

MoL offers 300,000 hours of part-time work

Jobs are being offered as part of the ministry's efforts to implement 1mn hours of part-time work in government establishments

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To implement the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to offer jobs to various segments of society, the Ministry of Labour (MoL) has announced 309,778 hours of part-time work.

MoL has stated that the jobs are being offered as part of its efforts to implement 1mn hours of part-time work in government establishments in different governorates. 'Work will be given to 644 jobseekers with different educational qualifications,' it stated.

The ministry's effort to create part-time work arises from the realisation of its importance in



The last date to apply for these jobs is June 12 through www.mol.gov.om/job

building a sustainable and diverse economy. 'Part-time work is one of the most important contributors to building experience and refining skills, and is an additional source of income to benefit a jobseeker or a worker. The ministry seeks to raise awareness on the importance of part-time work and to review ministerial decisions regulating these in line with the require-

ments of the current economy.'

The last date for submission of application for these jobs is June 12 through www.mol.gov.om/job

More than 10,000 citizens were recruited in the public and private sectors in the first quarter of 2022.

MoL has stated that the public and private sectors are partners in creating and generating job

opportunities. The total number of Omanis employed during the first quarter of this year was 10,017 - 4,126 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.

Additionally, the ministry conducted interviews for a number of public sector jobs at the headquarters of the Directorate General of Labour in Al Wusta governorate on Monday.

MoL is aiming to provide 35,000 jobs through recruitment, replacement and training for citizens in 2022.

Expats can now own ITC properties in Musandam

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Expatriates can now purchase property in integrated tourism complexes (ITCs) in Musandam governorate following a decision issued by H E Dr Khalfan bin Saeed al Shuaily, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning.

The new decision enables foreign investors to own property in ITCs in Musandam for 99 years.

According to the decision, Omanis and non-Omanis can own property in built-up units or plots of land prepared for construction in ITCs.

The decision - No 109/2022 - was issued on May 18, 2022, and



took effect a day after its publication in the *Official Gazette*.

In 2018, the government had prohibited non-Omanis from

owning property in the governorates of Musandam, Buraimi, Dhahirah and Wusta, and other strategic areas.

Oil prices hit highest level in two months

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oil prices hit their highest level in more than two months on Monday, supported by China's easing of COVID-19 restrictions and its move to stimulate a slowing economy. Traders are also waiting to see whether the European Union reaches an agreement on banning Russian oil imports.

Brent crude futures rose half a per cent to US\$116.12 a barrel. US West Texas crude futures also rose half a per cent to US\$115.64.

However, Oman crude price

(for July delivery) dropped by US\$1.43 to US\$110.84 on Monday. On Friday, it rose to US\$112.27.

The average price of Oman oil (for May delivery) was US\$110.96, US\$19 higher than April delivery.

Both Beijing and Shanghai eased pandemic restrictions, and authorities in Shanghai launched a total of 50 stimulus measures to support the local economy, which has been hit hard by restrictions.

The EU started a meeting on Monday, which will continue till

Tuesday, to discuss a sixth package of sanctions against Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.

"If we look at the recent price movement, it seems the market has factored in that the European Union may reach a deal on some form of restrictions on Russian crude," said Madhavi Mehta, commodity research analyst at Kotak Securities.

"We may see further upside only if it is a complete ban. Any watered-down deal or one which includes exemptions may not have much positive impact," she added.



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His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik

350 media personnel from 120 nations to meet in Muscat today

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is hosting one of the biggest gatherings of journalists in the world from Tuesday, May 31, to June 3, Friday. Over 350 journalists and media personnel from 120 countries will attend the International Federation of Journalists Congress in Muscat.

The triennial congress being held in cooperation with Oman Journalists' Association (OJA) will help Oman register its presence in the global media map and open new avenues in diverse fields, according to the sultanate's media professionals.

The congress will be presided over by Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Co-operation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan.

In an interview to the radio programme *Sabah al Shabab*, Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harassi, Minister of Information, said the congress will provide an opportunity to introduce the sultanate and its economic, natural, historical and cultural elements to the world.

"The world will get a closer look at Omani society, where there is peace and stimulation for intellectual pursuits, besides development in all aspects of life," the minister said.



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DR ABDULLAH BIN NASSER AL HARASSI



He added that the presence of journalists from across the world reflects appreciation of Omani media internationally. "The local media is known for representing rationality, balance and prioritising the interests of the nation, society, and the people."

The congress is also a tribute to the history of Oman's media

of the last 50 years, during which it played an essential role in raising national awareness and guiding society, Harassi said.

"The freedom of expression is guaranteed, and there are no restrictions on any journalist or any citizen who wishes to express his opinion with evidence and understanding in any field. This

should be done within the framework of the law that regulates media practices, in a manner that enhances the process of development and progress."

He noted that the public in the sultanate express opinions on social media. "This is appreciated as long as it is within the limits of the law and it does not infringe

on anyone's right. Whoever expresses his opinion within these limits is welcome."

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Fayza al Kalbani, a Muscat-based journalist, said that the congress is a reflection of the world's confidence in the media institutions of the sultanate and recognition of Oman's capabilities in organising such international conferences.

She praised the efforts made by OJA to host the congress, requiring coordination between associations and unions from across the world.

"This event is an opportunity to market and promote Oman in the international media, about its tourism, culture and economic potential. The concerned institutions should organise field visits to tourist and historical sites for the participants, which will give them an opportunity to write for their media about the sultanate."

Zainab Khamis al Zadjali, another journalist, said that hosting the congress is in line with the current developments in the field of journalism and media in the country. "The conference is an opportunity to get acquainted with some of the brightest journalists and international media experts, to discuss opportunities to preserve and protect the rights of journalists, and to raise awareness on quality in journalistic and media work," Zainab said.



Communities to finance 8 dams in Dhahirah, Dakhliyah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) is helping construction of eight dams in Dakhliyah and Dhahirah governorates with the support and financing of communities around these projects.

A statement issued by MAFWR described the dams as underground recharge.

"The ministry is preparing a study of the proposed sites for the construction of the dams, including tenders and designs of the projects, while the people of the area are financing the dams," MAFWR stated.

Of the eight, five are in Dakhliyah - Nizwa (50m long, 12.5m high), Bidiyah (42m long, 8m high), Izki (244m long, 9m high), and two in Bahla (130m

Of the 8, five are in Dakhliyah - Nizwa, Bidiyah, Izki and 2 in Bahla - and 3 in Dhahirah - 2 in Ibri and 1 in Yanqul

long, 5m high, and 54m long, 10m high).

Dhahirah governorate will have three dams, of which two will be constructed in the wilayat of Ibri (25m long, 9.5m high, and 226m long, 9m high). The third dam, in the wilayat of Yanqul, will be 20m long and 10m high.

The ministry has built 174 dams, 56 of which are for groundwater recharge, 115 surface storage and three for flood protection in various governorates.

Workshop held to support real estate sector in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Dhofar branch of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), in cooperation with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, organised a workshop on Monday to raise awareness on real estate sector practices in the sultanate.

A statement issued by OCCI Dhofar said that the workshop addressed the professions and activities licensed by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP). It targeted real estate owners, brokerage firms and valuation offices, besides bank managers in the governorate.

The topics of the workshop included terms of reference and



Wesama al Harbi

objectives of the Directorate General of Real Estate Development, the sector's stimulus plan, escrow contracts for real estate development projects, and combating money laundering and terrorist financing and their impact on the real estate sector.

The workshop also discussed procedures for obtaining licences to engage in real estate activities,

and introduced the National Initiative for Integrated Residential Neighbourhoods (Sorouh) of MHUP.

Wesama al Harbi, director of Sorouh, informed that the objectives of the project include increasing the efficiency of urban development and enhancing modern lifestyle by providing ready housing.

Real estate worth RO587.5mn was traded in the first quarter of 2022, while more than 60,000 title deeds were issued during this period, according to a report issued by MHUP.

Of the RO587.5mn worth of real estate traded, RO284.5mn was for mortgages, RO99.1mn for sales contracts, and RO3.9mn for swap contracts, among others.



Sayyid Badr receives Patriarch John X

Muscat - H E Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, received His Beatitude John X, Patriarch of Antioch in the Syrian Arab Republic, on Monday.

The two reviewed efforts ex-

erted to enhance political and diplomatic dialogue in a bid to achieve regional and international stability, security and peace. His Beatitude John X lauded Oman's good will initia-

tive in spreading peace, tolerance and coexistence.

The meeting was attended by several officials from the Foreign Ministry and the delegation accompanying the guest.

19 infiltrators arrested, 23kg of drugs seized: ROP

Muscat - Royal Oman Police (ROP) has arrested 19 expatriates for entering Oman illegally and seized 23kg of drugs in separate incidents.

The Department for Combating Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, led by the South Batinah Governorate Police, arrested two Asians with 23kg of crystal meth in their possession.

In the second incident, Coast Guard Police boats in North Batinah governorate arrested 17 infiltrators of Asian nationalities on two boats off the coast of North Batinah.

150 unauthorised military uniforms seized in Muttrah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) seized 150 unauthorised military uniforms in Muttrah on Monday.

"The authority carried out inspection visits to 62 shops in Muttrah to ensure compliance with the Consumer Protection Law and its regulations, relevant systems and decisions. Such inspections also make sure markets are free of goods and practices that may affect the safety and health of consumers," the CPA stated.

Its specialists seized 45 goods past validity date, besides the unauthorised uniforms, which violate Consumer Protection Authority Decision No 9/2019 banning the circulation of military or similar clothes. Seven shops were raided and issued 30 warnings for non-compliance with the Consumer Protection Law.

SHOPS GUTTED IN SEEB, NO INJURIES REPORTED



The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) extinguished a fire that broke out in a commercial establishment in the wilayat of Seeb on Monday. In a statement, CDAA said firefighters managed to put out the fire in a cluster of shops in Seeb. No injuries were reported. The authority called on institutions and companies to adhere to safety requirements in commercial buildings to avoid risk of catching fire (Supplied photo)



Royal Academy of Management unveils programmes, strategy, brand identity

Shaddad al Musalmi
Muscat

The Royal Academy of Management - established via Royal Decree 2/2022 on January 11, 2022, and having the honorary patronage of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik - unveiled its strategy and launched the first suite of its national programmes at a press conference held on Monday.

Highlighting the guiding principle of the academy's work in developing and empowering existing and future leaders of Oman in both the public and private sectors, Dr Ali bin Qassim al Lawati, president of the academy, said it aims to become a "beacon in executive leadership and management" fulfilling Oman's vision for the future.

"The academy's fundamental pillars are Oman Vision 2040, the development of the state's institutions, the economic requirements of the future, and adoption of modern learning tools and methods. The academy is a dynamic hub for executive learning and a centre for developing national leadership, managerial capabilities and future knowledge," Lawati said.

He explained that the academy's work philosophy is built upon an innovative lean model



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DR ALI BIN QASSIM AL LAWATI

based on portfolio management to be carried out by independent teams. "These teams consist of graduates and professionals from the business community working together with the academy in a flexible structure. The guiding principle for the academy's work is the ambitious vision of His Majesty in developing and em-

powering existing and future leaders in Oman," he said.

The Royal Academy of Management has two boards - the International Advisory Board and the Alumni Board.

Lawati informed that the International Advisory Board consists of world-renowned experts ensuring that the academy follows

the latest practices and highest global standards. "This board will also help enhance the international reputation of the academy. The Alumni Board will be responsible for bringing together the academy's alumni, who will deliver some of its training programmes."

Four centres of excellence

The academy operates through four independent centres of excellence, ensuring a rapid response to changes in its work priorities. These are the Centre for Government, Centre for Leadership in Business, Centre for Local Governance and Centre for Future Studies. "These centres follow the guiding principles of Royal Directives on state institutions, the importance of the private sector, local sustainable development and Oman's national priorities," Lawati said.

The Centre for Government is tasked with primarily equipping the senior cadre of public sector officials in Oman who are directly responsible for the realisation of Oman's 2040 vision.

The Centre for Leadership in Business is mandated with providing cutting-edge innovations in private sector leadership at all levels, from middle management to CEOs.

The academy will also focus on development in governorates through the Centre for Local Governance. "This will include a wide range of programmes for governors, walis and director generals in governorates offering them best practices in local governance with an aim to stimulate economic growth and local sustainable development. In addition, the academy will develop a national index for measuring and tracking the quality of services provided by the governorates to citizens and businesses," Lawati said.

The academy has started delivering its leadership programmes, including the National Collaborative Leadership Programme and Train The Trainer.

"The next suite of programmes will be rolled out this year starting in the fourth quarter. The programmes are designed for undersecretaries, director generals, CEOs and future leaders in both the public and private sectors."

During the press conference, the academy revealed its official brand identity with an emblem that symbolises the convergence of a great legacy and a prosperous future. It was inspired by the ancient Sultanate Tughra, traditionally adopted by the sultans of Oman as a seal for their official documents and correspondence.



MHT invites bids to restore 5 heritage sites

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) will restore five heritage sites in its ongoing efforts to preserve historical buildings and boost tourism.

A ministry official said, "As part of our efforts to support the national economy and benefit from the historical structures in the country, the ministry has floated a tender for restoration of five heritage sites."

Bids are invited for maintenance of Sohar Fort, Hammam Fort in the wilayat of Dima Wa

al Taien in North Sharqiyah, Awlad Hamad Mosque in the wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan in South Sharqiyah, and two historical walls in Al Hilal and Al Maghabesha in the wilayat of Suwaiq in North Batinah.

Built in the 13th century, Sohar Fort is counted among the most important forts in North Batinah governorate due to its strategic location and the role it played in history, the ministry stated.

Hammam Fort is an important archaeological monument with 25 rooms and an exterior

wall of 250m.

The deadline for bid submission is July 12.

MHT is continuing to restore and maintain castles and forts of distinct architecture. It is currently working on setting up several projects to attract tourists to achieve the strategic goals of Oman Vision 2040.

According to National Centre for Statistics and Information's data for 2020, 133,464 people visited castles and forts that year compared to 426,525 in 2019, a decrease of 68.6 per cent due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Oman lifts all COVID-19 travel restrictions across its airports

Muscat - Oman Air, the national carrier, announced that all COVID-19 precautionary measures and procedures in place at airports across the sultanate have been lifted.

"Arriving international travellers no longer need to register through the eMushrif portal or undertake a PCR test before or upon arrival, as previously required. Furthermore, authorities have removed all quarantine requirements as well as the requirement to download the Tarassud+ Track & Trace application prior to departing for Oman," a statement said.

It added that guests departing Oman should ensure that they are aware of all pre-departure requirements, which are provided at omanair.com



Sultanate participates in WHO meet

Geneva, Switzerland - Oman, represented by the Ministry of Health (MoH), took part in the 151st meeting of World Health Organization, held in Geneva, on Monday.

The meeting's agenda covered several topics, including review of a report of the Executive Council on the Department of Budget and Management.

The event was attended by H E Dr Mohammed Saif al Hosni, Undersecretary for Health Affairs in MoH, and Dr Jumana Ahmed al Abduwani, Director-General of International Relations and Organisations, MoH.

MAFWR employs biological control to combat fruit tree pests

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has launched a programme to combat pomegranate moth in the 2022 season.

The programme employs biological control methods by using parasitic wasps of the genus *Trichogramma* to combat fruit tree pests in Jabal Akhdar.

The project, funded by the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund, started in May and will continue until September.

Pomegranate moths threaten pomegranate, apple and walnut crops.

The programme will see production of up to 220mn *Trichogramma* parasitic wasps in 2022 to fight fruit tree pests.

MAFWR released more than 265mn *Trichogramma* parasitic wasps in the last two years, which resulted in the protection of 94 per cent fruit crops in the



2020 season and 95 per cent in 2021. The biological pest control project contributed to protecting the environment, reducing the use of pesticides, and maintaining ecological balance for the cultivation of pomegranate trees.

The ministry cooperates with farmers and the Pomegranate Association to release *Trichogramma* parasitic wasps on farms to combat the pests, besides using environmentally friendly pesticides, to maintain

environmental diversity in Jabal Akhdar.

Trichogramma is a genus of minute polyphagous wasps that are endoparasitoids of insect eggs. *Trichogramma* is one of around 80 genera from the family Trichogrammatidae, with over 200 species worldwide. Although several groups of egg parasitoids are commonly employed for biological control, *Trichogramma* have been the most extensively studied.

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	38	25
Doha	37	24
Kuwait City	42	28
Manama	36	25
Muscat	36	27
Riyadh	41	25

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	3.54am
Sunrise	5.20am
Duhr	12.10pm
Asr	3.29pm
Maghrib	6.54pm
Isha	8.15pm

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MARKET WATCH	
MSX30	4,138.28
Sensex	55,925.74
FOREX RATES (RO1 equals)	
Indian Rs	201.47
Pakistani Rs	516.03
Bangladeshi taka	231.27
Philippines peso	135.97
Sri Lankan Rs	947.69
*Rates as on MAY30 Source: xe.com	

BRIEFS

Dubai's DAMAC makes foray into US market

UAE-based DAMAC Properties announced that it has won the US\$120mn bid to acquire land in the upscale Miami neighbourhood of Surfside. The Dubai-based developer plans to build an ultra-luxurious, CAVALLI branded condominium project.

The property, on Collins Avenue, offers residents 200 feet of direct beach frontage and access to South Beach and Bal Harbour. The land, comprising 1.8 acres, was sold to DAMAC for US\$120mn through the court process.

DAMAC chairman and founder, Hussain Sajwani, said, "DAMAC Properties has long been eyeing development opportunities in Miami. We see the city, which is known for being a luxury and fashion centre, as a natural fit for our company."

The Surfside project will be DAMAC's first in the United States.



OQ to set up plastic industries project in Suhar Industrial City

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's global integrated energy group OQ will establish a plastics industries park in the Suhar Industrial City that will produce high value-added semi-finished and finished plastics products.

OQ on Monday announced that it has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) to establish the plastics project on a 1mn sqm area within Suhar Industrial City.

The MoU was signed by Hilal bin Ali al Kharusi, chief executive - commercial and downstream at OQ, Hilal bin Hamed al Hasni, chief executive officer of Madayn, and Dr. Ayman bin Abdullah al Fudhaili, acting CEO

The plastics park will produce semi-finished and finished high value-added plastic products with OQ serving as the major provider of high-quality raw materials

of the Industrial Innovation Academy.

The signing ceremony took place under the patronage of H E Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, chairman of the Implementation Support and Follow-up Unit, according to the tweets posted by

OQ.

"The plastics park will produce semi-finished and finished high value-added plastic products with OQ serving as the major provider of high-quality raw materials. The plastics park is another accomplishment in OQ's repertoire in line with Oman Vision 2040," OQ said.

Madayn - which manages and operates industrial cities in Oman - in its tweets confirmed that Industrial Innovation Academy and Madayn signed the MoU with OQ aimed at developing plastics industries complex on an area exceeding 1mn sqm in the Suhar Industrial City.

"This new complex will play a key role in promoting value-added plastic industries and offering investment opportunities for SMEs," Madayn added.

Sohar Freezone attracts first IT project from Chinese firm



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sohar Port and Freezone has signed an agreement with China's United Projects Achievement (FZC) for the lease of 25,000 sqm of land at the freezone on which a new Cloud Data Centre will be constructed.

The data centre will include a multi-functional server room combined with artificial intelligence, big data, and cloud computing. Anticipated to be in operation towards the end of 2022, Cloud Data Centre will be the first investment project of information technology at Sohah Freezone, according to a press statement.

"This agreement represents a major milestone for us in line with our plans to make Sohah

Freezone a frontrunner in innovation and a smart, technologically advanced ecosystem. It is the second Chinese land-lease investment project at the freezone, as we continue to promote its enormous potential as a hub for Chinese investment," Omar al Mahrizi, chief executive officer of Sohah Freezone, said.

"A diverse number of industries, projects and countries have chosen to bring their business to Sohah Freezone, and we are confident that China's United Projects Achievement facility will help attract future investments, particularly in IT, diversifying our income sources with wide-ranging economic benefits for Oman," he added.

Yu Xiao, CEO of China's United Projects Achievement said, "Sohah Port and Feezone is

the world's fastest growing port and freezone complex that offers a strategic location at the heart of global trade routes. There are significant advantages for us to invest. The new data centre will enable us to replicate our achievements in our home market, serve the increasing demand for affordable and secure cloud computing, and add further impetus to Oman's economic diversification plans. This partnership is reaffirming our success as we remain among China's the top 10 when it comes to cloud computing platforms."

Presenting a wealth of benefits to investors, Sohah Freezone offers an abundance of land available for new construction as well as allowing investors to lease warehouses and commercial offices.

Food price shock reverberates through Middle East economies, says S&P

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Food and energy price shocks on the back of the Russia-Ukraine conflict could increase income inequality and pose risks in some Middle East and North African (MENA) countries, S&P Global Ratings said in a new report published on Monday.

"Our analysis has found that Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia will be among the hardest hit by economic spillovers from the conflict because their net food and energy imports account for between 4 per cent and 17 per cent of their GDP and they source a large part of their cereal supply from Russia and Ukraine," said S&P economist Valerij Rezvijs.



S&P believes that rising food and energy prices and supply insecurities, alongside high youth unemployment in these countries, could lead to higher income inequality and pose risks to existing sociopolitical dynamics.

Temporary fiscal measures to

soften the blow to consumers and producers and prevent social discontent will put pressure on post-pandemic fiscal consolidation, the ratings agency noted.

"A protracted Russia-Ukraine conflict that kept food prices el-

evated over the medium term bears a risk of worsening the fiscal dynamics of MENA commodity importers," said Rezvijs.

S&P's report said the Russia-Ukraine conflict will likely continue to pressure food and energy markets given Russia's pivotal role in energy supply and both countries' significant contribution to global agricultural exports.

The conflict has triggered steep increases in commodity prices because both countries are major exporters of many key commodities. Energy markets are hard hit, given Russia's pivotal role in the global energy supply, with Brent oil price up by 50 per cent this year.

Food markets are also among the most affected, as Russia and

Ukraine together account for almost 60 per cent of global exports of sunflower oil, over 25 per cent of wheat, and almost 15 per cent of corn. Russia and Belarus are also important producers of fertilizers, S&P said.

"Consequently, prices for cereals have surged following the start of the conflict. We are also seeing other countries imposing controls on food exports to protect domestic consumers, such as the Indian government's recent decision to restrict exports of wheat following a drought. Such developments are adding to food price pressures," the ratings agency said.

Future developments remain uncertain, but S&P believes that commodity prices are likely to stay elevated for some time.

MSX rises 0.43% amid thin trading

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange rose 0.43 per cent on Monday to close at 4,138.28 points.

The gains in the main index were supported by all the sectoral indices led by Financial Index which rose 0.56 per cent. While Services Index increased 0.26 per cent on Sunday, Industrial Index rose 0.18 per cent. MSX Sharia Index, however, inched down 0.02 per cent.

Total trading volumes decreased by 28.7 per cent to 14.7mn shares against 20.6mn shares traded on Sunday. Market turnover dropped 17.7 per cent to RO2.46mn

compared with RO2.99mn recorded in the previous trading session.

The market breadth of the MSX remained positive with 18 advancing stocks to seven decliners. As many as 23 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers for the day were Al Anwar Investment (7.23 per cent), National Aluminium Products (6.52 per cent), Al Sharqia Investment (4.55 per cent), United Finance (4.49 per cent) and Voltamp Energy (4.04 per cent). Top losers were Oman REIT Fund (-5.41 per cent), Financial Corporation (-1.25 per cent), A'Saffa Foods (-0.63 per cent) and Al Anwar Ceramics (-0.48 per cent).

Tourism recovering, but not back to pre-pandemic levels

Paris, France - Global tourism is roaring back to life despite Covid travel headaches and the effects of the war in Ukraine, but it has yet to return to its pre-pandemic health.

International tourist arrivals worldwide have more than doubled, up 130 per cent in January 2022 on the same period last year, according to the latest UN World Tourism Organization figures.

Travellers are regaining confidence, and Europe and the Americas are leading the resurgence.

Worldwide, there have been 18mn additional visitors, the UNWTO said, "equivalent to the total increase recorded over the whole of 2021".

In 2019, global tourism revenues reached US\$1.48tn. That figure dropped by almost two thirds due to the pandemic the following year.

While January confirms the recovery trend that began in 2021, the UNWTO highlighted how the Omicron Covid variant recently put the brakes on the rise. International arrivals in January 2022 were still 67 per cent lower than before the pandemic.

Most regions have seen travellers return and rebound from the low levels of early 2021, with Europe faring three times better and the Americas twice as well.

That's still some way off pre-pandemic numbers, but Larry Cuculic, general manager of the Best Western hotel company, is optimistic.

"I travelled earlier this week and I can tell you that the airports, the international terminals in the US are very crowded and there is a demand or an interest in travelling to Europe, because for several years we couldn't do that," he told AFP.

"We miss going to Paris,



People visit the Sensoji Temple, a tourist spot in Tokyo on Monday as Japan earlier announced borders reopen to tourists on guided tours starting June 10 (AFP)

Rome and Berlin."

The Middle East is also experiencing a boom, with arrivals up 89 per cent on 2021, and so is

Africa, with numbers up 51 per cent - but these two regions are still very far from their 2019 totals, according to the UNWTO.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the number of travellers is falling in the Asia-Pacific region, where several destinations remain

closed. In January, international tourist arrivals were down 93 per cent from pre-pandemic levels.

Travel by Chinese tourists, the world's biggest spenders before the pandemic, is also severely affected by China's zero-Covid policy.

According to travel analyst ForwardKeys, the second quarter of 2022 still looks "more promising for international travel in the world than the first quarter".

The Caribbean and South America are drawing tourists looking for sea and sunshine in the northern hemisphere summer. Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Aruba and Jamaica are among the 20 most popular destinations, even exceeding pre-pandemic levels.

In Europe, tourists are flocking to France, Spain, Portugal, Greece and Iceland, but not in the same numbers as before Covid.

France is doing well enough, though. In February, international tourism revenues in the country "came close to those of 2019", according to France's tourism minister Jean-Baptiste Lemoine.

At 2.7bn euros (US\$2.8bn), revenues were up 1.5bn euros compared to last year and down eight per cent compared to 2019, he told reporters.

In 2019, before the pandemic, the tourism sector in France represented 7.4 per cent of GDP and 9.5 per cent of jobs.

According to Lemoine, France is "very well positioned" as the "number one destination for travel in Europe for Americans, Belgians, Italians and Spaniards".

The French, for their part, are "a European exception", the minister said, pointing out that 60 per cent plan to stay in their own country over the holidays.

AFP

EU struggles to break deadlock on Russian oil ban before summit

Brussels, Belgium – Ambassadors from the 27 European Union member states examined a compromise mooted to enable them to break the deadlock on a Russian oil embargo ahead of an emergency summit in Brussels.

The bloc's officials fear the absence of an agreement would cast a shadow over the two-day meeting which started Monday between European leaders.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky will address the gathering by video link to press the bloc to "kill Russian exports" three months after the invasion of Ukraine.

The latest round of proposed sanctions by the EU has been blocked by landlocked Hungary, which has no access to seafaring oil cargo ships.

Hungary is dependent for 65 per cent of its oil needs on Russian crude supplied via the Druzhba pipeline, which runs from Russia to various points in eastern and central Europe.

Budapest has rejected as inadequate a proposal to allow it two years longer than other EU states to wean itself off Russian oil. It wants at least four years and at least 800mn euros (US\$860mn) in EU funds to adapt its refineries to process non-Russian crude and boost pipeline capacity to neighbouring Croatia.



People take part in a rally to call EU leaders to 'stop buying Russian gas' ahead of a EU summit in Brussels on Monday (AFP)

EU leaders will try to persuade Hungarian President Viktor Orban to back a watered-down oil embargo against Russia after a month of haggling over the bloc's latest sanctions.

The sixth wave of measures against Moscow was put on the table weeks ago, but has been refused by Orban who argues that an oil embargo would be an "atomic bomb" against his country's economy.

French President Emmanuel

Macron cautiously told reporters that a long-sought-after deal was "getting closer", but others doubted that the Hungarian leader was ready to sign on at this stage.

"I don't think we'll reach an agreement today," said Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas at a political meeting ahead of the summit in Brussels.

"Of course we're going to have discussions, but everybody needs to be on board," she said,

adding that she did not expect a solution before a summit in late June.

EU sanctions require the backing of all 27 member states and ambassadors fell short of finalising a deal just hours before the start of the summit.

Slovakia and the Czech Republic, also supplied by the Druzhba pipeline, accepted exemptions of two and half years, diplomatic sources said.

The compromise solution put

to national negotiators on Sunday consists in excluding the Druzhba pipeline from a future oil embargo and only imposing sanctions on oil shipped to the EU by tanker vessel, European sources said.

The Druzhba pipeline accounts for a third of all EU oil supplies from Russia. Maritime cargos account for the remaining two thirds.

No agreement

The compromise was tabled by France, which currently holds the rotating EU presidency, and by the European Council, which represents the governments of the EU nations.

Oil pumped in via the Druzhba pipeline would be excluded "for the time being", said one EU official. The aim is to break a stalemate that has, since early May, prevented the EU from imposing a sixth round of sanctions on Moscow over its war in Ukraine.

The proposal envisages ending the purchases of Russian crude within six months and Russian petroleum products by the end of the year.

It would also impose additional sanctions on Russian banks and expand the list of Russian individuals blacklisted by the bloc.

Yet EU ambassadors did not find agreement on the compro-

mise, with one EU official saying a "difficult and complex discussion" failed to bridge discord.

Another EU official said the mooted compromise raised questions of fairness on the sanctions burden shouldered by member states.

An EU diplomat said it was hoped an agreement could still be reached in time for Monday's summit, though that was far from certain.

"It might not work, it might work, but I think we have a duty to try," the official said.

"There is a willingness from all member states to work on oil and to ban (Russian) oil from European markets. The question is, how to do it and how to cater for national specificities," he added.

"To be frank, the question of sanctions will be in the room" when EU leaders meet, the official said.

Another option under consideration would be to postpone the entire package of new sanctions until a solution can be found to provide Hungary with alternative oil supplies, the sources said.

The EU wants to cut funding for the Kremlin's war effort. Last year's bill for Russian oil imports was 80bn euros (US\$86bn), four times greater than it was for gas in 2021.

AFP

Russians lose Netflix over Ukraine

Moscow, Russia – Russian subscribers have lost access to streaming giant Netflix in the latest pullout of a Western company over the conflict in Ukraine.

The Netflix site and apps were no longer available from Friday and a Netflix spokesperson confirmed that subscribers no longer had access.

"This is the fulfilment of the withdrawal from the Russian market" announced in March, a Netflix spokesperson told AFP on Monday.

The US-based platform announced in early March that it was withdrawing from Russia after Moscow sent thousands of troops into pro-Western Ukraine.

The spokesperson said the company had waited until the end of the current billing cycle before cutting off customers.

Netflix is the world's leading streaming platform, with 221.8mn subscribers at the end of 2021, but was a minor player in Russia. The company said in an April letter to shareholders that it had lost 700,000 paid subscribers as a result of its withdrawal from Russia, blaming the pullout for its first global drop in subscribers in a decade.

AFP

Global sales of electric cars soar but raw materials a concern

Paris, France – Sales of electric cars accelerated last year but the availability of critical raw materials such as lithium risked slowing the sector's growth, a report warned Monday.

At 6.6mn last year, electric vehicles sales more than doubled and they now account for one in 10 new cars sold, according to the International Energy Agency's annual report on the sector.

China alone accounted for half of those sales.

Electric vehicle sales continue to soar, rising by 75 per cent in the first quarter of this year compared to the same period last year. Public subsidies to lower the cost to consumers have been a major factor in the adoption of electric vehicles, and they doubled last year to nearly US\$32bn last year.

Manufacturers have also increased their offer with around 450 models now on sale, a five-fold increase since 2015.

But supply constraints and rising prices risk putting brakes on



the sector's growth.

"Policy makers, industry executives and investors need to be highly vigilant and resourceful in order to reduce the risks of supply disruptions and ensure sustainable supplies of critical minerals," said IEA director general Fatih Birol in a statement accompanying the report.

Production and processing of certain key materials is currently limited to a handful of countries.

China currently produces three quarters of the world's lithium-ion batteries, the main type used in cars and small electronic devices, and has half of the global refining capacity for lithium and other key elements

such as cobalt and graphite.

Supplies of lithium are inadequate if electric vehicles are to replace those internal combustion engines.

The IEA estimates a six-fold jump in output is needed by 2030, with the opening of 50 new mines.

AFP

India central bank to adopt graded approach for digital currency

Mumbai, India – The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has proposed to adopt a graded approach for the introduction of digital currency in the country, according to the RBI's annual report for financial year 2021-22.

The Reserve Bank of India is engaged in the introduction of a central bank digital currency (CBDC) in India.

The design of CBDC needs to be in conformity with the stated objectives of monetary policy, financial stability, and efficient operations of currency and payment systems, the report noted.

"The Reserve Bank proposes to adopt a graded approach to the introduction of CBDC, going step by step through stages of Proof of Concept, pilots and the launch," the report said.

Reacting on the report, BJD national spokesperson and Rajya Sabha MP Amar Patnaik said, the government should adopt the graded approach even in the case of private crypto space.

"With regard to a graded approach, I said exactly this about



six months ago. @RBI should have activated its regulatory sandbox at least two years ago & worked on this instead of espousing a ban. Even in the private #crypto space, Govt should follow this approach," Patnaik said in a tweet.

In the annual report, the RBI said it has been exploring the pros and cons of the introduction of CBDC in India.

The design of CBDC needs to be in conformity with the stated objectives of monetary policy, financial stability and efficient operations of currency and pay-

ment systems.

Accordingly, the appropriate design elements of CBDCs that could be implemented with little or no disruption are under examination.

The introduction of CBDC was announced in the Union Budget 2022-23 and an appropriate amendment to the RBI Act 1934 has been included in the Finance Bill 2022.

The Finance Bill 2022 has been enacted, providing a legal framework for the launch of CBDC.

ANI

Germany agrees to create \$107bn fund to modernise military in face of Russia threat

Berlin, Germany – Germany's government and conservative opposition have agreed a deal that will release 100bn euros (US\$107bn) to modernise the army in the face of the Russian threat. An agreement was reached late Sunday to create a special fund for military procurement that will also allow Berlin to achieve NATO's target of spending two per cent of GDP on defence.

The deal, which involves amending budgetary rules in the national constitution, was struck after weeks of difficult negotiations between the par-



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz

ties in the governing coalition and the conservatives of former chancellor Angela Merkel, representatives of these groups told AFP.

Three days after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February,

Chancellor Olaf Scholz pledged a special budget of 100bn euros to rearm the German military and modernise its outdated equipment over the next few years.

But critics have since accused Scholz of timidity in his support for Kyiv and failing to take enough concrete action in terms of arms deliveries.

The agreement will allow Berlin to achieve NATO's target of spending 2.0 per cent of GDP on defence "on average over several years", according to the text of the agreement obtained by AFP.

The exceptional fund will be financed by additional debt.

For that it was necessary to circumvent the "debt brake" rule enshrined in the constitution, which caps government borrowing.

This was why the government needed the support of the conservative opposition to muster the two-thirds majority in parliament needed to pass the constitutional amendment.

The 100bn euros will be paid into a special fund outside the national budget.

Release of the funds for the military is a major reversal for

Germany, which in recent years has dragged its feet on complying with its NATO spending commitments, drawing criticism from Washington in particular. Since the end of the Cold War, Germany has significantly reduced the size of its army, from around 500,000 in 1990 to just 200,000 today.

Fewer than 30 per cent of German naval ships were "fully operational" according to a report published December on the state of the military. Many of the country's fighter aircraft are unfit to fly.

AFP

ANNOUNCEMENT

Al Nama Real Estate Company announces that **Mr.Taha bin Humaid bin Salem Al Musalmi is Omani Nationality with civil number 4270769 who was working as a senior leasing consultant has left the work since 17/5/2022 and does not represent the company in any way Since the date he left the company. Thus, we would like to point out not to deal with the above-mentioned in any dealings related to The company, and in the event of any claims, please submit them to the company's management headquarters Located in Azaiba, 18 November Street, Building No.: 535, within a maximum period of two weeks from the date of this announcement was published, and no claims received from the company will be considered yet this period of time.**

Audi RS 3 makes its first regional appearance in Oman

Audi Oman, represented by Premium Motors, organised an exciting driving event for the all-new Audi RS3 at Oman Automobile Association where the model made its first regional appearance.

The Audi Driving Experience Team supported Audi Oman in organising the special event. The objective was for media and prospective customers to experience the new RS3 and also demonstrate the new torque splitter rear differential, a press release said.

Audi Driving Experience instructors set up two identical dynamic handling courses in a head-to-head format. Each guest got to test their skill levels in the new RS3 having practice laps first before competing against the clock.

The coned handling course included a staggered gate slalom showing the agility and steering feel. The course also featured a large U-turn corner demonstrating the torque splitter. A full acceleration zone followed by a target braking box was included in the last section showing the performance of the five-cylinder engine and larger brakes.

Once everyone in the session had completed their timed laps the winner was then taken on a quick lap in the car by Omani drifter Ali al Balushi and then the Audi Driving Instructors demonstrated the full advan-



tages of the torque mode in a drift lap.

As the most powerful and dynamic RS3 ever, the all-new Audi model delivers intelligent, and responsive performance. Equipped with a 294 kW (400 HP) five-cylinder, the high-performance engine delivers rapid

acceleration with an exhilarating sound. The power unit now delivers 500 Nm of torque and responds even faster than previous models. Externally, the RS3 demonstrates its sporty DNA with a widened body, RS sports exhaust system, and cockpit displays comparable to

those found in race cars.

Christian Nehme, general manager of Premium Motors Oman, said, "The new Audi RS3 sedan offers driving dynamics of the highest caliber and the best numbers in its segment. It provides impressive performance, a powerful design, in a 2.5ltr TFSI

engine providing the driver with new thrills every single day. Its 5-cylinder turbocharged engine produces a whopping 401 horsepower and, paired with the standard seven-speed dual-clutch transmission, helps propel the RS 3 from 0-62 mph in only 3.8 seconds."



Barwani bags 'Youth ICT Influencer of the Year' award at COMEX

At Oman's official technology event, COMEX 2022, Tariq Hilal al Barwani, has been honoured with the prestigious 'Youth ICT Influencer of the Year' award by H E Dr Ali al Shidhani, Undersecretary for Communications and Information Technology at Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

The award was presented to Tariq for his outstanding achievements over the years to influence youth towards adopting useful future technologies, a press release said.

"Tariq has been instrumental as a role model for the youth to adapt and prospect future technologies for two decades since he was a young boy. The positive impact of Tariq's work has created many Omanis to pursue ICT as a career, an entrepreneurial path as well as do business in the field of ICT. Tariq is an outstanding leader who continues to serve the community and the people in the country," said Sadiq

Khan, Group COO of OITE and Arab Research Bureau.

During the three-day packed technology event, Tariq ran an innovative technology clinic where he provided guidance to students to pursue the right ICT education for job opportunities, advised young entrepreneurs on their business ideas, plans, and operations, and supported employees on courses to take in order keep up with the advancements and requirements of future technologies.

"Tariq's contribution for COMEX helps individuals, societies and communities to embrace future technologies with confidence so as empower their personal and professional growth," added Sadiq.

"It is an honour to receive this award from the biggest technology event in the sultanate. I will continue supporting and empowering the youth and the society as a whole with resources I have for the betterment of Oman and its future," Barwani said.

Ooredoo provides super Internet



Giving its customers more of what they love, Ooredoo's free 5G bonus data offer gives users an unbeatable data experience. Customers can take advantage of up to a massive 4TB free 5G data on Shahry Omanuna 100 with total data of 6TB and 30GB on Shahry Endless 10 absolutely free with total data of 44GB, and all bonus data is valid for two months. With plans starting from RO10, there's no better way to enjoy super-charged internet wherever and whenever, a press release said.

Helping mobile users stay connected around the clock, Ooredoo's Shahry Endless and Omanuna offer a variety of options to suit all needs and budgets. From never-ending internet, unlimited local voice, generous international minutes and so much more, it all comes with no contract which means plenty of freedom to upgrade or downgrade, swap and repeat. Plus, Omanuna plans come with a free subscription to STARZPLAY, so there's entertainment on tap!

Sohar International to participate in New Age Banking Summit

Committed to leading the dialogue on innovation in the banking space, Sohar International will be participating in the New Age Banking Summit and extending its support to the event as the Digital Transformation Partner. The event will also witness Ewan John MacLeod, chief transformation officer at Sohar International sharing his insights in the event's panel discussion.

Sohar International has been leading the way in deploying unique digital banking solutions to meet the changing preferences of customers.

It has demonstrated exceptional development and application of technologies that have positively impacted the entire banking sector, further reinstating its calibre, agility, and digital prowess, a press release said.

The New Age Banking Summit is a highly anticipated banking event slated to take place on May 31 at Al Bustan Palace and will welcome as its chief guest and keynote speaker, Tahir al Amri, executive president of the Central Bank of Oman.

With strong support from Oman Banks Association, the summit will also witness the participation of over 150 delegates from more than 100 Banking, financial services, insurance and technology companies, including leaders of the top 10 banks in Oman.

Ahmed al Musalmi, CEO of Sohar International said, "Sohar International has been successful in establishing its position as a leader in digital transformation because of the bank's pervasive culture of experimentation,

agility in operations, and keenness in embracing technological innovation.

With strong values that align with the digital transformation goals of the nation, we will remain steadfast in our endeavours to contribute towards reshaping the future of banking."

A key part of the summit will be the insightful presentations from senior executives in the sector and a rounded, end-to-end panel discussion where MacLeod will present his views.

Through the bank's participation and support at thought-leadership forums like the New Age Banking Summit, Sohar International seeks to continuously build on its acquired momentum and offer its unfaltering services to cater to the varying digital banking needs of its customers.



Oman Arab Bank conducts 'Leading with a Smile' at NHI

Oman Arab Bank undertook a new type of training last week as they partnered with National Hospitality Institute's Smiles of Oman programme.

This particular course is named 'Leading with a smile' and is designed for the leaders in their areas to take responsibility and be role models in customer service for their team

members.

The course also includes the design of a Customer Charter which provides the operation with guidelines of standards of service.

This is ideally shared with the public so that they also know what to expect.

Banks are increasingly being measured by their stan-

dards of service and how their staff interact with their customers. Smiles of Oman is divided into three key areas - Starting with a smile, Serving with smile, and Leading with a smile.

These are all designed for different types of clients but all have the same theme of great customer service.

Indian school teachers win awards for excellence

The prestigious 'Navin Asher-Kazi Awards for Excellence in Teaching', instituted by the Board of Directors of Indian Schools in Oman, were conferred on ten teachers from Indian Schools in the Sultanate of Oman at a function on May 28 at Indian School Al Seeb.

H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, graced the occasion as the chief guest. Shununa Salim al Habsi, assistant director general for Special Education, Ministry of Education, was the Guest of Honour. Dr Sivakumar Manickam, chairman, Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman, presided over the function.

Dr Maha Kobeil, dean and CEO of Majan University College, delivered the keynote address. The function was attended by Kiran Asher and family, the patrons of the Award, members



of the Board of Directors, presidents, principals, and the award nominees of Indian Schools.

Dr Sivakuma, who highlighted the relevance of teachers during the pandemic, stressed the significant role teachers play in the lives of students. He announced

the board's plan to institute school-wise awards in addition to the existing Awards for Excellence to motivate and encourage more participation of the teachers. Navin Asher Kazi Award for Excellence in Teaching was conferred on ten teachers. These in-

cluded Manjubashini Saiprasanna (Indian School Al Maabela) and Rejani Baiju (Indian School Nizwa) in the Kindergarten category, M Dhanya and Neethu Chandran from Indian School Al Maabela in the Primary School Category,

Abida Akthar and Anu B Mathew from Indian School Muscat in the Middle School Category, C P Sudheer (Indian School Al Maabela) and Dr N Sujatha (Indian School Sur) in the Senior School Category, Vijayarajakumar (Indian School

Muscat) and Afzalkhan Sherkhan (Indian School Al Ghubra) in the Co-scholastic Category.

Teachers in different categories were also given certificates of recognition for their outstanding contributions.



SBA offers Nissan loyalty programme

Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) is offering a loyalty programme that gives a host of benefits for its customers.

As per the loyalty programme, all Nissan existing owners and their immediate family members (father, mother, son(s) and unmarried daughter(s)) will be eligible for additional benefits on purchase of another Nissan vehicle.

This offer for all loyal cus-

tomers will be applicable for vehicles bought for private use with yellow plate registrations and will not be applicable for rent a car, taxi, corporate, commercial registrations, SME or driving schools, a press release said.

A senior official of SBA said, "We are committed to rewarding loyal Nissan owners and the loyalty programme is our way of saying we care about our return-

ing customers.

When a current owner or an immediate family member purchases a new Nissan, the owner or the family member will be rewarded with loyalty benefits available at that time.

Over the years, Nissan has managed to make a loyal customer base and are happy to roll this program that benefits loyal Nissan customers."

Nissan loyalty programme

has been grouped in three categories - Gold Members (2-3 vehicles in family), Diamond Members (4-5 vehicles in family) and Platinum Members (6 and above vehicles in family).

The Nissan Loyalty Programme Members get special benefits like- special in-house interest rates on purchase of new vehicle, additional PMS services, trade-in additional benefit and many more.

Omantel's mobile app wins two gold at Stevie Awards



The winning streak continues for Omantel at global platforms as its service delivery approach integrated with innovation convenience makes daily lives and business operations better.

Oman's first and leading integrated telecom service provider in the sultanate has proudly bagged gold in two categories at the Middle East and North Africa Stevie Awards 2022 held recently, a press release said.

Omantel was named Gold Stevie Winner in the Innovation in Business Utility App and Innovative Use of Technology in Customer Service categories.

The awards, sponsored by the RAK Chamber of Commerce and Industry, received over 700

nominations from organisations across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) this year in close to 12 categories. Winners will be facilitated at a gala in Ras Al Khaimah, UAE.

The double victory for Omantel came for its innovative and groundbreaking mobile app, which combines international best practices in online customer service, its fully online onboarding process, exceptional customer experience, Noor - the app's Artificial Intelligence digital assistant, and round-the-clock customer service helpline.

The idea of relaunching Omantel App with a simplified online onboarding process

emerged shortly before the launch of eSIM in the Sultanate of Oman.

Omantel was the first telecommunications provider in Oman to offer its customers the option to order and activate an eSIM online.

Ammar al Lawati, senior manager of Digital Channels at Omantel, said, "The comprehensive digital experience has become an integral part of the customer's satisfaction and retention.

Thanks to the new features of Omantel App, customers can efficiently meet most of their needs online from their smartphone or tablets throughout the customer journey."

Trend Micro partners with OQ

Trend Micro Incorporated, a global leader in cybersecurity solutions, announced the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with one of the globally leading integrated energy companies OQ at the 31st Edition of the COMEX Technology Show 2022 at the Oman Convention Center recently.

The event was held under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, head of the Follow-up Unit for the Implementation of Oman Vision 2040, a press release said.

This initiative is considered one of the most important strategic projects in the field of cyber security in the Sultanate for the year 2022.

Under this agreement, Trend Micro will contribute to laying a solid foundation for protecting the entire digital infrastructure of OQ, as well as enhancing its capabilities in the Oil & Gas sector by pro-

moting and enabling innovations and helping to provide them with industry-leading solutions. The MoU was signed by Maryam al Shaibani, vice president for Information Digital Solution, Oman Oil Company and Assad Arabi, managing director, Gulf Cluster, Trend Micro.

Trend Micro aims to ensure the security protection of nine business units within the OQ framework, utilising best practices, advanced cybersecurity technology, and established strategies, especially since the group has built a strong presence in 17 countries globally.

Trend Micro's robust solutions will fortify OQ's operations and activities that cover the entire value chain in the energy sector, from exploration and production to marketing and distribution of finished products for fuels and chemicals to more than 60 countries across the world.

Renault Duster strikes a chord with owners

Renault Duster truly understands the aspirations of customers who wish to own a sports utility vehicle at a competitive price. Its powerful engine, attractive modern design, spacious cabin continues to resonate completely with proud customers in Oman.

Displaying Renault's essential characteristics of strength and SUV capability the Duster's features robust strength, functionality and safety, a press release said.

A die-hard fan of Renault Duster, Tariq al Abri from Rustaq, said, "The sports utility vehicle offers an invigorating take on 4WD driving experience, equipped great off-road capability and affordability. It outclasses the best in the market. Renault Duster adds more magnificence and refinement with its distinctive features."

Owner of a 1.6ltr 2WD Renault Duster, Khalil al Balushi from Salalah praised the car for its superior SUV capabilities and enhanced features. "It is equipped with multiple outstanding features and technology enhancements. It is an embodiment of strength, func-



tionality and safety. The great driving experience, off-road capability and affordability make

you a proud owner," he said.

Describing it an state of the art vehicle, Amal al Zedjali from

Muscat said, "I appreciate the car for its distinctive exterior styling, markedly self-assured

look and fuel efficiency. Renault Duster 2WD and 4WD's inspiring exteriors, elegant interiors and advanced equipment reiterates the maker's pledge for setting new standards in the SUV segment. With its proven strength to handle all challenges, the Renault Duster equipped with multiple outstanding features and technology enhancements, continues to set new standards in Oman."

A spokesperson for Renault Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, said, "Setting new standards in the SUV segment, the trendy Renault Duster continues to be a best-seller in Oman.

The vehicle plays a pivotal role in Renault Oman's product portfolio and has the widest offering in the segment and caters to evolving customer needs.

Its sleek style and innovative design, and its impressive interiors complement the striking exteriors, makes it a style statement inside out. The brand, which is embodied by top attributes, continues to resonate completely with proud customers in Oman."

GCET and Majan University College sign two MoUs

Global College of Engineering and Technology (GCET) and Majan University College (MUC) signed two Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) - one relating to research and innovation and the second one relating to benchmarking professional support department systems, processes, and practices.

The signing ceremony took place at Majan University College and was signed by Professor Geoffrey Elliott, dean-president of the Global College of Engineering and Technology and Dr Maha Kobeil, dean and CEO of Majan University College. Senior staff from both institutions attended the signing ceremony, a press release said.

Through this strategic collabor-



ation, both parties will support each other in enhancing the quality of research and innova-

tion activities and outcomes as well as benchmarking academic support practices and processes

and staff development.

Dr Kobeil said, "This cooperation effectively contributes to the

development and strengthening of the higher education sector in the Sultanate of Oman and en-

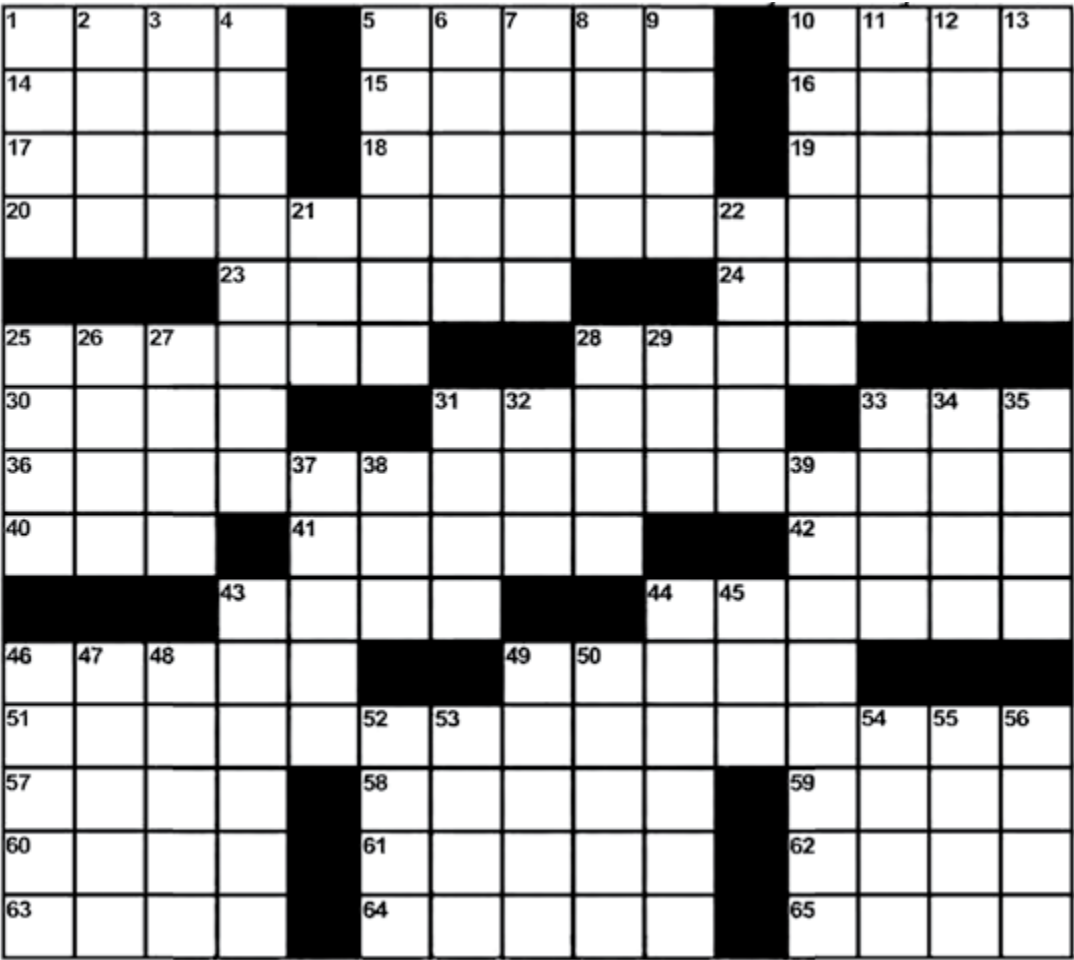
ables the sector to grow and achieve the desired goals.

This cooperation also pro-

vides opportunities to get to know the best practices and systems in the sector through benchmarking with the aim to benefit from these practices and to raise efficiency and quality in areas such as research, student support, and other important aspects in the higher education sector."

Professor Geoffrey added, "We are very excited indeed to have this collaboration with MUC. This agreement will enhance research and innovation cooperation. It will also facilitate staff development and enable us to benchmark to best-practices in the Higher Education sector. MUC is an outstanding institution to benchmark to in the sultanate of Oman."

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**

 - 1) Three-player card game
 - 5) Thumbnails
 - 10) "Then it's settled"
 - 14) "Little" girl of early comics
 - 15) Flynn of old Hollywood
 - 16) Napoleon exile spot
 - 17) Jewish month after Shevat
 - 18) Sung syllables
 - 19) Like a useless tire
 - 20) Back fill x 3
 - 23) Sculpting materials
 - 24) Decreases in strength
 - 25) Ancient
 - 28) A pair's air
 - 30) "Buona _" (Italian greeting)
 - 31) Cause to laugh
 - 33) Scholastic stat
 - 36) Back fill x 4
 - 40) "What _ the odds?"
 - 41) Fabled slipper material
 - 42) Place of desertion
 - 43) Bit of defamation
- 44) Steal gas, in a way

46) Follow as a result

49) Birchbark craft

51) Back fill x 3

57) Shot for one?

58) Baking need

59) Lake that's great

60) Certainly not for

61) Top-_ (golf ball brand)

62) Move merchandise

63) Medical advice, often

64) Jazzy instruments

65) Ooze through cracks

DOWN

 - 1) Concrete section
 - 2) African antelope
 - 3) Winged
 - 4) Traitor
 - 5) Group of four
 - 6) Deck out
 - 7) Sticking points on crows?
 - 8) Caffeine-containing nut
 - 9) Kill, as a dragon
 - 10) Beat in competition
 - 11) DeGeneres of TV
 - 12) Decrease
- 13) Plasterwork backers

21) Addition shape, sometimes

22) Dinner jacket material, sometimes

25) Fishing in the Atlantic, e.g.

26) Reverse or drive, e.g.

27) Scottish Gaelic

28) All couples

29) Apollo letters

31) Way, way off

32) Title for a married woman

33) "Fancy that!"

34) Game played with horses and mallets

35) Prayer's end

37) Like bodies on beaches

38) Winter ailment

39) Something tested on the vine

43) Naturally bright

44) Makes noise at night

45) Letters from a poor gambler

46) Painter Degas

47) Not a soul
- 48) Belts, as flies

49) _ de Guerre (French military award)

50) Type of angle or pain

52) Cut-_ (short shorts)

53) _ podrida (Spanish stew)

54) Fruit bearer

55) Make upset

56) Cry like a pup

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Be delicate with your criticism today, and remember to add a heaping helping of sugar to any medicine you're dispensing. You could be dealing with some powerful people who have rather fragile egos, so if you're too negative, you run the risk of alienating someone you don't want to alienate. But if you tap into your legendary tactfulness, there's nothing to worry about. You'll be able to deliver harsh truths without causing any discomfort.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Turning your thoughts into action should be your primary goal today. If you've been contemplating buying someone a gift, shop for it today. If you've been thinking about taking a trip, do some research and make those reservations today. And if you've been wanting to have a heart-to-heart talk with someone, sit that person down today and start talking. Action in any direction will boost your confidence and give you a nice sense of accomplishment.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Right now, something delicious is energizing the Universe, bringing up a secret surprise you won't be able to help but enjoy. The planets connect to make you even more fiery (oddly enough) when it comes to love affairs and relationships. Just be sure there isn't too much of that on the menu, though. It's definitely heady stuff. You don't even feel guilty about letting too much of the unadulterated truth out before others are ready to deal with it. Still, go easy on yourself.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You've got plenty to say, and it's all quite intense. In fact, you're also up for a bit of detective work. Start with the Universe activating all kinds of relationships, especially the intimate ones, and making each and every word you utter sound like an invitation to come closer, much closer. If you're not really interested, don't even play. This stuff lasts a lot longer than you might think. If you are interested, let it fly. This smacks of permanence.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

It's all about secrets and deciding whether or not to let them out of the bag. Your mission is to be sure before you even think about opening your mouth. And speaking of your mouth, be warned that today's cosmic energy could make it difficult for anyone, even the most evasive among us, to keep those secrets under wraps. In fact, it might be more of a challenge than ever before. That goes double for family secrets. Be totally honest and count to a hundred if you have to.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You are definitely happy when the people you love are happy, but that generous joy could be tested a bit today when someone who recently had a windfall is a little insensitive to your situation. If this person's boastfulness is driving you crazy, just put some distance between you and them. This will help you stay happy for them and stop any burgeoning feeling of resentment. This person just isn't in a very intuitive, compassionate place right now.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Live music is a great way to fire up a romantic relationship, so if you're working on building a connection with someone you're attracted to, take a look at upcoming concerts in your area. You could find a nice surprise. Get tickets as soon as possible. Any hesitation and you could miss out on a great experience. Even if you're not working on a relationship right now, taking yourself out on a nice date is a great way to remind yourself how special you are.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You could be torn between keeping yourself absolutely silent and letting absolutely everything you know be known. What a decision. The culprits behind your dilemma? You're feeling conversational and a little bit all-or-nothing, plus you've got some serious cosmic energy urging you to make a decision. Once you've made it, don't waffle. Let the rest of the world play games. You're above that. Right?

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Don't let a certain powerful authority figure intimidate you today. Sure, they might know more about certain things than you do, but you have a brilliant mind and the desire to learn. If you remain cool and calm in this person's presence, they'll get to know you better. They'll then think of you more favorably when an interesting opportunity arises in the future. Just be yourself. That's good enough!

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

A coworker or friend you see on a daily basis could pull you aside today with a rather worried look on their face. Don't run away. They need your advice and the benefit of your knowledge, not to mention your big heart. You can do an awful lot of good for them right now, especially once you let go of your own fears and share your experiences with them, and you know you can. Your friend will be more grateful than you know.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You're always seeking justice and equality in life, although you're wise enough to realize that sometimes life just isn't fair. Hang on to this realistic viewpoint! It will help you adjust to any situation, be more self-sufficient, and be much more effective in any negotiations you enter today. Everything can't be completely equitable in every situation, so be prepared to sacrifice a little bit of what you want, if necessary, for the greater good.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

There's only one person you can think of who's equipped to give you the advice you need now, especially since it's such a private matter. Go see them, or at least give them a call. If you're not sure what to do, most especially if the matter involves your career or reputation, don't hesitate to ask for help. After all, think of how many times and how many ways you've offered to help in the past without ever being asked.

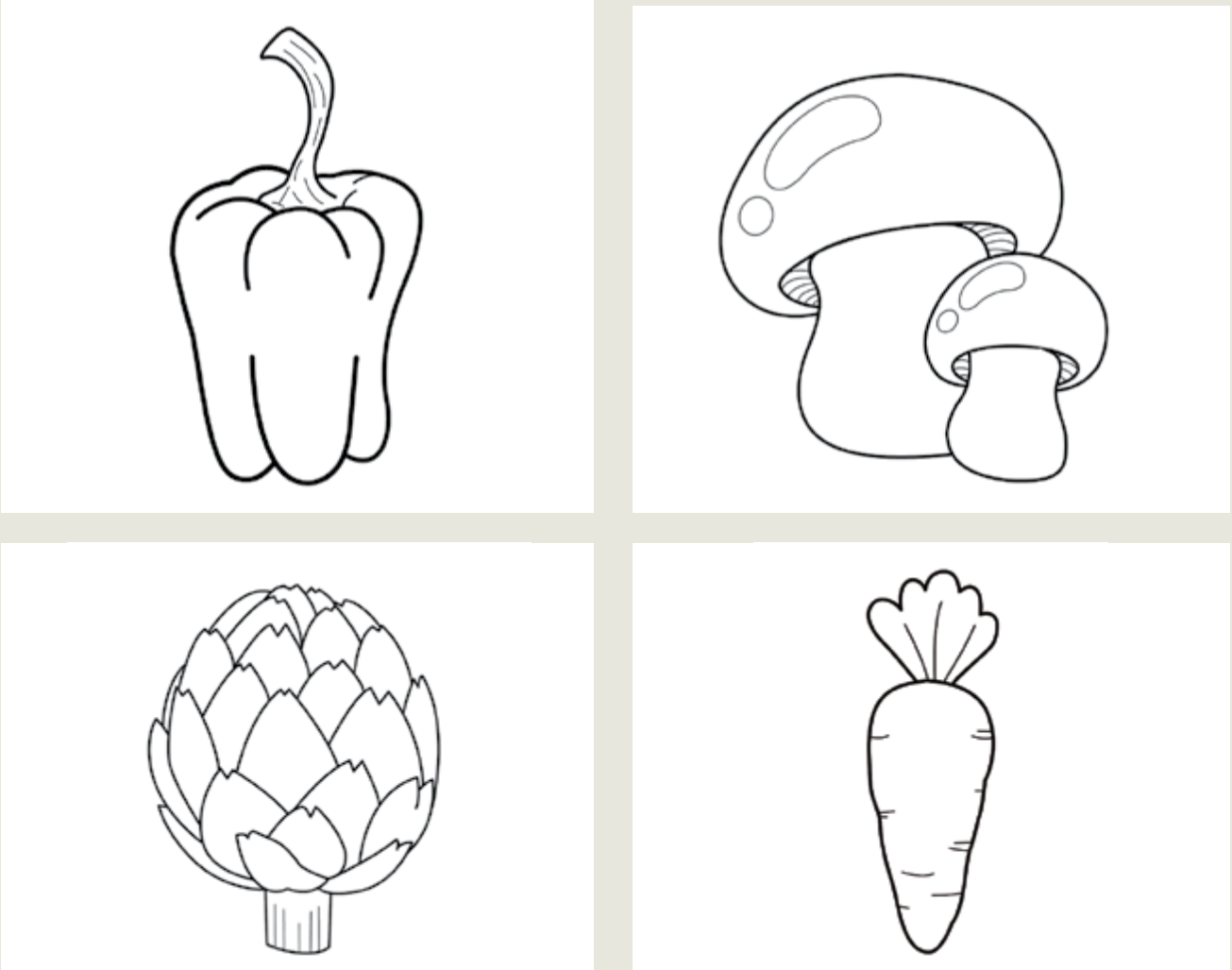


TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. In 1986, which country was found guilty by the International Court of Justice (World Court) of war crimes against Nicaragua?
- A. Bolivia
- B. Great Britain
- C. Australia
- D. USA
02. Which of these cities is in the Canadian province of Alberta?
- A. Montreal
- B. Calgary
- C. Toronto
- D. Vancouver
03. Which of these was an explorer of Australia who led several expeditions into the interior of the continent, from Sydney and Adelaide?
- A. Roald Amundsen
- B. James Cook
- C. Doctor David Livingstone
- D. Charles Sturt

Answers: 1.D 2.B 3.D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

T	A	Y	T
X	L	B	A
E	I	E	C
O	E	D	Z

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

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

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

Bodies pulled from wreckage of Nepal plane

Pokhara, Nepal - Nepali rescuers have retrieved the bodies of all but one of 22 people on board a plane that crashed into a Himalayan mountainside over the weekend, the army said on Monday.

Air traffic control lost contact with the Twin Otter plane operated by Nepali carrier Tara Air shortly after it took off from Pokhara in western Nepal on Sunday morning headed for Jomsom, a popular trekking destination.

Resuming a search on Monday after failing to find any trace a day earlier, the army shared on social media a photo of aircraft parts and other debris littering a sheer mountainside, including a wing with the registration number 9N-AET clearly visible.

"Twenty-one bodies have been recovered and teams are searching for the remaining one," Nepal Army spokesman Narayan Silwal told AFP.

"It is a very difficult area to work. The aircraft is several pieces scattered all over the slope," a police official at the crash site said.

About 60 people were in-



Members of a rescue team carrying out an operation at the crash site of a Twin Otter aircraft, operated by Nepali carrier Tara Air, on a mountainside in Mustang, a day after it crashed, on Monday (AFP)

involved in the operation, including the army, police, mountain guides and locals, most of whom trekked uphill for miles on foot to get there.

The civil aviation authority said the plane 'met an accident' at 14,500 feet (4,420 metres) in the Sanosware area of Thasang municipality.

"Analysing the pictures we received, it seems that the flight did not catch fire. Everything is scattered in the site. The flight seems to have collided with a big rock

on the hill," said Pokhara Airport spokesman Dev Raj Subedi.

Families
Four Indians were onboard, as

well as two Germans, with the remainder Nepalis including a computer engineer, his wife and their two daughters who had just returned from the United States.

The four Indians were a divorced couple and their daughter and son, aged 15 and 22, going on a family holiday, Indian police official Uttam Sonawane told AFP. "There was a court order for (the father) to spend time with the family for 10 days every year, so they were taking a trip," Sonawane said.

According to the Aviation Safety Network website, the aircraft was made by Canada's de Havilland and made its first flight more than 40 years ago.

Past crashes
Tara Air is a subsidiary of Yeti Airlines, a privately owned domestic carrier that services many remote destinations across Nepal.

It suffered its last fatal accident in 2016 on the same route when a plane with 23 on board crashed into a mountainside in Myagdi district.

Nepal's air industry has boomed in recent years, carrying

goods and people between hard-to-reach areas as well as foreign trekkers and climbers.

But it has long been plagued by poor safety due to insufficient training and maintenance.

The European Union has banned all Nepali airlines from its airspace over safety concerns.

The Himalayan country also has some of the world's most remote and tricky runways, flanked by snow-capped peaks with approaches that pose a challenge even for accomplished pilots.

The weather can also change quickly in the mountains, creating treacherous flying conditions.

In March 2018, a US-Bangla Airlines plane crash-landed near Kathmandu's notoriously difficult international airport, killing 51 people and seriously injuring 20. That accident was Nepal's deadliest since 1992, when all 167 people aboard a Pakistan International Airlines plane died when it crashed on approach to Kathmandu airport.

Just two months earlier a Thai Airways aircraft had crashed near the same airport, killing 113 people.

AFP



A soldier walks along a street in Morales, Suarez, Cauca department, Colombia, on election day, on Sunday (AFP)

Leftist ex-guerrilla leads in Colombian presidential elections

Bogota, Colombia - Colombians clamoring for 'change' gave a leftist ex-guerrilla an historic lead on Sunday in a first round of presidential elections that will culminate in a runoff against a maverick outsider in June.

With more than 99 per cent of votes counted, preliminary results showed 62-year-old Gustavo Petro, a former Bogota mayor, taking 40.3 per cent.

He now has a shot at becoming Colombia's first-ever leftist president and wresting power from the political and economic elites historically at the helm.

Rodolfo Hernandez, a 77-year-old millionaire and himself an ex-mayor, came out of left field to snatch second place with 28 per cent of the vote, denying Petro the 50 per cent-plus needed for an outright, first-round win.

Hernandez, who ran on an anti-corruption platform, also edged out right-winger Federico Gutierrez - a former mayor of second city Medellin who carried the hopes of establishment parties and who pollsters had predicted would finish in second place. On Sunday, Petro vowed 'real change' if elected, and promised to pursue 'social justice and economic stability'.

"A company cannot grow if society is impoverished. Profits cannot grow sustainably if the majority of the population (suffers from) hunger," he said.

'Danger for democracy'
Analysts say Petro's road to the presidency has been complicated by Hernandez's late surge.

With his anti-establishment, populist reputation, some polls have suggested Hernandez would stand a better chance

than Gutierrez at beating Petro in a second round. The gloves came off as soon as the results were out, with Petro pointing out that Hernandez is under investigation for graft and asking: "Is this what we want?" In his speech, a defeated Gutierrez said he would vote for Hernandez in the second round as Petro represented 'a danger for democracy'.

"We do not want to lose the country and we will not put at risk the future of Colombia, of our families, our children," he said. In a country marked by a deep-rooted fear of the political left - associated with guerrilla groups that sowed decades of misery - the pushback against Petro has been fierce, with rivals seeking to paint him as a radical, Hugo Chavez-style populist.

For his part, Hernandez said the results showed that Colombians were 'serious about ending corruption as a system of government'.

'We all want change'
Some 12,000 polling stations were open for eight hours on Sunday in a tense atmosphere one year after a brutal security crackdown on street protests fueled by deepening socioeconomic woes.

More than 8.5mn Colombians voted for Petro, hoping he is the man to address biting poverty, rural violence, urban crime and endemic corruption in a country historically governed by rightist elites. Hernandez, who is not aligned to a political party, garnered 5.9mn votes and Gutierrez five million. "We all want change," 34-year-old hotel porter Elisa Beltran, one of Hernandez's voters, told AFP of his choice.

AFP

Iran's Guards accuse 'Zionists' of assassinating colonel Khodai

Tehran, Iran - Iran's Revolutionary Guards on Monday accused 'Zionists' of shooting dead a colonel in Tehran earlier this month, days after Israel reportedly told the US it was behind the killing.

Guards Colonel Sayyad Khodai, 50, was fatally shot on May 22 outside his home in the east of the Iranian capital by assailants on motorcycles. He was hit with five bullets, according to official media.

It was the most high-profile killing inside Iran since the November 2020 murder of top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh - an act Tehran blamed on arch-enemy Israel.

Khodai was killed 'by the most vicious people, the Zionists, and God willing, we will avenge his death', head of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Major General Hossein Salami said during a visit to his family, according to the Guards' Sepah News website. The general did not, however, use the term 'Zionist regime', routinely used by the Islamic republic as a direct reference to Israel.

"The enemy pursued him (the colonel) from the heart of the White House and Tel Aviv for months and years, door to



Iranian women lift portraits of Revolutionary Guards colonel Sayyad Khodai during his funeral procession in Tehran, last week (AFP)

door and alley to alley to martyr him," Salami added.

The New York Times reported last week that Israel has told the US that the Jewish state was behind the killing of Khodai. The US daily cited an anonymous 'intelligence official briefed on the communications'. Iran had earlier blamed Khodai's killing on 'elements linked to the global arrogance', its catch-all term for the United States and allies including Israel.

According to The New York Times, Israeli officials claimed Khodai was the deputy commander of a 'secret unit within the Quds Force', involved in 'planning plots against foreigners, including Israelis'. The

Quds Force is an elite unit of the Guards in charge of external operations. The source, who spoke to the Times on condition of anonymity, said Israel told US officials the killing was meant as a warning to Iran to halt the operations of this covert group.

Stalled nuclear talks
Iran's state television has said that Khodai was a member of the Quds Force and that he was 'known' in Syria, where Iran has acknowledged deploying 'military advisers'. The Guards described Khodai as a 'defender of the sanctuary', a term used for those who work on behalf of Tehran in Syria or Iraq.

Iran maintains significant political influence in both countries and has backed President Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria's grinding civil war.

On Tuesday, thousands of Iranians attended Khodai's funeral, before he was buried in the martyrs' section of Behesht-e Zahra cemetery in southern Tehran. The colonel's killing came as negotiations between Iran and world powers to restore a frayed 2015 nuclear deal remain at a standstill, after stalling in March.

One of the main sticking points is Tehran's demand - rejected by Washington - that the Guards be removed from a US terrorism blacklist.

The agreement gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme to prevent Tehran from developing an atomic bomb - something it has always denied wanting to do.

But the pact was left on life support after then US president Donald Trump pulled out of it unilaterally in 2018 and reimposed biting economic sanctions on Tehran, prompting Iran to begin rolling back on its own commitments.

AFP

French man smears Mona Lisa with cake

Paris, France - A 36-year-old man has been arrested and placed in psychiatric care after he smeared a glass screen encasing the Mona Lisa with cake, prosecutors said on Monday, in a purported protest against artists not focusing enough on 'the planet'.

Officials at the Louvre Museum in Paris, where the enigmatic portrait holds pride of place, declined to comment on the bizarre incident on Sunday. The treasured work by Leonardo da Vinci was unharmed thanks to its bulletproof glass case.

A Twitter user identified as Lukeee posted a video showing a museum employee wiping a mess off the glass and another showing a man dressed in white being escorted away by security guards. "A man dressed as an old lady jumps out of a wheelchair and attempted to smash the bulletproof glass of the Mona Lisa. Then proceeds to smear cake on the glass and throws roses everywhere, all before being tackled by security," Lukeee wrote. Speaking French, the man says: "There are people who are destroying the Earth... All artists, think about the Earth. That's why I did this. Think of the planet."

AFP

Thousands march through Jerusalem's Old City

Jerusalem - Thousands of flag-waving Israelis on Sunday marched through Jerusalem's Old City during a nationalist procession that regularly stokes Palestinian anger, a year after Jerusalem tensions exploded into war.

About 70,000 Jewish Israelis paraded through the streets, police said, for an annual 'flag march' marking Israel's 1967 capture of east Jerusalem. Some marchers chanted 'death to Arabs', as a number of Palestinians hurled projectiles from the rooftops.

Israel's Foreign Minister Yair Lapid described far-right Jewish groups who taunted Arabs - specifically the Lehava and La Familia extremist organisations - as a 'disgrace', saying they 'aren't worthy of holding the Israeli flag'.



Demonstrators gather with Israeli flags at the Western Wall in the old city of Jerusalem on Sunday, during the Israeli 'flags march' to mark 'Jerusalem Day' (AFP)

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett ordered police to show 'zero tolerance' towards Jewish extremists who planned to 'incite' tensions, singling out La Familia.

More than 3,000 police officers were deployed across

Jerusalem, reporting more than 60 arrests over 'disorderly conduct'. The Palestinian Red Crescent said 79 Palestinians were injured in and around the Old City. Around annexed east Jerusalem, many Palestinians

flew flags, with police clashing with the protesters carrying them. Above one of the Old City gates, a Palestinian flag was flown from a drone, which police shot down, an AFP photographer said.

During the march, thousands of Jewish Israelis - overwhelmingly men, and many of them youths - poured through Damascus Gate, the main Old City thoroughfare used by Palestinians and of huge symbolic importance. "This is our country, and that's it," 18-year-old Jewish Israeli Ofer Amar told AFP at Damascus Gate. "The Palestinians are guests in our country."

Dozens of Israelis hoisted flags on the gate, while others sang and danced on the surrounding steps, where isolated clashes were reported ahead of the march.

Jonathan Bnidik, another marcher, said the purpose of the rally was 'to tell the whole world that (Jerusalem) is our ancient and historical national capital'.

AFP

Ten Pacific island nations reject China security pact

Suva, Fiji - Ten Pacific island nations rebuffed China's push for a wide-ranging regional security pact on Monday, amid worries the proposal was designed to pull them into Beijing's orbit.

Talks in Fiji between Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and leaders from the small island nations failed to reach an agreement, in a high-profile diplomatic setback for Beijing. China is offering to radically ramp up its activities in the South Pacific, directly challenging the influence of the United States and its allies in the strategically vital region.

The proposed pact would see Beijing train Pacific island police, become involved in cybersecurity, expand political ties, conduct sensitive marine mapping and gain greater access to natural resources on land and in the water. As an enticement, Beijing is offering millions of dollars in financial assistance, the prospect of a potentially lucrative China-Pacific islands free trade agreement and access to China's vast market of 1.4bn people.

Behind the scenes, Pacific leaders have voiced deep misgivings about the offer.

In a recent letter to fellow leaders, David Panuelo, the President of the Federated States of Micronesia, warned the offer was 'disingenuous' and would 'ensure Chinese influence in government' and 'economic control' of key industries.

A more soft-spoken public rebuke came after the talks, when leaders said they could not agree



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (left) and Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama arrive for a joint press conference in Fiji's capital city Suva on Monday (AFP)

There has been general support from the 10 countries. But of course, there are some concerns on some specific issues and we have agreed that these two documents will be discussed afterwards to reach an agreement

QIAN BO

to Beijing's proposed 'Common Development Vision' due to a lack of regional consensus.

"As always, we put consensus first," co-host and Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama said after the meeting, indicating that broad accord would be needed before inking any 'new regional agreements'.

Papua New Guinea, Samoa and the Federated States of Micronesia were said to be among those concerned about the proposals, along with Taiwan-recognising Palau, which was not invited. "We would rather deal with our own security issues with China," Papua New Guinea Foreign Minister Soroi Eoe told AFP,

indicating concern about any region-wide pact.

Chinese officials - working frantically to secure support during Wang's 10-day diplomatic blitz of the region - admitted their entreaties had fallen short.

"There has been general support from the 10 countries," Chinese ambassador to Fiji Qian Bo told reporters in Suva. "But of course, there are some concerns on some specific issues and we have agreed that these two documents will be discussed afterwards until we have reached an agreement." Speaking from Suva, Wang made the face-saving announcement that the 10 countries agreed to memorandums of

understanding on China's 'Belt and Road' infrastructure initiative. The two sides will 'continue to have ongoing and in-depth discussions and consultations to shape more consensus on cooperation', he said, urging those worried by Beijing's intentions not to be 'too anxious and don't be too nervous'. The full proposal has not been made public, but was leaked to media including AFP ahead of Monday's meeting.

China has said it will release a 'position paper' highlighting the proposals to the public in the coming weeks.

Balancing act

Western powers have bristled against China's move into the region, with the US State Department warning South Pacific nations to be wary of 'shadowy, vague deals with little transparency'. Australia joined the United States in urging a spurning of China's attempts to expand its security reach deep into the region, with the country's new foreign minister warning of the 'consequences' of such deals.

Many in the Pacific are uneasy at being thrust to the centre of a geopolitical tussle between China and US allies.

Most capitals are keen to maintain amicable ties with China, balancing relations between Beijing, Washington, Canberra and Wellington, while focusing on the more urgent threat of climate change and day-to-day economic issues.

AFP



This file photo shows a woman holding candles in memory of Tiananmen victims in the Causeway Bay district of Hong Kong on June 4, 2021 (AFP)

Tiananmen masses axed as crackdown memorials erased in Hong Kong

Hong Kong, China - For the first time in 33 years, church services to commemorate the Tiananmen crackdown will not be held in Hong Kong, erasing one of the last reminders of China's bloody suppression of the 1989 protests.

Since Beijing imposed a sweeping national security law in 2020 to snuff out pro-democracy demonstrations, once-packed candlelit vigils have been banned, a Tiananmen museum has been forced to close, and statues have been pulled down.

The annual Catholic masses were one of the last ways for Hong Kongers to come together publicly to remember the deadly clampdown in Beijing on June 4, 1989, when the Chinese government set tanks and troops on peaceful demonstrators.

But this year, they too have been cancelled over fears of falling foul of Hong Kong authorities. "We find it very difficult under the current social atmosphere," said Reverend Martin Ip, chaplain of the Hong Kong Federation of Catholic Students - one of the organisers.

"Our bottom line is that we don't want to breach any law in Hong Kong," he told AFP.

The Diocese, whose Justice and Peace Commission was a co-organiser, said its frontline colleagues were concerned they might violate Hong Kong law.

Communist Party was alive and kicking - until the imposition of the security law.

In the space of months, decades of commemoration have been wiped out as authorities wield the law to refashion Hong Kong in Beijing's authoritarian image.

The Hong Kong Alliance, the most prominent Tiananmen advocacy group and the candlelight vigil organiser, was prosecuted as a 'foreign agent' over incitement to subversion.

Last September, its leaders were arrested, their June 4 Museum was shuttered after a police raid, and digital records of the crackdown were deleted overnight under a police order to close the group's website and social media accounts.

For others, much like the organisers of the masses, uncertainty over where the new red lines fall has been enough to make them pull back.

Six universities removed June 4 monuments that had stood on their campuses for years - just before Christmas last year, three were whisked away within 48 hours.

The 'Pillar of Shame' in the University of Hong Kong (HKU), an eight-metre-high sculpture by Danish artist Jens Galschiot, was dismantled, tucked into a cargo container and left on an HKU-owned plot of rural land.

At Lingnan University, a wall relief by artist Chen Weiming was banished to an underground storage room.

His 'Goddess of Democracy' statue at the Chinese University of Hong Kong was sent to a secretive 'safe place'.

AFP

31 rescued, 11 still missing after Indonesia ferry sinks

Jakarta, Indonesia - Thirty-one people have been rescued and 11 are still missing after a ferry ran out of fuel and sank in bad weather off the coast of Indonesia, an official said on Monday.

Local tugboats and fishermen brought many of the survivors ashore after the *KM Ladang Pertiwi* sank while sailing through the Makassar strait in South Sulawesi province on Thursday.

"Until now 31 people have been rescued alive and we are still looking for 11 more people who are still missing," head of



Rescue personnel assisting a saved passenger from the Ladang Pertiwi 02 ferry, which sank off the coast of Indonesia, in Kotabaru on Sunday (AFP)

local search and rescue team Djunaidi, who like some Indonesians goes by only one name, told AFP on Monday.

"They have returned home now and they are generally in good health," he added.

Rescuers have deployed a helicopter and extended the search area to 20 nautical miles from where the boat sank in the search for the missing, Djunaidi said.

The vessel did not have a permit to transport passengers, he added, and both the ship's cap-

tain and owner have been taken in for questioning.

No official passenger manifest was kept - common in a country where crews sometimes sell illegal tickets past the ships' official capacity - but authorities have said they believe there were 42 people onboard when the boat sank.

Marine accidents are common in the Southeast Asian archipelago of around 17,000 islands, where safety standards are often lax.

AFP

Australia's opposition elects hardliner as leader

Sydney, Australia - Australia's conservatives elected hardliner and China hawk Peter Dutton as the country's new opposition leader on Monday, an outcome many will see as a lurch to the right for his party.

Dutton came out swinging after accepting the top spot, saying the country's newly elected Labour government was not 'ready to govern and we are already seeing their inexperience on display'.

Elected unopposed, the former police officer inherits a Liberal party decimated by Australia's May 21 election, when many of its long-time voters swung to independent candidates who promised action on climate change.

The new opposition leader will have to rebuild his shattered party and try to unite its fiercely divided moderate and conservative wings, with climate a key sticking point.

Dutton described himself Monday as 'a very passionate believer' in Australia's need for

an 'appropriate response' to emissions reduction.

During his two decades in politics, the Queenslander has made a name for himself with tough talk and a penchant for headline-grabbing commentary. On election day, he tweeted out a Border Force statement about the interception of an asylum seeker boat, adding his comment: "Don't risk Australia's national security with Labour."

In previous posts as defence minister, Dutton often likened China's expansionist ambitions to Nazi Germany.

"The only way you can preserve peace is to prepare for war," he said in one. During Monday's speech, he described China under Xi Jinping as 'the biggest issue our country will face in our lifetime'.

Dutton served as Australia's immigration minister for nearly four years, overseeing the country's widely criticised offshore detention regime.

AFP

Sleepless nights in South Africa's 'Village of Death'

Zingqolweni, South Africa - Sleep is something that the inhabitants of Zingqolweni abandoned many months ago.

Tucked in a remote corner of South Africa, this frightened village of 3,000 people has suffered a murder almost every month, occurring with clockwork regularity for a year.

The brutal series of killings has earned Zingqolweni a chilling moniker: 'The Village of Death'.

All 11 victims have been elderly people, most of whom were women and most of whom lived alone. They have been stabbed to death in their homes after nightfall, when pitch darkness falls over a village where the unpaved roads are unlit.

Nobongile Fihla, 50, spoke to AFP as she walked back from the cemetery.

Her mother was among the first victims, killed in May 2021.

"I found my mother there, next to the door, lying in a pool of blood. Her throat was slit," Fihla told AFP.

Her aunt was then found stabbed to death in the same thatched round hut where the two sisters lived.



Nobongile Fihla, 50, whose aunt and mother were murdered in May 2021, walks towards a cemetery in Zingqolweni village on May 16 this year (AFP)

No-one saw or heard anything.

The homes, known as rondavels, are far apart from each other in Zingqolweni, a Xhosa-speaking community lying three hours

from the nearest large city of East London.

Here the sun sets behind the green mountains of the Eastern Cape province by 6pm (1600 GMT) in the winter months.

Never in South Africa South Africa is one of the world's most violent countries outside a war zone, with a murder committed every 20 minutes on average.

But even hardened police have been taken aback by the gruesomeness of this killing spree.

All the victims were brutally stabbed. Some also had their throats slit. "They literally bleed to death," a senior police investigator told AFP.

"A series of murders of elderly people with a psychological motive. No, not seen before in South Africa," said the investigator, who asked not to be named.

Six men have been arrested over the killings, and their trial is set to begin in June.

Local police believe the murders are simply burglaries that have gone wrong.

But local official Gcinikaya Koki, 64, is among those who doubt that thieves are to blame.

"After the killings, when people were searching the house they found the money in the house," he said, adding that other valuables were also untouched.

"Now, you then ask yourself, 'What is it that they want from this person that they killed?'"

The only clue ever found has been a piece of clothing.

Fears of a serial killer on the loose have swept the village. Some have fled and women have started sleeping together at night.

A lone killer?

A special police unit that investigates serial crimes has visited the area several times.

The murders, the investigator told AFP, share hallmarks that fit the narrative of a lone killer.

In each killing, there is a single modus operandi; the murders occur regularly at the start of each month; and there is no evidence of a criminal motive.

The murderer must be young and strong enough to overpower his victims, according to this scenario. And given the remoteness of the village, he probably lives nearby, and possibly harbours a hatred of the elderly. "The person must have known the people living there and who was living alone," the investigator said.

AFP

Gold miners clash in Chad, around 100 people dead

N'Djamena, Chad - Around 100 people have died in clashes between gold miners in northern Chad, Defence Minister General Daoud Yaya Brahim said on Monday.

Violence broke out on May 23 at Kouri Bougoudi near the Libyan border, sparked by a 'mundane dispute between two people which degenerated', he said, adding that the toll was 'around 100 dead and at least 40 wounded'. The clashes occurred in the Tibesti Mountains, a lawless region in the central Sahara some 1,000km from the capital N'Djamena.

The discovery of gold there 10 years ago sparked a rush of miners from across Chad and neighbouring countries, and tensions often run high. The latest clashes were between Mauritians and Libyans, Yaya Brahim said. He spoke to AFP by phone from the area, where he said he was with a large military contingent sent to help restore order.

"This isn't the first time that there's been violence among gold miners in the region, and we have decided to suspend all gold mining at Kouri until further notice," he said, adding that 'the great majority are illegal'.

AFP

Russia advances in east Ukraine

Russian forces are upping the pressure on the twin cities of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk

Kyiv, Ukraine - Russian forces edged toward the centre of the eastern Ukrainian city of Severodonetsk on Monday, while President Volodymyr Zelensky prepared to appeal to EU leaders at an emergency summit where a ban on Russian oil imports is on the agenda.

Zelensky is expected to press EU officials at the summit 'to kill Russian exports' as he seeks to crank up international pressure on Moscow.

Member states are searching for a compromise on a sixth round of sanctions, which has been delayed by resistance from within the bloc, namely from Hungary.

Meanwhile, Russia forces continued their push in the eastern Donbas region, upping the pressure on the twin cities of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk.

Since failing to capture Kyiv in the war's early stages, Russia's army has narrowed its focus, hammering cities with relentless artillery and missile barrages as it seeks to consolidate its control.

The situation in Severodonetsk, just across the Donets river from Lysychansk, was 'very difficult', the local Lugansk regional governor Sergiy Gaiday said in a statement on so-



Children play on a destroyed car in a residential area of Mariupol on Sunday, amid the ongoing Russian military action in Ukraine (AFP)

cial media.

"The Russians are advancing into the middle of Severodonetsk", while the fighting continued, Gaiday said.

Pressure on the east

While Russia concentrated its efforts in the east, Ukrainian forces pushed back over the weekend in the southern region of Kherson, the country's military leadership said.

At the same time, two people were injured following an explosion in the Moscow-controlled

city of Melitopol in southeastern Ukraine, with local pro-Kremlin authorities said pinning the blame on Kyiv.

Newly appointed French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna also made the journey to the Ukrainian capital on Monday for talks with Zelensky.

The highest-ranking French official to visit Kyiv since Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, Colonna also visited the town of Bucha, where Russian troops have been accused of committing war crimes against the civil-

ian population.

In the eastern Donbas region, Moscow's forces were making slow progress towards taking the city of Severodonetsk.

Zelensky, in his daily address on Sunday, described a scene of devastation in Severodonetsk.

"All critical infrastructure has already been destroyed... More than two-thirds of the city's housing stock has been completely destroyed," he said.

'Constant shelling'

In Severodonetsk, where an esti-

mated 15,000 civilians remain, a local official said 'constant shelling' made it increasingly difficult to get in or out while the water supply is increasingly unstable. Ukrainian forces counter-attacked in the region of Kherson, the only region of the country fully controlled by Russian troops.

Russia gained control over most of Kherson, which borders Crimea, in the early stages of the war and Moscow-backed officials in the region have recently pushed for annexation.

While limited in nature, the at-

tack could have the effect of stretching Russian forces.

The Ukrainian general staff claimed the move had put their adversary into 'unfavourable positions' around the villages of Andriyivka, Lozovo and Bilohorka and forced Moscow to send reserves to the area.

"Kherson, hold on. We're close!" it tweeted Sunday.

In Melitopol, Russia-installed authorities said in a statement the city had been targeted by a 'terrorist attack'.

AFP

Death toll mounts from Brazil downpours, search continues

Recife, Brazil - Torrential rains in northeastern Brazil have left at least 79 people dead and dozens missing, civil defense officials said on Sunday, as rescuers capitalised on a lull in downpours to search for survivors.

"As of 6pm (2100 GMT) this Sunday, the number of people killed as a result of the rains has reached 79," the civil defense authority of Pernambuco state, where the affected communities of Recife and Olinda are located, said in a statement.

The disaster is the latest in a recent series of deadly landslides and floods triggered by extreme weather in Brazil. The number of dead has mounted steadily over the weekend, including dozens in landslides, as heavy rains caused rivers to overflow and torrents of mud swept away everything in their path.

The latest statement from the civil defense did not offer an update on the number of people missing, though the agency had earlier reported 56 people still unaccounted for and nearly 4,000 who had lost their homes.

"We still don't have an exact number, but there are still reports



A man removes debris on a landslide area at the community Jardim Monte Verde, Ibura neighbourhood, in Recife, Pernambuco State, Brazil, on Sunday (AFP)

of victims... who have not been found," Pernambuco Governor Paulo Camara said during a press conference. "The search will continue until we can identify all the missing people," he said.

Authorities warned that rain was forecast to continue on Monday, but in the meantime while the storm subsided some 1,200 personnel - some in boats or helicopters - resumed search and rescue work, state officials

said. Minister of Regional Development Daniel Ferreira urged caution in a press conference on Sunday in Recife, the capital of hard-hit northeastern Pernambuco state.

"Although it has stopped raining now, we are forecasting heavy rains for the next few days," he said. "So the first thing is to maintain self-protection measures."

Between Friday night and Sat-

urday morning, rainfall volume reached 70 per cent of what was forecast for all of May in some parts of Recife. Images circulated on media showed rescue workers and volunteers clearing heaps of debris in Jardim Monte Verde, on the border between Recife and the municipality of Jaboatão dos Guararapes, where 19 died on Saturday morning in a landslide that ripped through homes.

AFP

Thousands quarantined after Beijing man ignores COVID-19 restrictions

Beijing, China - A Beijing man has landed thousands of his neighbours in quarantine after he ignored an order to stay at home and later tested positive for COVID-19, prompting a police investigation.

The Chinese capital has ordered hundreds of thousands of residents to stay home over the last five weeks to curb its largest coronavirus outbreak since the start of the pandemic.

Officials said on Sunday a man in his 40s surnamed Sun had failed to follow a requirement to isolate that he was given after he visited a shopping centre considered high-risk.

"During the home isolation period he... went out many times and walked in the neighbourhood," said Beijing public security official Pan Xuhong.

Sun and his wife later tested positive, prompting authorities to lock down 5,000 of their neighbours at home and send 250 to a government quarantine centre.

It came as virus restrictions began to be eased in Beijing on Monday, with authorities reopening parks, museums and cinemas and declaring the outbreak under control.

China is wedded to a zero-



People queue to be tested for the COVID-19 at a swab collection site in Beijing on Sunday (AFP)

During the home isolation period, he went out many times and walked in the neighbourhood

PAN XUHONG

COVID strategy of hard lockdowns, mass testing and long quarantine periods to wipe out clusters as they emerge.

There are tough penalties for breaking the rules and Sun is now under police investigation.

Beijing's Omicron-fuelled cluster has seen more than 1,700 in-

fections since late April - a tiny number by global standards but troubling for China's rigid approach to the virus.

Case numbers have dropped sharply in the past week.

"There have been no new cases found in society (outside quarantine centres) for two days," Xu Hejian, a spokesman for the Beijing government, said on Sunday. "The situation is stable and improving... but the risk of a rebound still exists." Most bus, subway and taxi services in three of the capital's most populous districts were running again on Monday and millions were told to return to work.

AFP

High-tech race to map Ukraine's historic monuments amid Russia invasion

Kharkiv, Ukraine - Many of Ukraine's historic monuments have been destroyed in the three months since Russia invaded, but cultural experts are working to conserve their memory using cutting-edge technology and 3D scans.

One of them is volunteer French engineer Emmanuel Durand, a specialist in 3D data acquisition, who is assisting a bevy of architects, engineers, historic building experts and a museum director to record buildings in Kyiv, Lviv, Chernigiv and Kharkiv.

Durand steps over a jumbled pile of beams and crunches over the rubble that was once Kharkiv's 19th-century fire station. He plants his laser scanner, a sort of tripod with a pivoting head, in a strategic corner of the severely damaged building.

The redbrick fire station and its watchtower, built in 1887, are a monument to Kharkiv's industrial revolution.

Durand's gadget records the building from all angles.

"The scanner records 500,000 points per second.

We'll get 10mn points from this location. Then we'll change location and go round the whole building, outside and inside. A billion points in all," he explains.

At the end of the day, Durand assembles all the data on a computer 'like the pieces of a jigsaw' to digitally reconstruct the building. The result is a perfect reproduction, accurate to within five millimetres (a fraction of an inch) that can be rotated in any direction or sliced into sections. You can even see the holes where blast waves from explosions have



French engineer Emmanuel Durand uses his laser-scanner 22, to map the architecture of the Karkhiv fire station built in 1887 (AFP)

damaged the structure.

"This enables us to map out the building for the future. That could help us work out if anything has moved, which is important for safety purposes, and see what can be restored and what can't. It's also useful from a historical point of view," he says.

"We've got the actual missile-damaged building and an exact replica of how it used to look."

'Over 100 hit'

In Kharkiv alone, around 500 buildings are listed as being of

historic architectural significance. Most are in the dense historic city centre, on which Russian airstrikes are concentrated, according to architect Kateryna Kuplytska, a member of the body documenting damaged heritage sites.

She estimates that over a hundred of them have been hit already.

And while Russian troops have loosened their noose around Ukraine's second city, shells still rain down with regular monotony.

AFP

CLAUDIA CARDINALE



Popular Tunisian filmstar of the 60s Claudia Cardinale was honoured in her birthplace with a street named after her

A ctress Claudia Cardinale may have been a sixties legend of Italian and French cinema, but in Tunisia, in the portside district where she grew up, she says she feels 'at home'. "I left very young, but I spent my whole childhood here, my adolescence," said Cardinale, now 84. "My origins are here."

To celebrate her connection to the North African country, authorities on Sunday named a street after her in the La Goulette suburb of the capital Tunis, where petals were scattered in a ceremony in her honour.

"You marked the world of cinema for almost half a century with your dazzling beauty, your charisma and through the roles you played," said Amel Limam, the mayor of La Goulette.

"I am very honoured, because it is here that I was born and spent my childhood," Cardinale said. "I kiss you!" The multicultural beachfront neighbourhood was once home to a sizeable Sicilian population, including Cardinale's parents.

Before Tunisia's independence from France in 1956, more than 130,000 Italians were resident, and many of their ancestors had settled there before French colonial rule.

"I still keep a lot of Tunisia inside me - the scenery, the people, sense of welcome, the openness," Cardinale told AFP.

We're all equal

In 1957, aged 19, Cardinale won a beauty contest for 'The Prettiest Italian' in newly independent Tunisia. Her prize was a trip to the Venice film festival, where she caught the eye of influential cinema figures. That led to her first film role, in Mario Monicelli's *Le Pigeon*.

Soon afterwards, she moved with her family to Rome to pursue her career, which took off with a role in Luchino Visconti's film *The Leopard*, alongside French film star

Alain Delon and Hollywood legend Burt Lancaster.

That was the start of a long career that has continued into her 80s. After starring in *The Pink Panther* opposite David Niven in 1963, she shot to attention in the United States and Britain.

In one of her latest roles, she plays a grandmother in a film by Tunisia's Ridha Behi - *L'île du Pardon* - currently in post-production.

Her parents never recovered from their departure from Tunisia, which they experienced as an exile.

"It was very hard. My father never wanted to come back, that's how much he dreaded the pain of what was for him a real heartbreak," she said. "My mother recreated Tunisia in Italy. She planted all Tunisian plants and kept on cooking Tunisian meals."

Cardinale said the Tunisian sense of hospitality can be a model for how to treat migrants. The country "can and should be proud of its history," she said.

And in an era when many Tunisians are willing to risk their lives boarding unseaworthy boats to reach Europe, she stresses the importance of remembering this shared past to build the future.

"The wind changes, and we're all equal in terms of the need to leave," she said. "Tunisia for us was a welcoming land. I wish everyone in the world who needs to leave somewhere could receive the same welcome."

AFP



Claudia Cardinale poses for a picture in the city of Goulette near the Tunisian capital on May 29 during the inauguration of 'Claudia Cardinale Street'

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CANNES FASHION HIGHLIGHTS

FAUX TROT

THE RED CARPET PARADE AT THE CANNES FILM FESTIVAL CLOSING CEREMONY WAS A DISPLAY OF EXPENSIVE ATTIRE IN CONTRAST TO POVERTY AND DISTRESS PORTRAYED ON CELLULOID

It is one of the special aspects of the Cannes Film Festival that it serves as much as a parade of extremely expensive clothing as it does as a showcase for devastating films focused on poverty, inequality and emotional crises.

What should one wear to the premiere of a film about a family struggling to make ends meet (*Leila's Brothers*), or desperate African refugees forced into crime (*Tori and Lokita*) or a biting satire about the excesses of the super-rich (*Triangle of Sadness*)? The answer is always: something fabulous! Though only for women of course, thanks to the festival's rules about which gender is allowed to be colourful and which is condemned to formal black tie.

BABY BUMPS

The hottest fashion accessory in 2022 seems to be the presence of a foetus.

Rihanna made the baby bump an integral part of her look at Paris Fashion Week earlier this year, and it was the turn of Brazilian model Adriana Lima to put her belly on full display at Cannes.

She appeared first in a black robe with the tummy section open. But perhaps her most arresting look of the festival fortnight was the apparent homage to Princess Leia's slave outfit from *Return of the Jedi*, which she sported for the premiere of *Elvis*.

COVERED UP

Balenciaga has created some very bold looks for recent red carpets - not least shrouding Kim Kardashian head-to-toe in black for last year's Met Gala, or wrapping her entirely in yellow Balenciaga-branded packing tape at Paris Fashion Week.

Another of the label's ambassadors, French actress Isabelle Huppert, at least left her face on show this week at Cannes as she coated herself entirely in green - in a dress that covered her shoes and hands.

BOLLYWOOD GLAM

By selecting Indian superstar Deepika Padukone as one of the jury members this year, the festival guaranteed itself a daily display of Bollywood megastyle walking up the red carpet.

Depending on the day, there were elaborate saris, a neck full of

jewels, or a slinky black dress and heavy kohl eyeliner, and at one point a giant-shouldered furry black-and-gold combination by Louis Vuitton that looked rather warmer than the sweltering Cannes weather required.

LIPS AND FEATHERS

Jake Gyllenhaal made a rare public appearance with his French model girlfriend Jeanne Cadieu, and her dress was a lip-smacking delight. The hot pink look featured an image of pursed lips across the chest that led to more than a few double-takes on the red carpet.

Other outfits that caught the eye of fashionistas included the silver mirror gown worn by Eva Longoria for the launch of *Top Gun: Maverick*, the canary yellow in which Women in Motion award-winner Viola Davis appeared, and the black feather dress chosen by Naomi Campbell.

BUCKLED UP

Although men are very constrained in their options about what they can wear on the red carpet at Cannes, the ever-colourful Australian director Baz Luhrmann managed to sneak a bit of glam for the premiere of his new film with a jewel-encrusted *Elvis* belt buckle.

One invitee who seemed uninterested in the fusty dress code was Greek director Panos Koutras, who showed up at the *Elvis* premiere in a bright orange suit.

PROTEST POWER

By far the most powerful statement on the red carpet came from a woman wearing just some yellow and blue paint representing the Ukrainian flag with a curt message written across her torso. Beyond that, the red carpet was a pretty docile place despite the upheaval in the world.

A group of women dressed in black - 'in mourning' - unfurled a list of 129 women killed in France since the last edition of the festival in July 2021.

AFP



South Korean director Park Chan-Wook poses during a photocall after he won the Best Director prize for the film *Decision to Leave* (Heojil Kyolshim)



Australian director Baz Luhrmann (L) hugs US actor Austin Butler as they leave the Festival Palace following the screening of the film *Elvis*



Belgian director Jean-Pierre Dardenne (L) and Belgian director Luc Dardenne pose during a photocall after they won the Prix du 75e Festival for their film *Tori And Lokita*



Belgian director Lukas Dhont (R) and Belgian actor Eden Dambrine pose with his trophy during a photocall after he won equally the Grand Prix for the film *Close*

(From L) British director and screenwriter Gina Gammell poses with the trophy next to Spanish actress and President of the Camera d'or jury Rosy De Palma and Japanese director and screenwriter Chie Hayakawa



(From L) Japanese film director, producer, screenplay writer and film editor Hirokazu Kore-Eda, South Korean actress Lee Joo-Young, South Korean actress Lee Ji-Eun, South Korean actor Song Kang-Ho and South Korean actor Gang Dong-Won arrive for the Closing Ceremony of the 75th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes - AFP



Rafael Nadal (L) and Novak Djokovic renew their epic 16-year rivalry at the French Open on Tuesday, with a semi-final spot at stake (AFP)

EPIC RIVALRY

Novak Djokovic braced to deliver Rafael Nadal hammer blow at French Open

Paris, France - Novak Djokovic renews his epic 16-year rivalry with Rafael Nadal at the French Open on Tuesday with a semi-final spot at stake and where victory could end the 13-time champion's Roland Garros career.

Nadal, who will turn 36 on Friday, puts his record of 109 wins and just three losses in Paris, since his title-winning debut in 2005, on the line against the defending champion.

The Spaniard was taken to five sets for only the third time in his tournament history by 21-year-old Felix Auger-Aliassime in the fourth round.

In the immediate aftermath of that victory, Nadal admitted that not only was this year's French Open at stake for him but possibly his entire playing future.

"I know my situation, and I accept it. I can't complain much," said Nadal, who arrived in Paris unsure if he would be able to take part after suffering a recurrence in Rome of a chronic foot injury which has plagued him for large parts of his career.

"I am just enjoying the fact that I am here for one more year. And being honest, every match that I play here, I don't know if it's going to be my last at Roland Garros.

"I went through a tough process again with my foot, so I don't know what can happen in the near future."

Overall, Djokovic leads Nadal 30-28 since their first career meeting at the 2006 French Open.

Nadal has a 19-8 edge on clay and has won seven of the pair's

nine meetings in Paris.

Djokovic, however, came out on top in the semi-finals at Roland Garros in 2021 on his way to a second title.

Night fears

That defeat took a physical toll on Nadal who then skipped Wimbledon, the Olympics and the US Open.

With Djokovic deported from Melbourne on the eve of the Australian Open, Nadal seized the opportunity to claim a record-setting 21st Grand Slam title, breaking a tie with Djokovic and Roger Federer. Both men are playing in the quarter-finals at Roland Garros for the 16th time.

Djokovic has reached the last-eight with ease. He has won 22 sets in a row, a run stretching back to his Italian Open triumph

in Rome.

"I'm glad that I didn't spend too much time on the court up to the quarter-finals, knowing that playing Nadal in Roland Garros is always a physical battle. It's a huge challenge and probably the biggest one that you can have here," said Djokovic.

Adding an extra twist to the clash was a battle of wills over scheduling which Nadal lost Monday when organisers selected the clash for the night session under the Court Philippe Chatrier lights.

"I don't like to play on clay during the night, because the humidity is higher, the ball is slower, and there can be very heavy conditions especially when it's cold," said Nadal.

Djokovic had hinted he would prefer to face Nadal as late as

possible. "All I will say is Rafa and I would make different requests," he said.

Carlos Alcaraz, who faces Alexander Zverev also on Tuesday, said it would have been "unfair" if he was ordered to play after 9pm for the third time. Nadal and Djokovic have played one match each after dark.

Alcaraz show

Alcaraz, 19, is the youngest man to make the last-eight in Paris since Djokovic in 2006.

He boasts a 2022 claycourt record of 20 wins against just one loss. For the year, he is 32-3.

The sixth seed had to save a match point to defeat compatriot Albert Ramos-Vinolas in the second round but has otherwise been untoubled.

AFP



Alexander Zverev

Zverev says French Open organisers favouring Alcaraz

Berlin, Germany - World number three Alexander Zverev has criticised French Open organisers, who he claims have favoured rising Spanish teen star Carlos Alcaraz, his quarter-final opponent at Roland Garros on Tuesday.

Zverev, 25, is unhappy about his lack of matches on Roland Garros' showpiece Philippe Chatrier court, which has a retractable roof, compared to Alcaez.

The German feels organisers put him at a disadvantage ahead of his quarter-final with only one of his four matches so far on Chatrier.

"I played on Chatrier once, (world number one Novak) Djokovic played twice, (Rafael) Nadal three times, like Alcaraz," Zverev told German media after labouring to a last 16 win over Spain's Bernabe Zapata Miralles.

"Sure, he's the new superstar, the new face of tennis and it's nice to see something new too, but in our half of the draw it should be more divided who's playing when and where."

Zverev, the reigning Olympic

Sure, he's the new superstar, the new face of tennis and it's nice to see something new too

ALEXANDER ZVEREV

champion, described playing on Chatrier in Paris as "completely different" compared to other courts. "It's like playing on another continent."

Zverev says he is not concerned if organisers gave Djokovic, the defending French Open champion, and Nadal, who has won Roland Garros 13 times, preferential treatment.

"It is clear, and rightly so, that Rafa and Novak get what they want," said Zverev.

"Now comes a new and young player who deserves a lot of attention, but I have the feeling that the other players are being ignored."

AFP

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Kasatkina, Kudermetova to share 'good memory' in French Open quarter-final

Paris, France - Daria Kasatkina on Monday said she is looking forward to sharing another "good memory" with Veronika Kudermetova when the Russian duo face each other in the French Open quarter-finals.

Kasatkina, seeded 20th, took advantage of an error-strewn performance from Italian Camila Giorgi to win their last-16 tie 6-2, 6-2.

She will face compatriot Kudermetova in the last eight on Wednesday.

Kasatkina and Kudermetova, who are both 25, played against each other from a young age and were part of the Russian squad who won last year's Billie Jean King Cup.

"(We played) many times in juniors. We played so many



Daria Kasatkina celebrates winning a point against Camila Giorgi on Monday

times," said Kasatkina.

"We were on one team winning Billie Jean King Cup last year, so we have many good memories to share together.

"Even before we played many European championships together because we're the same age, so we have a lot of memories to share.

"We will have one more, playing quarters at Roland Garros, I think it's a very nice moment."

The draw guarantees at least one Russian semi-finalist in Paris.

That heightens the prospect of the newly-crowned French Open champion not being able to play at Wimbledon, where Russian and Belarusian players have been banned over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

AFP

Crestfallen Leclerc blames Ferrari for many mistakes

Monaco, Principality of Monaco - A crestfallen Charles Leclerc reluctantly criticised his Ferrari team on Sunday after their bungled strategy and confused communications cost him a likely victory in his home Monaco Grand Prix.

The 24-year-old finished fourth, after holding a dominant leading position from pole position, as Red Bull triumphed with superior strategic decisions helping Sergio Perez claim his first



Charles Leclerc drives ahead of Carlos Sainz Jr, Sergio Perez and Max Verstappen at the Monaco Formula 1 Grand Prix on Sunday (AFP)

win of the year.

Leclerc's race hinged on a mis-

taken pit-stop call when he came in behind Sainz in a 'double-stack'

as Ferrari sought to switch to slick dry tyres in changing conditions. But as he came in, the team realised rivals Red Bull were 'under-cutting' them by doing the same and attempted to change their decision and request him to stay out as he was poised to regain his lead.

"I don't understand what made us change our minds," said Leclerc. "We got 'undercut' and then stuck behind Carlos."

AFP



CAPTAIN FANTASTIC!

Hardik Pandya tipped as future India captain after leading Gujarat Titans to fairytale IPL triumph

Ahmedabad, India -All-rounder Hardik Pandya is being tipped as a future India captain after leading an unfancied debut team to victory in the world's most valuable cricket tournament.

Pandya's Gujarat Titans thrashed Rajasthan Royals by seven wickets in the Indian Premier League final on Sunday, with the skipper taking three wickets and scoring 34 runs in front of nearly 105,000 fans in the world's biggest cricket stadium.

It was the culmination of an extraordinary season that began with pundits lashing the side's purchases in the player auction, questioning Pandya's appointment as captain and predicting a dire outcome for the expansion franchise's first season.

But the 28-year-old - a flamboyant cricketer who loves his tattoos and expensive watches, and was once suspended for sexist comments on a TV show - has proved a revelation in his first leadership role. Commentators have lauded the precision of his decision-making and field-setting in the Twenty20 format.

In the wake of the Titans' triumph at their home ground in Ahmedabad, former India captain Sunil Gavaskar said Pandya would be a worthy choice to follow in his footsteps.

"When you have leadership



Hardik Pandya basks in the glory of Gujarat's IPL triumph

qualities, it automatically opens the door for honours at the national level to be able to captain the Indian national team in the near future," the batting great said.

"The way he has led the team,

the way he has got them together, the way he has got them to gel together means he has got leadership qualities," he told *Star Sports*.

"Not just my estimation, but everybody's estimation. This was

an aspect of his game which nobody had too much information about."

The national side are currently led in all formats by Rohit Sharma, who was appointed earlier this year after Virat Kohli's

ODI sacking, but at 35 he is unlikely to be a long-term captain and is being rested for a home series against South Africa in June.

Rohit's five-time IPL champions Mumbai Indians had a disastrous season, finishing bottom

of table.

'Dream come true'

A hard-hitting middle-order batsman and a fast bowler, Pandya has played 11 Tests, 63 one-day internationals and 54 Twenty20 matches for India.

A back injury kept him out after the T20 World Cup last year but he proved his fitness with 487 runs and eight wickets in 15 IPL matches to earn a recall for the five-match Twenty20 series against South Africa beginning on

The way he has led the team, the way he has got them together, the way he has got them to gel together means he has got leadership qualities

SUNIL GAVASKAR

June 9.

He could be given his first taste of national leadership in two T20s in Ireland later in June, according to Indian media reports.

Pandya said he had "always enjoyed responsibility" and "it kind of gets the best out of me".

His next goal, he told reporters after the IPL victory, was "absolutely to win the World Cup for India no matter what happens."

"Playing for India has always been a dream come true, no matter how many times and how many games I have played. And the kind of love and support I've got it's only from the Indian team point of view."

India, then led by Kohli, failed to make the semi-finals of last year's T20 World Cup in the United Arab Emirates but will have another shot at the title when Australia host the next edition later this year.

Former New Zealand captain Daniel Vettori feels captaincy does not burden Pandya as all-

Kohli jinx to Indian talent: 5 things we learned from IPL

Ahmedabad, India - The Indian Premier League ended with debutants Gujarat Titans, led by

India all-rounder Hardik Pandya, hammering Rajasthan Royals by seven wickets in front of almost

105,000 fans at the world's biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad. AFP Sport looks at

five things we learned from the 15th edition of the Twenty20 tournament, which was ex-

panded to 10 teams this year, with Lucknow Super Giants being the other debutants.



Kohli's jinx

Former India captain Virat Kohli and Royal Challengers Bangalore's wait for their first IPL title drags on after they went down to Rajasthan in the second qualifier.

Kohli endured a tough season that including three golden ducks - out on first ball - before he scored a match-winning 73 in the team's final league game. He averaged 22.73 across the tournament.



Debut success

Gujarat Titans emphatically shrugged off pundits' concerns about their squad at the end of the February auction to emerge as the team to beat in their debut season.

Hardik Pandya, who was called an unlikely choice to lead the side because of his maverick ways and injury-prone career, combined with David Miller, Rahul Tewatia and Rashid Khan to become champions.



Evergreen Dhoni

Old warhorse MS Dhoni had a dramatic year for four-time champions Chennai Super Kings, who ended ninth in the table. The 40-year-old gave up the captaincy ahead of the season but returned to lead the side midway through the campaign after Ravindra Jadeja stood down.

The wicketkeeper-batsman not only got some wins for Chennai but also played a few vintage knocks.



Indian talent

While foreign stars including Jos Buttler at Rajasthan Royals and Quinton de Kock at Lucknow Super Giants were vital to the success of their teams, emerging Indian talent made its presence felt this season.

Hyderabad speed demon Umran Malik emerged as a future star and earned a place in the Indian T20 team alongside medium-fast bowler Arshdeep Singh.



Spin rules

Spinners including Yuzvendra Chahal and Wanindu Hasaranga ruled the roost despite Umran grabbing the headlines by clocking speeds of over 150 kilometres (93 miles) per hour.

Rajasthan's Chahal finished with 27 scalps with his leg spin to secure the purple cap as the tournament's leading bowler while Bangalore's Hasaranga had 26 wickets.

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Serial winners

Tearful Marcelo bids farewell as Real Madrid celebrate 14th European Cup

Madrid, Spain - Real Madrid captain Marcelo bid a tearful farewell as the players celebrated winning a 14th European Cup at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Real Madrid defeated Liverpool 1-0 at the Stade de France on Saturday night, with Vinicius Junior scoring the winning goal to secure the club their fifth Champions League title in the last nine seasons.

To celebrate the success, the players took the trophy on an open-top bus tour around Madrid on Sunday, which included stops at the Almudena Cathedral, regional government headquarters, City Hall, Plaza Cibeles and finally the Santiago Bernabeu.

Marcelo led the celebrations and broke into tears as he was presented to the crowd inside the stadium. The Brazilian has been at Real Madrid since 2007 and leaves after collecting his fifth Champions League trophy.

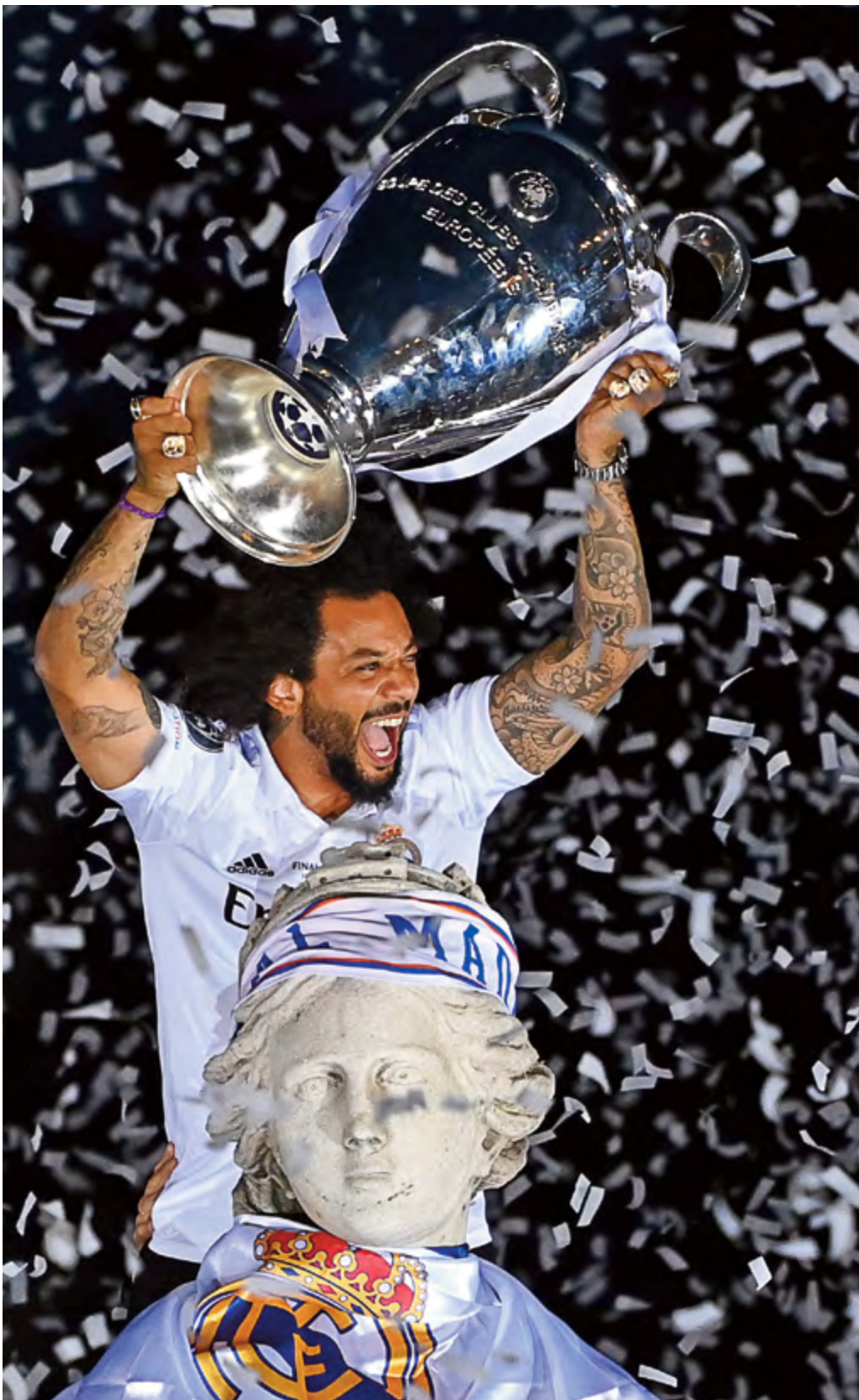
"It is a wonderful moment in my life, I close a cycle here, at the best club in the world," Marcelo said in a speech to the fans. "Today is not a day of sadness, it is a day of joy because we have won again, the best competition in the world."

Real Madrid president Florentino Perez had earlier told the team to turn their attention to winning a 15th European Cup next season.

"Real Madrid has made history again and here is our 14th European Cup and 35th La Liga trophy," Perez said.

"This European Cup, won against a legendary club like Liverpool, will be remembered as one of the greatest in the history of the Champions League.

"This club's legend grows bigger and bigger. We have



Marcelo celebrates with the Champions League trophy on top of the statue of Greek goddess Cybele on Sunday

beaten four of the best teams in Europe by fighting and always believing until the end.

"It has been a wonderful season and it has been achieved in one of the most beautiful and difficult times in our history. Five Champions Leagues in eight years is something very difficult for football fans to forget from all over the world. Madrid is eternal. And now, let's go for the 15th."

'Haven't slept much'

Perez also praised Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti, who this season has become the first coach to win four European Cups and the first to win all five major European leagues.

"He symbolises what Real Madrid is," said Perez.

Dressed in black suits, white shirts and black ties, the Real Madrid players paraded the Champions League and La Liga trophies at each location, while also signing shirts, giving autographs and posing for photos with their adoring fans.

On top of the bus, the players put on Real Madrid shirts that had the number 14 and 'champions' written on the back.

"I haven't slept much, I had too much adrenaline to be able to sleep," said Thibaut Courtois, Real Madrid's goalkeeper who was named man of the match in the final. "I still couldn't believe it, it's an incredible feeling. For me it's an honour to play for Real Madrid and I hope I can help the team win more."

Thousands of fans gathered at Plaza Cibeles, the central square at the end of Gran Via, where the club traditionally celebrates its biggest successes around the statue of the goddess Cybele.

AFF

Pride and anger as Liverpool return to heroes' welcome

Liverpool, United Kingdom - Thousands of fans lined the streets of the city as double cup-winners Liverpool returned home for an open-top bus parade on Sunday that took place amid a flood of conflicting emotions.

Winning both the League Cup and FA Cup in the one season, as Liverpool did by twice beating Chelsea on penalties in two Wembley finals, would be reason enough to celebrate for most clubs.

But the two trophies they really wanted, and which would have enabled them to claim an unprecedented quadruple in a single campaign, narrowly eluded Liverpool.

Manchester City pipped them to the Premier League by just a single point last week before Liverpool lost 1-0 to Spanish giants Real Madrid in Europe's showpiece Champions League final in Paris on Saturday.

Supporters of rival teams were quick to point out Liverpool had failed to score a goal in regulation time in any of the three finals they had played this season.

'Best club in the world'

But as the bus carrying players and officials displaying the two trophies won by the Reds this term made its way through the city amid loud cheers and a vibrant backdrop of flares and flags, defiant Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said: "This is the best club in the world.

"We lost a Champions League final yesterday and this is the reception we received. I really couldn't care

less what other people think. What a club," the German added.

The result in Paris was overshadowed by chaotic scenes which delayed the kick-off at the Stade de France by over half an hour, with thousands of ticket holders struggling to enter the stadium as French police used tear gas on Liverpool fans.

As Reds supporter Richard Dickinson watched the parade go by, he told AFP: "There are several high-profile media people who have actually come out and talked about how badly fans were treated over there (Paris) and

We lost a Champions League final yesterday and this is the reception we received

JURGEN KLOPP

My Bayern story has come to an end, says Lewa

Warsaw, Poland - Robert Lewandowski said Monday that his time with Bayern Munich was over, without specifying his future plans, amid reports that Barcelona have made him an offer.

"Today it is certain that my story with Bayern has come to an end," the Polish star striker told reporters in Warsaw.

"I can't imagine further cooperation, after what has happened over the last few months," he added.

"A transfer will be the best solution. I trust that Bayern won't stop me, just because they can."

With a year left on Lewandowski's contract, Barcelona have reportedly made an offer of 32 million euros (\$34.5 million) to sign him.

In an interview with Polish

broadcaster Eleven Sports PL, Lewandowski dropped a teaser about how he would enjoy living in Spain.

"I think it's a really good place - not just to go on holiday there," he said, adding that he has a house in Mallorca.

Bayern CEO Oliver Khan and director of sports Hasan Salihamidzic have both publicly stated the club will not let Lewandowski leave before 2023.

Earlier this month, Lewandowski's agent Pini Zahavi warned Bayern against insisting on the contract.

"Of course they can keep Robert for another year, to be fair he has a contract until 2023, but I wouldn't recommend that to them," Zahavi told German daily Bild.

He added that the issue for



Robert Lewandowski

Lewandowski is not about extra money.

"He has felt disrespected by those in charge (at Bayern) for months, that's the truth.

"FC Bayern has not lost

dream and move to the club (Barcelona) he has always dreamed of."

A back-to-back winner of FIFA's best male player award, Lewandowski has won every title available since joining Bayern in 2014, including eight Bundesliga trophies for a total of 10 having won two with ex-club Dortmund.

He also won the Champions League with Bayern in 2020.

Lewandowski was top-scorer in the Bundesliga last season for the fifth year running after netting 35 goals in Germany's top flight.

On Monday, Bayern also confirmed the exit of France midfielder Corentin Tolisso whose contract has expired after five years in Munich.

AFF



Liverpool players wave to supporters from an open-top bus during a parade through the streets of Liverpool on Sunday (AFP)

France blames 'massive' ticket fraud for Champions League fiasco



Liverpool fans stand outside the stadium before the match

Paris, France - France on Monday blamed massive ticket fraud for the chaotic scenes that marred the Champions League final between Liverpool and Real Madrid that raised questions over the capacity of Paris to host the 2024 Olympics.

The French government has faced a barrage of criticism from press and politicians in Britain over police handling of the match on Saturday, which saw thousands of Liverpool fans with tickets struggling to enter.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's spokesman told reporters in London many Liverpool fans were in the French capital "in good time".

"We're hugely disappointed by how they were treated," the spokesman added. "Fans deserve to know what happened."

But after a crisis meeting at the sports ministry, French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin defiantly insisted that ticket scams and the behaviour of Liverpool fans was to blame.

"What has been confirmed is a massive, industrial-scale and organised fraud in fake tickets... this was the root cause of the delay to the match," Darmanin said, also charging that Liverpool fans had been less well-organised than their Spanish counterparts.

Sports Minister Amelie Oudea-Castera said French authorities were "extremely sorry" for the approximately 2,700 fans with tickets that were unable to enter the Stade de France be-

cause of the crowd control problems and suggested they receive compensation. The scenes tarnished the image of the French capital, raising questions about its ability to host major sporting events as it gears up for the 2024 Olympics, as well as the 2023 Rugby World Cup.

Leading French daily Le Monde echoed the British complaints Monday, saying the French authorities were "in denial" about their shortcomings that had turned the event into a "fiasco".

Monday's meeting at the sports ministry involved European football's governing body UEFA, French football chiefs and the French police. Darmanin and Paris police chief Didier Lallement were both in attendance, along with the Sports Minister Oudea-Castera.

Lallement has called for a formal investigation into the production of fake tickets, which he said had helped cause the problems.

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