

H M gives audience to Russian FM

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik granted an audience at Al Barakah Palace on Wednesday to Sergey Lavrov, Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation.

During the audience, the guest conveyed greetings and best wishes of President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people. He also lauded Oman's wisdom in dealing with various regional and international issues. He briefed His Majesty about the viewpoint of the Russian side on the current crisis with Ukraine.

His Majesty the Sultan expressed his appreciation for the visit of the Russian Foreign Minister. His Majesty asked him to convey His greetings and best wishes to President Putin.

On the crisis between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Ukraine, His Majesty the Sultan stressed the importance of adhering to international law and intensifying efforts to reach political and diplomatic solutions based on dialogue to preserve the countries' and peoples' independence, sovereignty and peaceful coexistence.

The audience was attended by Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, Morgunov Ilya, Ambassador of Russia to Oman, and members of the delegation accompanying the guest.

ONA



Oman's position on Russia-Ukraine strife 'balanced'

Muscat - H E Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, held a session of official talks with Sergey Lavrov, Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, on Wednesday.

The two sides reviewed the cooperation relations between the two countries, affirming the keenness of both sides on developing these in all spheres to serve joint interests.

H E Sayyid Badr said that Oman is following with great interest the situation in Ukraine and called on all parties to exercise restraint and resolve differences peacefully in order to avoid aggravation of the situation. "The sultanate supports all international efforts, especially the efforts of the United Nations, which aim to enhance security and stability in the region."

Lavrov described Oman's position on the Russian-Ukrainian strife as 'balanced', adding that he discussed with the Omani side the latest developments of Russian operations in Ukraine and their geopolitical dimension.

On the regional front, Lavrov spoke of Russia's deep belief in the importance of activating ne-

gotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis to reach a comprehensive solution for the historical issue. On the crisis in Syria, he said, "We appreciate the role of Oman in the Syrian issue. We believe that the time has come for Syria to return to the Arab League, and we believe that

We believe that the time has come for Syria to return to the Arab League, and we believe that Oman is able to contribute effectively to this matter

SERGEY LAVROV

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Bilateral relations

The two sides discussed furthering economic relations between the two countries and agreed on expanding a package of bilateral agreements.

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► NEWS BRIEF

OMAN TAKES PART IN GLOBAL COALITION MEET TO DEFEAT ISIS

Marrakesh, Morocco - Oman participated in a ministerial meeting of a global coalition to defeat ISIS, which was held in the Moroccan city of Marrakesh on Wednesday.

The meeting discussed ways of cooperation and coordination to face challenges in the African continent and combat the spread of terrorist organisations, especially the ISIS.

The sultanate's delegation was headed by H E Dr Saeed bin Muhammad al Barami, Oman's Ambassador to Morocco.

The meeting also reviewed the initiatives taken with regard to ensuring stability in areas previously affected by terrorist attacks and confronting the escalation of extremism.

The international coalition against ISIS consists of 84 countries and relevant international organisations and was established in September 2014 with the aim of eliminating ISIS.

Sayyid Bilarab to open Sultan Qaboos Corner at National Museum

Muscat - Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said will inaugurate a section on the Late Sultan Qaboos bin Said at the National Museum of Oman's Renaissance Age Hall on Thursday.

Salim Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, and chairman of the museum's Board of Trustees, has informed that the Sultan Qaboos Corner is a significant feature reflecting the turning point in Oman's modern history.

The edifice will portray the legacy of the late Sultan and present his achievements over the first five decades of the Renaissance, which laid solid foundations for a comprehensive development process, said Mahrouqi, noting that the country is now advancing with firm steps towards a brighter future under the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan.

In a statement to ONA, Mahrouqi added that after this



Sayyid Bilarab

induction, the ministry will organise makeshift exhibitions showcasing collections of the late Sultan in the governorates, with a view to associating the Renaissance with different traits of the late Sultan.

The exhibits will include gifts made to the Sultan by leaders of Arab and non-Arab states.

With the inauguration of the Sultan Qaboos Corner, the Renaissance Age Hall will celebrate Oman's modern history and the epochs of progress and prosperity that the country has witnessed since 1970.

High risk world will breach 1.5°C warming within 5 years: UN

Geneva, Switzerland - There is a 50:50 chance of the average global temperature reaching 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels in the next five years, and the likelihood is increasing with time, according to a new report by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), published on Tuesday in Geneva.

The *Global Annual to Decadal Climate Update* also reveals a 93 per cent likelihood of at least one year between 2022 to 2026 becoming the warmest on record, knocking 2016 from the top spot.

The chance of the five-year average for this period being higher than the last five years, 2017-2021, is also 93 per cent.

The 1.5°C target is the goal of the Paris Agreement, which calls for countries to take concerted climate action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to limit global warming.

Probability rising

"This study shows - with a high level of scientific skill - that we are getting measurably closer to



There's a 93 per cent likelihood of at least one year between 2022 to 2026 becoming the warmest on record, knocking 2016 from the top spot

temporarily reaching the lower target of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change," said Petteri Taalas, WMO's secretary-general.

"The 1.5°C figure is not some random statistic, but rather an indicator of the point at which climate impacts will become increasingly harmful for people and indeed the entire planet."

The chance of temporarily exceeding the 1.5°C threshold has risen steadily since 2015, according to the report, which was produced by the UK Met Office, the WMO lead centre for climate up-

date predictions.

Back then, it was close to zero, but the probability increased to ten per cent over the past five years, and to nearly 50 per cent for the period from 2022-2026.

Edging ever closer

The Paris Agreement level of 1.5°C refers to long-term warming, but temporary exceedances are expected to occur with increasing frequency as global temperatures rise.

"A single year of exceedance above 1.5°C does not mean we

have breached the iconic threshold of the Paris Agreement, but it does reveal that we are edging ever closer to a situation where 1.5°C could be exceeded for an extended period," said Leon Hermanson of Britain's Met Office national weather service, who led the report. The average global temperature in 2021 was around 1.11°C above pre-industrial levels, according to provisional WMO figures.

The report said that back-to-back La Nina events at the start and end of 2021 had a cooling effect on global temperatures.

However, this was only temporary and did not reverse the long-term global warming trend.

Greenhouse gas link

The annual mean global near-surface temperature for each year between 2022 and 2026 is predicted to be between 1.1°C and 1.7°C higher than pre-industrial levels. "For as long as we continue to emit greenhouse gases, temperatures will continue to rise," Taalas said.

Muscat Municipality to set up Golden Jubilee Walk in Seeb

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In its efforts to develop the Governorate of Muscat and create recreational facilities for citizens and residents, Muscat Municipality will start Phase 1 of a project called Golden Jubilee Walk in Seeb.

Spread over 84,400sqm, the project will be developed in the middle of the wilayat close to already vibrant areas of Mawaleh, Al Hail and Al Khoudh. The project includes recreational ele-



ments, areas for picnics and physical activities, a bicycle path, and various other services.

Providing a natural environment for outdoor activities, the project will have 38,250sqm of green spaces.

A statement issued by Muscat Municipality said, 'The municipality will start work on the first phase of the Golden Jubilee Walk project in Seeb mid-2022 and complete it in April 2023.'

'The project aims to develop modern outlets that serve the community, enhance physical

health, and activate social and economic aspects of the community.'

The civic body added that the project will help spread the culture of sports, stimulate commercial activities and provide a place to hold exhibitions and recreational events.

Golden Jubilee Walk includes a 1,972m pedestrian walkway, a 1,972m long and 3m wide bicycle path, two sites equipped with equipment for physical sports, two children's play areas, and 140 car park spaces.

03

Oman to host prestigious FIAP Biennial in October

FIA appoints Omani as safety officer for World Rally Championship

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An Omani motorsports enthusiast has been appointed safety officer for the International Automobile Federation (FIA) World Rally Championship in Greece to be held in September 2022.

Rashid Faqir al Balushi, director of Motorcycle Learning Centre, has supervised several races organised by FIA in the region as safety officer.

The FIA chose Balushi in recognition of his expertise and knowledge of the sport.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Balushi said, "FIA had chosen me as safety officer for the third round of the Middle East Championship at the Kuwait International Rally held from March 17 to 20.



(Supplied photo)

"I supervised all safety requirements at the Kuwait International Rally according to the regulations of FIA. I have been a supervisor of races in several countries, including Qatar, Lebanon and Jordan, besides Oman."

Describing his responsibilities, Balushi said safety officers monitor all aspects related to the safety of participants, including availability of ambulance, fire-fighting equipment and competitors' commitment to safety and security during the race.

Strict adherence to safety conditions of FIA are very important, so only the most experienced, knowledgeable and confident people are chosen for the work

RASHID AL BALUSHI

"Strict adherence to safety conditions of FIA are very important, so only the most experienced, knowledgeable and confident people are chosen for the work. I proved my worth in this work through participation in many rallies."

SAYYID FAHD MEETS RUSSIAN FOREIGN MINISTER



H H Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, received Sergey Lavrov, Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, on Wednesday. The two sides reviewed bilateral relations and ways of enhancing cooperation between the two countries. Their talks included international efforts exerted to settle various issues to serve the interests of all parties. The Russian Foreign Minister underscored the importance of his visit, affirming his country's appreciation for Oman's foreign policy. The meeting was attended by H E Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, and H E Ilya Morgunov, Ambassador of Russia to Oman (ONA)

EA fights mesquite menace in Dhofar, documents wild trees in Dakhliyah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environment Authority (EA) has launched a campaign in Dhofar governorate to combat harmful mesquite trees.

A statement issued by EA said, 'The authority, in cooperation with the Port of Salalah, carried out a campaign to remove mesquite trees from several khors (lagoons) in Dhofar.

'The campaign aims to get rid of mesquite trees in ways that limit their spread.'

Mesquite trees threaten indigenous flora by competing for water and soil nutrients. Leaves of mesquite shrubs and trees



(Supplied photo)

contain a toxic substance, and the thorns cause serious injury to human beings. According to EA,

mesquite pollen has been identified as a respiratory allergen, and consumption of the pods by ani-

mals leads to teeth decay. The shrubs and trees also affect soil salinity.

Meanwhile, the Environment Department in Dakhliyah has started implementing a project to document perennial wild trees in the governorate.

The project aims to identify the types of perennial trees in the governorate.

The project will also help educate community members and visitors about the importance of preserving perennial wild trees and the role these play in the local ecology. The authority will install number plates on trees in order to protect them and monitor their existence.



Oman's 'balanced' position on Russia-Ukraine strife

Continued from Page 01

These include the mutual exemption of visas for citizens of the two countries, and a cooperation agreement between the Russian Museum and the National Museum of Oman.

"We seek to strengthen trade cooperation between Oman and the Russian Federation in order to raise the volume of exchange

to meet the aspirations of both sides," said Lavrov.

Additionally, H E Sayyid Badr affirmed Oman's commitment to the existing agreements with the OPEC Plus group.

The two underlined the importance of dialogue and cooperation for diplomatic solutions for various issues, as well as supporting all efforts that aim at

maintaining regional and international security, stability and peace.

The session was attended by Khalid Hashel al Musalhi, Head of the Minister's Office Department, several officials of the Foreign Ministry, H E Morgunov Ilya, Russian Ambassador to Oman, and members of the delegation accompanying the guest.



Royal Oman Police

Directorate of Public Relations & Security Information

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Royal Oman Police - General Administration of Customs - announces the establishment of an electronic auction through the Bayan system for the sale of various goods on Tuesday, May 24, 2022 AD, provided that the inspection will take place at Sohar Industrial Port during official working hours on Sunday and Monday, corresponding to May 22-23, 2022 AD, according to the following requirements :

- The person wishing to bid must be registered in the Bayan system.
- A guarantee of five riyals is collected for the participant in the auction (non-refundable).
- The goods shall not be delivered to the one who is awarded the bid until after the restrictions are paid and the customs declaration is completed (payment of taxes and fees and the provision of permits for the restricted goods).
- The General Administration of Customs shall not bear any damage to the goods after the end of the sale.
- The successful bidder must review the Customs Department of Sohar Port to receive the goods during the period from May 25 to June 2, 2022 AD, bearing in mind that a fine for delaying after this period will be calculated.

Wheat harvest continues in Dhofar: MAFWR



(Supplied photo)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has confirmed that the wheat harvest continues in Dhofar governorate.

In a statement, MAFWR said,

'The ministry continues to harvest wheat in the Najd farms in the wilayat of Thumrait in Dhofar.'

The ministry also confirmed that a project to expand the cultivation and production of improved varieties of Omani wheat is continuing in various gover-

norates.

Meanwhile, as part of its efforts to achieve self-sufficiency in agricultural crops and support local farmers, the ministry has signed a memorandum of cooperation with Oman Flour Mills. As per the pact, Oman Flour Mills buys wheat from Omani farmers

at a rate of RO500 per tonne.

In April, Oman Flour Mills received the first batch of Omani wheat - about 830 tonnes - harvested this season by 44 farmers at the company's factory in Muttrah. The flour produced from this will be available in the market soon.

WEATHER WATCH			PRAYER TIMINGS	
	Max	Min		
Abu Dhabi	36	24	Fajr	4.04am
Doha	36	26	Sunrise	5.27am
Kuwait City	37	25	Duhr	12.08pm
Manama	33	25	Asr	3.32pm
Muscat	40	28	Maghrib	6.45pm
Riyadh	38	22	Isha	8.03pm

Mwasalat ferried over 100,00 passengers during Eid holidays

Muscat - Mwasalat ferried over 100,00 passengers during the recently concluded Eid al Fitr holidays from Sunday, May 1 to Thursday, May 5 via its bus and ferry services on various routes

and internal lines.

In a statement it said, 'This is the highest turnout for the use of public transport services during a holiday period in the last two years.'

Oman to host FIAP Biennial in October



(Mohammed al Shaaili/Supplied photo)

Muscat - Oman will host the 35th FIAP Black and White Biennial - Oman 2022 from October 24 to 31 in Muscat. Oman will be the first Middle Eastern country to host this prestigious international event.

A meeting was held to discuss this between H E Said Sultan al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Culture in the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and Riccardo Busi, president of Board of Directors of the International Federation of Photo-

graphic Art (FIAP), in Muscat on Tuesday.

The idea of hosting the global event comes from the cultural strategy launched by the ministry at the end of 2021, which emphasises the importance of 'cultural communication' with the aim of investing, introducing and promoting the cultural diversity of Oman. This is in addition to achieving partnership and integration of local and international institutions in cultural fields.

'The event will enhance Oman's role as a world-leading cultural destination. The biennial also emphasises the pioneering role played by Oman in promoting the art of photography,' said H E Busaidi.

As many as 180 international photographers representing over 60 countries will participate in the event. Participants will also visit a number of governorates where they will take a close look at Oman's cultural and tourist attractions.

On his part, Busi said that Oman has a rich history and inspiring geographical diversity for photographers to explore. The event, he added, will be special due to the fact that it is the first of a kind since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to FIAP, biennials have a very particular characteristic, different from the international contests. 'It is not only the quality of the individual work that counts, but FIAP asks for coherent collections.'



AQAR launches Rimal 2

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Spread over 40,000sqm with three-level underground parking, Al Khonji Real Estate and Development (AQAR) launched its Rimal 2 project at Grand Millennium Hotel on Wednesday.

Among the leading property developers in the sultanate, AQAR's new project is an extension of Rimal 1 located in Bausher. Ownership in the project is open to all nationalities. Rimal 2 offers 148 residential units, with prices starting from RO35,000.

The launch event at Grand Millennium Hotel included signing of a memorandum of cooperation with Bank Nizwa to finance the bank's customers who are interested in owning residential units in Rimal 2.

Speaking at the event, Mohammed al Khonji, chairman and CEO of AQAR, said, "The real estate market still demands integrated housing complexes with

unique specifications. This is the most appropriate time to buy residential units and Rimal 2 offers the best living experience." He informed that the project is expected to take three years to complete. However, 35 per cent of the project was sold in an offer during Phase 1. "The great de-

This is the most appropriate time to buy residential units and Rimal 2 offers the best living experience

MOHAMMED AL KHONJI

mand Rimal 1 received and its success motivated us to start Rimal 2 where units were sold within two weeks of launch."

Rimal 2 includes residential units of different sizes - one- and two-bedroom apartments (70sqm to 215sqm), with maid's room and office. Some apart-

ments come with small swimming pools.

A commercial mall built in Rimal 2 will be interconnected with the commercial mall of Rimal 1. The first level of the project's electronic three-level underground parking is for the mall, while level two and second are for residents. Other facilities include a children's play area, dedicated barbecue area, and gym for men and women.

Speaking at the launch, Arif al Zaabi, AGM - retail banking at Bank Nizwa, said, "We have designed our real estate financing solutions to meet the varying requirements of our growing customer base. Retail customers are interested in utilising our easy and flexible Shariah-compliant real estate financing solutions."

AQAR's payment schedule is ten per cent advance within 30 days, ten per cent within 12 months, and 80 per cent at handover of property to customers financed by Bank Nizwa or any other local bank.

ASMED calls on SMEs to register for its on-the-job training programme

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) has launched its second on-the-job training initiative for nationals.

A statement issued by ASMED said, 'The authority launched the initiative for nationals and urges owners of

SMEs to register for the on-the-job training programme.

'The initiative aims to employ jobseekers by enhancing their competitive capabilities in accordance with specific requirements. It targets all owners of SMEs and jobseekers registered with the Ministry of Labour and those nominated by SMEs which they deem fit for training.'



The Ministry of Labour will bear the cost of the monthly training. In the first year, 100 per cent of the grant will be paid. A Bachelor's degree graduate will receive RO500 per month, a diploma graduate RO400 per month, and General Education Diploma graduate RO300 per month. In the second year, 50 per cent of the training cost will be paid by the ministry.

ASMED called on SMEs to register for the initiative through the following link: <https://eqp.datamining.om/es-tebyanar/ilixykhkiz20220404172150>

The total number of Omanis employed during the first quarter of this year was 10,017. Of these, 4,126 were employed in the government sector and 5,891 in the private sector.

'With this, 29 per cent of the total jobs targeted in 2022 has been achieved,' MoL stated.

According to figures released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information, the total number of SMEs registered with ASMED till the end of March 2022 was 73,741, an increase of 2.22 per cent compared to the same period of 2021.

JOB VACANCIES



Aligned with the national recruitment campaign of the Oman Investment Authority and its subsidiaries and in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, Oman Electricity Transmission Company is pleased to announce a number of job opportunities as per the following details:-

Job Title	Job Code
1. Performance Engineer	IRC15598
2. Asset Information Engineer	IRC15599
3. Telecommunication Engineer	IRC15602
4. Asset Performance Engineer	IRC15603
5. Control Shift Engineer	IRC15638
6. Energy Management System (EMS) Engineer	IRC15618
7. Network Operation Application Support Engineer	IRC15619
8. SCADA Hardware Engineer	IRC15620
9. Protection and Metering Engineer - Dhofar	IRC15639

Interested candidates may apply for this post through www.omangrid.com/vacancies by not later than 21 May 2022.

Please attach the following when applying:

- CV
- University Degree
- Transcript

Note: only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.



Oman Electricity Transmission Company S.A.O.C.
MUSCAT-Mawaleh
Way No.2153, Building No.4230, Square No.321
Tel: +93268155
Website: www.omangrid.com



وظائف شاغرة



ضمن حملة التوظيف الوطنية لجهاز الاستثمار العماني والشركات التابعة له وبالتنسيق مع وزارة العمل. يسر الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء الإعلان عن عدد من الفرص الوظيفية وذلك حسب التفاصيل المذكورة

رمز الوظيفة	الوظائف
IRC15598	١- مهندس أداء الشبكة
IRC15599	٢- مهندس معلومات الأصول
IRC15602	٣- مهندس اتصالات
IRC15603	٤- مهندس أداء الأصول
IRC15638	٥- مهندس مناوبة تحكم
IRC15618	٦- مهندس نظم إدارة الطاقة
IRC15619	٧- مهندس دعم تطبيقات الشبكة التشغيلية
IRC15620	٨- مهندس أجهزة سكاذا
IRC15639	٩- مهندس حماية وعدادات - ظفار

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هاتف: ٩٣٢ ٦٨١٥٥
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MARKET WATCH

MSX30	4,159.31
Sensex	54,088.39

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

Indian Rs	200.72
Pakistani Rs	494.39
Bangladesh taka	225.14
Philippines peso	135.52
Sri Lankan Rs	934.55

*Rates as on MAY 11

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

UN seeks donors to stop Yemen oil spill

The United Nations and the Netherlands are holding a donors' conference to raise millions of dollars to stop an ageing oil tanker unleashing a potentially catastrophic oil spill off the coast of Yemen. The 45-year-old FSO Safer, long used as a floating storage platform and now abandoned off the rebel-held Yemeni port of Hodeida with 1.1mn barrels of crude, was in "imminent" danger of breaking up, the UN warned on Monday. The UN says it is seeking pledges of nearly US\$80mn to transfer the oil from the "rapidly decaying" tanker – but that it would be far less than the colossal US\$20bn it would cost to clean up a spill in the Red Sea.

Oman and India aim to boost bilateral trade, investment

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Qais al Yousef, Oman's Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), attended the 10th Oman-India Joint Commission Meeting on Wednesday in New Delhi, holding discussions with Piyush Goyal, India's Minister of Commerce and Industry and Raj Kumar Singh, India's Minister of Power and New and Renewable Energy. With the goal of forging a new business agenda to help drive growth for both Oman and India, the highly productive meeting took place on the second day of a five-day trade and investment mission to India, one of the world's fastest growing economies and a country which Oman has historic cultural and commercial ties. Accompanied by senior management from Oman Investment Authority, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones and Madayn, H E Yousef will hold high-level talks with senior management from Tata Steel, Hitachi, HCL, the Federation of



H E Qais al Yousef (left) and Piyush Goyal participated in 10th Oman-India Joint Commission Meeting in New Delhi on Wednesday

Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry and NITI Aayog, the government of India's leading policy think tank. Noting his satisfaction with the outcomes of Wednesday's 10th Oman-India Joint Commission Meeting, H E Yousef said, "Today's session underlined the fact that this is a partnership that can boost exports and investment as well as deliver growth, jobs and opportunities for our

2021. This uptick shows the great faith Indian companies have in Oman. A remarkable achievement that has been made possible thanks to the opportunities opened up by Oman Vision 2040, which, while future-focused is already having a positive impact on attracting investment into Oman and our economy in general," H E Yousef said. Cutting red tape is MoCIIP's Invest Easy one-stop shop for investors, issuing licenses from ten leading authorities and approvals for more than 1,500 economic activities in one single e-transaction. Since the launch of the ministry's new service in April 2021, over 196,000 licenses have been issued, 23,000 of which to foreign investors, a year-on-year rise of 305 per cent. Commenting on Oman's US\$1.2bn non-oil exports to India in 2021, a jump of 172 per cent on the previous year, H E Yousef said, "This is a remarkable achievement given the serious disruptions we have seen to business during the pandemic and is testament to the hard work and dedication of manufacturers the length and breadth of Oman."

Renewable energy to grow to new record in 2022: IEA

Paris, France – The world will set a new record for renewable power capacity this year led by solar energy in China and Europe, but growth could lose steam in 2023, the International Energy Agency said Wednesday. A record 295 gigawatts of new renewable power capacity was added in 2021 despite supply chain bottlenecks, construction delays and high prices of raw materials, the IEA said in a report. An additional 320 gigawatts is expected to be installed this year, equivalent to the entire electricity demand of Germany or the European Union's total electricity generation from natural gas. Solar energy will account for 60 per cent of renewable power growth in 2022, ahead of wind and hydropower, according to the agency, which advises developed nations on energy policy. "The additional renewables capacity commissioned for 2022 and 2023 has the potential to significantly reduce the European Union's dependence on Russian gas in the power sector," the IEA said. "However, the actual contribution will depend on the success of parallel energy efficiency measures to keep the region's energy demand in check." The EU set a goal of slashing its heavy reliance on Russian natural gas by two thirds this year following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. "Energy market developments in recent months – especially in Europe – have proven once again the essential role of renewables in improving energy security, in addition to their well-established effectiveness at reducing emissions," IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol said in a statement. He urged governments to cut red tape, accelerate the deliveries of permits and provide the right incentives for a faster deployment of renewables. The IEA warned that, based on current policies, "renewable power's global growth is set to lose momentum next year."

US inflation slowed to 8.3% in April

Washington, US - US consumer price inflation slowed slightly last month, jumping 8.3 per cent compared to April 2021, according to government data released Wednesday. The annual increase in the consumer price index (CPI) peaked in March at 8.5 per cent but slowed last month amid a drop in energy costs, the Labor Department reported. Gasoline fell 6.1 per cent in April compared to March after the 18.3 per cent surge in the previous month. Still, prices continued to rise last month for a range of goods, including housing, groceries, airline fares and new vehicles, and annual inflation remains at its highest rate since early 1982. CPI rose just 0.3 per cent compared to March, after the 1.2 per cent surge in the prior month, but excluding volatile food and energy goods, the index increased 0.6 per cent – double the rate in March, the report said. Food at home jumped 10.8 per cent over the last 12 months – the largest annual increase since November 1980, according to the report. The index for meat, poultry, fish and eggs surged 14.3 per cent in the biggest gain since May 1979. Even with the decline in gasoline, energy costs have surged 30.3 per cent over the past 12 months, with gasoline up 43.6 per cent compared to a year ago. AFP

Ministry of Energy, instOG launch mining programme

Muscat – Oman Institute for Oil & Gas (instOG) and the Ministry of Energy and Minerals on Wednesday launched the Mining Development Program, a training scheme that provides a 360° view of the mining industry. The programme aims to provide participants with a solid foundation in the mining industry, through a short induction programme followed by several technical modules. It is designed to target the current workforce working in the government authorities and mining companies in Oman, according to a press release. The programme was officially launched on Wednesday under the patronage of H E Salem bin Nasser al Aufi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, and in the presence of a number of heads of companies in the sector and the director general of Oman Institute for Oil & Gas. Naser al Siyabi, general manager of instOG said, "It is a great pleasure to welcome you to this inauguration ceremony of Mining Development Program. At instOG, we aim to contribute to the human capital development of the promising mining sector through integration in the provision of high-level training programmes."

H E Salem bin Nasser al Aufi

CMA hosts board meeting of Union of Arab Securities Authorities

Muscat – The Union of Arab Securities Authorities (UASA) board held its 16th meeting in Muscat on Wednesday to discuss a spectrum of topics, including developing capital markets, facing systemic risks and supporting liquidity and financial sustainability. The event also covered cyber risks, fraud risks, financial technology, investor education and awareness and financial inclusion. The meeting, which was hosted by the Capital Market Authority (CMA), came within the framework of the efforts exerted by member states to enhance cooperation and to upgrade the legislative and regulatory level of Arab stock markets in order to achieve justice, efficiency and transparency. It aimed to unify efforts to reach effective levels of control over transactions in the markets, as well as to highlight a mechanism for facing challenges and changes in the regional and international arenas. The UASA board also discussed the annual report of the union for 2021 and the most important achievements that were achieved during the first year of the strategic plan 2021-2025. The board also reviewed the report of the auditors and the final audited accounts of the union for the fiscal year 2021. A growth was recorded in 2021 and it reflects the indicators of global markets. The data issued by the World Federation of Exchanges indicate that the international financial markets have achieved significant increases in the total market value by reaching US\$124.6tn, compared to US\$106tn in 2020, constituting a rise by 16.7 per cent. In terms of Arab financial markets, the market value went up at the end of 2021 compared to its 2020 level, reaching about US\$3.6tn, comprising an increase by 16.1 per cent. ONA

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Sri Lanka economy on brink of collapse as troops quell unrest

Colombo, Sri Lanka – Sri Lanka's economy will "collapse" unless a new government is urgently appointed, the central bank chief warned Wednesday, as security forces fanned out on the streets to restore order after spasms of mob violence.

Police say nine people have died since Monday, when frustration at a dire economic crisis erupted into clashes between backers and opponents of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, injuring more than 200.

Opposition parties have refused Rajapaksa's overtures for a unity government to resolve a political deadlock and instead demanded his resignation.

Central Bank Governor Nandanal Weerasinghe said it was critical that a new administration take charge by Friday or the country would suffer a catastrophe. "The economy will completely collapse and no one will be able to save it," he told reporters.

"The country was fast going down a slope when I took over just over a month ago. I thought we were able to apply the brakes, but with events of Monday the brakes no longer work."

Shortly after taking over as the bank's chief in April, Weerasinghe announced a default on Sri Lanka's US\$51bn external debt, saying the country had no money to pay its creditors.

He said political stability was vital to implement the reforms needed to address Sri Lanka's snowballing debt crisis and the



Anti-government demonstrators take part in a protest near the President's office in Colombo on Tuesday (AFP)

acute shortage of foreign exchange to import essentials.

Security forces have largely curbed public disorder after they were deployed to enforce a nationwide curfew with orders to "shoot on sight" anyone engaged in looting or violence.

"If the situation is not brought under control, there could be total anarchy," a senior security official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The capital Colombo was almost deserted on Wednesday aside from soldiers manning checkpoints, near the charred remains of buses that had been set

alight by anti-government crowds.

A small crowd continued to defy the curfew near the president's seafront office, where a protest camp has for the past month maintained a vigil calling on him to step down.

"We want the whole Rajapaksa clan out because they are so, so corrupt. They have been eating into Sri Lanka like a caterpillar eating into some fruit," activist Kaushalya Fernando told AFP.

Turning point

Sri Lankans have been suffering

shortages of essential goods, fuel and medicines for months in the island's worst economic downturn since independence in 1948.

The crisis moved into a darker phase on Monday when government supporters with sticks and clubs attacked demonstrators who had been protesting peacefully for weeks demanding the president's resignation.

Mobs then retaliated across the country, torching dozens of homes of ruling-party politicians.

Mahinda Rajapaksa had to be rescued in a pre-dawn military operation on Tuesday and taken to a naval dockyard for safety

after protesters tried to storm his official residence.

With vital tourism revenues torpedoed by the pandemic, Sri Lanka last month defaulted on its foreign debt, some of it stemming from Rajapaksa vanity projects built with Chinese loans.

The International Monetary Fund this week began a "virtual mission" of staff-level talks on a possible bailout.

IMF mission chief Masahiro Nozaki said the lender aimed to be "fully prepared for policy discussions once a new government has been formed".

AFP



Ukraine says Russia halts gas supplies at key transit point

Kyiv, Ukraine – Ukraine on Wednesday said Russia had halted gas supplies through a key transit hub in the east of the country, fuelling fears Moscow's invasion could worsen an energy crisis in Europe.

Ukraine pipeline operator GTSOU said in a statement that Russian state energy giant Gazprom had "stopped supplying gas" to the key Sokhranivka transit point.

The claim came as GTSOU announced late Tuesday it was suspending flows through Sokhranivka citing interference by Russia's invading army.

Also on Tuesday, Ukraine state energy company Naftogaz said it told Gazprom it was no longer responsible for transit of gas through territory occupied by Russian forces, volumes it said accounted for one-third of the total transiting Ukraine to Europe.

Kyiv's announcement has fuelled fears that Russia's invasion of its pro-Western neighbour could further push up prices at a time when they are already soaring, with Germany

saying it was monitoring the situation "closely".

"Gazprom turned off the tap" to Sokhranivka, GTSOU said on Wednesday.

The company also said Russia had redirected gas intended for transit through Ukraine to the breakaway republics held by pro-Russian separatists in the east. GTSOU had promised to temporarily reroute all supplies via another crossing point in the north, Sudzha, to "fulfil its transit obligations to European partners in full".

Svitlana Zalishchuk, a top advisor at Ukraine state energy company Naftogaz, told AFP Russia had increased volumes through Sudzha by 15 per cent but warned it was "not enough" to compensate for the drop though Sokhranivka.

Figures released by GTSOU on Wednesday showed flows through Sokhranivka had dropped to zero.

It said the amount of gas transiting Ukraine via these routes on Wednesday could fall by 18 per cent, or 16mn cubic metres, compared to Tuesday. AFP

ECB signals first rate hike as soon as July

Frankfurt, Germany – European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde hinted Wednesday at a first interest rate hike in July to tackle soaring inflation, echoing the actions of other major central banks and heralding the end of the eurozone's cheap money era.

The ECB should end its bond-buying stimulus "early in the third quarter" and could raise interest rates "only a few weeks" later, Lagarde said in a speech in the Slovenian capital Ljubljana.

The comment is the clearest sign yet from Lagarde that the ECB is ready to move on rates sooner rather than later, as the institution trails rate hikes made by the US Federal Reserve and others to tame global inflation.

Any hike would be the ECB's first in over a decade and would lift rates from their current historically low levels.

These include a minus 0.5 deposit rate which effectively charges banks to park their excess cash at the ECB overnight.



Inflation in the eurozone climbed to 7.5 per cent in April, an all-time high for the currency club and well above the ECB's own two-per cent target.

The surge, driven in no small part by steep increases in prices for energy due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, has strengthened calls for the ECB to follow its peers towards hikes.

ECB policymakers will decide their course of action in upcoming

June 9 and July 21 meetings, with the July date now seen as the most likely opportunity for a rate announcement.

At its last meeting in April, the ECB's governing council resolved to end its vast monthly bond purchases "in the third quarter".

Over recent years, the scheme has hoovered up billions of euros in government and corporate bonds each month to stoke economic growth and keep

credit flowing in the 19-nation currency club.

The ECB should draw a line under it "early" in the third quarter, which starts in July, Lagarde specified on Wednesday.

Ending net purchases under the programme would open the door to an interest rate rise that could follow "only a few weeks" after, she said.

After the initial move the process of monetary policy "normalisation", taking interest rates out of negative territory, would be "gradual".

"To sum up Lagarde's speech: first rate hike on July 21," Carsten Brzeski, head of macro at ING bank, said on Twitter.

Decisions by the Fed and the Bank of England to raise rates aggressively to counter inflation have added to the pressure on the ECB to act.

German central bank president Joachim Nagel said Tuesday he "will advocate a first step normalising ECB interest rates in

July".

The call made by the head of the traditionally conservative Bundesbank has been echoed by other members of the governing council.

On Wednesday, the head of the French central bank Francois Villeroy de Galhau also said the ECB would "progressively raise rates from the summer" to steer inflation towards the ECB's two-per cent target.

The central bank is set to ratchet up interest rates at a delicate moment for the economy.

The war in Ukraine has both pushed up prices and added to supply chain disruptions, putting further strain on households and businesses.

In response to the invasion, the European Union has sought to reduce its reliance on Russian energy imports and is in discussions over an embargo of Russian oil that would add to the economic stress.

AFP

China's inflation picks up in April in virus flare-up

Beijing, China – China's consumer inflation rose at its quickest pace in nearly half a year, official data showed Wednesday, reflecting the growing costs of the country's zero-Covid curbs and high commodity prices.

The damage from Beijing's strict zero-COVID strategy has been increasingly reflected in economic data, as lockdowns in key cities such as Shanghai snarled supply chains and pushed up transportation prices.

April's consumer price index (CPI), a key gauge of retail inflation, rose more than expected at 2.1 per cent on-year, picking up from levels seen the month before, said the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

This was due to "factors like the domestic epidemic and continued rise in international commodity prices," the bureau's senior statistician Dong Lijuan said in a statement.

Since April, China's biggest city Shanghai had been almost entirely sealed off.

Most of its 25mn residents have been confined to their homes, while goods piled up at its port as authorities rush to stamp out the worst COVID resurgence since the early days of the pandemic.

Dong said that "due to the rise in logistics costs during the pandemic and increase in demand for stockpiling," prices of potatoes, eggs and fresh fruits ticked up.

The latest figures also showed that after four consecutive months of contraction, food prices overall rose for the first time on-year in April.

Meanwhile, the producer price index (PPI) – which gauges the cost of goods at the factory gate – came in at 8.0 per cent, higher than expected but down slightly from in March. AFP

Toyota posts record \$22bn full year profit, forecasts caution

Tokyo, Japan – Toyota on Wednesday posted a record full-year net profit helped by strong sales and a cheaper yen, but issued cautious forecasts as the pandemic and the war in Ukraine disrupt supply chains.

The Japanese auto giant, which kept its crown as the world's top-selling carmaker in 2021, reported a net profit of 2.85tn yen (US\$22bn), up 26.9 per cent from the previous year.

But for the current year to March 2023, it said it expects to post an annual net profit of 2.26tn yen (US\$17.3bn), citing ongoing uncertainties.

Toyota said its robust results

were due in part to beneficial foreign exchange rates, with a cheaper yen helping inflate profits from sales abroad.

It also cited cost reduction efforts and stronger sales helped by marketing efforts.

In the year to March 2022, operating profit surged 36.3 per cent year-on-year to three trillion yen, as sales increased 15.3 per cent to 31.4tn yen – also a record.

Toyota's strong sales came despite the firm being forced to repeatedly adjust production targets because of supply chain issues ranging from the semiconductor shortage to pan-



demic-linked factory closures.

On Tuesday, it said it was suspending production at eight domestic plants for six days due to the impact of China's tough COVID measures – particularly in economic engine Shanghai,

which has been under lockdown since April.

The closure forced Toyota to lower its global production target in May by 50,000 units to 700,000 vehicles, the latest in a string of revisions. Operations

were also hit by an earthquake in Japan and a cyberattack on a Toyota supplier.

The firm set a production target for the current fiscal year of 9.7mn units, after meeting a revised target of 8.5mn units for

the year to March 2022.

"This fiscal year it's going to be even more difficult than other years to make a forecast," said chief communications officer Jun Nagata.

"Overall recovery from COVID-19 is going to be a big positive factor," he said, but "raw material prices are soaring and the inflation in various areas will have an impact on the daily lives of people."

"And then there is the Ukrainian factor, that is causing a lot of concerns in many areas," he added, noting continuing constraints also with the supply of chips and other parts.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is the most unpredictable factor for now, said Masayuki Kubota, chief strategist of Rakuten Securities.

"The chip shortage and the impact of COVID are issues that have been there for a while and drag on, but the more serious problem is Russia," he told AFP.

"It is not clear how the Russia situation will turn out," so companies are likely to issue conservative full-year forecasts, he added. In March, Toyota said it would suspend operations at its only factory in Russia and stop shipping vehicles to the country. AFP



Genesis makes strong inroads

Global luxury automotive brand Genesis continues to make strong inroads into the Omani market with its distinctive lineup of superbly crafted sedans, SUVs and sports coupes.

Exemplifying motoring luxury, the brand enjoys an emotional connection with a new generation of customers charmed by its innovative design and engineer-

ing, a press release said.

All four models in the Genesis portfolio - G70, G80, GV70 and GV80 - have been well-received in Oman. Defined by their symbolic 'Two Lines' theme, they incorporate Genesis' 'Athletic Elegance' design philosophy, espousing a perfect balance between two opposing characteristics - athleticism and

elegance. Inside the cabin, the 'Beauty of White Space' philosophy is evident in the harmony of personal space and state-of-the-art technology.

Not surprisingly, the Genesis brand has garnered an array of international awards over the past years for design excellence, quality and safety. At the world-renowned iF Design Award 2022

competition held in Seoul in April, Genesis won four coveted honours - three for Product Design and one for Interior Architecture.

The awards, organised by German-based International Forum Design GmbH, were a testament to the passion, dedication and creative collaboration of the brand's design team.

Safety is also synonymous with the brand, as attested by the growing number of awards conferred upon Genesis in recent years. Most notably, the California-based Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) announced in February this year that all 2022 model year Genesis vehicles have been designated as Top Safety Pick for 2022.

Align Technology expands regional footprint in Oman

Align Technology, a leading global medical device company that designs, manufactures, and sells the Invisalign system of clear aligners, iTero intraoral scanners, and exocad CAD/CAM software for digital orthodontics and restorative dentistry, has reinforced its commitment to the Middle East region with the announcement of launching direct operations in the Oman market.

With the aim of increasing access to digitally advanced technology that brings the latest advances in digital dentistry, Align Technology's presence in Oman will further bolster its regional presence, ensuring access to a broader range of dental practitioners across the region, and helping to treat more pa-



Agnello Maura

tients, a press release said.

Angelo Maura, general manager Middle East and Africa at Align Technology, said, "We are extremely proud to be launching our suite of digital products in the Oman market. This market expansion is a testament to our commitment in bringing the best-in-class technology to our doctors right across the Middle East."

Communications landscape in GCC in for a change

Credo Communications has announced its regional and international launch opening offices in Abu Dhabi (HQ), Dubai, Bahrain, and the UK, with affiliates in KSA, Egypt, Eastern Europe, and China.

Credo is a full-service communication, marketing and digital agency formed by experienced professionals with an industry background, or having held senior roles in global PR networks, brought together under the guidance and leadership of Emirati Chairman, Samer al Haira, a press release said.

The agency will use insightful local knowledge and the latest

global thinking to give regional firms and organisations genuine business advantage, with a focus on new and developing channels, which target a new generation of users.

Haira commented, "As a buyer of marketing and communication services across the region I was aware that overseas companies want to advise, but do not fully understand the UAE or GCC, which restricts what they can deliver. There are some great companies, but they are headquartered in New York, London, or elsewhere. At Credo, we are from the region, for the region."

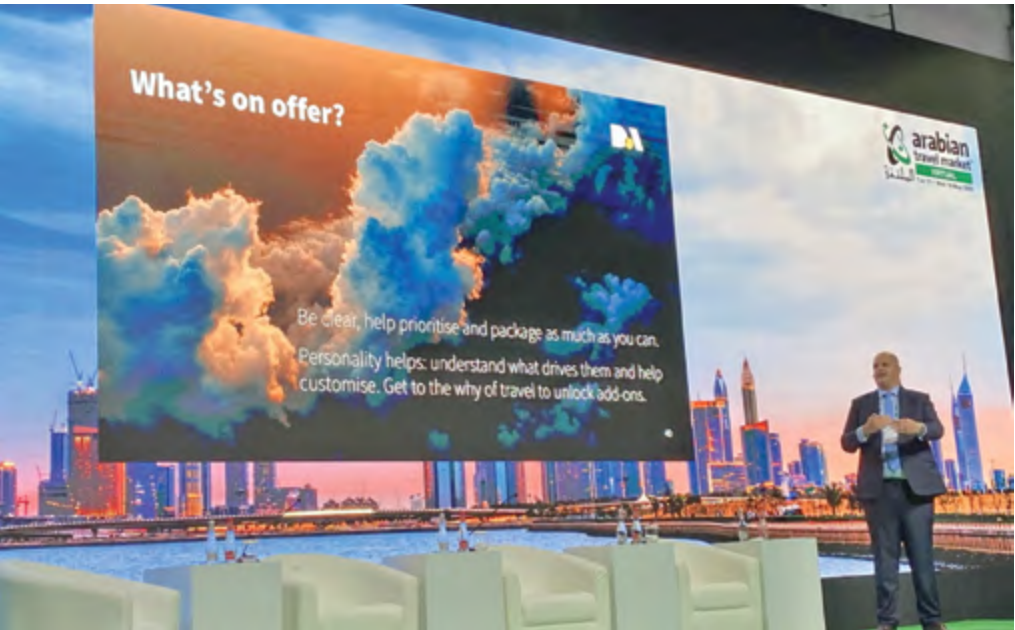
GCC travellers plan for new travel experiences

GCC travellers are looking to make up for lost time when it comes to travel, with the anticipation of new experiences dominating conversations, according to research revealed yesterday at the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2022 by leading consumer intelligence company D/A.

The research is based on the analysis of over four million social media posts and comments from more than two million Arabic-speaking unique users in the GCC.

The number of travel conversations and posts about travel increased by 110% and 151%, respectively, between 2019 and 2021, a press release said.

Speaking on the ATM Global Stage on May 10, Paul Kelly, Managing Partner, D/A, said,



"Travel conversations increased to over 1.3 million in 2021, underscoring the willingness by Arabic

speakers in the GCC to travel, regardless of age or nationality. We are ultimately witnessing the

pent-up demand from the last two years coming to the fore as borders reopen, flights are back

on track and restrictions are lifted."

GCC travellers have a vital role in tourism recovery, a direct result of their spending power. According to the UNWTO, GCC travellers spend 6.5 times more than the global average, with 40% of GCC travellers spending more than AED36,700 on their last trip to Europe.

Travellers from Saudi Arabia are reportedly the highest travel spenders globally.

"Overall, when it comes to the GCC traveller, the conversations indicate that something new is the order of the moment. Even in the familiar, a new experience is at the top of the wish list for those intent on travelling soon - a huge change from what we have seen in the past year or two," Kelly added.

ROHM to stage 'The Pipe Organ Concert' with ROSO

The Royal Opera House Muscat is delighted to announce a very special concert marking another historic moment in the 10th anniversary season of the Royal Opera House Muscat - *The Pipe Organ Concert*, featuring the Munchner Knabenchor and the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra (ROSO) on May 14.

A landmark opera house across the region and a beacon for the arts on a global scale, the opera house is home to one of the most unique pipe organs in the world. This awe-inspiring instrument is featured in an annual



concert each season, drawing the world's greatest organists to

perform, a press release said.

In 2022, the concert takes on

added significance as the concert will premiere the new composi-

tion by esteemed Italian composer Marcus Tutino. *'The Dreaming Lion'* has been written especially for the ROHM pipe organ and the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra. This two-part concert also presents the international organist, Hansjorg Albrecht, alongside the children of Munchner Knabenchor, besides Omani organist Rashid Salim al Rashidy. *The Pipe Organ Concert* provides a stage not just for the immense expression of world class music but also a creative collaboration spanning the world.



Huawei highlights commitment to technological advances

Leaders and experts from the telecommunications industry came together at this year's SAMENA Council Leaders' Summit hosted by Huawei for the ninth consecutive year.

The annual gathering was held under the theme of 'Thriving with Resilience & Integration in the New Opportunity Realm' and focused on the new business opportunities that 5G and allied technologies provide for all industries and economic sectors.

This year, Huawei shed light on the role of 5G, cloud and digital power in tackling the sustainability needs of the telecom industry and how an integrated intelligent ICT architecture will light up the future. Through its 'Everything as a Service' model, Huawei highlighted the cloud's integral role in enabling the digital economy and data sovereignty. The summit also focused on the opportunities gained by

integrating technologies, infrastructure investment, connectivity, and spectrum availability, which will benefit vertical industries and economic sectors.

Steven Yi, president of Huawei Middle East, highlighted the crucial role of 5G in driving digital transformation across the region and the immense opportunities for enterprises in the 5G era. "Digital renaissance triggered by the pandemic has pivoted digital transformation to new heights, with 5G era infrastructure and communications technologies taking centerstage. A strong drive for digital transformation is taking place worldwide, and Huawei is committed to bring the ingenious new technologies that will enrich people's lives with immersive digital services and enabling new opportunities in the industry's digital transformation with smart digital solutions." Yi noted.

Global leaders meet at World Utilities Congress

Held under the patronage of Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, Member of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council and Chairman of Abu Dhabi Executive Office, the first edition of the World Utilities Congress convened global leaders and industry exports from the utilities sector for a second day in Abu Dhabi.

The World Utilities Congress offers an unrivalled opportunity for the global power and water industry to converge and discuss trends and explore technologies and innovations influencing future power and water demand, and is hosted by Abu Dhabi National Energy Company (TAQA) and organised by dmg events, a press release said.

With the aim to support the mandate to address the acceleration to a sustainable future for the world's power and water



supply, the Strategic Conference programme has reflected the issues that CEOs and their leadership teams need to consider, as they modernise utilities to manage disruptive change and embed future-focused digital transformation strategies in response to evolving market and customer needs.

Day two's conference highlight was the ministerial session titled 'Balancing decarbonisation

and energy security' which was a key session that brought together global leaders to gain deeper insights into different decarbonisation pathways. Speakers included HRH Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman al Saud, Minister of Energy, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Suhail Mohamed al Mazrouei, Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, United Arab Emirates.

During the session, Prince

Abdulaziz said, "The energy sector is suffering holistically from so many things, such as running out of capacity at all levels, be it upstream, downstream, in manufacturing, and supply chains.

This causes disruptions in the supply chain, which is a phenomena that affects other sectors."

Ensuring the sustainability of the energy system and the sustainability of worldwide econ-

omy is of great concern.

In developing sustainable answers to the calling of future, these answers must be focused on three components - security supply, economic prosperity, and economic growth.

We are driving sustainability in a world that is seeking environmental solutions, solutions that can deliver a cost effective and efficient energy system, which enables us to achieve our environmental cause."

Prince Abdulaziz added, "The world needs to work collectively, responsibly and comprehensively providing us with strategy for the world's economy.

Two things need our focus: supply chain issues and services issues, including energy.

This is fundamentally why we are here today and it is the most profound two topics that we need to focus on."

SBA offers attractive EMI on Nissan Altima

Nissan Oman from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) has announced a low EMI on Nissan Altima. Customers can now avail an exceptionally low EMI rate of RO120.

The Altima starting EMI is calculated on the price of the SV variant with 20% down payment, and 2.75% as rate of interest for a 10-year loan tenure through Bank Muscat, a press release said. Nissan Altima is cherished by owners in Oman for its good looks, striking exterior, colour range, spaciousness and fashionable interior have brought the car a lifetime of fans.

As part of the special scheme, customers of Nissan Altima can also avail free periodic vehicle service package, free insurance, assured gift voucher, and free registration. The offer, which is available on models purchased for personal use, will go on till May 19. Vehicles purchased with commercial registration will not be eligible for the scheme. Vehicles bought for taxi, driving school, ministries, fleet and rent-a-car usage will not be eligible for this scheme.



A senior official of Nissan Oman said, "We are delighted to offer low EMI on a model that offers effortless power while furthering remarkable fuel economy. Nissan Altima is a model known for its excellent drive, superior handling, and thoughtful technology solutions. Its good looks, striking exterior, colour range, spaciousness and fashionable interior have brought the car a lifetime of fans. Its powerful high-performance engine and a range of other options adds to its appeal."

All customers purchasing Nissan Altima during this scheme period will be eligible for free periodic maintenance service package for three years/60,000km (whichever is earlier), limited to six services only. This offer includes only the service intervals of 10,000km. All customers buying Nissan Altima during this scheme will be eligible for Value Added Service (VAS) gift vouchers up to RO100. Vouchers can be redeemed for purchase of any value-added service products, services contracts and parts at SBA service centres.

Jashanmal opens first retail store in Oman

Jashanmal, carrying its 100 year legacy of trust and quality, has announced the opening of its first department store in Oman, bringing some of the world's best brands under one roof.

The newly opened Jashanmal Department Store, located at level 3 of the renowned community shopping complex - Mall of Oman in Muscat, offers a remarkable shopping experience for consumers. It is a spacious shop of 4200 square feet, housing a wide variety of products in home appliances, luggage, cookware, porcelain dinnerware, and home fragrances, offering a consumer-friendly ambience at this venue.

Shuja Jashanmal, Group Chief Officer, said, "We established our trading company in Oman - Jashanmal Oman - in the mid-1990s and are regional distributors for many beauty, lifestyle, luggage, and appliances brands."

"We have already been physically present in Oman with a sales force and a small management team to supply and service the local retailers like hypermarkets, electronics stores, local retail stores and chains."

There is a demand for the quality brands and products that one finds in Jashanmal stores, which significantly enhances the quality of life for consumers.

Jashanmal is retailing many leading, bestselling brands in home appliances, like De Longhi, Kenwood, Nespresso, Blendtec, Jura, Hoover, Bertazzoni, and Porche Design, Victorinox, Piquadro, Echolac, and Kipling for travel luggage and accessories. For kitchen brands, it retails Fissler, Le Creuset, Silampos, Berghoff, Dankotuwa, Ozlem Tuna, Regent and Porland. The store also carries leading home fragrance brands like Dr Vranjes, Locheber Milano, Teatro Firenze among several others.

Shuja added, "We see ourselves as regional retailers in the GCC countries, and Oman had to be a part of our footprint. Omanis who visit the UAE, Bahrain, or Kuwait recognise us well and are our customers for a long time. We have become seasoned retailers and market leaders."

ISG student scales summits of success

Akshaj Udaiwal, a class two student of Indian School Ghubra ISG has successfully scaled the summits of two mountain peaks - Mount Nangakarshang (5077m above sea level) on April 28 and Mount Everest Base Camp (5364m above sea level) on April 30 under the watchful supervision of Lt Colonel Romil Barthwal (Retd.).

The seven year old's dream run began as a mere four year old when he accompanied his mother, Anuradha Udaiwal, on her hiking expeditions in the mountains of Oman. Little Akshaj claims mountain climbing comes naturally to him and he feels a deep sense of exhilaration as he fearlessly explores the natural terrains of the Indian subcontinent, a press release said.

Colonel Pradeep Bist identified Akshaj's unique ability and trained him in honing his mountaineering skills. In December 2021, Akshaj created a record of sorts by scaling the Chandrashila summit in Uttarakhand which is 4000m above sea level. This feat earned him a place in The India Book of Records wherein he was conferred with an Honour of Appreciation.

"The school is truly proud of Akshaj's stupendous achievement and wishes him luck in his future endeavours," said Papri Ghosh, ISG principal. "Akshaj Udaiwal is an inspiration for youngsters his age who dream of creating a niche for themselves."



Shangri-La to celebrate World Family Day

Shangri-La announces its debut partnership with Make-A-Wish International in view of the upcoming World Family Day on May 15.

Celebrating the importance of family, special offerings across select hotels in the Middle East, Europe, India, the Indian Ocean, and Canada will be created to raise vital funds for the inspiring work the foundation does for children and families around the world. Shangri-La will also work closely with Make-A-Wish International to support the granting of wishes for children with critical illnesses across hotels, where the sky is the limit.

A wish has the ability to transform the lives of children and their families during some of the most difficult times, giving a sense of hope and escapism when needed most. Through partnering with Make-A-Wish International, Shangri-La invites guests to make a difference with their travels by supporting this essential cause to help children experience the power of imagination and the strength it brings.

This World Family Day sees the launch of a special collaboration with Make-A-Wish International, involving three campaigns that will run across the next 12 months. Beginning with the summer launch campaign, from June 2022 select hotels will offer specially created 'Afternoon Teas', restaurant experiences, dedicated 'Make-A-Wish Come True' stay packages, and more to raise funds for Make-A-Wish International.

Following the summer, and paying homage to Shangri-La's Asian heritage, a toy will be created for the Mid-Autumn Lunar Festival with 100% of the proceeds given to Make-A-Wish International. The collaboration then moves on to the festive season, where a variety of exciting offerings will be created to celebrate the best time of the year.



Averda, the leading end-to-end waste management, treatment and recycling company in emerging markets has announced the appointment of Niteese Lenton as its Chief Financial Officer (CFO).

Niteese brings with her a wealth of relevant experience and knowledge with over 20 years' financial management experience in the automotive and logistics sectors. She has been finance director for Ford Motor Company Middle East & Africa, and more recently, served as deputy Group CFO at Tristar Transport, an integrated energy logistics company based in Dubai, where she was responsible for the management of the finance team.

Niteese will be responsible for strengthening the finance function and supporting the strong pipeline of business development opportunities that exist across the markets in which Averda operates. She will also help manage deployment of the US\$45mn investment loan recently secured from the US. International Development Finance Corporation for the construction and development of new recycling facilities, as well as providing additional operational working capital.

Averda appoints Niteese Lenton as CFO

Tomorrowland to open magical desert destination in Dubai

Tomorrowland, one of the most iconic music festivals in the world, is set to open Terra Solis, a brand-new unique desert destination in Dubai.

Nestled between the Arabian dunes and inspired by the most beautiful star constellations, Terra Solis will open in September in Dubailand, Al Yufra, welcoming people from around the globe to a magical oasis of relaxation in the Arabian desert. Guests will be encouraged to celebrate life by the pool during the day and stargaze into their dreams at night.

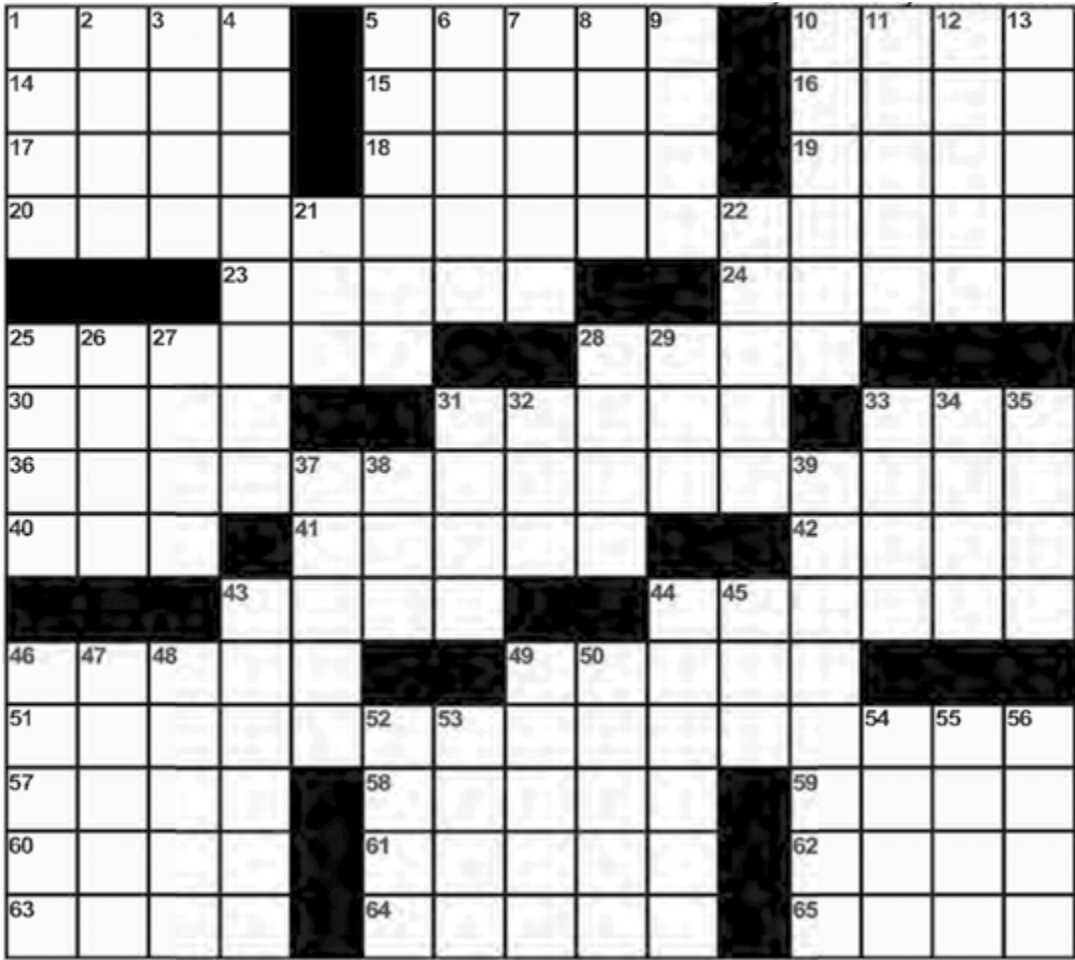
Featuring a collection of three stunning accommodation options, all named after stars, meteor showers and constellations, the stunning Polaris bell tents, the marvelous Perseid lodges, and the spectacular Orion pool lodges will provide a unique stay in the Arabian dunes. Guests will also have access to a picturesque swimming pool at the heart of the destination, some of the most iconic Tomorrowland elements, a restaurant, a bar and a shisha lounge.

Nicolas Vandenabeele, founder and CEO, Terra Solis, said, "Terra Solis is a one-of-a-kind desert destination away from all the noise. It is inspired by the magic of Tomorrowland and the most beautiful star constellations, where you can wake up from a night under the stars and live to the rhythm of the sun. Guests will have the opportunity to immerse themselves in a memorable world of wonder with the finest music, a vibrant yet relaxing pool scene, incredible tastes and aromas and a unique glamping experience in the Arabian dunes while relaxing in style under the Dubai sun."

Spread over 371,000sqm Terra Solis combines outstanding music and entertainment, a fun party atmosphere, and an exceptional food and beverage offering in one refreshing, energising destination where guests are encouraged to explore the sweeping desert landscapes.



DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Rough file
5) Cold shower?
10) Very excited
14) Way, way off
15) Classic John Wayne film
16) "Ain't gonna happen"
17) "Frasier" actress Gilpin
18) "Encore!"
19) "Hold_ your hat!"
20) Stung a second time
23) Make president
24) Battery projection
25) Barroom fights
28) It's historic?
30) Exercise for the flexible
31) Organic fertilizer
33) Object stared at in disbelief
36) Certain condiment
40) Chapter in a history book
41) Count of jazz
42) Paste alternative
43) Legend's cousin
44) Fine wool
46) Book of many places
49) Crooner Sam

51) Container ship, e.g.
57) "Swan Lake" costume
58) Taper off, as wind
59) Kind of palm
60) Advil target
61) Aficionado
62) Units of work
63) Casting need
64) Looks of wickedness
65) Backtalk

DOWN

1) Wholly absorbed
2) Not many
3) Wrapped Indian garment
4) Bargain hunter's accomplishment
5) Tends to stubble
6) Mr. Spock's forte
7) Make new laws
8) Cut a scene
9) "Beloved" author Morrison
10) Consecrate with oil
11) Muppet with a hooked nose
12) Didn't take part (with "out")
13) Rock containing crystals

21) Building addition, sometimes
22) Type of jar
25) Computer info quantity
26) Laugh like a lion?
27) Taj Mahal location
28) Cover ground?
29) Singer DiFranco
31) "Gee whillikers!"
32) Prefix with "cycle" or "sex"
33) Jamaican fruit
34) Roman satyr
35) Popular cookie
37) Bottomless pit
38) Gangster's rapid-firer
39) Ways out
43) Former Panamanian leader Noriega
44) Workers with vans
45) _ out a living
46) Essence of roses
47) Event that buries hatchets
48) Carpenter's rotating device
49) Yearn for
50) Playful aquatic mammal

52) Gloomy atmosphere
53) Slender woodwind
54) Gilbert of
"Roseanne"
55) Baker's dozen?
56) It's not for a winner

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You're not generally prone to daydreaming. Like your practical ancestors, you're more inclined to just sit down with someone as reasonable as you and sketch out plans. You avoid letting anything as unpredictable as intuition guide your actions, but right now you're feeling softer and more willing to let your gut guide the way. If you must take a day or so away from the world to let it all settle, go for it.

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You've been going over this for what feels like too long, trying to decide whether to maintain silence or simply say what needs to be said. If you're instinctively inspired to believe that opening up is right for you, then go for it and let the world know what's really going. You might stop short of broadcasting it on social media, just so you don't have to live down the teasing.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

You're all about foreign people and cultures, and if you're not on the road, your only consolation is getting in touch with something that reminds you of a distant place you adore. When it comes to long-distance communication, you can bet it's right at the top of your list of favorite things. You are totally ready for branching out in a big way.

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

If you thought that yesterday was sweet and magical, expect more action today. Your agenda has even crazier business in store. As fond as you are of romance and the heart thumping that goes along with it, you can see how you're getting even more than that right now. Your job is to be thoughtful to your friends and let them know that you're heading out for a while.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Someone has kept you daydreaming, smiling, and waiting for the phone to ring with a crazy look on your face for some time now. It's awesome, and you're ready to tell the whole world, but not quite yet. For now, you need to hold on to it and keep it yours for at least a little longer. You have all the time you need to share the news, but just a little bit longer for it to be all yours.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You'd always rather keep your mouth shut and look like a fool than open it and remove all doubt. That's why you've never been a fan of emotional chatter. Lately, though, you've been spouting off, and you may be starting to get used to it. While today might not be all that surprising to you, expect your actions to shock others, especially those close to you. It's only right to warn them before you get going!

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

You're ready to get the show started, and your enthusiasm is catching on with at least one of your closest friends. They may even be starting to think about doing something similar or following in your footsteps, literally. If you combine your plans and make it a group effort, it goes much better. What could beat making a new start with an old friend?

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Love is in the air for everyone, but you specialize in this sought-after condition just like you specialize in keeping your friends happy with love and attention. At least one of them is feeling pretty childish right now because of your absence, like a kid who's lost their parent at the mall. As good as you feel, you can still afford an hour or so to cheer them up. It's only fair. You're the one who spoiled them!

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You love the spontaneous side of life, and that goes double when it comes to people willing to act on impulse. You're due to meet up with several of those types today, and you shouldn't find a single one boring. You may need to settle a few disputes (like who asked you out first), and please excuse the rest of us if we're not sympathetic to this big problem.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

Even though you can often feel quite shy, you occasionally feel the urge to just let go and let the rest of the world see how good you are and what you can do. You don't often give into that urge, but just now it's simply irresistible. Don't hesitate! You've worked hard to get where you are and become an expert, so why keep hiding your light under a bushel?

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Don't worry too much about that boss you've been wanting to ask for a promotion or raise. They should be much more than simply supportive. They probably already know what you need before you think to ask! Choose an informal time for the big conversation and it should proceed even more smoothly than you had hoped. Make it a casual lunch or maybe pizza after work.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Everyone knows you've got a big heart, a huge one, in fact. You have enough room in there for those you love, of course, but also for anyone else who might need you, or need anyone, for that matter. Your job today is to help those in that last category find what they're after without feeling obligated to just provide it yourself. Don't try to become what they need to feel happy. Direct them toward it.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. A hunter claimed to have seen what bird in 1688, thought to be the last recorded sighting?

A. Gryphon
B. Roc
C. Phoenix
D. Dodo

02. When was the first award ceremony for the US's Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences held?

A. 1951
B. 1919
C. 1941
D. 1929

03. Which of these was a former name of Northern Rhodesia?

A. Zanzibar
B. Zimbabwe
C. Zaire
D. Zambia

Answers: 1.D 2.D 3.D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

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

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Journalist killed during Israel raid

Jenin, Palestinian Territories - Veteran Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Aqleh, a Palestinian-American who was among the network's most prominent figures, was shot dead on Wednesday as she covered an Israeli army raid in the occupied West Bank.

The Qatar-based TV channel said Israeli forces shot Abu Aqleh, 51, deliberately and 'in cold blood' while she was covering unrest in the Jenin refugee camp.

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett however said it was 'ikely' that Palestinian gunfire killed her.

Another Al Jazeera journalist, producer Ali al-Samudi, was wounded in the incident, the broadcaster added.

An AFP photographer said Abu Aqleh was wearing a press flak jacket when she was shot. The photographer reported that Israeli forces were firing in the area and then saw Abu Aqleh's body lying on the ground.

There were no Palestinian gunmen visible in the area when Abu Aqleh was killed, the AFP photographer added.

The Israeli army confirmed it had conducted an operation in the camp early on Wednesday but firmly denied it had deliberately targeted a reporter.

The army said there was an exchange of fire between suspects and security forces and that it was 'investigating the event and looking into the possi-



This file photo shows TV journalist Shireen Abu Aqleh reporting from Jerusalem on June 12, last year (AFP)

bility that journalists were hit by the Palestinian gunmen'.

"The (army) of course does not aim at journalists," a military official told AFP.

A statement from Al Jazeera said: "The Israeli occupation forces assassinated in cold blood Al Jazeera's correspondent in Palestine."

It called on the international community to hold the Israeli forces accountable for their 'intentional targeting and killing' of

the journalist.

Joint investigation

Foreign Minister Yair Lapid said Israel was seeking a 'joint pathological investigation into the sad death of journalist Shireen Abu Aqleh'. "Journalists must be protected in conflict zones and we all have a responsibility to get to the truth," Lapid added.

Senior Palestinian Authority official Hussein al-Sheikh said there had been no contact from

Israel about any joint probe and held Israel 'responsible' for Abu Aqleh's killing.

In a sign of her prominence in the West Bank, residents laid flowers on the roadside as the vehicle carrying her body moved towards Nablus, where an autopsy was scheduled before her burial in her native Jerusalem.

US ambassador to Israel Tomas Nides called for a 'thorough investigation' into the killing of the US citizen.

'Palestinian gunmen'?

The Israeli premier said: "According to the information we've gathered, it appears likely that armed Palestinians - who were indiscriminately firing at the time - were responsible for the unfortunate death of the journalist."

The wounded Al Jazeera producer, Samudi, said there were no Palestinian fighters in the area where Abu Aqleh was shot.

"If there were resistance fight-

ers, we would not have gone into the area," he said in testimony posted online.

In recent weeks, the army has stepped up operations in Jenin, a historic flashpoint in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Several of the suspects blamed for deadly attacks on Israelis in recent weeks were from the area.

The army said that during its operation in the camp, 'massive fire was shot toward Israeli forces by tens of armed Palestinian gunmen'.

Rising tensions

The fatal shooting comes nearly a year after an Israeli air strike destroyed a Gaza building that housed the offices of Al Jazeera and news agency AP.

Israel has said the building also hosted offices used by key members of the Hamas Islamist group, which controls the Israeli-blockaded Gaza strip.

Tensions have risen in recent months as Israel has grappled with a wave of attacks which has killed at least 18 people since March 22, including an Arab-Israeli police officer and two Ukrainians.

An 18-year-old Palestinian was killed by Israeli troops during clashes near Ramallah on Wednesday. The army said its forced had used rubber bullets.

Wednesday's deaths brought the number of Palestinians killed since March 22 to 31, according to an AFP tally.

AFP

2 'foreign agents' arrested in Iran

Tehran, Iran - Iran's intelligence ministry announced on Wednesday that two Europeans had been arrested on accusations of seeking to 'destabilise the country', without specifying their nationality. "Two Europeans, who had entered the country with the aim of unleashing chaos and destabilising society, were identified and arrested," the ministry said in a statement.

The two detainees had attempted to get close to the teachers' union, the ministry said. For months, teachers in Iran have held protests to demand that the authorities speed up the implementation of reforms that would see their salaries better reflect their experience and performance.

The ministry described the detainees as 'two experienced agents' and said they were citizens of a European country, without specifying which country or giving the date of their arrest.

Earlier this month, Human Rights Watch called for the release of almost 40 teachers arrested in events surrounding nationwide demonstrations on May 1. In April, teachers' union member Rasoul Bodaghi was sentenced to five years in prison over his participation in the protests.

AFP



Iranian chief nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani (left) welcoming EU envoy Enrique Mora in Tehran, on Wednesday (AFP)

Nuclear deal: EU envoy meets Iran's chief negotiator

Tehran, Iran - The European Union's coordinator for nuclear talks with Iran, Enrique Mora, held talks in Tehran on Wednesday with the Islamic republic's chief negotiator Ali Bagheri, state media reported.

The meeting between Mora and Iranian Deputy Vice President Ali Bagheri is 'currently taking place', according to state news agency IRNA, which circulated pictures of the encounter without providing further details.

Talks between world powers and Iran have stalled since mid-March as negotiators seek to return to the landmark accord that curtailed the Islamic republic's nuclear programme in exchange for sanctions relief.

Mora has played a key role as an intermediary between the United States and Iran during a year of on-off talks in Vienna to restore the deal formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The deal was agreed in 2015 between Iran and the five permanent United Nations Security Council members Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States, plus Germany.

But Washington unilaterally withdrew in 2018 under then-president Donald Trump before imposing biting economic sanctions on Iran, prompting the Islamic republic to begin rolling back its own commitments.

Iran called in late April for a new meeting 'as soon as possible' to move towards restoring the agreement.

Its foreign ministry spokesman, Saeed Khatibzadeh, said on Monday that Mora's visit 'moves the talks in the right direction', but added this did not mean he would arrive with a 'new message'.

Qatari emir to visit Iran

Meanwhile, Qatar's emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, is to visit Tehran on Thursday following the Iranian president's visit to Doha, Iran's official IRNA news agency reported.

"The emir of Qatar will arrive on May 12 in Iran to follow up on the implementation of agreements and expand relations between the two countries," the news agency said on Wednesday.

It added that the visit would focus on cooperation for the 2022 FIFA World Cup to be held in Doha from November, after Iran said it was ready to host some fans on its nearby resort island of Kish.

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said on Monday that the Qatari leader would visit Tehran 'in response to President Ebrahim Raisi's visit to Doha' in February.

AFP

India's Supreme court suspends colonial-era sedition law

New Delhi, India - India's Supreme Court on Wednesday suspended a colonial-era sedition law that activists say is often used by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government to target free speech and dissent.

Modi's critics say that the law, which was once used by Britain to target independence hero Mahatma Gandhi, has been abused by his government against many journalists, activists and students.

Section 124A of the Indian

penal code gives wide-ranging powers to the police to arrest people, who can even face life imprisonment, for an act or speech that 'brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the government'. "The rigours of Section 124A (are) not in tune with the current social milieu, and was intended for a time when this country was under the colonial regime," India's chief justice N.V Ramana, part of a three-judge bench hearing

a petition against the law, said.

Ramana asked the government not to file any new sedition cases and pause ongoing sedition investigations.

'All pending trials, appeals and proceedings' under sedition, the court said, 'be kept in abeyance' until the 're-examination of the provision is complete'. The government had said on Monday that it had decided to 're-examine and reconsider' the law but it remained in force.

The top court also urged people jailed for sedition to ap-

proach local courts for bail.

India's official crime data says 236 people faced sedition charges between 2018 and 2020.

The law has long been misused by all Indian political parties in power but critics say Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has widened its scope, including to target minorities and ideological dissenters.

The government of India's most populous state Uttar Pradesh, led by firebrand monk Yogi Adityanath from the BJP,

has been an especially enthusiastic user of the law.

Police there last year jailed three students from Indian-administered Kashmir for sedition after they celebrated India's defeat to arch-rival Pakistan in a cricket match.

India sparked global outrage last year after 22-year-old climate change activist Disha Ravi was arrested for sedition for allegedly creating a 'toolkit' to aid anti-government farmer protests.

AFP

Elon Musk says he would lift Twitter ban on Trump

San Francisco, US - Elon Musk said on Tuesday that as owner of Twitter he would lift the ban on Donald Trump, contending that kicking the former US president off the platform 'alienated a large part of the country'.

Musk's endorsement of a Trump return to the global messaging platform triggered fears among activists that Musk would 'open the floodgates of hate'.

"I would reverse the permanent ban," the billionaire said at a *Financial Times* conference, noting that he doesn't own Twitter yet, so 'this is not like a thing that will definitely happen'.

Trump has stated publicly that he would not come back to Twitter if permitted, opting instead to stick with his own social network, which has failed to gain traction.

The Tesla chief's US\$44bn deal to buy Twitter must still get the backing of shareholders and regulators, but he has voiced enthusiasm for less content moderation and 'time-outs' instead of bans.

Trump was booted from Twitter and other online platforms after supporters fired up by his tweets and speech alleging election fraud attacked the US Capitol on January 6, 2021 in a deadly bid to stop Joe Biden from being certified as the victor in the US



Elon Musk (left) and Donald Trump (AFP)

presidential election.

"I think that was a mistake because it alienated a large part of the country, and did not ultimately result in Donald Trump not having a voice," Musk said.

red-pilled right-wing radical or just someone very interested in enabling right-wing extremists, the result is the same."

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), however, backed

I would reverse the permanent ban, which was a mistake because it alienated a large part of the country, and did not ultimately result in Donald Trump not having a voice

ELON MUSK

Musk maintained that permanent bans undermine trust in Twitter as an online town square where everyone can be heard.

"Elon Musk would open the floodgates of hate and disinformation on Twitter," said Media Matters for America president Angelo Carusone.

"Whether Elon Musk is a fully

Musk's perspective.

"Elon Musk's decision to re-platform President Trump is the right call," said organisation director Anthony Romero.

"Like it or not, president Trump is one of the most important political figures in this country, and the public has a strong interest in hearing his speech."

Romero pointed out that some of Trump's controversy causing tweets have wound up being evidence in lawsuits against the former president by the ACLU and others.

Musk reasoned that permanent bans at Twitter should be rare, and reserved for accounts that are spam, scams or run by software 'bots'.

"That doesn't mean that somebody gets to say whatever they want to say," Musk said.

"If they say something that is illegal or otherwise just destructive to the world, then there should be a perhaps a timeout, a temporary suspension, or that particular tweet should be made invisible or have very limited attraction."

Ad boycott?

Activist groups have called on Twitter advertisers to boycott the service if it opens the gates to abusive and misinformative posts with Musk as its owner.

"Under Musk's management, Twitter risks becoming a cesspool of misinformation, with your brand attached," said an open letter signed by more than two dozen groups including Media Matters, Access Now and Ultraviolet.

Twitter makes most of its revenue from ads, and that could be

jeopardised by advertisers' reaction to content posted on the platform, the San Francisco-based tech firm said in a filing with US regulators.

"We believe that our long-term success depends on our ability to improve the health of the public conversation on Twitter," the company said in a regulatory filing.

Efforts toward that goal include fighting abuse, harassment, and spam, Twitter told regulators. "Elon Musk owes the world a better explanation of how the platform will deal with the likes of Trump than an edict that his ouster was wrong because it proved unpopular in some places," said Suzanne Nossel, chief of human rights non-profit PEN America.

The Knight Foundation said that a survey it commissioned found that only 41 per cent of adults in the United States believe Trump was deprived of free expression rights by social media platforms that banned him.

"People died because of Donald Trump's Twitter account," said Muslim Advocates senior policy counsel Sumayyah Waheed.

"I'm terrified of what else would be allowed under Musk's watch."

AFP

Ferdinand Marcos Jr vows to be a leader ‘for all Filipinos’

Manila, Philippines - The son of the late Philippines dictator Ferdinand Marcos on Wednesday claimed victory in the presidential election, vowing to be a leader ‘for all Filipinos’, his spokesman said.

With an initial count almost complete, Ferdinand Marcos Jr, popularly known as ‘Bongbong’, has secured over 56 per cent of the vote and more than double the tally of his nearest rival, liberal Leni Robredo.

The win is an astonishing reversal in the fortunes of the Marcos family, who have gone from the presidential palace to pariahs and back again in the space of a few decades.

“To the world, he says: Judge me not by my ancestors, but by my actions,” spokesman Vic Rodriguez said in a statement.

Voters had been predicted to back Marcos by a landslide in Monday’s election, after relentless online whitewashing of the family’s past, the backing of powerful political dynasties and public disenchantment with post-dictatorship governments.

For years pro-Marcos accounts have flooded social media, leaving many young Facebook-educated Filipinos believing his father’s rule was a golden period of peace and prosperity.

In reality, Marcos senior left the Philippines bankrupt, and killed, tortured and jailed tens of thousands of opponents during his corrupt dictatorship.

Hours after his thumping victory Marcos Jr visited his father’s grave at the national heroes’ cemetery in Manila.



Ferdinand Marcos Jr celebrates with supporters at the campaign headquarters in Manila on Wednesday (AFP)

Photos posted on official Marcos social media accounts on Wednesday showed him standing before the oversized tomb with his head slightly bowed and covering his eyes with his right hand, as if crying.

“This is a victory for all Filipinos, and for democracy,” Rodriguez said in the statement.

“To those who voted for Bongbong, and those who did not, it is his promise to be a President for all Filipinos. To seek common ground across political divides, and to work together to unite the nation.”

Marcos is waiting for the vote count to finish before he fronts the media to declare victory, Rodriguez told reporters at Marcos’s campaign headquarters in Manila.

Marcos arrived at the build-

ing a short time later and was greeted by a crush of supporters outside.

The crowd erupted in cheers when he grabbed a cardboard sign from a fan that read ‘Thank you 31 million’, referring to the number of votes he won.

“I am so happy, so overwhelmed,” said Joseph Bugayong, a 30-year-old gardener who was standing outside the headquarters.

“I saw him in person and even shook his hand. My wait was worth it.”

Questions over leadership style

The Marcos family’s astounding journey from ignominy back to political favour has overshadowed questions about what Marcos Jr’s administration

To the world, he says: Judge me not by my ancestors, but by my actions. This is a victory for all Filipinos and for democracy. To those who voted for Bongbong and those who did not, it is his promise to be a President for all Filipinos

VIC RODRIGUEZ

The overwhelming win has devastated Robredo’s supporters, who saw the election as a make-or-break moment for the country’s fragile democracy.

Many of them went door to door across the vast archipelago in a months-long effort to convince voters to support the liberal candidate for the top job.

Robredo, a 57-year-old lawyer and the current vice president, has admitted ‘clear disappointment’ about the result but vowed to continue the fight against poor governance.

Marcos will have to contend with this opposition that could congeal into a potent pro-democracy movement.

“I think they could still be in a position to check the worst instincts of the incoming Marcos and Duterte administration,” said political analyst Richard Heydarian.

AFP

Organisers of HK Tiananmen vigil labelled ‘foreign agents’

Hong Kong, China - A Hong Kong court ruled on Wednesday that prosecutors could label organisers of the city’s annual Tiananmen vigil ‘foreign agents’ without having to reveal who the group is accused of working for.

The decision was made on national security grounds but those being prosecuted argue that the precedent-setting ruling makes it harder to prepare their defence ahead of trial.

For three decades, the now-disbanded Hong Kong Alliance held vigils commemorating victims of China’s deadly 1989 crackdown on democracy protesters in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square. Those commemorations have been driven underground since Beijing imposed a sweeping national security law on Hong Kong following democracy protests three years ago. Authorities charged the alliance with ‘incitement to subversion’, a national security offence, and ordered it to

turn over years of data about its membership, finances and overseas ties.

Police arrested five alliance leaders, including vice chair Chow Hang-tung, last year after they openly defied the order to surrender information. As basis for their data demand, police accused the alliance of working as a ‘foreign agent’ - rhetoric that matches Beijing’s stance that the Tiananmen protests were instigated by foreign forces rather than being a popular movement.

Pre-trial hearings under Hong Kong’s national security law are often shrouded in secrecy and covered by strict reporting restrictions. But this week’s hearing was a rare session held in open court.

Three Alliance defendants will go on trial on July 13, which coincides with the fifth death anniversary of Nobel Peace Prize laureate and Tiananmen activist Liu Xiaobo.

AFP

At least 148 dead in Haiti gang war, some burned alive: NGO

Port-au-Prince, Haiti - At least 148 people have been killed in the Haitian capital, some of them burned alive, since two rival gangs launched an all out turf war late last month, a human rights organisation said on Tuesday.

“At least 148 people were murdered, including seven bandits... executed by their leader,” between April 24 and the beginning of May, declared the National Network for the Defense of Human Rights (RNDDH), after an investigation carried out in the northern neighborhoods of the capital where the gang war has raged. Denouncing ‘a massacre of incredible cruelty’, the rights group said people were killed by bullets and knives, while some victims were burned alive ‘inside their own torched houses’ or ‘in the streets, with tires’.

‘Most of the murdered women and girls had been raped before’ they were killed, it said.

The Haitian organisation said it knew of a mass grave with 30 corpses, buried by one of the gangs because the bodies had been left in the street to rot under the blazing Caribbean sun.

Other bodies were thrown by

the killers into wells or latrines.

The United Nations said last Friday that it had learned of the killing of at least 75 civilians in this latest upsurge of violence, including women and children.

At least 9,000 residents of the afflicted neighborhoods have fled their homes and taken refuge with relatives or in temporary sites, such as churches and schools.

While the violence has abated somewhat in recent days, most of the people who fled have not yet returned to their homes, for fear of a resumption of violence.

For several decades, armed gangs have been raging in the poorest neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince, but they have drastically tightened their hold on the city and the country in recent years, sending the rates of murder and kidnapping skyrocketing.

More than two weeks since the outbreak began, the Haitian government has still not commented on the violence which has placed the capital in a state of siege, preventing any safe exit by road to the rest of the country.

AFP

Cambodian fishermen hook giant endangered stingray

Phnom Penh, Cambodia - Cambodian fishermen on the Mekong River got a shock when they inadvertently hooked an endangered giant freshwater stingray four metres long and weighing 180kg, scientists said on Wednesday.

The female leviathan, one of Southeast Asia’s largest and rarest species of fish, was caught by accident last week in Stung Treng province when it swallowed a smaller fish that had taken a baited hook.

An international team of experts on the US-funded Wonders of the Mekong project worked with the fishermen to unhook the ray before weighing and measuring it and returning it



The female giant freshwater stingray that was caught and released in the Mekong River in Cambodia’s Stung Treng province (AFP)

unharmed to the river.

The giant Mekong is a crucial habitat for a vast array of species large and small, but project leader Zeb Hogan, a fish biologist from the University of Nevada, said the river’s underwater ecosystem was poorly understood. “They are unseen worlds, underappreciated and out of sight,” he said in a statement issued by his university.

More than 1,000 fish species call the Mekong home and the stingray is not the only giant lurking in the muddy waters - the giant catfish and giant barb also reach up to three metres long and 270kg in weight.

The study group said in the statement that the remote loca-

tion where the ray was caught has pools up to 80 metres deep and could harbour even bigger specimens.

But they also warned that underwater video footage showed plastic waste even in the deepest stretches of the Mekong, along with ‘ghost nets’ - abandoned by fishers but still able to snare fish.

Environmentalists have long voiced concerns about dam building along the Mekong River that will destroy fish stocks

The famous waterway starts in China and twists south through parts of Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam, feeding 60mn people through its basin and tributaries.

AFP

France opens torture case against Interpol’s UAE president

Paris, France - French authorities have opened a case against Interpol president Ahmed Nasser al-Raisi of the United Arab Emirates over accusations of torture and arbitrary detention filed by two Britons who were detained in the country, a source close to the investigation said on Wednesday.

The case into suspected complicity in torture by the top UAE official has been handed by French anti-terror prosecutors to an investigating magistrate who will now decide whether to press charges, the source, who asked not to be named, told AFP.

The two Britons, Matthew Hedges and Ali Issa Ahmad, accuse al-Raisi of having ultimate responsibility - as a senior interior ministry security official - for the torture and arbitrary detention they say they suffered in the UAE.

The source said the investigating magistrate must also de-

cide if al-Raisi, who was elected Interpol president in November, enjoys diplomatic immunity from prosecution in France.

The Britons filed the complaint on the basis of universal jurisdiction, which allows states to

At the time, the UAE’s foreign ministry rejected the complaints over Mansoor’s detention conditions as ‘without foundation’.

In the latest case, the inquiry is now in the hands of an investigating magistrate, a step that

The case into suspected complicity in torture by the top UAE official has been handed by French anti-terror prosecutors to an investigating magistrate who will now decide whether to press charges

prosecute serious crimes even if they were committed on foreign soil.

The opening of this case against al-Raisi goes a step further than the torture investigation opened against him by French prosecutors in November, over the detention of UAE dissident Ahmed Mansoor.

precedes the pressing of any charges.

This means that al-Raisi could potentially be detained for questioning in France if his visits the country. Interpol’s headquarters are in the southeastern French city of Lyon.

He is already believed to have visited Lyon several times since



This file photo shows Ahmed Nasser al-Raisi at the Interpol General Assembly in Istanbul on November 23, last year (AFP)

January.

The case was opened at the end of March, the source added.

‘Unfortunately the norm’

Both plaintiffs were in Paris on Wednesday to testify before the investigating magistrate.

Hedges says he was detained and tortured in the UAE from May to November 2018 after being arrested on false charges of espionage during a study trip.

Sentenced to life imprisonment, he was eventually released after international pressure led by the UK.

Ahmad, meanwhile, says he was repeatedly beaten and even stabbed during a month in detention in January 2019, allegedly for enthusiastically supporting the UAE’s Gulf rival Qatar in a football clash.

In a statement, Hedges said it was a ‘real moment of pride’ to

give evidence to the magistrate about the torture he says he suffered. “Given the human rights record of the UAE it was incredible that al-Raisi was even elected as president. The torture that myself, Ali, and countless other people in the UAE have suffered is unfortunately the norm in the UAE,” he said.

Ahmad said: “So many times I have lost hope that al-Raisi and all the other men that did this to me would get away with it with total impunity, but today is a good day.”

Al-Raisi’s four-year term at Interpol is largely ceremonial, with Secretary General Jurgen Stock handling day-to-day management of the organisation.

His candidacy for the Interpol job prompted an outcry from activists, who pointed to the generous funding Interpol receives from the United Arab Emirates.

AFP

Russia urged to annex Ukraine's Kherson

Kyiv, Ukraine - Pro-Kremlin authorities in Ukraine's Kherson said on Wednesday they will ask Russia to annex the region as Moscow seeks to shore up its gains in the increasingly drawn-out and bloody war.

Gas supplies to energy-starved Europe were also disrupted by a halt in Russian supplies flowing through Ukraine as the international shockwaves of the February 24 invasion continued.

The developments came as Ukraine said it was pushing Russian troops away from the country's second city Kharkiv in the northeast but facing stiff resistance from the invading forces.

Russia has focused on eastern and southern Ukraine since it failed to take Kyiv in the first weeks after the February 24 invasion, and US intelligence has warned Putin is ready for a long war.

Kherson, the first major Ukrainian city to fall after the Russian invasion of its pro-Western neighbour, is north of Crimea, which itself was annexed by Moscow in 2014 after an internationally-condemned vote.

Kirill Stremousov, deputy head of Kherson's Moscow-installed civilian and military administration, said there would be a 'request to make Kherson region a full subject of the Russian Federation'. Stremousov suggested the authorities would appeal directly to Putin without putting the move to a vote. But the Kremlin replied



Workers clean rubbles atop a building destroyed by shelling a month ago in Cherkaske, eastern Ukraine on Wednesday (AFP)

The US House of Representatives voted to send a US\$40bn aid package to Ukraine as Joe Biden warned that Kyiv would run out of funds to keep fighting Russia

that it was up to the residents of Kherson to 'determine their own fate'.

Kherson is just north of Crimea and essential for its water supplies. But Russia also

appears set on creating a land bridge to Crimea from its own territory, with US intelligence suggesting it wants to go all the way across the southern coast to Moldova.

"They come in waves"
On the battlefield, Ukraine's forces were boosted by what Kyiv says is the recapture of four

villages around Kharkiv
President Volodymyr Zelensky said in his nightly address Tuesday that he had 'good news' from Kharkiv and praised the 'superhuman strength' of Ukrainian defenders.
Ukraine's general staff of the armed forces said on Wednesday that 'occupiers continue to focus their efforts on preventing

the further advance of our troops towards the state border of Ukraine' from Kharkiv.
But Ukraine is engaged in what appears to be an increasingly desperate effort to hold the Russian-speaking Donbas region in the east.
"They come in waves," volunteer fighter Mykola said of the Russians' repeated attempts to

push south past a strategic river near a rural settlement called Bilogorivka.

US chips in \$40bn
Ukraine has been pushing Western countries for more support on all fronts, with Washington the latest to step up.

As President Joe Biden warned that Ukraine would within days likely run out of funds to keep fighting, the US House of Representatives voted late on Tuesday to send a \$40 billion aid package to the country.
"With this aid package, America sends a resounding message to the world of our unwavering determination to stand with the courageous people of Ukraine until victory is won," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said.

The United States views it as increasingly likely that Putin will mobilise his entire country, including ordering martial law, and is counting on his perseverance to wear down Western support for Ukraine.

One of the key symbols of Ukrainian resistance has been the strategic port of Mariupol, where Ukraine says around 1,000 troops remain trapped in increasingly dire circumstances at the Azovstal steelworks.
The sprawling plant is the final bastion of Ukraine's defiance in the devastated city, over which Russia now has almost complete control.
AFP

'New Zealand to reopen fully to world in August'

Wellington, New Zealand - New Zealand will fully reopen to the world in August, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said on Wednesday, ending one of the toughest anti-COVID-19 border restrictions. Border safeguards will be lifted fully and all pre-departure testing dropped from 11:59pm on July 31, with Ardern saying 'New Zealand is in demand and now fully open for business'.

The controls dating back to March 2020 have been hailed as world-leading in some quarters, with New Zealand boasting one of the lowest coronavirus death rates among developed nations.

However, critics have decried the system as lacking flexibility and compassion, as well as curtailing the economy.

For much of the pandemic, all international arrivals had to undergo two weeks of quarantine in government-run hotel facilities patrolled by the military. Those restrictions have already been dropped for New Zealand residents and travellers from nations with visa-free agreements. But the rest of the world had been told to wait until October.

Ardern told a business audience in Auckland on Tuesday that the date had been brought forward by more than two months as part of a raft of announcements to reinvigorate the economy - most notably the ailing tourism industry. "This will be welcome news for families, businesses and our migrant communities. It also provides certainty and good preparation time for airlines and cruise ship companies planning a return to New Zealand in the peak spring and summer seasons," she said.

New Zealand welcomed 3.9mn international arrivals in 2019, making tourism the country's biggest pre-pandemic export earner, generating more than NZ\$16bn (US\$10.9bn) annually.
AFP

Top defence official rules out military takeover in Sri Lanka

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka's top defence official on Wednesday ruled out a military takeover despite the island nation's political deadlock and thousands of troops on the streets to keep order after two days of deadly mob violence.

Weeks of peaceful protests against a crippling economic crisis have boiled over after government loyalists attacked demonstrators demanding the country's leaders resign.

A nationwide curfew is in effect and troops are patrolling streets with instructions to shoot on sight anyone attacking property or committing acts of violence. Footage of armoured personnel carriers moving around the streets of the capital Colombo have prompted accusations from opposition lawmakers and social media users that the country could be facing an imminent coup.

"When there is a dangerous situation in the country, powers are given to the military to deal with it," Kamal Gunaratne, the secretary of Sri Lanka's defence ministry, told a press conference in response to the claims.
"Don't ever think that we are



Soldiers stand guard near an armoured vehicle at a check point in Colombo on Wednesday (AFP)

trying to capture power," he added. "The military has no such intentions."

Gunaratne was a top field commander in the final battle that defeated Sri Lanka's separatist Tamil Tigers movement in 2009, ending a decades-old civil war.

His superior at the time was Gotabaya Rajapaksa, now serv-

ing as the nation's president.
The leader has kept to his tightly guarded official residence in recent weeks after huge protests calling on him to step down.

He has so far been unable to form a unity government to steer the country out of its financial crisis.

The defence chief said the

government had asked the military to reinforce police because of the 'dangerous situation' facing the country, with nine people killed in mob attacks since Monday. Opposition leader Sajith Premadasa had earlier suggested that the violent unrest had been orchestrated to give the pretext for a coup.
AFP

Coalition against IS discusses how to counter resurgence

Marrakesh, Morocco - The global coalition against the Islamic State group gathered on Wednesday in Morocco to coordinate efforts to prevent the militants staging a revival in the Middle East and North Africa.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was to co-host the meeting with Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita, but Washington's top diplomat tested positive for COVID-19 and was replaced by senior diplomat Victoria Nuland.

Senior officials from dozens of other countries are also attending the meeting, under high security at a discreet luxury hotel in Marrakesh.

The discussions were to cover 'stabilisation efforts in areas previously impacted by Daesh', strategic communication against the group's 'radicalisation propaganda' and the battle against foreign fighters, the Moroccan foreign ministry said. The meeting comes three years after the coalition helped Syrian fighters to crush the 'caliphate' IS had proclaimed in Iraq and Syria and as the militants step up their efforts to

bolster their presence in the Sahel region and West Africa.
The Global Coalition against Daesh (an Arabic acronym for IS) was formed in 2014 after the militants seized huge swathes of Iraq and Syria and now included 84 states and international organisations. Officials have long

The coalition will coordinate efforts to prevent the militants staging a revival in the Middle East and North Africa

warned that IS continues to pose a worldwide threat despite its loss of a territorial base.

IS has vowed to take vengeance for its elusive leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, killed in a US raid in northern Syria in late 2019.

It has also urged its supporters to take advantage of the war in Ukraine to carry out attacks in Europe.
AFP

China censors zero-COVID debate after WHO criticises policy

Beijing, China - China's censors scrambled to wipe out online debate over its zero-COVID strategy on Wednesday after the World Health Organization (WHO) criticised the country's headline approach to crushing the virus.

China is the last major economy glued to a zero-COVID policy and enforces some of the most stringent virus controls anywhere in the world.

Those restrictions have trapped most of Shanghai's 25mn people in a lockdown with no clear end date, while Beijing has also gradually corralled



Workers ride scooters on a street during a COVID-19 lockdown in the Jing'an district in Shanghai on Wednesday (AFP)

many of its residents indoors as it battles its biggest outbreak since the pandemic began.

On Tuesday WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus urged China to change tack, saying the approach 'will not be sustainable' in the face of new fast-spreading variants.

The intervention prompted China's army of internet censors to race to snuff out his comments. Searches for the hashtags 'Tedros' and 'who' on the popular Weibo social media platform displayed no results, while users of the WeChat app were unable to share an article

posted on an official United Nations account.

A social media hashtag about the WHO's comments, which had been a rallying point for lively online discussion, appeared to have been blocked by mid-morning. Before they were expunged from the internet, comments had questioned zero-COVID, with one saying 'even the WHO's Tedros has now changed his stance'.

Another wrote: "Will our government listen to the WHO director general's recommendations?"

Virus controls are causing

mounting anger and frustration, especially in Shanghai where residents have raged against seemingly endless lockdowns, spartan quarantine facilities and heavy-handed enforcement.

The city has witnessed repeated protests and violent scuffles with police, rare images which have pinballed across social media before censors can catch up.

The ruling Communist Party says its virus strategy places life before material concerns and has averted the public health crises seen in other nations.
AFP

TOURISM TRAVAILS



Security personnel march at the entrance of the Forbidden City in Beijing

Beijing tourist sites are almost empty on COVID-19-stalked weekends and public holidays

Major Beijing tourist venues have been virtually deserted on weekends while restaurant footfalls were meagre, as a typically bustling public holiday was overshadowed by a fresh bout of coronavirus that has shunted millions under lockdown nationwide.

China's staunch 'zero-Covid' policy had kept the virus at bay for more than two years but it is currently facing its worst outbreak since the start of the pandemic, thanks to an Omicron-fuelled wave.

Millions across the country - particularly in the economic engine Shanghai - have been pushed to stay at home for weeks, as the lockdowns have dampened economic growth and investor sentiment in the world's second-largest economy.

Beijing, so far, has reported over 300 cases under the current wave, and authorities had last week banned city-wide dining services - an attempt to curb infections during a holiday that is typically an annual peak consumption period.

"It will have a definite impact on sales," a restaurant employee told AFP, as she scanned for customers around Beijing's Dongcheng district - home to historic attractions like the Forbidden City.

Eateries nearby were shuttered, with some only allowing customers to order takeout if they have a negative COVID-19 test report. This restriction is the latest measure ordered by Beijing authorities, who say, all visitors to public spaces must have a negative test result within the past 48 hours.

"Of course we will abide by the country's rules," the employee said. "But, we make less profit through delivery and our sales volume is lower."

The Temple of Heaven - one of China's biggest his-



A stall employee prepares takeout food outside a restaurant after the government banned dining at restaurants

torical attractions - is usually heaving with tens of thousands of visitors a day, elbowing each other. But on Sunday, masked families could snap selfies without any interruptions along the imperial complex.

Even the downtown shopping street Wangfujing - a commerce heaven of food stalls and fashionable outlets - was deserted.

At a restaurant not far from the unusually quiet For-

bidden City palace complex, stacks of marinated chicken feet, flatbreads, and cold cuts in takeaway containers languished on an outdoor table as staff chatted idly inside.

"Obviously it's bad in terms of our own self-interest, but it's necessary overall for the good of the country," said a young waiter. "We would normally sell 10,000 yuan (US\$1,500) worth of food in a day, but now it's only

1,000 to 2,000 yuan (US\$300)," he added.

Instead of entering the Forbidden City, lines of people waited outside the palace complex to get a swab test - a new normal for Beijing residents.

Universal Studios shuttered

About 30km east of the palace on the city's outskirts, Universal Studios - Beijing's largest Western theme park boasting a Jurassic World and Harry Potter-themed zones - announced its indefinite closure Sunday. It was launched in September and has seen more than two million visitors in five months.

The Labour Day holiday was supposed to be a massive commercial coup for the park - which earlier this week had initially required a negative COVID-19 test within 24 hours of visiting.

The capital reported 59 new infections Sunday, as officials announced the reopening of a Covid quarantine hospital that has not been mobilised since the pandemic's first wave in 2020.

All indoor fitness activities - like public gyms and pools - were suspended till May 4, while authorities say about 4,000 makeshift hospital beds had been prepared and larger quarantine centres were being constructed.

"There still exists a small number of hidden infected (patients) found through community screening," Beijing health official Pang Xinghuo said at a Sunday briefing. "The epidemic is overall at a high plateau period."

Meanwhile in Shanghai, officials declared on Sunday that 'community transmission risk has been effectively curbed' and that daily infections are trending downwards. The financial hub of 25 million has been locked down for almost a month, with residents complaining of food shortages and lack of timely medical care.

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SHOULDER WORKOUTS



This dumbbell workout only uses five moves to build and define shoulder muscle

Besides routine cardio exercises to improve stamina, breathing, and overall fitness, it is also important to train your upper body to increase muscle mass and strength. Consider a short, five-move dumbbell shoulder routine to train and build your upper body in a short time.

According to a recent article in Fit&Well (a fitness website for anyone who wants to improve their overall health and fitness), nearly all upper body movements and exer-

cises use your shoulder muscles in some way or the other, whether that involves lifting heavy bags after grocery shopping, moving furniture, or weight training at the gym. Therefore, it's a good idea to build muscle and make everyday tasks and exercise a little bit easier for yourself.

If upper body strength is something you're already working on then you may have already been targeting certain areas and using effective exercises from this tricep and chest workout. Training your upper body with some of the best adjustable dumbbells is a great way to build muscle at home and is the

only piece of equipment you will need for this shoulder routine.

This dumbbell workout for the shoulders comes from certified personal trainer Lisa Lanceford, also known as Lisafiit. Lanceford posts regular muscle and strength-building workouts for her 2.8 million followers on Instagram.

This routine calls for performing 12 reps for each exercise, repeating the first four moves for three sets. The fifth move involves one partial rep followed by one full rep that you will perform for eight reps in total and also repeat this for three sets.

Another good reason to work on improving muscle mass in your shoulders is that it can help avoid lower back pain. If you have a weaker upper body you may find that your lower body muscles have to compensate for the work your arms and shoulders struggle with due to being weaker.

As with any healthy and sustainable fitness programme whether you're doing more cardio training, strength, or both, it's important to consume a good diet. Food not only provides fuel but can also boost muscle growth.

Protein is the building block for tissue

growth and repair so consuming lean options of protein like chicken, fish, lentils, and beans will all help with recovery and growth. Adding one of the best protein powders for weight loss to oats or a smoothie can also be a useful way to increase your intake.

If you don't have much experience lifting weights for upper body movements, you can always just use some lighter household items to practice with at first, such as, food cans or bottles. You will still be performing each exercise the same way but just building up your strength more gradually to be able to include weights with the five moves, as listed below:



LATERAL RAISE
3 X 12



SINGLE ARM LATERAL RAISE
3 X 12 EACH ARM



AROUND THE WORLD
3 X 12



FRONT RAISE VARIATION
3 X 12



SHOULDER PRESS WITH 1 PARTIAL REP
+ 1 FULL REP 3 X 8

ANATOMY OF SHOULDER MUSCLES

We can't start to build up shoulder muscles without first knowing what muscles make up the shoulders. Basically, the shoulder is made up of two groups of muscles - extrinsic muscles, which originate from the torso and attach to the bones of the shoulder, and intrinsic muscles, which originate from the scapula and/or clavicle, and attach to the humerus.

The extrinsic muscles comprise:
Trapezius - the triangle-shaped muscle that runs down along your

spine and across your shoulder blade. These muscles support your arms and shoulders, and are needed to raise your arms.

Latissimus Dorsi
The latissimus dorsi muscle is one of the largest muscles in your back, and is partially covered by the trapezius.

Levator Scapulae
Your levator scapulae muscle is located at the side and back of the neck. Its primary function is to lift the triangle-shaped bone located



at the back of the shoulder (scapula) that connects your upper arm bone (humerus) with the clav-

icle (collarbone).
Rhomboids
The rhomboids are the muscles at

the top of the back and middle of the shoulder blades. When they contract, they pull your shoulder blades together.

The Intrinsic muscles comprise:
Deltoids
Your deltoid is made up of three main sets of muscle fibres: anterior, lateral and posterior, which are connected by a very thick tendon and are anchored into a V-shape. The deltoid muscle is primarily responsible for arm rotation.

Teres Major
Teres major is a small muscle that's located on the underside of the upper arm. It's sometimes called 'lat's little helper' because of its partnership with the latissimus dorsi.

Rotator Cuff
The rotator cuff is a group of muscles and tendons, including teres minor, that surround the shoulder joint. They keep the head of your upper arm bone firmly within the shallow socket of the shoulder.



Oman's Ahmad al Harthy in action

Al Harthy eyes GTE podium at Imola

Oman Racing’s Ahmad al Harthy focused on Imola fightback after unlucky start

Muscat - Oman’s Ahmad al Harthy is eyeing a GTE podium finish to kick-start his maiden European Le Mans Series campaign in the second round in Italy on Saturday and Sunday.

Al Harthy showed plenty of early promise but was unlucky in the opening ELMS event of the season at Circuit Paul Ricard in France where he and Oman Racing team-mates Sam De Haan and Marco Sorensen were forced into early retirement after their No.69 Aston Martin Vantage GTE came into contact with another car.

De Haan was at the wheel of the car at the time of the incident

I can’t wait to race at Imola for the first time, it’s such a famous track and it’s always great being faced with a new challenge. Hopefully we can fight for our first podium.

AHMAD AL HARTHY

and was leading the class early on after Al Harthy had qualified an excellent second fastest. But the damage to the steering caused by contact from an errant LMP3 class car led to instant retirement.

Though it was a frustrating outcome for the entire Oman

Racing team, Al Harthy was still happy with the pace and competitiveness shown and the team is high on confidence.

The weekend’s action will also mark the Al Harthy’s first ever visit to the legendary Italian track, a challenge he is looking forward to as the team – which carries

support from the Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS – look to put the luckless dramas of round one firmly behind them.

“I’ve no doubt our car will be strong again for Imola, as it was at Paul Ricard, and Marco, Sam and I will be competitive and able to push for a strong result and give a real kick-start to our season”, said Al Harthy.

“In qualifying and race trim we were very strong in France and I know the TF Sport guys, who prepare the car, will do an amazing job again as always.

“I can’t wait to race at Imola for the first time, it’s such a fa-

mous track and it’s always great being faced with a new challenge. We were able to learn a lot about the GTE car at Paul Ricard so hopefully that will give us a solid base to build from at the weekend. Hopefully we can fight for our first podium in the ELMS at Imola and proudly fly the flag for Oman there.”

Opening free practice and a dedicated session for bronze graded drivers will take place at Imola on Friday.

On Sunday, the 4 hours of Imola will get underway at 11.30 am local time with live streaming available online: <https://live.europeanlemansseries.com/en/>



Rafael Nadal hits a forehand return against John Isner

Nadal eases past Isner into Rome last 16

Rome, Italy - Rafael Nadal eased into the last 16 of the Italian Open on Wednesday with a straightforward 6-3, 6-1 win over John Isner, while Alexander Zverev beat Sebastian Baez.

Third seed Nadal made short work of Isner as he bids for an 11th title in Rome, the King of Clay seeing off his American opponent in one hour and 17 minutes under blazing sunshine at the Foro Italico.

A quarter-final loser to countryman Carlos Alcaraz in Madrid, Nadal can profit from the in-form teenager’s absence in the Italian capital to win the last big clay event before the French Open later this month.

The 35-year-old had been out for six weeks with a rib injury before returning in the Spanish cap-

ital last week but Isner put up little resistance against the 21-time Grand Slam winner.

“I need to build again the things after a tough stop and that’s what I’m trying, just to stay with the right attitude and let’s see if I’m able to make that happen,” Nadal said courtside.

The match swung in Nadal’s favour in game eight, when Nadal broke veteran world number 27 Isner before serving out to take the first set. From there Nadal cruised to victory, dropping just 14 points on his way to setting up a third round clash with Denis Shapovalov.

Earlier Zverev got through with a straight-sets 7-6 (8/6), 6-3 win over Baez in just over an hour and a half.

AFP

PGA Tour refuses to release players for Saudi-backed opener

Los Angeles, United States - The PGA Tour has refused to grant releases for players seeking to take part in the Saudi-backed LIV Golf Invitational Series opener in England next month, multiple US media reports said Tuesday.

In a decision that puts the PGA Tour on a collision course with its players eager to play in the lucrative new series, the tour reportedly said in a memo dis-

tributed to members that no releases would be granted.

Any players who go ahead and play in the June 9-11 event at Centurion Golf Club outside London will be deemed to be in violation of tour regulations, opening the door to a possible suspension or exclusion.

Former world number one and reigning PGA Championship champion Phil Mickelson is among the players who had

But no matter what obstacles the PGA Tour puts in our way, we will not be stopped. We will continue to give players options that promote the great game of golf globally.

GREG NORMAN

requested a release to play in the tournament, along with England’s Lee Westwood.

“We have notified those who

have applied that their request has been declined in accordance with the PGA TOUR Tournament Regulations,” according to

the memo sent to players by PGA Tour senior vice president Tyler Dennis.

“As such, Tour members are not authorized to participate in the Saudi Golf League’s London event under our Regulations.

“As a membership organization, we believe this decision is in the best interest of the PGA Tour and its players.”

Australian golfing great Greg Norman, the chief executive of

LIV Golf, hit back at the decision.

“Sadly, the PGA Tour seems intent on denying professional golfers their right to play golf, unless it’s exclusively in a PGA Tour tournament,” he said in a statement.

“But no matter what obstacles the PGA Tour puts in our way, we will not be stopped. We will continue to give players options that promote the great game of golf globally.”

Britain’s *Daily Telegraph* reported later Wednesday that officials on the DP World Tour (formerly the European Tour) had followed their US counterparts at the PGA by refusing to grant permission to players to appear in the London event.

The money-spinning Saudi-backed series will offer purses of \$25 million per tournament.

AFP

UAE hosts Bucks, Hawks in pre-season games

Dubai, United Arab Emirates - The Milwaukee Bucks and Atlanta Hawks will face off in two pre-season games in October in the United Arab Emirates, marking the first time two NBA teams have played each other in the Middle East.

The matchups will take place in the capital Abu Dhabi on October 6 and 8, officials announced on Tuesday during a press conference.

The games are part of a multi-year agreement between the NBA and Abu Dhabi’s Department of Culture and Tourism.

In 2021, the Milwaukee Bucks captured their first NBA title since 1971, with Giannis Antetok-

ounmpo scoring 50 points - only the seventh player in finals history with a 50-point game.

The exhibitions in Abu Dhabi will mark the third time the team has played outside of the United States after Antetokounmpo joined - the first in 2015 in London against the New York Knicks and the second in Paris in 2020 against the Charlotte Hornets.

The NBA has a long history of staging pre-season and regular season games outside North America.

The first official overseas game took place in 1978, when the Washington Bullets traveled to Israel to play Maccabi Tel Aviv.

AFP

Oman Cricket’s Chairman’s XI win Friendship Cup

Muscat: Oman Cricket’s Chairman’s XI won the ‘Friendship Cup Cricket Tournament 2022’ held at the Oman Cricket Academy from April 22 to 29.

They defeated Indian Embassy in a thrilling final.

The tournament was organised as part of ‘Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav’ - an initiative celebrating the 75 years of Indian independence. Four teams took part, with OC Chairman’s XI and Indian Embassy joined by sides representing the embassies of United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Paul Sheridan, Vice-Chairman of Oman Cricket along with the ambassadors of the other three nations to the Sultanate inaugurated the tournament on April 22.



The Friendship Cup finalists pose with the trophy before the title clash

OC’s Chairman’s XI won all their games in the league stage to set up a showdown with the Indian Embassy team in the final. In it, the latter posted a first innings score of 103 in 15 overs. The run chase was a nail-biting

affair and in the end, the Chairman’s XI clinched a last ball victory to take home the inaugural ‘Friendship Cup’.

Speaking of the overall experience, Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to Oman said: “This

unique tournament saw riveting cricketing action, with amateur diplomat-cricketers showcasing impressive skills with both bat and ball but more importantly, it was a beautiful show of sportsmanship and camaraderie and

also gave the families from respective countries a chance to come together and enjoy the sporting entertainment”.

Pankaj Khimji, Chairman Oman Cricket added: “It was an honor and a lot of fun to host this event at the Oman Cricket Academy. I thank everyone involved in making it a success, with a special mention to the families of those that took the field. My appreciation also extends to all the spectators that turned up to cheer us on. Looking forward to another edition very soon!”.

The tournament managed to capture the interest of locals and expatriates in the region alike, while also serving to strengthen the ties between the nations involved.



RR V DC

Marsh sparkles as Delhi cruise to victory against Rajasthan





BRIEF SCORES:
Rajasthan Royals 160 for 6 in 20 overs (Ravichandran Ashwin 50 (38) 4x4, 2x6, Devdutt Padikkal 48 (30) 6x4, 2x6; Chetan Sakariya 2 for 23) lost to Delhi Capitals 161 for 2 in 18.1 overs (Mitchell Marsh 89 (62) 5x4, 7x6, David Warner 52 (41) 5x4, 1x6) by 8 wickets

TODAY'S MATCH
(6PM)

 CHENNAI SUPER KINGS

VS

 MUMBAI INDIANS

Struggling Kohli mutes TV to silence critics

New Delhi, India - Out-of-form Virat Kohli says that he has a sure-fire way of drowning out his growing number of critics -- he just mutes the television.

The 33-year-old former India skipper has endured an extended batting slump for Royal Challengers Bangalore in the Indian Premier League and fell for his third golden duck of the season on Sunday.

Commentators have said that the usually prolific batsman looks "overcooked" and needs a break, but in a mostly light-hearted video on Bangalore's website Kohli said that he has learnt to drown out those who criticise him.

"They can't be in my shoes, they can't feel what I feel, they can't live my life, they can't live those moments," Kohli said of analysts attempting to write him off.

"How do you cut out the noise? You either mute the TV or don't listen to or pay attention to what people are saying. I do both of these things."

After his latest golden duck,



when he flicked the opening delivery of the match to Sunrisers Hyderabad skipper Kane Williamson, Kohli walked off with a wry smile.

The host of the video joked that Kohli has two ducks, a reference to how the batsman got out

twice in a row to first balls earlier this season.

"It hasn't happened to me ever in my career, I think. I have seen everything now. It's been so long, I have seen everything in this game," Kohli said with a grin.

Kohli has now failed to score

a century in more than 100 matches in all formats.

He has managed just 216 runs from 12 games in the IPL this season, scoring one half-century.

Still hoping to win a maiden IPL trophy with Bangalore, the team he captained between 2013

and 2021, Kohli spoke fondly about South African great and former IPL teammate AB de Villiers.

"Miss him a lot. I speak to him regularly, quite regularly," said Kohli.

"He keeps messaging me... we stay in touch, he is very keenly obviously watching RCB and hopefully here next year in some

I have seen everything now. It's been so long, I have seen everything in this game.

VIRAT KOHLI

capacity."

South Africa's Faf du Plessis took over as Bangalore captain this season and they are currently fourth in the 10-team Twenty20 tournament and in the running for a playoff spot.

AFF





Liverpool still chasing Man City like ‘mad’ in title race

Reds come back from a goal down and beat Aston Villa to be level on points with leaders Man City

Birmingham, United Kingdom - Liverpool are still “chasing like mad” after Manchester City at the top of the Premier League, said Jurgen Klopp after coming from a goal down to beat Aston Villa 2-1 on Tuesday.

The top two are now level on points, but City stay top on goal difference and have a game in hand away to Wolves on Wednesday.

Liverpool could ill-afford another slip up after being held 1-1 at home by Tottenham at the weekend and got off to the worst possible start when Douglas Luiz fired Villa in front after three minutes.

But Joel Matip quickly levelled and Sadio Mane’s fine header 25 minutes from time kept the Reds in contention for a historic quadruple of trophies.

“We are still chasing like mad,” said Klopp. “We just know we have to win, that didn’t change and now we have to recover to play the FA Cup final. There is no mercy.”

However, victory came at a cost as Fabinho limped off with a muscle injury that makes him a major doubt for both Saturday’s FA Cup final and the Champions League final against Real Madrid on May 28.

“He felt a muscle, not too much,” added Klopp. “He is quite



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah tries to escape the attention of Aston Villa's Lucas Digne during their Premier League match on Tuesday (AFP)

positive but I’m not sure what I can make of that to be honest.”

With one eye on Wembley, Klopp rolled the dice with his team selection as Mohamed Salah and Thiago Alcantara were left on the bench, while there was no place in the squad for Andy Robertson.

The visitors looked like a much-changed side as Villa sprang out of the traps and caught them cold.

Alisson Becker had already denied Ollie Watkins by the time Steven Gerrard’s men took the lead on three minutes.

Luiz’s header was parried by

Alisson, but only back into the path of his Brazilian international teammate to hammer the rebound high into the net.

Villa won this fixture 7-2 last season, but Liverpool this time

bounced straight back from the early blow of conceding.

The hosts did not deal with a free-kick into the box and the ball eventually broke for Virgil van Dijk to square for his centre-back partner Matip to apply the finishing touch.

Chances continued to come at both ends in a frantic first half.

Mane headed inches wide and Naby Keita missed his kick with

“I’m frustrated we didn’t score more than once.

“We were ambitious, brave and courageous against one of the best teams in the world.”

Luis Diaz’s arrival in January has played a huge part in keeping Klopp’s men in contention for four trophies.

The Colombian created the winner as he teased Tyrone Mings before delivering a pin-

We are still chasing like mad. We just know we have to win, that didn’t change and now we have to recover to play the FA Cup final. There is no mercy.

JURGEN KLOPP

the goal gaping for Liverpool, while, at the other end, Danny Ings just failed to keep his header down from Lucas Digne’s inviting cross.

Liverpool’s heavy schedule began to show physically when Fabinho limped off with a hamstring injury midway through the first half.

However, Liverpool went through the gears in the second period to show the gulf in class between the sides.

“We’ve got to take the big moments we created in the game,” said Gerrard.

point cross for Mane to head in his 22nd goal of the season.

There were still nervy moments for Liverpool to see out in the final quarter as Villa sought to expose their high line.

Twice Ings failed to capitalise when played through on goal.

But Liverpool held on and will hope Gerrard can finally come to their rescue in a title race.

Gerrard famously never won a league title during his decorated playing career at Anfield, but will take Villa to face City at the Etihad on the final day of the season.

AFP

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Haaland satisfies Man City’s need for a striker and status

Manchester, United Kingdom - Manchester City are still licking their wounds from another painful Champions League exit, but by winning the race to sign Erling Haaland they have established themselves as a go-to destination for Europe’s top talent.

The 21-year-old goalscoring phenomenon had his choice of the continent’s top clubs thanks to a reported buyout clause of 60 million euros (£51 million, \$63 million) that will see him leave Borussia Dortmund well below his market value.

Real Madrid wanted to pair the Norwegian with Kylian Mbappe at the Bernabeu next season, Barcelona sought him as a successor to Lionel Messi, while Bayern Munich again aimed to swoop on their Bundesliga rivals.

Haaland, however, will instead line up in City blue next season, just as his father Alf-Inge did between 2000-2003 during a very



Erling Braut Haaland

different era for the club.

The arrival of cash from Abu Dhabi has long since transformed City’s fortunes, with Pep Guardiola’s men now on the brink of a fourth Premier League title in five seasons. But Haaland is the man City need to fill a void if they are to reach the next level - a superstar striker.

City have played the best part of two seasons without a recog-

nised number nine.

An attempt to land Harry Kane as Sergio Aguero’s successor fell short last summer and it may have cost City another shot at Champions League glory.

Despite beating Real Madrid 4-2 in the first leg of their semi-final, Guardiola’s men missed a series of sitters to put the tie to bed.

AFP

Barcelona win overshadowed by Araujo injury

Madrid, Spain - Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang scored twice as Barcelona tightened their grip on second place in La Liga on Tuesday with a 3-1 win at home to Celta Vigo.

But Barca’s victory was overshadowed by a nasty head injury to defender Ronald Araujo, who had to be taken away in an ambulance in the 64th minute.

Araujo was lifted into the ambulance on a stretcher, wearing a neck brace. Barcelona confirmed the 23-year-old “suffered a concussion and has been taken to the hospital”.

After the game, Barca coach Xavi Hernandez said: “The doctor has told us he is conscious. He will spend the night in hospital



Barcelona’s Aubameyang celebrates his goal with Araujo

but he is out of danger.

“The doctor said we shouldn’t worry, that he will spend the night in hospital as a precaution, nothing more.”

Araujo’s injury came after he

and Gavi banged heads challenging for the same ball. Araujo stumbled on for a few seconds before dropping to the floor as a concerned Iago Aspas and Eric Garcia called urgently for the medics.

The Uruguayan was put into the recovery position and after a few minutes, he was lifted into an ambulance that had driven onto the pitch.

Aubameyang’s double either side of half-time came after Memphis Depay had opened the scoring at Camp Nou. Celta pulled one back through Aspas but any hopes of a comeback were dashed when Jeison Murillo was sent off just before the hour.

AFP