning

Islamabad, Pakistan - Embattled Pakistan opposition leader Imran Khan returned to court on Wednesday, as the nation's human rights watchdog warned all sides are to blame in a rapidly deteriorating democratic crisis. Khan's brief arrest earlier this month sparked days of deadly unrest before Islamabad orchestrated a crackdown on his party, including mass arrests and a pledge to try some protesters in army courts. The Islamabad High Court and a specialist corruption court granted Khan bail on Wednesday in the same graft case which prompted his arrest on May 9, his lawyers said. Thousands, including grassroots supporters and key Khan aides, have been rounded up since the Supreme Court declared that detention illegal and allowed him to walk free.



A vehicle carrying Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan leaves from Islamabad High court on Wednesday, after Khan was granted bail in multiple cases (AFP)

Islamabad says the arrests are justified because it was targeted by anti-state terrorism, while Khan claims his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party is being quashed ahead of elections

Pakistan (HRCP), issued a stark warning to 'all political stakeholders'. "Unless they desist from any further measures that could imperil the country's fragile democracy, they may find themselves unable to steer the country safely through the multiple crises it is facing." Since he was ousted from office in a no-confidence vote last spring, Khan has waged an unprecedented campaign of defiance against Pakistan's powerful military establishment, which analysts say was behind his rise and fall from power. His arrest was widely seen as payback ordered by top brass after he repeated incendiary allegations that they plotted an assassination attempt against him. The HRCP said 'civilian supremacy has emerged as the greatest casualty' from the deepening political crisis, which

comes as Pakistan suffers from a flatlining economy and worsening security situation. 'The government's inability - or unwillingness - to safeguard civilian supremacy' and PTI's 'incessant humiliation of law... has led to making military interference in politics inevitable', Jilani said. Meanwhile on Wednesday, Human Rights Watch criticised Islamabad for agreeing to try 33 civilians in military courts for allegedly attacking army installations during the unrest. "Pakistan's military courts, which use secret procedures that deny due process rights, should not be used to prosecute civilians," said associate Asia director Patricia Gossman. As the clampdown on PTI continues, several senior figures have defected, leaving former cricket star Khan increasingly isolated. AFP

Body of German climber found in Himalayas

Kathmandu, Nepal - The body of German mountaineer Luis Stitzinger has been found on Kanchenjunga, expedition organisers said on Wednesday, days after he went missing during his descent from summit. A search team of five Nepali guides found Stitzinger's body just below the Himalayan peak at about 8,400 metres (27,600 feet) on Tuesday, Mingma Sherpa of Seven Summit Treks told AFP. The 54-year-old had reached the summit of the 8,586-metre-tall mountain on May 25 without supplemental oxygen but then lost contact. AFP

Jokic ready for crowning glory

Title-hungry Denver Nuggets face odds-defying Miami Heat in NBA final

Denver, United States - Nikola Jokic can cap an improbable journey to the pinnacle of his sport by leading the Denver Nuggets to a first ever championship when the NBA Finals get under way on Thursday.

Nine years ago, the softly spoken Serbian center barely caused a murmur of attention when the Nuggets chose him with the 41st overall pick in the draft. That selection was so low-key that it was not even broadcast live; instead, viewers watching the NBA draft were shown a commercial for a popular fast-food chain.

The consensus was that while Jokic had size coupled with respectable passing and shooting ability, the doughy youngster lacked the athleticism and speed to thrive in the world's toughest basketball league.

But over the course of the 28-year-old's rise to the very highest echelon of the NBA, those early scouting assessments have been

steadily shredded.

He won back-to-back NBA Most Valuable Player awards in 2021 and 2022, and this year only narrowly missed out on averaging a triple double over the course of the regular season, finishing with 11.8 rebounds, 9.8 as-

You are always off-balance when you are guarding a player like that (Jokic) because of his ability to score, rebound, shoot. He sees plays before they happen

LEBRON JAMES

sists and 24.5 assists per game.

"He's going to go down as one of the all-time great centers to ever touch a basketball," was Kevin Durant's verdict on Jokic after the Nuggets eliminated the Phoenix Suns in the second round of the playoffs.

LeBron James was similarly complimentary after the Nuggets swept the Los Angeles

Lakers in the Western Conference finals.

"There are certain guys in this league that play the game a certain way, a certain way that I like to play the game as well - and he's one of them," James said.

"You are always off-balance

the subject of sniping.

Some critics say his triple-double prowess is the result of "stat-padding," while others accuse him of lacking true star power.

"Jokic can win this championship and no one's going to care," former Washington Wizards player Gilbert Arenas said recently.

"Let's just be honest. I'm sorry. He's not going to go from where he is right now to this super megastar because he's not doing anything kids want to see," Arenas said.

"It's the players, their personality. You know Jokic is great, but he doesn't have IT."

Those kinds of criticisms leave Nuggets coach Michael Malone bemused.

Malone notes that Jokic's remarkable postseason - he has averaged 29.9 points, 13.3 rebounds and 10.3 assists in 15 games - ought to quash any debate about his skills.

"Have you seen any stat-padding out there?" Malone said. "I'm serious, enough of the silliness. The guy is a great player."

"Give him his damn respect. Stop chopping him down at the knees. He's a great player, and give him the respect he deserves."

Malone nevertheless admits that Jokic was a long way from being the finished article when he arrived in the NBA in 2014, recalling performances in the Las Vegas Summer League where he was "300 pounds, out of shape."

"No one - and if anybody tells you different, they're full of shit - no one ever could have seen that he'd be a two-time MVP," Malone said.

"That speaks to his dedication to his craft, getting in great shape and understanding that for him to fulfill his potential, he had to work harder, and he's done that."

AFP



Nikola Jokic

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GALATASARAY CHAMPIONS

Mauro Icardi brace seals 23rd Turkish title for Okan Buruk’s side



Galatasaray's Mauro Icardi (C) celebrates after scoring against MKE Ankaragucu in their Super Lig match in Ankara on Tuesday (AFP)

Istanbul, Turkey - Mauro Icardi scored twice as Galatasaray sealed the Turkish league title for a 23rd time with a 4-1 win at Ankaragucu on Tuesday.

The Istanbul club have 82 points with one game to play and cannot be caught by their great city rivals Fenerbahce, who have 77.

Galatasaray reclaim the title they last won in 2019, having slumped to a historic low of 13th last season.

Argentine striker Icardi, on loan from Paris Saint-Germain this season, has scored 21 goals with Uruguayan midfielder Lucas Torreira also influential as Galatasaray clinched a return to the Champions League.

Okan Buruk’s side will celebrate their title Sunday during a much-anticipated derby against Fenerbahce, who have not won the title since 2014.

The arrival of Icardi and Torreira last summer gave the club a massive boost.

They also acquired Belgian forward Dries Mertens, Portuguese midfielder Sergio Oliveira and Italian midfielder Nicolo Zaniolo.

AFP

London, United Kingdom - Manchester United forward Anthony Martial will miss Saturday’s FA Cup final against Manchester City due to a hamstring problem.

The Frenchman sustained the injury after coming off the bench against Fulham on Sunday in United’s final game of the Premier League season.

“Anthony Martial is out of Saturday’s FA Cup final against Manchester City due to injury,” United said in a statement Tuesday.

“The France international strained his hamstring towards the end of Sunday’s 2-1 win against Fulham at Old Trafford.

“Assessments have since revealed a muscle tear that rules the 27-year-old out of the Wembley showdown.”

Martial scored nine goals in 29 appearances for United this term but was restricted by a series of injuries.

Only 11 of his 21 league appearances have been in the starting line-up, but he had been hoping to be in contention to start at Wembley against City, who are bidding for a treble of Premier League, FA Cup and Champions League.

AFP



Anthony Martial

Man United’s Martial out of FA Cup final

The France international strained his hamstring in Sunday’s 2-1 win against Fulham



Ben Stokes (R) with England’s head coach Brendon McCullum

England’s Stokes optimistic about bowling in Ashes

London, United Kingdom - England captain Ben Stokes said on Wednesday he believes he has given himself the “best opportunity” to bowl against Australia in this season’s Ashes series.

The all-rounder has been managing a longstanding left knee problem which flared up during February’s tour of New Zealand.

Stokes’s recent stint in the lucrative Indian Premier League yielded just two appearances for the Chennai Super Kings, where the paceman bowled only one over for 18 runs.

But speaking on the eve of England’s Test against Ireland at Lord’s, the 31-year-old was optimistic he could feature with the ball again when the five-match Ashes contest starts on June 16.

“The knee is in much better place than it was in Wellington,” Stokes told reporters.

“I’ve been over in India for the IPL and these last eight or nine weeks I know I have got myself in a position where I can’t say I regret anything.

“I have got myself into a place where I feel like in a 2019, 2020 space in terms of my own body and fitness. I have definitely given myself the best opportunity (to bowl this summer).

“We know what it is (the problem) and now it is about managing it.”

Stokes was one of the standout performers the last time the Ashes were staged in England four years ago, his superb unbeaten century guiding the hosts to an incredible one-wicket win at Headingley during a series that ended 2-2.

Asked what the Ashes meant to him, he replied: “It is just the history and what the Ashes is. We’re lucky enough as English players and Australian players to be the only ones able to play in it.

“It is one of those series that has got unbelievable history and will continue to capture the imagination of the whole world.”

Dembele, Nkunku in France squad for Euro 2024 qualifiers

Paris, France - Barcelona’s Ousmane Dembele and RB Leipzig forward Christopher Nkunku are among the players recalled to the France squad named on Thursday by coach Didier Deschamps ahead of two Euro 2024 qualifiers in for June.

Fitness problems meant both players missed France’s opening qualifying matches in March, when they beat the Netherlands 4-0 at home and won 1-0 away to the Republic of Ireland.

They now go into a match against minnows Gibraltar in Faro, Portugal on June 16, and a home clash with Greece three days later, on top of qualifying Group B with six points.

“You will say I am very pragmatic, but the three points that are available against Gibraltar have the same value as those we took against the Netherlands or in Ireland,” Deschamps said.

“He was supposed to be in the squad for the World Cup but was ruled out by injury, but now he is back on top form,” added Deschamps of Nkunku, who scored four goals in the last five Bundesliga games of the season for his club as they finished third.

He is set to feature for Leipzig in this weekend’s German Cup final against Eintracht Frankfurt.

Chelsea centre-back Wesley Fofana is also in the squad and will hope to make his full France debut after withdrawing from the March list due to injury.

Real Madrid left-back Ferland Mendy was also handed a first call-up since before the World Cup, while injured Arsenal defender William Saliba is among the notable absentees.



Ousmane Dembele

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WHAT CONSTITUTES A GRAND SLAM CHAMPION?

Tsitsipas says lungs of a marathon runner, strength of Navy SEAL and power of footballer needed to win French Open

Paris, France - Stefanos Tsitsipas believes he'll need to have the mental and physical strength of an elite, battle-hardened special forces commando to break through to a maiden Grand Slam title.

The Greek world number five came agonisingly close to winning the French Open in 2021 when he surrendered a two-sets lead to lose in five to Novak Djokovic.

It's a memory which still haunts him, especially after losing to the Serbian superstar again in January in the final of the Australian Open.

"There are a few guys that can play good under pressure, especially in big, tight moments, and you have to have the mental strength of a Navy SEAL to pull it through," said Tsitsipas, hailing the crack US special forces unit.

Tsitsipas made the French Open last 32 for the fourth year in succession on Wednesday with a 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 6-2 victory over Spain's Roberto Carballes

Baena.

As well as making two Grand Slam finals, the 24-year-old has fallen at the semi-finals on four occasions -- twice to bitter rival Daniil Medvedev (2020 and 2021 Australian Open) and to Djokovic (2020 French Open) and Rafael Nadal (2019 Australian Open).

In his quest, he has resorted to consulting Rafael's Nadal autobiography because he "kind of shows you that anyone can do it".

"You have to have the physique of a marathon runner, the lungs of a marathon runner. You have to have the power of a football player," added Tsitsipas when asked what constitutes a Grand Slam champion.

"There are so many little components that you have to link up in order to make this unbelievable player where you allow yourself to be unstoppable."

Tsitsipas racked up his 50th Grand Slam win in the first round against Jiri Vesely while



Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas celebrates after a winning point against Spain's Roberto Carballes Baena during their second-round match at French Open on Wednesday (AFP)

Wednesday's victory against Carballes Baena was his 20th at Roland Garros.

"I get excited when I see personal records being kind of set and broken," he added.

Another of Tsitsipas's ambitions is to deliver a first Davis

tion.

The Tsitsipas brothers were beaten in the first round in Paris on Tuesday, losing in a final set tiebreak to Marcelo Arevalo and Jean-Julien Rojer.

"Trust me, it sucks. To be losing that with your brother, it

I'm doing this for my brother. I don't think I would have done this for anyone else. One of our own personal dreams is winning Davis Cup together, which is a beautiful thing

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS

Cup title to Greece.

However, he is his country's only player in the world's top 500 so if an unlikely triumph in the prestigious team event is ever to be secured, it would require Greece to have a reliable doubles pairing.

That's where his brother Petros, who is Greece's top-ranked doubles player, enters the equa-

sucks more than usually," said Stefanos.

"I'm doing this for my brother. I don't think I would have done this for anyone else. One of our own personal dreams is winning Davis Cup together. Doing that with your brother is probably the most beautiful thing you can witness on a tennis court."

AFP



Thiago Seyboth Wild

Medvedev backs Seyboth Wild for top 30

Paris, France - Daniil Medvedev backed 172nd-ranked Thiago Seyboth Wild to break the top 30 by the end of the year after suffering a shock French Open first round exit at the hands of the Brazilian on Tuesday.

As far as the mercurial Russian is concerned, he was just happy to turn his back on another roller-coaster clay court season.

"Every time it finishes I'm happy," said the world number two after losing to Seyboth Wild, who came through the qualifiers and had never previously won a Grand Slam match, 7-6 (7/5), 6-7 (6/8), 2-6, 6-3, 6-4.

It was Medvedev's fifth loss in the opening round at Roland Garros in seven appearances.

AFP

Invitation to attend the Chamber's Annual General Assembly Meeting

Pursuant to Article (18) of OCCI Law promulgated by Royal Decree No. (56/2022) on invitation of the assembly to ordinary meeting at least once per year,

OCCI Chairman has pleasure to invite the assembly members who paid the annual fees due for the assembly membership to attend the ordinary general meeting to be held at **5 pm, Sunday, 25 June 2023**, at OCCI's head office in Ruwi, to discuss the following agenda:

1. To discuss the annual report on OCCI's work, and the balance sheet of the last fiscal year as well as the auditor's report on the fiscal year ending 31 December 2022 and approve them.
2. To consider suggestions of the registered members which are presented to the board at least (15) fifteen days before its meeting.
3. T
4. In accordance with OCCI's law, registered members shall be represented in the general meeting as owner or authorized partner singly or authorized manager singly, in accordance with the commercial register data. Every member shall have one vote. No authorization or proxy may be granted in attendance of the assembly meeting or voting thereat.

Important note:

1. Members shall note that the first meeting shall be valid if attended by at least (200) two hundred registered members. In the event this quorum is not satisfied, the second meeting shall be held within (15) days after the date of the first meeting at 5:00 pm, on 6/7/2023 at the Chamber's headquarters in Ruwi and shall be valid, regardless of the number of attendees..
2. The annual report on OCCI's works is available in OCCI's head office and branches.
3. The auditor's report on the last fiscal year shall be provided before the meeting.
4. Please log in for attendance of the meeting via OCCI's website: www.omanchamber.om
5. Registration is also available in all OCCI branches in governorates.

OCCI Chairman



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'Totally crazy': Monfils hobbles to memorable French Open win

Paris, France - Gael Monfils overcame cramping and a four-game final set deficit to win his first match in nine months in a French Open late night blockbuster, dubbing himself "totally crazy".

The 36-year-old crowd-pleaser, who has slumped to 394 in the world rankings after battling a crippling foot injury, defeated Sebastian Baez of Argentina 3-6, 6-3, 7-5, 1-6, 7-5 in a first round tie which ended in the early moments of Wednesday morning.

A semi-finalist at Roland Garros back in 2008, Monfils came back from 0-4, 30-40 in the decider to stun an opponent 14 years his junior and ranked at 42.

"It's crazy. I talked to myself (after the fourth set), and I said, Don't you worry, I'll recover, and I'll beat him, I'll kill him during the fifth set," said Monfils.

"Think about this, I'm totally



Gael Monfils tries to return the ball to Argentina's Sebastian Baez (AFP)

crazy." Monfils could hardly walk in the final set as the intensity of the occasion sparked cramping in both legs.

His winning backhand brought the Court Philippe Chatrier crowd to its feet before a

sobbing Monfils collapsed onto the red clay surface.

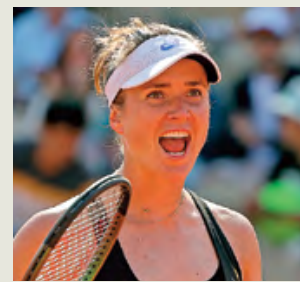
He saved 11 of the 20 break points he faced in a tie which stretched the best part of four hours.

AFP

Djokovic 'free' to express his opinions, says Svitolina

Paris, France - Ukrainian Elina Svitolina said on Wednesday that Novak Djokovic should be free to "say his opinion" after the Serb controversially wrote "Kosovo is the heart of Serbia" on a camera at the French Open. Svitolina, who has repeatedly spoken out over tennis' response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, believes players should be able to talk publicly about political issues.

Djokovic was criticised for his comments about recent clashes in Kosovo by French



Elina Svitolina

sports minister Amelie Oudea-Castera who said he "shouldn't get involved".

"We are living in the free world, so why not say your

opinion on something?," said Svitolina.

"I feel like if you stand for something, you think that this is the way, you should say. I mean, if you are with a friend sitting, talking, you're going to say your opinion, he is going to say his opinion. So why not?"

Thirty peacekeepers from a NATO-led force in Kosovo were injured in clashes with ethnic Serb demonstrators on Monday during protests about the installation of ethnic Albanian mayors in northern Kosovo.



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14

TRICKY TUMMY?
It's summertime and you need to go easy on your tummy with light meals



15

IN TOWN
Graduation of ABA Oman Intr'l School and Qurum Private School



16

ENTERTAINMENT
A peek into tinsel town in Hollywood and Bollywood



How green is your wadi?

Some wadis in Muscat are adorned with leafy boughs that serve many environmental purposes

Hubert Vaz

Look around the wadis that form a network across the length and breadth of the capital to take rain water to the Arabian Sea, one can find these home to a variety of entities - from elevated drain sumps and oases for driving instructors to camp as students practice 'drum tests', to feeding locales for pigeons and cricket pitches for weekend revelry.

The most fascinating aspect of some sections of these wadis in the capital, however, is the presence of trees/shrubs which make them come alive in green splendour and offer a pleasing sight for pedestrians as well as motorists. After all, the magic of leafy boughs, that invite birds, bees, and butterflies, is more welcome than the rugged stretches of sand and gravel.

According to a popular Indian botanist in Muscat, Dr Zulfikar Ali, who has been studying as well as imparting education on horticulture and environment issues, there are numerous indigenous plants, shrubs and trees found in and around many wadis which should not be removed as they have deep fibrous roots and serve many purposes

POPULAR PLANTS

Sun plants
Trailing gazamia
Bacopa

SHRUBS

Salt bush
Bougainvillea
Caesal Pimia (Barbados' pride)
Hibiscus rosa-sinensis

TREES

Prosopis (Indian almond)
Prosopis cineraria (Ghaf)
Thespesia (Tulip tree)
Albizia lebbek (Rain tree)
Azadiracta indica (Neem tree)
Tamarix aphylla (Athel)
Pithecellobium dulce (Manila tamarind)
Zizyphus spina-christi (Christ thorn tree)

like binding soil, preventing soil erosion, providing sweet smelling flowers and good quality nectar, as well as serving as food for gulf-dominant animals.

Some of the popular shrubs include salt bush, bougainvillea, Barbados' pride, hibiscus rosa-sinensis, while trees include Indian almond, tulip tree, thorn tree, Ghaf, rain trees which are salt and drought resistant. These trees spread their pods with winds and are easily cultivated to prevent soil erosion. Neem trees are also very popular as they stay green and fresh all through the year and can be grown where nothing else can be grown.

There are other varieties like Tamarix

aphylla which are salt, wind and drought resistant, zizyphus spina christi, that is native to the gulf and seen lining most wadis, and Manila tamarind which needs minimal water to grow.

"All the trees mentioned are indigenous trees, except neem, and should never be removed as, besides preventing soil erosion, they also help the economy," Dr Ali said, explaining that most of the flower bearing indigenous trees provide good quality nectar which is used for the production of honey - like prosopis honey, sumor honey - which facilitate production of world renowned honey in the gulf."

“All the trees are indigenous trees and should never be removed as, besides preventing soil erosion, they also help the economy

DR ZULFIKAR ALI

(Photos: V K Shafeer)



cook-up



Slow-cooker Bone Broth

Bone broth is full of healthy protein and collagen, making it a light and satisfying meal for nights when your stomach isn't up for something complex.

Ingredients

- 2 carrots - chopped, 2 celery stalks - chopped
- 1 medium onion - chopped, 2 cloves garlic
- 1kg beef or chicken bones
- Kosher salt, 2tbsp apple cider vinegar
- A pinch of black pepper

Method

Place the bones in a slow cooker. The bones should fill

up about 3/4 of the slow-cooker. Chop the vegetables and garlic, no need to peel. You can also add vegetable scraps into your slow-cooker. You'll be straining these out before consuming the broth. Fill the slow-cooker with water. Season with a generous amount of salt (as per taste) and a pinch of freshly crushed black pepper. Add 2tbsp of apple cider vinegar and cook on slow flame for 12-15 hours. (Pressure cooking is helpful but taste will not be the same.)

Strain the broth through cheesecloth or a strainer and cool. A good broth will usually have a layer of fat on the top, and will gelatinise when thoroughly cool. Remove the fat with a spoon and discard. Enjoy warm.

YUMMIES FOR Tricky Tummys



Quinoa Tabbouleh Salad

This 'Summer Bowl' combines nutty quinoa, juicy cherry tomatoes, cucumber, mint, parsley, and a garlicky lemon dressing. The healthy factor is that quinoa instead of bulgur makes it gluten free. Hence, this is naturally a vegan salad - it is also a nut-free, soy-free, and low-sugar salad.

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup quinoa - rinsed, 1 cup water
- 2 garlic cloves - minced, 2tbsp olive oil
- 2tbsp lemon juice, 8-10 mint leaves - chopped
- 2-3tbsp parsley - chopped, 2 green onions - diced small
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes - diced, 2 cucumbers - diced small
- Salt and black pepper, to taste

Method

Rinse quinoa under running water, add to a pot with 1 cup water and bring to a boil. Simmer on medium heat for 8-10 minutes, until quinoa sprouts, remove and spread on a tray to cool. To prepare the salad bowl, take a large serving bowl and add minced garlic, scallions, oil, lemon juice, and a pinch of salt and black pepper. Then add diced tomato, cucumber, mint, parsley and quinoa to it, and toss well to combine. Chill and serve.

Summertime tends to bring on sensitive stomachs for some who cannot handle spice well. So, conjuring up the right meal can be quite a task. Try these easy recipes that won't upset your gut and put your tummy at ease

Tummy healing Soup

This is a gluten-free and vegan tummy healing soup for one, full of anti-inflammatory and nourishing ingredients like turmeric, ginger, veggies, spices, and a bit of pasta to bring you all the love your body needs.

Ingredients

- 3 cups water
- 1 inch piece turmeric root - grated
- 1/2tsp ground ginger
- 1/4tsp Chinese 5 spice
- 1/4tsp minced garlic
- 1/4cup dried porcini mushrooms
- 1 heaping cup chopped broccoli rabe
- 1/2 cup gluten-free penne pasta
- 1tsp coconut aminos
- 1/2tsp toasted sesame seeds



Method

Pour 3 cups of water, turmeric, ginger, 5 spice, and garlic into a small pot. Bring it to a boil on the stove. Now add in the mushrooms, chopped broccoli rabe, and penne. Reduce heat to medium and cook for 5 minutes. Add the coconut aminos, stir, and pour into a large soup bowl. Top with sesame seeds, if desired.



Black-eyed Peas Curry

Loaded with ginger and garlic, known to aid the digestive system, besides fenugreek and asafoetida that also helps reduce stomach inflammations, this recipe is helpful to treat digestive issues, and its anti-septic, anti-inflammatory properties fight infections.

Ingredients

- 1 large yellow onion - diced
- 3-4 cloves garlic - minced
- 1 1/2 tablespoon fresh ginger - minced
- 1 1/2 cup dried black eyed peas - soaked overnight
- 6 cups vegetable stock
- 1/2tbsp ground turmeric
- 1tsp paprika, 1/2tsp cayenne pepper
- 1/2tsp ground coriander, 1/2tsp ground cardamom
- 1/2tsp fenugreek seeds, 1/4tsp asafoetida
- 400ml coconut milk
- Fresh cilantro - for garnish
- Cooked basmati - to serve

Method

Add all ingredients (except coconut, cilantro, and rice) to a large soup pot and bring to a boil. Turn heat down to medium and cover with a lid, cooking about 40 minutes, until black eyed peas are almost tender and liquid is mostly absorbed. Meanwhile, cook rice and set aside. Add coconut milk to soup pot, and continue cooking uncovered for about 10 minutes, until black eyed peas are tender. Adjust seasonings if necessary. Remove from heat and spoon into bowls. Garnish with cilantro and serve with steamed rice

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IN TOWN

ABA GRADUATION



The ABA Oman International School held its graduation ceremony for the batch of 2023 under the auspices of H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said



(Photos: VK Shafeer)

QPS graduation



Qurum Private School held its graduation ceremony for Kinder Garten students last week



(Photos: VK Shafeer)

BOGGLER

S	R	U	S
E	R	E	B
N	O	V	I
R	E	I	Y

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

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

Weird but True...or False?



Can you spot the difference between a fun fact and a made-up tidbit? Take this 'Weird But True...or False' quiz to find out, based on facts from National Geographic Kids magazine.

In England, black cats are considered bad luck - True or False?

False - Although black cats are considered symbols of bad luck in many places, they're actually considered good luck in England!

Interesting facts

Desert animals are tough - they have to be in order to survive in this extreme habitat. Discover some interesting facts about desert animals.

When food is scarce, desert-dwelling scorpions can live off just one insect a year. True or False?

Answer: True - The scorpion can slow down its metabolism (the process animals use to get energy from food) so much so that some species are able to live off of a single insect a year.

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Your family's history is the key to helping you deal with your family's future, so get in touch with some older relatives and ask them the questions that you need answers to. Their insight is all you need right now to get your clarity back so that you can make the right decisions. A lot of old experiences from your past with return to your life today.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

What someone is saying and what they really mean deep down in their heart are two different things today, and you know it. You're entering a very intuitive phase right now, where you can see the underlying meaning behind empty words. This is a very powerful position, but it's also dangerous.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

All the stimulation you've been adding to your life has been great, but the cost of those experiences is adding up to quite a total on your credit card statement! It's time to add some more bulk to your rapidly dwindling rainy day fund. Put together a budget that's a little bit painful. Force yourself to go without a few indulgences for a while.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Be careful how much you rely on your instincts today. Because they're based so much on emotions, and your emotions right now are rapidly fluctuating, they could be somewhat unreliable. Stick to the facts, and if they aren't leading you anywhere concrete, then hold off making any big decisions. Wait for another day when your head is clearer.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You've controlled your extravagant impulses very well, and you should be proud of yourself for how well you're sticking to your budget! It might be time to give yourself a little treat just to reward your efforts, but make sure it's little. Go up a size in your latte, pick up one of your favourite gourmet goodies, or buy some music from one of your favorite bands.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You might not like it, but living on a budget really can make a difference in your life right now! Besides helping you save money, it's a great way to organize your life and get better focus on your priorities. Spend some time sorting through how much you're spending and what you're spending it on.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

An unwanted voice could chime in on your plans today, but having your routine disrupted won't be annoying to you at all. It will be a blessing in disguise! They have a good point, and you should listen to their input even though you probably don't feel like it. Your ego is healthy enough to withstand this honest input.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

In a situation where you're typically uncomfortable, you'll be able to let yourself go and relax. This new clarity might not last long, so take advantage of it while it's here. Think about the next steps you want to take in a relationship. Is it time to push things forward? Weigh the pros and cons, and be prepared to arrive at an answer you don't like.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You're extra charming right now, but that might not be enough to move a certain relationship forward. Today, you're going to have to go in deep and let yourself be a little bit more vulnerable. Share a story with this person that's somewhat embarrassing. Show them that you trust them with the things that you wouldn't entrust to just anybody.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

If you think that a few problems at home have been affecting your work or school life, don't worry. They haven't been causing you nearly as much distraction as you fear. To further reduce the chances of getting distracted, you should relax and just not worry about it. You can't shut part of yourself down at certain times of the day anyway.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Today, all signs point to the fact that one of your relationships might be reaching a turning point. You need to see things as they really are and make that decision that you've been dreading. Is it time to let them go? Things aren't equitable between you two, and if they haven't made an effort to change, then the answer may be yes. Talk to them today and find out how they feel about things.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Today, you'll have much more fun just running along and living your life than you will analyzing every little word out of every person's mouth. It's not the right time to get all serious about your life. There are good things going on right now and less good things going on right now. Why don't you just focus on the good things for the next day or so and give your worries a rest?

entertainment

HINDI CRIME THRILLER STEALS 'BEST PIC' AT BOLLYWOOD AWARDS IN UAE



Crime thriller *Drishyam 2* was crowned best picture as Bollywood glossed over its recent struggles with a high-octane International Indian Film Academy Awards show in Abu Dhabi on Saturday.

Director Abhishek Pathak's gritty remake of a Malayalam film took the top honour at the end of a four-hour ceremony of pumping dance routines that showcased the Hindi-language movie industry.

Best director went to Ranganathan Madhavan for *Rocky: The Nambi Effect*. Hrithik Roshan won best actor for his role in *Vikram Vedha* and Alia Bhatt took best actress for *Gangubai Kathiawadi*.

PADMA LAKSHMI HAS 'HOPES' OF BEATING MARTHA STEWART

Padma Lakshmi hopes to become the oldest Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue model in history.

The 52-year-old model has revealed that she'd love to replace Martha Stewart in the record books after the 81-year-old TV star appeared on the cover of the 2023 Swimsuit Issue.

Asked if she'd like to surpass Martha's record, Padma Lakshmi told the *New York Post* newspaper's *Page Six Style* column: "I hope. I mean, listen, if I'm still doing covers like she is at 80 plus. I mean, God, more power to her. And she's always been someone I've admired, so why should this be any different?"



'Anatomy of a Fall' wins top prize as women dominate Cannes



A tense courtroom drama about a writer accused of her husband's murder took the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival on Saturday, capping a strong year for women filmmakers.

French director Justine Triet became only the third woman ever to win the festival's top prize with the icy tale *Anatomy of a Fall*, led by a riveting performance from German actress Sandra Hüller.

Triet used her acceptance speech to slam the government of President Emmanuel Macron for the 'shocking' way it imposed a law increasing the retirement age in France.

But, she said, she was 'deeply touched'.

"I am very pleased to be the third woman who has gotten this prize - things are truly changing and for the best," she told reporters.

CELINE DION CANCELS 2023-24 SHOWS OVER HEALTH

Pop icon Celine Dion on Friday cancelled all her remaining shows scheduled for 2023-2024, saying she was not strong enough to tour as she battles a rare neurological disorder.

Last year the 55-year-old Canadian singer revealed that she was suffering from a rare medical condition that was affecting her singing.

"I'm so sorry to disappoint all of you once again... and even though it breaks my heart, it's best that we cancel everything until I'm really ready to be back on stage," the *My Heart Will Go On* songstress tweeted.



DILJIT DOSANJH TO STAR IN NETFLIX MUSIC BIOPIC 'AMAR SINGH CHAMKILA'

Rising Indian musician and film star Diljit Dosanjh will play legendary Punjab singer Amar Singh Chamkila in a new biopic backed by Netflix. The streamer revealed the project Tuesday, along with a first teaser trailer, describing the film as a film presenting 'the untold true story of Punjab's original rockstar of the masses.'

Amar Singh Chamkila, as the film is titled, is directed by Hindi hitmaker Imtiaz Ali, who reunites on the project with acclaimed musician and composer A R Rahman, who will handle the film's score and soundtrack.

COMING SOON



ABOUT MY FATHER

The hottest comic in America, Sebastian Maniscalco joins forces with legendary Italian-American and two-time Oscar winner, Robert De Niro, in the new comedy *ABOUT MY FATHER*. The film centers around Sebastian (Maniscalco) who is encouraged by his fiancée (Leslie Bibb) to bring his immigrant, hairdresser father, Salvo (De Niro), to a weekend get-together with her super-rich and exceedingly eccentric family (Kim Cattrall, Anders Holm, Brett Dier, David Rasche).

Genre: Comedy

Starring: Robert De Niro, Sebastian Maniscalco, Kim Cattrall, Leslie Bibb **Language:** English

SEAN PENN DATES OLGA KOROTYAYEVA

Sean Penn may be making the moves on stunning actress Olga Korotayeva, as they were spotted on a dinner date in Malibu over the Memorial Day weekend. The Oscar winner, 62, rocked a classic suit and tie for the trip to the famed sushi spot *Nobu*, while Olga, 42, was picture-perfect in polk dots, as seen here via *DailyMail*. The romantic outing comes more than two years after Sean's divorce from Leila George, 31.



WHEN THE WATERS RISE



BOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW

2018 (MALAYALAM)

Genre: Drama **Starring:** Tovino Thomas, Kun-chacko Boban, Asif Ali

'2018: Everyone is a Hero' is a realistic, thought-provoking, and emotional movie that showcases the resilience of the people of Kerala in the face of calamity and resonates well with audiences, especially the Indian diaspora in

other countries.

The movie was said to be an emotional survival story, a story of triumph against all odds, but proved to be more than that. Those who witnessed the 'Kerala Floods of 2018' as well as those who kept abreast of the developments, identify well with its



pulse. A technically sound and thoughtfully crafted film, 2018, is a lucid cinematic experience that all Keralites will treasure.

The story starts in a village Aruvikkulam, where one meets a lot of people involved in petty quarrels. Among them is a youngster who left the Army with a fake medical certificate, played by Tovino.

We get to see their ordinary lives and later, in sharp contrast, how it gets overturned because of the flood. The absolute horror and the helplessness one feels when water goes up to the roof of their house is depicted well and director Jude Anthany

Joseph succeeds in doing justice to the sufferings of thousands.

While the first half was comparatively calm, in the second half, we see fishermen and their rescue efforts, the locals and the help they provided, the helicopter rescue operations, almost everything that we remember from the natural calamity.

The songs and background scores were not too jarring. Certain scenes deserved better treatment but, overall, the film did justice in depicting an unprecedented tragedy for the current generation.

Rating ★★★★★

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Vision of the City

Total Landscape
2,900,000 m²

Total Residents
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Total Land Area
14,800,000 m²

Central Park and Wadi
1,640,000 m²



Total Residential Unites **20** Thousan Breaths

| Attached Villas | Detached Villas | Semi-Detached Villas | Apartments



39 Schools

- 9 | Private Schools
- 30 | Public Schools
- 10 | High Schools
- 10 | Secondary Schools
- 10 | Primary schools



11 Healthcare Facilities

- 1 | Private Hospital
- 2 | CA health center (20,000 population)
- 6 | CB health center (10,000 population)
- 1 | Referral Hospital (1,200 Bed)
- 1 | Special Needs Rehabilitation & Elderly Care Centre People With



25 Mosques

- 23 | Prayer Rooms
- 1 | Mosque
- 1 | Grand Mosque

Integrated Neighbourhoods

19

Community Centres for Each Neighbourhood:

- | Shared sports facilities
- | Public Halls
- | A playground for team sports
- | Nursery / early education center
- | High School
- | Mosque
- | Car parking
- | Clinic
- | Prep school
- | Primary school

City Features

- | Accessible
- | Healthy
- | Compact
- | Affordable
- | Robust
- | A city for all
- | Efficient
- | Comfortable
- | Sustainable
- | Safe
- | Smart
- | Attractive

