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RAISI'S VISIT BOOSTS TIES

HM the Sultan welcomes President Raisi

HISTORICAL VISIT BY IRANIAN PRESIDENT EBRAHIM RAISI PAVES THE WAY FOR FURTHER STRENGTHENING TRADE TIES AS WELL AS PEOPLE TO PEOPLE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO FRIENDLY NEIGHBOURS; SEVERAL AGREEMENTS INKED

Official talks explore cooperation

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik welcomed President Ebrahim Raisi of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the Royal Airport on his one-day visit to Muscat on Monday.

His Majesty the Sultan met the guest at the foot of the ramp, welcoming him and wishing him and his official delegation a pleasant stay in Oman.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan and President Raisi headed to the reception hall, passing through two rows of the guard of honour of the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO).

After a short stay, the motorcade with His Majesty the Sultan and the guest left for Al Alam Palace for an official reception ceremony.

A squadron of cavalry lined the two sides of the road heading to the gate of the palace, while the RGO band played a welcome tune, to the accompaniment of trumpets, as the motorcade entered the courtyard of Al Alam Palace.

His Majesty the Sultan accompanied President Raisi to the dais of honour where the Royal Anthem of Iran was played, while the artillery fired a 21-gun salute for the guest.

Later, His Majesty the Sultan was introduced to the official delegation accompanying the President of Iran. On his turn, the guest shook hands with members of the Royal Family, chairmen of the State Council and Majlis A'Shura, ministers, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces and Royal Oman Police.

After that, His Majesty the Sultan Haitham and President Raisi proceeded to the hall where they enjoyed Arabian coffee and exchanged cordial talks.

The visit provides an opportunity to explore areas of interest to the two neighbouring countries, with a view to realising their aspirations.

President Raisi was accompanied by a delegation comprising several ministers and officials.

ONA



Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik held a round of official talks with President Ebrahim Raisi of the Islamic Republic of Iran at Al Alam Palace on Monday.

The talks explored various aspects of bilateral cooperation and ways of enhancing the strong ties binding the peoples of Oman and Iran. They exchanged views on issues of common concern.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan and President Raisi held a closed-door session. The session was attended from the Omani side by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, Dr Hamad bin Said al Oufi, Head of the Private Office, and Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Muaini, Ambassador of Oman to Iran.

From the Iranian side, it was attended by Dr Hossein Amir Abdollahian, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mohammad Jamshidi, Deputy Head of the Presidential Office for Political Affairs, and Ali Najafi, Ambassador of Iran to Oman.

In a joint communique later on Monday, His Majesty the Sultan and President Raisi expressed satisfaction with the existing level of cooperation, and decided to continue strengthening it further by opening new areas of economic partnership.

The two leaders also expressed their happiness at the consensus reached at the level of joint committees for cooperation between the two countries in several fields.

His Majesty the Sultan and President Raisi also stressed on the positive and fruitful role played by the private sector in the two countries, and expressed hope that new activities lead to an increase in the volume of investments and trade exchange between the two countries.

They stressed the importance of redoubling efforts and endeavours to ensure the continuation of security and stability in the region and the world. The two sides also stressed the importance of combating terrorism and extremism in all its forms and manifestations.

See also [Page 04](#)

Oman, Iran sign 12 agreements

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman and Iran signed 12 agreements on Monday paving the way for further strengthening trade ties as well as people to people relations between the two countries.

The two sides signed eight memoranda of understanding (MoU) and four cooperation programmes in several fields on the sidelines of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's visit to Oman.

The first MoU is in the field of diplomatic studies and training, the second in the field of radio and television, and the third in higher education, scientific research and innovation. These were signed by H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, and Hossein Amir Abdollahian, Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The fourth MoU - in the oil and gas sector - was signed by H E Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Rumhy, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and Jawad Owji,



Another package of MoUs and executive work programmes will be signed with the Iranian side at a later stage

H E SAYYID BADR BIN HAMAD AL BUSAIDI

Iranian Minister of Petroleum.

The fifth MoU, in the field of transport, was signed by H E Said bin Hamoud al Ma'awali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and Rostam Qasemi, Iran-

ian Minister of Transport and Urban Development.

The other MoUs are in the fields of agriculture, livestock and fisheries; plant protection and plant quarantine; and standards, metrology and conformity

assessment. These were signed by H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Sayed Reza Fatemi Amin, Iranian Minister of Industry, Minerals and Trade.

The four cooperation programmes include one in the field of trade, investment and services, which was signed by H E Yousef and Amin.

The second is related to an executive programme for technical cooperation in the field of work and employment, while the third is in the field of environment. The fourth is for cooperation in the field of sports. These cooperation programmes were signed by H E Sheikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, and Alireza Peyman-Pak, Undersecretary in the Iranian Ministry of Industry, Mines and Trade.

According to H E Sayyid Badr, another package of MoUs and executive work programmes will be signed with the Iranian side at a later stage.

HM HOSTS LUNCHEON FOR RAISI



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik hosted an official luncheon at Al Alam Palace in honor of President Ebrahim Raisi of Iran and his accompanying delegation. Prior to the lunch banquet, His Majesty the Sultan presented President Raisi an Omani sword, as a souvenir (ONA)

Oman visit a step to expand ties with neighbours: Raisi



Tehran, Iran - Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said that his visit to Oman is in line with steps to develop good relationships with neighbouring states, while expressing hope for continuation of such interactions, according to an IRNA report.

President Raisi made the remark prior to leaving Tehran for Muscat. Addressing reporters at Mehrabad Airport in Tehran on Monday morning, he noted

that trade exchange between the two countries will 'definitely improve'.

He added, "Political and economic relations with the friendly, brotherly and neighbouring country of Oman are good. But this level of ties needs to be further enhanced. For this reason, both countries are determined to upgrade the level of political and economic ties."

The president went on to say that ex-

pansion and development of relationship between Oman and Iran are the most important aspects of the visit, emphasising that regional collaborations and negotiations can help bolster security.

An Iranian delegation of 50 businessmen and investors visited Oman last week in order to lay the ground for development of economic and trade ties.



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RIAL ~~1.050~~
RIAL **0.650**
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RIAL **2.490**
Dana Brown Egg Tray
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RIAL **3.100**
Althamarat Instant Filled
Milk Powder 2 kgs



SAVE 31.304%
RIAL ~~1.150~~
RIAL **0.790**
Mixed Fried Rice
500 gms



RIAL **1.900**
Chicken Sausage Pizza
Large



4 Pcs
SAVE 51.707%
RIAL ~~2.050~~
RIAL **0.990**
Dettol Soap 4 x 165 gms
Assorted



2 Pcs
SAVE 31.250%
RIAL ~~2.400~~
RIAL **1.650**
Pantene Shampoo
2 x 400 ml Assorted



SAVE 40.431%
RIAL ~~4.180~~
RIAL **2.490**
Dettol Liquid 2 x 1 Ltr

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New batch of Omani leaders trained

Oxford, United Kingdom - The Royal Academy of Administration has completed the first phase of 'National Collaborative Programme for Executive Leadership Development for the Public and Private Sectors'. The programme aims to develop a comprehensive community of leaders in the public and private sectors.

It focuses on enhancing the efficiency of the two sectors by providing participants with the latest knowledge in leadership, economics, innovation and applications of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

The design and implementation of the programme is being done in partnership with Oxford University's Said Business School - one of the most prominent academic institutions in preparing and developing leaders globally.

In the first phase of the programme, 40 participants took part in a unique experience of building joint working groups and expertise over a two-week period



(Supplied photo)

It establishes a new stage for the future of business in Oman by building empowered executive leaders capable of achieving Oman Vision 2040

DR ALI AL LAWATI

in the United Kingdom.

The participants had an opportunity to explore experiences of various concepts of the new economy and its competitive features.

The programme, which included field visits to government institutions and private enterprises in the United Kingdom, also touched on common practices in the fields of partnership

between the private and public sectors, innovation, digital transformation and ways of localising these practices.

Dr Ali bin Qassim al Lawati, director of Royal Academy of

Administration, said, "This programme focuses on four main pillars - leadership, sustainability, innovation and partnership. It establishes a new stage for the future of business in Oman by building empowered executive leaders capable of achieving Oman Vision 2040."

He added that it will also help keep pace with real market needs and new technology paths, noting that the programme is in line with the sultanate's national priorities in developing Omani leaders in the two sectors and investing in human capital.

On her part, Prof Sue Dopson, acting dean of Said Business School, said, "We are pleased to be part of the Royal Academy of Administration's vision to build executive leaders in the public and private sectors who will work to achieve Oman Vision 2040, of being a country with economic competitiveness and inclusive sustainable development."

The Royal Academy of Administration was established by a Royal Decree in January 2022.

Results of archaeological studies of 2021/22 announced by MHT

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) announced the results of archaeological surveys and excavations for the season 2021/2022 on Monday.

A statement issued by MHT said that an excavation programme began in October 2021 and covered various governorates involving 19 archaeological missions of local and international universities and scientific institutions.

The archaeological missions carried out surveys and excavation of archaeological sites dating back to different periods of time and hosted a number of experts and specialists to study artefacts.

The results of the surveys revealed significant information about past civilisations, including demographics and social life, in addition to the economic aspects



(Supplied photo)

of the related period.

MHT, in cooperation with an Italian mission from the University of Rome, worked at an archaeological excavation in Dibba and studied pottery, stone and bronze vessels, swords, arrows and other objects found at the dig.

In cooperation with a Polish

mission, MHT continued the sixth season of excavations at three settlements near Ain Bani Sa'idah, wilayat of Dhank, Dhahirah, dating back to a period between Umm al Nar and the Iron Age.

A mission from the University of Tübingen, Germany, found stone buildings dating back to

3100 BC in Al Khashba village in the wilayat of Mudhaibi.

A mission from Leiden University, The Netherlands, worked on several archaeological sites, including Ras al Jinz 1 and 2 dating back to the 3rd and 2nd millennium BC. Both sites include settlements built with mud bricks and stones.

An American mission from Ohio University studied climate change and its impact on human lifestyle in Dhofar in ancient times. The mission also collected samples of plants and pollen. Additionally, the mission's excavations unearthed a settlement in the Halqut area.

A joint archaeological mission of MHT, Sultan Qaboos University and the British University of Durham discovered remnants of a fort surrounded by circular towers at the Al Fulajj archaeological site in the wilayat of Saham.



Contest held for creative tourism development concepts in Musandam

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Musandam Governor's Office, in cooperation with Innovation Oasis Company, organised a contest called Tourithon Musandam with the objective of developing the tourism and municipal sectors in the governorate.

Asilah Mohammed Sultan al Kalbani, founder of Innovation Oasis, informed that an event was held over two days - Sunday and Monday - at Atana Khasab Hotel to discuss the future of de-

velopment in the tourism and municipal sectors in Musandam. "The most important among these were ideas to develop adventure and eco-tourism in the governorate."

The Musandam Governor's Office brought together individuals with creative ideas, youngsters in particular, on Sunday and launched Tourithon Musandam, with the aim of developing tourism in Musandam. "More than 60 people submitted their ideas in the competition," Asilah said.

Musandam is distinguished for its geographical location and diverse terrain, holding immense tourism potential. Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the governorate attracted 200,000 tourists annually.

In another tourism-related development in the governorate, Omran has started implementing the first phase of an adventure centre with a 1,500m zip line. It will begin at the top of a mountain at a height of 250m above sea level. Completion is expected in 2022.

Oman, Germany mark 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties

Muscat - Oman and Germany marked the 50th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations on Monday.

A ceremony was held at the Foreign Ministry to mark the occasion, attended by H E Sheikh al Harthy, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, and H E Thomas Schneider, Ambassador of Germany to Oman.

A commemorative stamp was issued on the occasion.

ONA

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	39	25
Doha	36	26
Kuwait City	37	26
Manama	32	26
Muscat	37	30
Riyadh	38	23

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	3.57am
Sunrise	5.22am
Duhr	12.09pm
Asr	3.30pm
Maghrib	6.51pm
Isha	8.11pm

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Internal Tender Committee, Ministry of Labour, invites the following Tender:

Tender No.	Tender Description	Last date for electronic purchasing	Last date of tender submission	Documents fee (RO)
5 /2022	Maintenance and modification work in Samail department	Sunday 12/06/2022 at 02:00 pm	Thursday 30/06/2022 at 10:00 am	R.O 25/=

- Specialized establishments can obtain electronic documents from this link below, starting from Monday 23/05/2022, 7:30 AM.

<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om/>

- Each bid is to be attached with a bank guarantee or a certified cheque from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate of (1%) of the value of the tender for the Ministry of Manpower, valid for a period of (90) days from the date of submission of the tender.
- Each electronic bid is to be attached with a copy of the bank guarantee.
- Tenders envelopes will be opened at 11:00am on the same day.

(The ministry is not bound to accept the lowest price of or any tender)

labour_OMAN

RAISI'S VISIT BOOSTS TIES



SAYYID FAHD EXCHANGES VIEWS ON COMMON INTEREST WITH RAISI



H H Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, hosted Ebrahim Raisi, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, at Al Alam Palace guest house on Monday.

The meeting discussed areas of cooperation between the two countries and means of promoting these to serve joint interests. They also exchanged views on regional and international developments.

(ONA)

COMEX 2022 showcases cutting-edge technologies



Our Correspondent Muscat

With participation of 108 exhibitors from 16 countries and expecting 30,000 visitors from Oman and abroad, COMEX 2022 started at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Monday.

Considered the largest exhibition of technology, communications, innovation and digital transformation in the country, it targets the public and private sectors to showcase services, innovation and products.

Cutting-edge technologies, innovations and digital services that promise to make human efforts easy and fast, are on display in the 31st edition of the exhibition. Robots, cybersecurity solu-

tions, artificial intelligence and smart city technologies are proving to be special attractions at COMEX 2022.

Qrlix @ Dine easy

One of the most annoying aspects of eating out is having to wait for a waiter to show up with a menu or the bill. Qrlix does away with this. Launched on Monday, the app helps place orders easily with just a click. Customers simply need to scan a QR code at the table, see the menu and chose what they want without the traditional role of a waiter. The order directly goes to the kitchen.

Sales executive Asma al Balushi said, "It also sends notifications to waiters to deliver the order to a specific table."

The startup is in talks with several restaurants to instal Qrlix and have QR coded menus. Sixteen restaurants have so far signed up.

M30 @ Drones for ROP

In the last few years, drones have played a big role in industries and security. On display is the recently launched M30 from DJI, which has built a reputation globally with its consumer and enterprise drones. IBN Firas Drone Centre, DJI's dealer in the sultanate, has worked with authorities in the deployment of drones in policing and agriculture.

Abdulah al Rashdi, drone engineer and drone pilot, informed that the M30 is used by Royal



Oman Police for security purposes.

According to Osama Ghailani, marketing manager, the M30 has an optical zoom of 60x and thermal sensors that make it apt for nighttime use.

Other drones on display are the Phantom 4 Multispectral, which has a six-camera RGB

multispectral imaging setup capable of providing precise data (to the centimetre) for agricultural deployment. It can be used to gather minute details and progress of crops in farms.

Make it fast @ MoL

A new e-service from the Ministry of Labour is drawing a large

number of visitors at COMEX 2022. It makes renewal, cancellation, transfer and clearance of foreign employees (including maids) easy, not requiring physically presence of the individual. Khawa al Janaidi, head of IT department, said, "Documents have to be submitted online, not physically. Ministry officials review the documents and then decide if the person needs to be present physically."

The new service also has an option to register mega projects - malls, roads and museums.

Cashless payment @ BankMuscat

BankMuscat's QR Smart payment option is designed for cashless payments through phones. Users can log in through the

bank's app, scan the payment QR code of the purchase and enter the amount. Said al Harthy, relationship manager of the bank, said, "You don't have to carry cash. Just scan and make the payment by logging into the app."

Digital innovation @ MHUP

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) held the soft launch of Tatwir - a platform for real estate development - and displayed electronic platforms called Choose Your Land, Amlak, Salasa and Geo-Oman. These enhance the user experience and showcase the ministry's capabilities in the field of digital innovation to support sustainability.

MARKET WATCH

MSX30	4,133.32
Sensex	54,288.61

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

Indian Rs	201.51
Pakistani Rs	520.62
Bangladeshi taka	228.45
Philippines peso	135.69
Sri Lankan Rs	935.10

* Rates as on MAY 23
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Oil prices increase on tight supply

Oil prices gained on Monday with US fuel demand, tight supply and a slightly weaker US dollar supporting the market, as Shanghai prepares to reopen after a two-month lockdown fuelled worries about a sharp slowdown in growth.

Brent crude futures rose 72 cents to US\$113.27 a barrel at 0408 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures climbed 53 cents, or 0.48 per cent, to US\$110.81 a barrel, adding to last week's small gains for both contracts, Reuters reported.

The US peak driving season traditionally begins on Memorial Day weekend at the end of May and ends on Labor Day in September.

A weaker U.S. dollar also sent oil higher on Monday, as that makes crude cheaper for buyers holding other currencies.

Oman's inflation drops to 2.7% in April despite higher food prices



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Despite the increase in prices of many food items, Oman's annual inflation rate further decreased for the third straight month in April, thanks to the stability in prices of fuel, rent, water, electricity, communication and transportation.

Inflation rate – as measured by the sultanate's consumer price index (CPI) – decreased to 2.67 per cent in April 2022 from 3.6 per cent in March 2022. The sultanate's annual inflation was recorded at 4.0 per cent in February and 4.4 per cent in January this year, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

However, consumer price inflation for food and non-alcoholic beverages group, which has nearly 24 per cent weight in

Oman's CPI, rose to 5.43 per cent in April 2022 compared to the same month of the previous year.

Global food prices have been soaring fast since the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Since Oman needs to import most of the food materials from international markets, rising global prices directly affect the prices in the local market.

Among food items, prices of cooking oil and fats rose nearly 15 per cent year-on-year in April, but bread and cereals prices grew at a lower rate of 2.7 per cent.

While meat prices recorded a 7.7 per cent increase, prices of fish and seafood products jumped 6.5 per cent in April on year-on-year basis.

Consumer prices for vegetables remained 9.7 per cent higher in April 2022 compared with the same month a year ago,

and prices for fruits increased by nearly 8 per cent on year-on-year basis.

On the other hand, prices in the housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels group – which has over 26 per cent weight in Oman's CPI – increased only by 2 per cent in April this year compared to April 2021.

Prices in the transport group – which has more than 19 per cent weight in CPI – increased by 2.4 per cent in April 2022 compared to the same month a year ago.

Oman's annual inflation rate has first time dropped below three per cent level since October last year.

International institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and global credit ratings agencies expect Oman's inflation to remain above three per cent level in 2022.



Metso wins \$35mn contract for large pellet plant in Sohar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Finland-based technology company Metso Outotec has signed an agreement for the delivery of engineering and key equipment for an iron ore Grate Kiln pellet plant to Vulcan Pelletizing.

The pellet plant, which is located at the industrial port of Sohar, will supply pellets to Sohar-based Jindal Shaded Iron & Steel Company. Vulcan owns 49 per cent stake in Jindal Shaded Iron & Steel Company.

The value of the order is approximately 33mn euro (around US\$35mn), Metso Outotec said in a statement on its website.

Metso Outotec is the world's leading supplier of Grate Kiln pellet plants, with more than 50 in-

stallations globally totalling over 130 metric tonnes per annum (mtpa) of production. Metso Outotec's technology is known to produce superior-quality pellets while minimizing overall plant operational expenses.

In this new contract in Oman, Metso Outotec's scope of delivery consists of the supply of core pelletising plant equipment, including the travelling grate, rotary kiln, and annular cooler. The design is based on the Grate Kiln plants that Metso Outotec is currently supplying for a customer in India.

The plant in Sohar, which is planned to produce 6mn tonnes of high-quality iron ore pellets per year, is scheduled to be operational by the end of 2023, the company said.

"This is the third order for a 6 mtpa Grate-Kiln pelletising plant within the last 16 months. Metso Outotec is proud to be the Vulcan Group's selected partner in iron ore pelletising, and we look forward to propelling the Vulcan Group to be a global leader with world-class pellet products," said Chris Urban, vice president – heat transfer products at Metso Outotec.

Metso Outotec is a frontrunner in sustainable technologies, end-to-end solutions and services for the aggregates, minerals processing and metals refining industries globally.

Headquartered in Helsinki, Metso Outotec employs over 15,000 people in more than 50 countries and its sales for 2021 were about 4.2bn euro.

ECB plans end to negative rates era as inflation soars

Frankfurt, Germany – Negative interest rates will soon be a thing of the past in the eurozone, the ECB's chief signalled Monday, with the bank poised to raise rates for the first time in over a decade to tamp down soaring inflation.

The Frankfurt-based institution was "likely to be in a position to exit negative interest rates by the end of the third quarter", ECB President Christine Lagarde wrote in a blog post.

The clear time frame for rate rises came as the ECB plays catch up with other central banks in responding to surging inflation.

Lagarde had previously argued that sharp leaps in consumer prices, driven in part by the waning effect of COVID-19 pandemic, were likely to subside in a few months.

But Russia's war in Ukraine has thrown a new spanner in the works, worsening already disrupted supply chains and throwing up new shortages in essential material from wheat to metals.

Energy prices were also on the march, as Western economies including Germany – the eurozone's biggest – scramble to wean themselves off Russian power.

Consumer prices soared at a rate of 7.5 per cent in the eurozone in April, an all-time high for the currency club and well above the bank's two-per cent target.

The renewed surge has already prompted a sharp response from many central banks.

The US Federal Reserve raised rates by an unusually large 50 basis points at the beginning of May, while the Bank of England sealed its fourth consecutive hike.

The euro climbed one per cent against the dollar following Lagarde's comments, having struggled as the Fed acted more



aggressively to fight inflation.

First rate hike

The end of the ECB's bond-buying stimulus programme "very early in the third quarter" would pave the way for a "rate lift-off at our meeting in July", Lagarde said.

The initial hike would lift rates from their current historically low levels.

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

Any hikes beyond zero would be dependent on the "inflation outlook", Lagarde said.

If the forecasted rate of inflation appeared to be stabilising around the ECB's two-per cent target, further increases "will be appropriate".

Policymakers will be keeping an especially close eye on the development of wages for fear pay increases could stoke inflation

further.

Wage rises in the first quarter of 2022 had been "moderate", the German central bank said in a report also published Monday.

But the Bundesbank warned that the ballooning cost of living could lead to "stronger rises" in Europe's largest economy in the near future.

Following Lagarde's comments, Commerzbank senior economist, Michael Schubert, said he expected the ECB "to raise the deposit rate by 25 basis points at each of its seven meetings between July and April" next year. The hiking streak would bring the key rate to 1.25 per cent, he said, but warned the ECB may need to go further in order to bring inflation under control.

ECB policymakers next meet to decide their course of action on June 9 and July 21, with the July date seen as the most likely for the first hike.

AFP

Biden says US recession not inevitable

Tokyo, Japan – A recession in the United States is not inevitable, President Joe Biden said Monday, while acknowledging the economic pain experienced by Americans as inflation soars.

Speaking in Tokyo, Biden replied "no" when asked if a US recession is inevitable.

"This is going to be a haul, this is going to take some time," Biden said.

The US economy has recovered strongly from its COVID-19 era shutdown, but the highest in-



US President Joe Biden

flation in four decades and persistent problems in getting international supply chains flowing again are driving pessimism – and Biden's sinking poll numbers.

Biden blamed inflation on fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine and other global problems and he defended US economic performance.

"We have problems the rest of the world has but less consequential," he said.

While acknowledging the high fuel prices and food supply

crunches caused by the war in wheat-producing Ukraine, Biden said his administration would continue to "grow our economy, create jobs". Last week Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said "I really don't expect the United States to fall into a recession".

However, she cautioned that European countries, which are among the biggest US trading partners, "are more vulnerable" due to reliance on Russian energy imports.

AFP

Sri Lanka inflation hits new record at 34%

Colombo, Sri Lanka – Sri Lanka's inflation hit a seventh consecutive record high in April as a petrol shortage worsened and food prices rose sharply, official data showed Monday.

The National Consumer Price Index rose 33.8 per cent year-on-year in April, more than six times the 5.5 per cent inflation of a year earlier.

Annual food inflation stood at 45.1 per cent, according to the latest data released by the Department of Census and Statistics.

Hammered by a foreign exchange crisis, the country's 22mn people have been enduring acute shortages of essentials – including food and medicines – for months.

Protests are continuing outside President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office demanding his resignation over the unprecedented economic turmoil.

Inflation is likely to rise further in May as fuel price hikes of 35 per cent for petrol and 65 per cent for diesel – commonly used in public transport – feed into the wider economy.

Petrol remains in short supply with long queues outside the few pumping stations still dis-



People queue to buy LPG cylinders in Colombo on Monday (AFP)

tributing the fuel.

Sri Lanka asked the International Monetary Fund last month for emergency assistance. The country has de-

faulted on its US\$51bn external debt and is seeking international aid to revive the bankrupt economy.

The economy has collapsed

since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, with a nose-dive in tourism revenues and foreign worker remittances.

AFP

Lulu awards winners of ‘Shop & Win’ Ramadan promotion



Lulu Oman distributed the prizes to the winners of its recent ‘Shop & Win’ promotion, which was held from March 10 to May 7 coinciding with the Ramadan and Eid celebrations.

The prize distribution ceremony was held at Lulu Hypermarket in Avenues Mall. The prizes were distributed to the winners by the senior management members of Lulu Oman in the presence of shoppers, well-wishers as well as management and staff of Lulu Hypermarket Oman, a press release said.

The first-of-its-kind promotion ‘Shop & Win’ gave 281 customers a chance to win cash prizes totally worth RO100,000. A Grand Prize of RO10,000 cash as well as Weekly Cash Prizes of RO5000, RO750, RO500, and more were won by Lulu customers from all over Oman. The winners of each draw were picked and their names were announced in the presence of officials from the MOCI, the management of Lulu and other dignitaries.

Shoppers purchasing a minimum value of RO10 at any Lulu Hypermarket in Oman during the promotional period were entitled to register themselves to be part of eight e-raffle draws held during the entire period.



Ananth A V, Director of Lulu Hypermarkets Oman & India, stated, “I congratulate all the winners of our Shop and Win Promotion, especially the Grand Prize winner. The response to this year’s unique promotion was overwhelming. We could see a

perceptible excitement during the promotion, which was a clear indication of the promotion having caught the customer’s imagination. We at Lulu, constantly strive to up our offerings and enhance the customer experience so that the process is rewarding

in more than one respect.”

Shabeer K A, regional director – Oman, said, “We offer ‘meaningful deals and discounts’ to meet consumer needs for every season and occasion. Our innovative strategies and ideas are tailored to meet and exceed cus-

tomers expectations. A lot of other promotions, deals, offers and discounts were also offered alongside the Shop and Win promotion to make shopping at Lulu an enjoyable and rewarding experience for our customers during Ramadan.”

Tariq al Barwani to speak at ICAI Muscat Chapter

As part of the annual general meeting for the year 2021-2022, the Institute of Chartered Accounts of India (ICAI) Muscat Chapter is organising a full day seminar for its members on May 27 at the Hall of the College of Banking and Financial Studies in Muscat. Tariq has been invited as a motivational speaker to share eight practical habits that transform lives positively.

ICAI Muscat Chapter was established in the year 2008 under the sponsorship of College of Banking and Financial Studies (CBFS) by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by two bodies for the development of accounting profession in Oman and sharing knowledge and skills, a press release said.

The ICAI chapter is a non-profit group of Indian Chartered Accountants who are employed in Oman and organises professional learning events which is open to attendance by the professionals of all nationalities residing in Oman. It also runs an Omani Professionals Working Group (OPWG) which entitles all Omani nationals who become part of



Tariq al Barwani

OPWG to attend Chapter programs without paying any membership fee or other charges which are payable by chapter members to meet the cost of running such programmes.

“I am honoured to be invited to speak at ICAI Muscat Chapter Seminar and I look forward to share the eight practical habits that I personally use to continuously transform myself and all the people I associate with positively,” said Barwani. Over 150 members of ICAI that comprise of qualified accountants, finance professional and CBFS students are expected to attend the seminar.

Ooredoo connects five more areas with fibre home internet

Providing more people than ever with access to great quality connection, Ooredoo has now added its Fibre Home Internet service to Saham City Centre, Hay Al Kawthar, Al Swaiq Al Subaiki, Saham Heights, and Wilayat Al Khabourah – Soor Qtaut and Qasabit Al Zab, with more areas being added all the time. Residents in those areas can now enjoy an amazing value high-speed service from as little as RO29.4 per month.

With speeds of up to 1GB, plus a whole range of unique

benefits like unlimited data, 10% discount on international calling, unlimited national minutes, and free modem and installation, it’s the perfect solution for the whole family, a press release said.

With Ooredoo’s Fibre Home Internet services, customers can surf, chat and browse the Internet for much longer without worrying about any interruptions while streaming, gaming and more. So, connect today and enjoy an amazing online experience.

Danube Home offers fully customisable kitchen solutions

Danube Home the region’s leading one-stop-shop for home improvement and furnishing needs has a one-stop solution for customers looking for the perfect kitchen.

With a range of stylish and functional kitchen fittings, designed to suit the tastes and needs of every family – from space maximisation to state of the art design innovation and beyond, Danube Home is setting a new standard for home kitchens. Apart from the stellar range of products, Danube Home also offers a Design and Develop service that helps customers design their dream kitchens, from scratch, a press release said.

Danube Home offers free kitchen designing and consultation services.

The in-house design team starts with an initial consultation with the customer, to understand their specific requirements in order to design a seamless workspace.

Danube Home then works with interior designers and site



engineers to create a 3D design of the intended kitchen so clients can visualize their future space and make necessary edits. Once the design is finalised, the team begins the execution to bring the vision alive.

The expert Danube Home Design and Develop team work with a wide variety of kitchen styles and can recommend the ideal solution based on the

available space – from islands, to parallel and U-shaped kitchens and more. Customers can also choose from a variety of natural or modern finishes like Melamine, Lacquer, Acrylic and PVC depending on their specific tastes.

Danube Home products are affordably priced and our design team is expert in working within budgetary and time constraints.



SQU and Global Colleges of Engineering sign agreement

Making another significant step in the educational cooperation in the Sultanate of Oman, Sultan Qaboos University and Global College of Engineering and Technology have signed a Letter of Agreement on May 9 in the Cultural Centre at SQU.

The letter was signed by Professor Salim al Harthi, deputy

vice chancellor for Academic Affairs and Community Service at Sultan Qaboos University and Professor Geoffrey Elliott, dean-president at Global College of Engineering and Technology, a press release said.

The agreement highlights cooperation between Centre for Preparatory Studies at SQU and

the Academic Department of Foundation Studies at GCET, which aims to share academic practices in General Foundation Programme (GFP), to initiate benchmarking activities, and to contribute to the enhancement of GFP in both institutions.

Areas of cooperation are related to GFP, including teach-

ing and learning, assessments, placement tests and exit tests, benchmarking systems, etc.

Prof Harthi stressed the importance of mutual cooperation between private and governmental institutions in higher education while Prof Elliott hoped for more arrangements with the College of Engineering at SQU.

ODP, Vodafone sign strategic pact

Oman Data Park (ODP), the sultanate's first managed cyber security and cloud services provider, and Vodafone have signed a strategic partnership agreement under which ODP will provide Cloud Services, Colocation Services, Managed Security Services and Managed Infrastructure services to Vodafone in the sultanate.

The signed agreement reflects the future vision of the two parties on the importance of enabling technology to serve national economy in line with Oman vision 2040, which stresses the need to provide technical solutions that contribute to localise the technology in the sultanate, keep pace with the requirements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and create wider horizons for utilising modern technologies in various fields of business, a press release said.

The inking of the agreement also reflects the confidence of international companies such as Vodafone in the local companies and their capabilities to provide technical solutions that help to save time, reduce operational costs and speeding up the work process.

Engineer Maqbool al Wahabi, CEO of Oman Data Park Company, said, "As a pioneering Omani company in all its fields of work, our involving into a strategic partnership with Vodafone as a global company in the



telecommunications fields is considered as an affirmation of the capability of Oman Data Park in providing colocation and cloud services locally to various companies, including advanced telecommunications companies". He added, "We are proud

that the services offered by ODP through its own locally hosted Tier 3 certified datacenters in Rusayl, Duqm and Wattayah, and the cyber security services through its Cyber security Park Center, will contribute to provide high quality services for Voda-

fone to meet its needs in this regard."

Sayyid Fahad bin Abdulaziz al Busaidi, chief Support Services officer at Vodafone, said, "We are delighted by this strategic partnership, which will pave the way for Vodafone and ODP to

work together towards strengthening this partnership to broad horizons to contribute and to enhance the in-country value. "We stress our full commitment to work with our partners in utilising all the supportive capabilities in creating a digital society that

is capable to meet the requirements of the next stage, in particular with Oman Data Park, which enjoys advanced services in the field of Cloud Services, Colocation Services, Managed Security Services and Managed Infrastructure services."

Italian embassy announces scholarships

The Embassy of Italy in Muscat offers grants in favour of Omani students with the aim to further foster cooperation with the sultanate in the cultural, scientific and technological fields, as well as to promote Italian language and culture.

Scholarships for Omani Students for a total of 18 months are offered to complete study courses and research or training programmes in government or legally recognised Italian educational institutions for a period of study of 6 or 9 months. Grants for Italian advanced language and culture courses are awarded for a period of 3 months, a press release said.

Interested candidates can read more details and submit the online application form at <https://studyinitaly.esteri.it>. Applications will be evaluated by a committee set up by the Embassy of Italy. Grantees will receive a 900 Euro monthly allowance. The deadline for applications is June 9.

Italy offers a broad variety of global, top-class universities, covering all sectors of research, from medicine, engineering, architecture and physics to literature, arts, music and social sciences.



Sri Lankan community holds blood donation drive

A blood donation programme was organised by the Sri Lankan community in Oman under the patronage of H.E. Ameer Ajwad, Sri Lankan Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, coinciding with Vesak Festival 2022.

Vesak is the full moon day in the month of May when Lord Buddha was born, attained enlightenment, and passed away. Vesak is an internationally recognised day by the United Nations to celebrate the message of Buddhism.

The blood donation programme was organised at the premises of the Sri Lanka embassy in Muscat on May 20 in association with the Central Blood Bank, Sri Sambutthatwa Jayanthi Viharaya Committee and the Sri Lanka Community Social Club in Oman. More than 100 members of the Sri Lankan community in Oman volunteered and donated their blood to the Central Blood Bank of the Sultanate of Oman. H.E. Ajwad complimented the Sri Lankan

community in Oman for their invaluable humanitarian gesture of solidarity with the people of the host country. The ambassador also extended his sincere appreciation to the medical staff of the Central Blood Bank for their dedicated services throughout the programme.

A free medical camp was also organised by Sri Lankan medical doctors serving in the sultanate for the benefit of the participants during the programme.

Shura delegates visit Al Mazunah Free Zone

A delegation representing the Economic and Financial Committee of Majlis A'Shura visited Al Mazunah Free Zone to get familiarised with the ongoing and future projects that are planned by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates 'Mada'yn' in Al Mazunah.

Eng Ali al Maashani, director general of Al Mazunah Free Zone, briefed the committee on the free zone and its projects, and elaborated on the incentives that are offered to the investors in the free zone. These incentives include customs' exemptions, 100 per cent foreign ownership, no minimum capital requirements, and the Omanisation rate at 10 per cent.

More incentives include easy access of individuals and in-



vestors to the free zone without entry visas being required for Yemenis, facilitation of employing Yemeni workforce without work visas, in addition to other incentives.

A number of service projects are currently being implemented

in Al Mazunah Free Zone including new road network, water tanks and network, fiber optic network, and electricity and drainage networks. The facility building project, which is valued at more than RO3mn, is also expected to be completed by end

of this year.

The committee was also introduced to the tasks undertaken by the customs area in the free zone, including the handling operations that are managed by Al Madina Logistics Services Company.

Ahli Islamic extends salary transfer rewards

Ahli Islamic has announced the extension of the salary transfer offer until the end of May, through which it offers a 10% cash reward of the total salary, up to a maximum of RO500. All current and new Ahli Islamic customers from Oman whose monthly salary is at least RO1,000, are eligible to receive a

one-time offer.

This initiative is part of the bank's strategic efforts to enhance its services and products, maximising benefits for its customers, within a framework that conforms to the Islamic-sharia'h principles. Through its new salary transfer campaign, which runs until the end of May, Ahli Is-

lamic aims to provide its customers with Islamic banking products and services that suit the ever-evolving choices of today's customer, a press release said.

Yousuf bin Salim al Rawahi, deputy general manager and head of Ahli Islamic, said, "Islamic banking has recently

become increasingly popular among Oman's new workforce, which is characterised by being more aware, and decisive of their choices. Clearly, the trend is attributed to customer's awareness of the benefits offered. By extending our promotion period, we hope to expand the benefits of this offer to our customers."

Bank Nizwa supports COMEX 2022 as main sponsor

As a firm believer in technological innovation in the banking sector, Bank Nizwa, the leading and most trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, extended its support to COMEX 2022, Oman's official technology, communications, innovation and digital transformation show, as the main Islamic Banking sponsor, the 31st Annual Hybrid Event, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), as well as through Virtual Support Platforms.

The event included exhibitions, conferences, awards, workshops, seminars, certified



training programmes, gaming, B2B meetings and other attractions, a press release said.

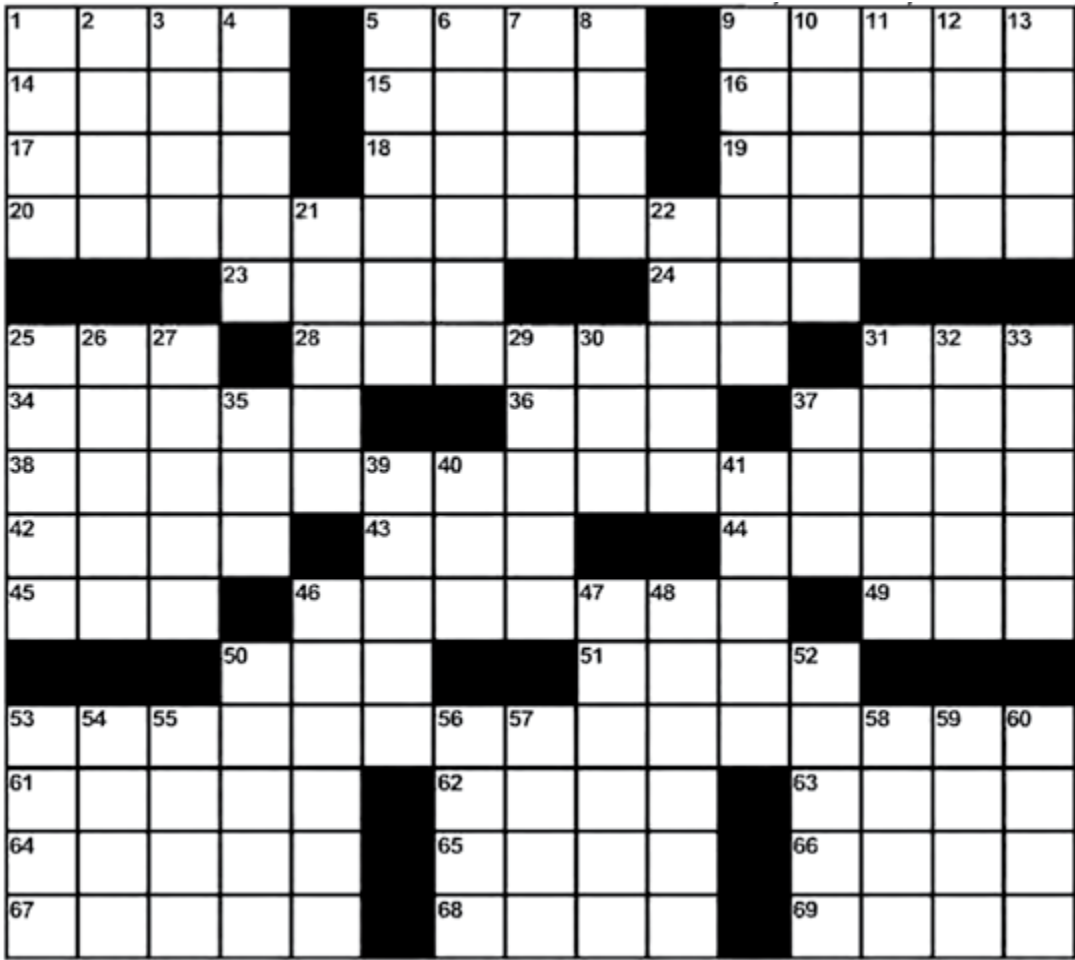
With Bank Nizwa being at the forefront of Banking and Fintech and being deemed as the 'Most Innovative Islamic Bank', it has always directed its focus on digitalisation and the introduction of dynamic Shari'a-compliant products and services.

Exhibiting at the COMEX 2022, the bank showcased its digital banking offerings to visitors, which included a Digital Onboarding section that enabled visitors to open an account with Bank Nizwa

digitally via the use of a QR code.

Digital onboarding has allowed the bank to reach bring Islamic Banking closer to a larger audience and simplify the account opening process for prospective customers. Also displayed was a prototype of an Interactive ATM and a Self-Service Card Issuance/Printing Machine. Visitors could use the machines in real-time to understand their mechanism and received token cards that allowed them to enter the raffle draw to win exciting prizes, exclusive for COMEX visitors.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Lockable fastener
5) Hue fit for a duck
9) Toyota of old
14) "... happily_ after"
15) Continental cash
16) Judge, at times
17) Big name in building blocks
18) Indeterminate long time
19) Crosswise to a ship's middle
20) Accepts a proposal
23) Telling sign
24) Buddhist discipline
25) Scratch, as furniture
28) Persevere
31) Cobbler's need
34) Belittle
36) Basker's quest
37) Skin lotion ingredient
38) Unwanted welcome
BLISS?
42) Like Mr. Claus' cheeks
43) Profit ender?
44) Implant snugly
45) Vein glory?

46) Involve deeply
49) Recognizes
50) Royal flush card
51) Lifted, as an anchor
53) Things issued before peoples' "big day"
61) Ferric_ (rust)
62) Connect
63) Turn over_ leaf
64) Icicle sites
65) Clarinet kin
66) Pepsi, for one
67) Nobody's fool
68) "Ahem" alternative
69) Cookbook abbr.

DOWN

1) "SOS!"
2) Affirmatively allege
3) Lily variety
4) Trailer, briefly
5) Relative of 4-Down
6) Oregon city
7) "Iliad" deity
8) Type of cause
9) Pollen-bearing organ
10) Like city residents
11) Dock
12) Raise, as young'uns
13) Private organization?

21) Move forward
22) Ultraviolet index factor
25) Computer shortcut
26) Dislike, and then some
27) Aggressive poker bet
29) Metric unit of volume
30) Bunt that moves one along, briefly
31) Accused's need
32) Courted
33) Advances
35) Using trickery
37) Where to get your balance
39) Aden's country
40) Sleep cycle acronym
41) Annoy
46) Superlatively slippery
47) Thick-skinned behemoths, briefly
48) Bulb's place
50) Snake that puts two and two together?
52) Legislate
53) Travails

54) Academic challenge
55) Opera star
56) Hardly haute cuisine
57) Ad_ (improvises)
58) High-hatter

59) Congers
60) Cashless deal
12th September

NOTE PAD

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

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Does it seem like the lunatics are in charge of the asylum? A boss, manager, or some other big cheese might not be quite the cool, calm, and collected authority figure you were hoping for. If that's the case, don't just stamp your feet and scream. Instead, keep your cool while others around you lose theirs. Hopefully, everyone will notice your example and follow it.

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You're at a turning point professionally, and while you may feel your enthusiasm for your current situation start to lag, it's important to remember that you get back exactly what you put into job tasks. You know you've got the energy to back up your words, so make sure that you devote your time to doing just that. While your confident way with words is normally irresistible, concrete action is much more appropriate at this time.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Of all the changes you've embraced, today's may be the most shocking. Could your daring, "up for anything" soul actually be feeling quiet and contemplative? Well, why the heck not? You're quite enjoying your newly restrained and low-key persona. It's a nice change of pace and gives you some necessary moments for thinking it all through. Go ahead and roll with this feeling and enjoy the insight it provides.

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Someone nearby might start to preach when you come near, but you don't have to provide an audience, especially if you have your own life to lead, and you very definitely do, right? If you feel up to it, go ahead and engage them in a little open-minded debate. You might expose them to a different point of view that they've never considered. You can make that your good deed for the day.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

It may feel like today is full of tests and turning points, but don't let the pressure (self-induced or from others) get to you. Try instead to follow your instincts and do what you think is best. Push yourself to the limit if you like, but take your own sweet time if you're dealing with unknown territory. Your performance depends on how well you understand what's going on.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You're getting so many congratulatory pats on the back today that you might start to feel a little sore! Some people (jealous or unobservant) might call it luck, but you know better. In your case, "luck" was composed of equal parts talent, perseverance, hard work, and opportunity. So go ahead and show off how happy you are. You deserve it, no matter what. How sweet it is!

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

Your wild ideas and "anything goes" mentality are actually firmly grounded in earthy concerns (and earthy delights) right now. Your energy is pushing you in a more stable direction, and you want to see concrete results and follow your plans through to some kind of resolution. Make sure you get the most out of this bout of perseverance. You could lay the groundwork for some great things to come.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Your daily routines and instructions don't feel all that fulfilling right now. In fact, it might feel like you're kowtowing and knuckling under to authority for no good reason. Today, you're a rebel and you need to feel free of strictures, especially those that don't make any sense to you. Find ways to convert this strong mental energy into something useful, preferably far away from the presence of authority figures.

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You usually have strong ideas about how to get things done, which may not always conform with the accepted ways. Rather than waste time arguing about whose way is the right way, get down to business, and you'll find that the day practically flies by while you make unbelievable progress. Things that you thought might be enormous problems somehow take care of themselves (especially when you give them a gentle nudge or two).

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

Speak your mind right away and you should start to see results soon. This isn't always the easiest thing in the world for you to do, but your energy gives you the gumption to state your thoughts without a fuss and without any kind of personal agenda. Whether you're addressing the latest project at work or telling your sweetie that you have no opinion about that restaurant, your needs are sure to be met today when you voice them.

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Anyone with any common sense knows that when it comes to business matters, you're the wrong one to mess with, but you may run across someone right now who's not too observant or doesn't value their hide at all! Fortunately, your shrewdness steps in and saves the day for everyone, especially when it turns out the deal on the table is the worst thing for all parties involved. Just go easy on the poor soul who thought they could fool you.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Assistance appears just when you need it the most, and it might even come without you having to ask. Your workplace or neighborhood karma shines right now when someone comes to your rescue just in the nick of time. You're suitably grateful, of course, but there's no need to overdo it. After all, you've helped out plenty of your people over the years. It was just a matter of them noticing you needed help in return.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. What is a mermaid's purse?

A. A walrus's genitalia
B. A species of seaweed
C. A type of jellyfish
D. The casing that surrounds the egg or eggs of a shark, skate or chimaera

02. In geology, what are nappe formations?

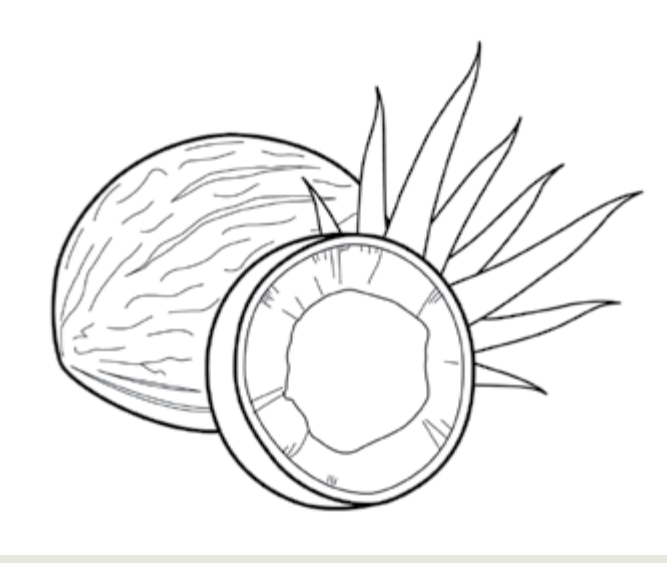
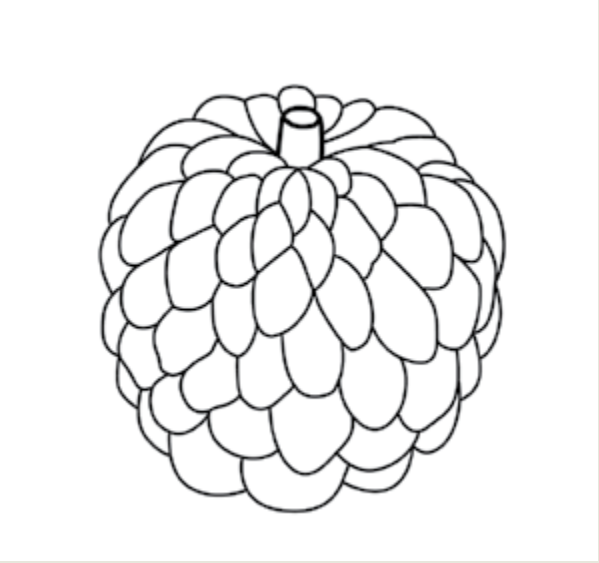
A. A complex fold system of shifted sheets of rock
B. Breaks or faults in otherwise continuous sheets of rock
C. Abrupt changes in level
D. Tablerocks

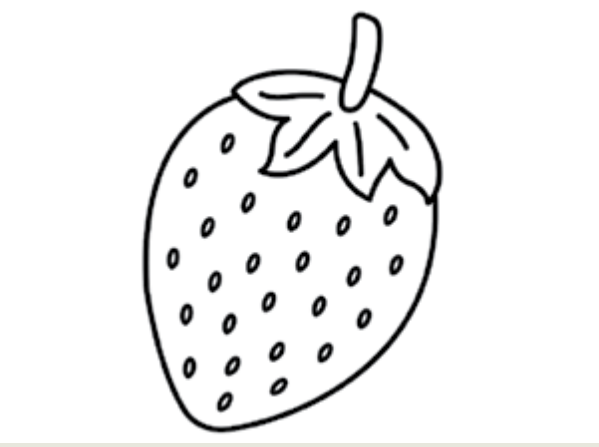
03. What date is "Singles' Day" in China?

A. 13 February
B. ! January
C. 11 November
D. 21 February

Answers: 1. D 2. A 3. C

KIDS COLOURING





BOGGLER

E	T	R	N
J	O	A	S
K	E	R	E
S	C	R	S

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.

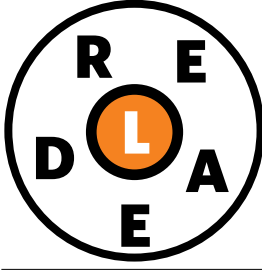
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Iran to 'avenge' killing of colonel Khodai

Assailants on Sunday hit Revolutionary Guards colonel Sayyad Khodai with five bullets in his car

Tehran, Iran - Iran will avenge the killing of a Revolutionary Guards colonel who was shot dead in Tehran, President Ebrahim Raisi warned on Monday. Assailants on motorcycles on Sunday hit Colonel Sayyad Khodai with five bullets as he sat in his car outside his home.

Iran blamed 'elements linked to the global arrogance' - the Islamic republic's term for its arch enemy the United States and US allies including Israel.

It was the most high-profile killing inside Iran since the November 2020 murder of top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh. Raisi said: "I insist on the serious pursuit (of the killers) by security officials, and I have no doubt that the blood of this great martyr will be avenged."

"There is no doubt that the hand of global arrogance can be seen in this crime," he added, echoing the Guards' assertion, before he travelled to Oman



Colonel Sayyad Khodai

where he was to meet His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq. A memorial service for Khodai was scheduled in Tehran at 5pm local time (1230 GMT) on Monday. The funeral will take place at 8am (0330 GMT) on Tuesday in Imam Hossein Square in central Tehran, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp said in a statement.

The ideological arm of Iran's military, the Guards described



Two women mourning next to the body of Colonel Sayyad Khodai, after he was shot dead, in his car in Tehran on Sunday (AFP)

Khodai as a 'defender of the sanctuary', a term used for those who work on behalf of Iran in Syria or Iraq. Iran maintains sig-

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

I insist on the serious pursuit (of the killers) by security officials and I have no doubt that the blood of this great martyr will be avenged. There is no doubt that the hand of global arrogance can be seen in this crime

EBRAHIM RAISI

State television noted that Khodai was 'known' in Syria, where Iran has acknowledged deploying 'military advisers'.

'Criminal act'

The official news agency IRNA

said Khodai was killed by five bullets as he returned home on Sunday at around 4pm.

The agency published pictures showing a man slumped over in the driver's seat of a white car, with blood around the collar of his blue shirt and on his right arm. He was strapped in with his seat belt, and the front window on the passenger side had been shot out. The Fars news agency reported that the state prosecutor had visited the scene of the killing and ordered the 'quick identification and arrest of the authors of this criminal act'.

The Guards said they had arrested several 'thugs linked to the intelligence agency of the Zionist regime', as Iran calls its enemy Israel. A statement said the suspects had been involved in a series of crimes, including 'robberies, kidnappings and vandalism'. "The dimensions of this assassination are being investigated," said the spokesman for

the joint chiefs of staff of the Iranian armed forces, General Abolfazl Shakarji.

Khodai's killing came as negotiations between Iran and world powers to restore a frayed 2015 nuclear deal have stalled since March. One of the main sticking points is Tehran's demand to remove the Guards from a US terrorism list - a request rejected by Washington.

The 2015 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 nuclear agreement was left hanging by a thread 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



People walk down a road in Iraq's capital Baghdad as thick dust blankets the city, on Monday (AFP)

Sandstorm forces closure of Iraqi airports, buildings

Baghdad, Iraq - Iraq closed public buildings and temporarily shut airports on Monday as another sandstorm - the ninth since mid-April - hit the country, authorities said.

The capital Baghdad was enveloped in a giant dust cloud that left usually traffic-choked streets largely deserted, an AFP correspondent said.

Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi ordered all work to cease in public institutions, with the exception of health facilities and security agencies.

He cited 'poor climatic conditions and the arrival of violent sandstorms' in a statement issued by his office.

Iraq is ranked as one of the

five most vulnerable nations to climate change and desertification. The environment ministry has warned that over the next two decades, Iraq could endure an average of 272 days of sandstorms per year, rising to above 300 by 2050.

Air traffic was suspended on Monday at international airports in Baghdad, Erbil and Najaf, according to statements issued by each airport, before authorities announced later in the morning that flights were resuming at Baghdad and Erbil.

The previous two sandstorms killed one person and sent nearly 10,000 people to various hospitals with respiratory problems.

The Middle East has always been battered by sandstorms, but they have become more frequent and intense in recent years.

The trend has been associated with rising heat and water scarcity, overuse of river water, more dams, overgrazing and deforestation.

Oil-rich Iraq is known in Arabic as the land of the two rivers, in reference to the Tigris and Euphrates.

Iraq's environment ministry has said the weather phenomenon could be addressed by increasing the vegetation cover and planting trees that act as windbreaks.

AFP

Turkmen ex-ruler's horse to get statue

Ashgabat, Turkmenistan - Long treated as a national celebrity, the favourite horse of Turkmenistan's former president is to be immortalised with a personal statue in the gas-rich Central Asian country.

The Akhal-Teke breed of horse enjoys a prominent role in government propaganda in the former Soviet nation and Ak Khan - whose name means White Khan - was the prized stallion of Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, who stepped down in March after 16 years in power.

On Monday, state newspaper *Neutrals Turkmenistan* reported that Berdimukhamedov's son and successor, Serdar Berdimukhamedov, had approved the monument in the province of Akhal outside the capital city of Ashgabat.

The monument will 'increase the glory of the Akhal-Teke horses - the national pride of the Turkmen people', the paper cited a presidential decree as saying.

Berdimukhamedov, 64, stepped down stating a desire to allow 'younger leaders' to govern. His only son subsequently won a snap election in March, beating token rival candidates.

The former president is known by state media as Turkmenistan's 'protector' and remains head of the upper house of



This file photo shows a circus rider sitting atop Ak Khan, an Akhal-Teke breed steed, at a circus arena in Ashgabat on June 29, 2018 (AFP)

parliament.

In 2015, a golden monument portraying Berdimukhamedov atop Ak Khan, a dove on his wrist, was unveiled in the capital as a leadership cult intensified around the then-head of state.

Berdimukhamedov took power in 2006 after the sudden death of autocrat Saparmurat Niyazov, whom he served first as his personal dentist and later as health minister. In 2018, Ak Khan, whom Berdimukhamedov claims to have reared personally, won a Guinness World Record for walking 10 metres in 4.19 seconds on his hind legs.

In 2017, he bore a rider who lit the flame of the Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games - a relatively obscure sports competition backed by the Olympic Council of Asia. Turkmenistan hosted the games with much pomp, ignoring demands from international rights groups to investigate allegations that residential homes were bulldozed as part of preparations for the tournament.

In March 2021, the then president was shown visiting the stables where Ak Khan's foal was born. The strongman named him 'Ashgabat' and wrote a song for the foal. A month later, Serdar replaced his father as chairman of the national horse association - a symbolic switch seen as paving the way for Central Asia's first dynastic succession.

AFP

Zelensky tells Davos: Send us weapons, stop Russia trade

Davos, Switzerland - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky used the Davos summit on Monday to appeal for more weapons and 'maximum' sanctions against Russia, lamenting that tens of thousands of lives would have been saved had countries acted faster.

Appearing by video link, Zelensky delivered the headline speech to the first World Economic Forum to be held in the Swiss Alps in more than two years after the COVID pandemic derailed the event.

The conflict shows 'that support to the country under attack is more valuable the sooner it is provided: weapons, funding, political support and sanctions against Russia', said Zelensky, who received a standing ovation.

"If we would have received them by 100 per cent of ours needs at once back in February, the result would have been tens of thousands of lives saved," said

Zelensky, flanked by Ukrainian flags and wearing an olive-green T-shirt.

"This is why Ukraine needs all the weapons that we ask for, not just the ones that have been provided," he said, adding that 87 people were killed in a May 17 Russian strike on a military base in northern Ukraine.

Anastasia Radina, a Ukrainian lawmaker, told AFP that her country needs 'NATO-style' weapons including tanks and ground-based air defence systems. "What we are looking for most importantly are fighter jets and this has been the most difficult discussion," she said.

"Three months into the war, and tens of thousands lives lost, we are still at the point of discussing if we need fighter jets. Frankly speaking this is outrageous," she added.

Ukraine is receiving howitzers 'but that is not yet enough', she said.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is seen on a giant screen during his address by video conference as part of the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos on Monday (AFP)

End all Russia trade

Zelensky called for an oil embargo on Russia, punitive measures against all its banks and the shunning of its IT sector, adding that all foreign companies should

leave the country.

"There should not be any trade with Russia," he told the gathering. "I believe there are still no such sanctions against Russia - and there should be."

While the United States, Britain and Canada have moved to ban Russian oil and gas, the European Union has been divided over imposing similar measures. EU members such as

Germany and Hungary are heavily dependent on energy supplies from Russia.

WEF Klaus Schwab praised Zelensky for his 'courageous leadership' and said Davos participants were eager to hear how they could assist Ukraine 'because everybody is affected by what's happening in your country'. The war is dominating the four-day meeting of the world's business and political elites, with Ukraine sending a strong contingent of officials, including the foreign minister, to plead for more aid.

Russian business and political leaders, who used to participate in debates and mingle with other A-listers at champagne parties, were barred by organisers from attending this year's gathering over the war.

The Ukrainians have transformed the 'Russia House' in Davos - normally used by the Russian delegation - into the

'Russia War Crimes House' to promote their cause. More than 50 heads of state or government are among the 2,500 delegates at the WEF under the title 'History at a Turning Point'.

Some of the biggest names include Germany's new chancellor, Olaf Scholz, European Union chief Ursula von der Leyen, NATO head Jens Stoltenberg and US climate envoy John Kerry. When the WEF last took place in Davos in January 2020, the coronavirus was just brewing in China before morphing into a devastating pandemic.

A Davos forum took place virtually last year, with Russian President Vladimir Putin among the speakers.

While the summit is back, it lacks its usual snowy backdrop after the Omicron variant forced this year's January meeting to be postponed until now. Instead, rain is forecast all week.

AFP

Biden warns China against invading Taiwan, vows US military defence

Tokyo, Japan - President Joe Biden vowed on Monday that US forces would defend Taiwan militarily if China attempted to take control of the self-ruled island by force, warning Beijing was already ‘flirting with danger’.

The remarks, made in Tokyo where he is meeting with Japan’s prime minister ahead of a regional summit on Tuesday, were Biden’s strongest to date on the issue and come amid rising tensions over China’s growing economic and military power.

Washington and allies like Japan have framed their tough response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as a warning to others, especially China, against unilateral military action.

Biden hammered that message home after talks with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in which the pair agreed to monitor Chinese naval activity and joint Chinese-Russia exercises. Biden then went further. Asked if Washington was willing to get involved militarily to defend Taiwan, he replied: “Yes.”

“That’s the commitment we made,” he added.

“We agreed with the One China policy, we signed on to it... but the idea that it can be taken by force is just not appropriate, it would dislocate the entire region and would be another action similar to Ukraine,” Biden said.

Biden directly linked the fates of Ukraine and Taiwan, saying Western sanctions on Russia must exact a ‘long-term price’ because otherwise ‘what signal does that send to China about the cost of attempting to take Taiwan by force?’ He warned Beijing was already ‘flirting with danger right now by flying so



Japanese PM Fumio Kishida (right) and his wife Yuko Kishida welcome US President Joe Biden as they arrive for dinner, in Tokyo on Monday (AFP)

close and all the manoeuvres undertaken’ - referring to a growing number of Chinese sorties, naval exercises and other power projections in the Taiwan Straits.

In Beijing, foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin swiftly responded, declaring that ‘no one should underestimate the firm resolve, staunch will and strong ability of the Chinese people in defending national sovereignty and territorial integrity’.

“China has no room for compromise or concession,” the spokesman said.

‘Policy has not changed’

Like most nations, the US diplomatically recognises Beijing over Taiwan. But it also maintains de facto diplomatic ties with the

self-ruled, democratic island. For decades it has maintained a policy of ‘strategic ambiguity’ in which it never makes clear what it would do in the event of an invasion while agreeing to help Taiwan build its defences against attack from Beijing.

The policy was designed both to keep Beijing from declaring war and also to stop Taiwan from formally declaring independence. Biden’s remarks on Monday overshadowed his roll-out of a new, 13-nation regional trade framework as well as Tuesday’s meeting of the Quad group.

The White House said that Biden was not diverging from the official ‘One China’ policy, which includes the commitment to ‘provide Taiwan with the military means to defend itself’.

“Our policy has not changed,” the official said.

But Beijing’s growing sabre-rattling on the issue, as well as Russia’s Ukraine invasion, is shaking up the status quo.

Among those augmenting diplomatic support for Taipei is Japan, which has regularly warned China against ‘unilateral’ attempts to change the impasse.

Kishida called for stability in the Taiwan Strait and said Tokyo was committed to boosting its defence spending, a sensitive subject in a country with constitutional limits on its military.

“Japan will fundamentally strengthen its defence capacity, and to back that up will significantly increase its defence spending,” Kishida said at a joint press conference with Biden.

“We don’t rule out any options, including (acquiring) the capacity to counter-attack,” he added. Biden is in Japan on the second leg of an Asia trip intended to reinforce regional ties and show Washington remains committed to the region despite its heavy involvement with the crisis in Ukraine.

He finished his hectic day by joining Kishida and the prime minister’s wife in an upscale Tokyo restaurant set in a peaceful garden and serving sushi and other traditional food.

Earlier, he announced Monday that 13 countries have joined a new, US-led Asia-Pacific trade initiative touted as a counterweight to China’s aggressive expansion.

AFP



People gather to see the motorcade transporting US President Joe Biden arriving at Happo-en in Tokyo on Monday (AFP)

US, Japan to work together to send humans to Moon

Tokyo, Japan - Japan and the United States said on Monday they want to put the first Japanese astronaut on the Moon as the allies deepen cooperation on space projects.

No non-American has ever touched down on the lunar surface, and Japan has previously said it hopes to achieve a Moon landing by the end of this decade.

President Joe Biden, after his first face-to-face meeting with Japan’s Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in Tokyo, said the nations will work together in the US-led Artemis programme to send humans to the Moon, and later to Mars. Biden said he was ‘excited’ about the collaboration, including on the Gateway facility, which will orbit the Moon and provide support for future missions.

“I’m excited (about) the work we’ll do together on the Gateway Station around the Moon, and look forward to the first Japanese astronaut joining us on the mission to the lunar surface under the Artemis programme,” he said at a joint press conference.

Japan’s domestic space programme focuses on satellites and probes, so Japanese astronauts have turned to the US and Russia to travel to the International Space Station.

But space agency JAXA is looking to revitalise its ranks, last year launching its first recruitment of new astronauts in 13 years.

It lifted the requirement that applicants have a science degree and urged women to apply, because all seven of the nation’s current astronauts are men.

AFP

Chinese province Henan to COVID test every two days

Beijing, China - The Chinese province of Henan has ordered its nearly 100mn people to take a COVID test every two days, an unprecedented step as the country grapples with an Omicron-fuelled surge. China has persisted with its zero-COVID policy, imposing hard lockdowns and movement restrictions on several cities even as much of the world has transitioned to living with the coronavirus.

The curbs, including stay-at-home orders in economic engine Shanghai and creeping restrictions across Beijing, have inflicted a heavy economic toll. To avoid a similar city-wide lockdown, local governments are adopting high-frequency testing to detect cases more swiftly and potentially isolate clusters without ordering entire populations to stay indoors.

“Residents of (Henan) province and other personnel there should complete nucleic acid sampling at least once

every 48 hours,” according to an article posted on Sunday on the local government’s website. The testing will begin in Henan’s provincial capital of Zhengzhou before the end of May, authorities said, according to the report, to help with ‘identifying potential risks’ quickly.

Residents who do not comply will have problems scanning the codes needed to enter public places or take transport, the report added.

Other provincial capitals - such as Shijiazhuang in the northern province of Hebei - have also rolled out similar measures, with Shijiazhuang saying it would start weekly COVID tests for its 11mn people on Monday.

If similar mandates are expanded to all of mainland China, it could cost between 0.9 per cent and 2.3 per cent of China’s gross domestic product, said Nomura analysts in a report this month.

AFP

Baby giant turtles released into Cambodian river

Phnom Penh, Cambodia - Hundreds of critically endangered baby giant turtles were released into Cambodia’s Mekong River to mark World Turtle Day on Monday. Cantor’s giant softshell turtles have all but vanished across their former territory in Vietnam and Thailand thanks to poaching and illegal trade, and were only rediscovered in the Southeast Asian country in 2007.

The Wildlife Conservation Society coordinated the release of 580 hatchlings, which can grow to a length of up to 200cm and mainly live buried in the sand and the water, surfacing only twice a day to breathe.

Monks blessed the baby reptiles - also known as ‘frog-faced turtles’ for their distinctive appearance - before helping conservationists and eager children



Children releasing Cantor’s giant turtle hatchlings (right) into Cambodia’s Mekong River to mark World Turtle Day on Monday (AFP)

send the stout-nosed snappers into the Mekong River’s muddy waters. The creatures are among a batch of 982 turtles rescued as eggs - to protect them from the dangers which threaten the species’ numbers - carefully incubated, hatched, and then released.

Ken Sereyrotha, country programme director for WCS Cambodia, said significant progress had been made in protecting the animal in the country but more work was needed. “This species is being threatened by illegal hunting and trafficking,” he said.

The WCS and Cambodia’s



department of fisheries conservation of fisheries administration has found and rescued more than 2,000 eggs this year - with the teams hopeful the remainder will eventually hatch.

Ouk Vibol, director of the fisheries department, urged local stakeholders to continue

the conversation work, and promised that ‘those who still trade protected species will face legal action’.

Last year, the teams managed to nurture and then release around 1,300 hatchlings into the wild.

AFP

Seven killed, 127 rescued after fire engulfs Philippine ferry

Manila, Philippines - At least seven people were killed and scores plucked to safety in the Philippines on Monday after a fire ripped through a ferry and forced passengers to jump overboard, the coast guard and witnesses said.

The blaze broke out on the *Mercraft 2* at around 6:30am (2230 GMT Sunday) as it carried 134 passengers and crew from Polillo Island to Real in Quezon province on the main island of Luzon.

Seven people died and 127 were rescued, Philippine Coast Guard spokesman Commodore Armando Balilo said after the last missing were found.

The fibreglass fast craft boat, which had a 186-person capacity,



People throwing buckets of water onto a smouldering ferry which had caught fire near Real town, Quezon province on Monday (AFP)

ity, was about a kilometre from Real when it caught fire.

“We heard an explosion,” said Kysel Pineda, 18, who was travelling on another ferry.

“When we saw the boat, it was already engulfed by fire and passengers were already floating in the sea,” the high school student added.

Thick black smoke billowed from the *Mercraft* as flames tore through the entire vessel, photos shared by the coast guard showed.

People with life rings and life vests were in the water.

Some were rescued by other ferries or clambered into inflatable boats.

The fire appears to have started in the engine room, Balilo said. A team of investigators was preparing to look into the cause.

“We were able to rescue 40 survivors,” said Captain Brunette Azagra, whose passenger vessel was 500 metres from the *Mercraft* when the fire broke out. Two bodies were also pulled from the water, he added. “They were lucky, because we also came from Polillo. They overtook us, but we were just nearby,” Azagra told a local radio station, describing sea conditions as ‘quite good’.

Twenty-four people were injured, including the captain of the ferry, according to the coast guard.

Speaking from the hospital where the injured were being treated, Real town disaster officer Ricky Poblete said the seven dead had drowned.

Photos posted on the coast guard’s Facebook page showed a survivor lying on a stretcher being carried off a ferry.

Another lay on the deck of a boat and appeared to be receiving treatment.

The Philippines, an archipelago of more than 7,000 islands, is plagued by poor sea transport, with its badly regulated boats and ships prone to overcrowding and accidents.

The fire on the *Mercraft* was under control and the burned-out wreckage towed to shore.

AFP

More than 100mn forcibly displaced: UN

‘The alarming figure must shake the world into ending the conflicts’

Geneva, Switzerland - Russia's war in Ukraine has pushed the number of forcibly displaced people around the world above 100mn for the first time ever, the United Nations said on Monday.

"The number of people forced to flee conflict, violence, human rights violations and persecution has now crossed the staggering milestone of 100mn for the first time on record, propelled by the war in Ukraine and other deadly conflicts," said UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency.

The 'alarming' figure must shake the world into ending the conflicts forcing record numbers to flee their own homes, the UNHCR said in a statement.

UNHCR said the numbers of forcibly displaced people rose towards 90mn by the end of 2021, spurred by violence in Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Myanmar and Nigeria. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, more than eight million people have been displaced within the country, while more than six million refugees have fled



A mother and her daughter sit inside a bus as they evacuate the city of Bakhmut in the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas on Sunday, amid Russian invasion of Ukraine (AFP)

across the borders.

‘Wake-up call’

"One hundred million is a stark figure - sobering and alarming in equal measure. It's a record that should never have been set," said UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi.

"This must serve as a wake-up call to resolve and prevent destructive conflicts, end persecution and address the underlying causes that force innocent people to flee their homes."

The 100mn figure amounts to

more than one per cent of the global population. Only 13 countries have a bigger population than the number of forcibly displaced people in the world.

The figures combine refugees, asylum-seekers and more than 50mn people displaced inside

their own countries. "The international response to people fleeing war in Ukraine has been overwhelmingly positive," said Grandi.

"Compassion is alive and we need a similar mobilisation for all crises around the world. But ultimately, humanitarian aid is a pal-

its annual Global Trends Report, due for release on June 16.

Forced to flee multiple times

More than two years on since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, at least 20 countries still deny access to asylum for people fleeing conflict, violence, and persecution based on measures to clamp down on the virus.

Grandi called on May 20 for those countries to lift any remaining pandemic-related asylum restrictions, saying they contravene a fundamental human right.

"I am worried that measures enacted on the pretext of responding to COVID-19 are being used as cover to exclude and deny asylum to people fleeing violence and persecution," he said.

A joint report last week by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) said around 38mn new internal displacements were reported in 2021. Some of those were by people forced to flee multiple times during the year.

The figure marks the second-highest annual number of new internal displacements in a decade after 2020, which saw record-breaking movement due to a string of natural disasters.

Last year, new internal displacements specifically from conflict surged to 14.4mn - marking a 50-per cent jump from 2020, the report showed.

AFP

14 bodies found on a beach in Myanmar

Yangon, Myanmar - The bodies of 14 people have been found washed up on a beach in Myanmar, police told AFP on Monday, with a local rescue group saying some were Rohingya attempting to reach Malaysia.

The migrants had been travelling by boat from western Myanmar, according to a local Rohingya activist. "Fourteen dead bodies were found, 35 people including the boat owners were rescued alive," said Lieutenant Colonel Tun Shwe, a police spokesperson in Patheingyi district, around 200km west of Yangon.

A member of Myanmar Rescue Organization Patheingyi who requested anonymity said the group found eight bodies on Sunday and all were from the Rohingya minority.

A local Rohingya activist told AFP that 12 women and two boys had died.

Their boat had been carrying people from the towns of Buthidaung, Maungdaw, and Sittoung in Myanmar's Rakhine state, the activist added, also requesting anonymity.

Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims have fled Buddhist-majority Myanmar since 2017 after a military crackdown that refugees said included mass killings and rape.

Those Rohingya still in Myanmar are widely seen as interlopers from Bangladesh and are denied citizenship, many rights and access to services. Each year hundreds of Rohingya make perilous, months-long journeys by sea to other parts of Southeast Asia.

AFP



Former king Juan Carlos I of Spain, waves from a car as he arrives at La Zarzuela palace in Madrid, on Monday (AFP)

Spain's ex-king makes controversial trip home

Madrid, Spain - Scandal-tainted Spanish ex-king Juan Carlos I visited his son and current monarch Felipe VI in Madrid on Monday, during a brief but controversial trip home after two years in self-imposed exile.

The meeting came at the end of the former king's first visit to Spain since he moved to the United Arab Emirates in August 2020.

Juan Carlos was for decades revered for his role in steering Spain to democracy following dictator Francisco Franco's death in 1975. But damaging scandals over his finances and private life forced him to abdicate in 2014, after nearly 40 years on the throne, and then to leave Spain.

The 84-year-old flew into Spain from Abu Dhabi on May 19 for a three-day regatta featuring his yacht the 'Bribon' - Spanish for 'rascal'.

He arrived on Monday morning at the royal palace in Madrid directly from the regatta venue in Sanxenxo, in the northwestern region of Galicia. He waved from his car to several dozen sympathisers waiting for him outside the Zarzuela Palace.

Juan Carlos had not seen his estranged wife, Queen Sofia, or his son since he fled to the UAE, dogged by corruption allegations. He was scheduled to leave Spain after Monday's private family reunion, the palace said.

AFP

Six dead, dozens injured in Iran tower-block collapse

Tehran, Iran - At least six people died and dozens were injured or missing under rubble after an unfinished high-rise building collapsed in southwestern Iran, officials said.

Choking white dust swirled from where the tower-block had stood, covering surrounding vehicles, as shocked onlookers stared at the wreckage in horror, some screaming.

"Parts of the 10-storey Metropolis building, located in Abadan in Khuzestan province, collapsed," state television said. "Six people lost their lives and 27 others were injured in the disaster." Rescuers clambered over huge slabs of shattered concrete and tangles of twisted metal bars.

The Iranian Red Crescent, in an initial report, said that as many as 80 people could be trapped under the rubble, but hours after the collapse, rescuers lowered the missing to 'tens' of people. Sniffer dogs were being used to search for them. "Today is a day of mourning for poor Abadan," residents shouted in a video posted on social media.

Cars squashed flat

Rescuers were seen on television



Iranians gather at the site where a building collapsed in the southwestern city of Abadan on Monday (AFP)

rushing out some of the wounded who had been pulled from the wreckage on stretchers.

Several cars were crushed by blocks of falling debris - some apparently with their occupants still inside, according to images.

A crane began work to try to clear some of the debris, including picking up a car squashed flat by the falling tonnes of concrete.

Authorities have not provided further details about the victims.

"About 40 per cent of the building has been destroyed, and (the rest) is in danger of completely collapsing," city governor Ehsan Abbaspour said on television, ordering the evacuation of neighbouring buildings.

The rest of the building still standing, with floors sagging,

towered over the pile of debris.

State television broadcast live images of the tragedy, showing several teams of firefighters clearing twisted metal.

The building is located on Abadan's busiest street where 'commercial, medical and office' buildings predominate, according to state television.

AFP

Four million people hit by worst floods in Bangladesh: UN

Sylhet, Bangladesh - At least four million people have been affected by the worst floods in Bangladesh's northeast for nearly two decades, the United Nations said on Monday.

The Bangladeshi government said the floods, which began last week, had submerged 70 per cent of Sylhet district in the northeast and 60 per cent of Sunamganj district, leaving at least 10 people dead and about two million marooned.

Heavy rains and a rush of water from upstream in India's northeast swelled rivers in Bangladesh, with two main bor-

der rivers, the Surma and Kushiara, breaching a major embankment and inundating hundreds of villages.

Arifuzzaman Bhuiyan, the head of the state-run Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre, said the two rivers hit their highest levels since records began in the 1970s. "It is one of the worst floods in the history of the country's northeast," he said. "The water level in the two rivers hit some 1.75 metres above their danger level at the height of the floods last week."

The United Nations Children Fund put the extent of the dam-



People make their way through a flooded street in Sylhet on Monday (AFP)

age even higher with 'over four million people' in five districts in the country's northeast affected by the floods. "The damage to lives, homes and schools is heartbreaking. In this disaster, as in most others, children are the most vulnerable," said Sheldon Yett, UNICEF Representative.

Bangladesh has shut all schools and colleges in the region. At least 350 schools have been turned into shelters with more than 8,500 flood-hit people seeking refuge in them, along with their cattle and goats.

But Netai De Sarker, a senior disaster management official,

said the flood situation had improved, with water receding from the northern areas, although 1.23mn people were still stranded as of Monday.

He said the government has sent 140 medical teams to treat flood-affected people and to help prevent any outbreak of water-borne diseases.

Floods are a regular menace to millions of people in low-lying Bangladesh and neighbouring northeast India, but many experts say that climate change is increasing their frequency, ferocity and unpredictability.

AFP



Fuelled by Premier League dynasty, Man City crave Champions League legacy

London, United Kingdom - Manchester City's latest Premier League title triumph established the champions as a burgeoning dynasty, but Pep Guardiola won't be satisfied until their domestic bliss becomes the catalyst to conquer Europe.

City's fourth title in five seasons is arguably the greatest achievement of Guardiola's glittering career as he found a way to hold off Liverpool's relentless challenge by one point.

"The magnitude of our achievement is because of the magnitude of this rival," said Guardiola. "Never ever I had a rival like Liverpool in my career as

a football player or manager."

But even Jurgen Klopp's men, in the midst of one of the best seasons in their history, were unable to surpass City, leaving them with just one Premier League title in 32 years.

Lauding his players' remarkable staying power, Guardiola said: "You cannot be here over the last five years if you don't have that resilience.

"We have the desire to win. To win titles, especially the Premier League, is not just how good we are with the ball."

Nothing resembled that resilience more than the manner of City's latest title triumph.

Losing 2-0 to Aston Villa with 15 minutes to go, City rallied in remarkable fashion to score three times in five minutes.

Yet, while Guardiola cele-

brates the ninth major prize of his six-year City reign, Klopp will be planning to add another chapter to Liverpool's rich Champions

The magnitude of our achievement is because of the magnitude of this rival. Never ever I had a rival like Liverpool in my career as a football player or manager.

PEP GUARDIOLA



League history.

Liverpool face Real Madrid in the Champions League final on May 28 and Guardiola would dearly love to swap places with

with Europe's elite club competition has been scarred by one agonising failure after another.

This season was no different as City crashed to a devastating semi-final exit against Real Madrid, blowing a 5-3 aggregate lead in the final seconds of normal time before losing in the extra period.

That heartache came a year after City's loss to Chelsea in their first ever Champions League final.

With that in mind, Guardiola knows City cannot afford to stand still if they are to finally triumph in Europe and keep Liverpool at bay in the Premier League.

A £51.5 million (\$63 million) swoop for Borussia Dortmund striker Erling Haaland earlier in May was the opening salvo in their bid to achieve those two targets. Haaland scored a remarkable 86 goals in 89 games for Dortmund and looks an ideal fit.

The 21-year-old son of former City defender Alfie Haaland will arrive in time for next season, bringing his elite predatory instincts and physical presence to a City attack lacking both those qualities despite their success.

With the Norway international in the fold and Guardiola also looking to upgrade his options at left-back and in central midfield,

it would be a major surprise if City were missing from the title race next term.

The only threat to City's dynastic ambitions comes in the shape of Guardiola's future plans.

Guardiola's current contract expires in June 2023, by which time he will have spent seven years with City, three seasons longer than he managed Barcelona and four more than his spell with Bayern Munich.

The 51-year-old revealed amid the title celebrations he is "exhausted" and will not discuss a further extension to his time in Manchester until next season.

AFP

New Man Utd boss Ten Hag aims to smash Liverpool-City duopoly

Manchester, United Kingdom - Manchester United's new manager Erik ten Hag believes it is possible to end the dominance of Manchester City and Liverpool despite taking over a struggling side that finished a lowly sixth in the Premier League.

United ended up 35 points behind champions City, who pipped Liverpool to the title by a point, as the Red Devils registered their lowest-ever Premier League points tally.

City boss Pep Guardiola has now claimed four titles in five



Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag

years, while Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp can complete a treble of cup trophies this season should the Reds see off Real Madrid in Saturday's Champions League final.

Guardiola and Klopp - the managers of United's two biggest rivals - have consistently battled it out for the major trophies, leaving the Red Devils, without silverware since 2017, as bystanders.

However, the Dutchman challenged the suggestion it would take the departure of one or both of Guardiola and Klopp for United

to be able to compete again.

"In this moment I admire them both," Ten Hag said as he was unveiled at Old Trafford on Monday. "They play in this moment really fantastic football, both Liverpool and Manchester City." "But you always see that an era can come to an end. I am looking forward to battle with them."

The former Ajax boss, 52, is United's fifth permanent manager since the club last won a league title in Alex Ferguson's farewell season in 2013.

AFP

Salah and Son share Premier League Golden Boot award



Son Heung-min



Mohamed Salah

London, United Kingdom - Mohamed Salah and Son Heung-min shared the Premier League Golden Boot on Sunday after both forwards scored on the final day of the season.

South Korea's Son netted twice in Tottenham's 5-0 win at Norwich to move to 23 goals - one clear of Salah, but the Egypt forward struck late in Liverpool's 3-1 win at home to Wolves.

Manchester United's Cristiano Ronaldo finished third with 18 goals in his first season back in the Premier League.

Salah's goal was ultimately in vain as Jurgen Klopp's team finished one point behind Manchester City, who scored three goals in five minutes to beat Aston

Villa 3-2.

Tottenham's win secured a fourth-place finish, meaning they qualify for next season's Champions League.

Son, 29, said it was "incredible" to have the award.

"I can't believe it," he told the BBC. "I got really emotional.

"I dreamed of it as a child. Literally it's my in hands. I can't believe it.

"Until my goal I was really frustrated that I missed big chances. I told the players I missed the easiest chances and scored one of the toughest ones.

"I didn't give up. I wanted to score today. The team helped me a lot at half-time. They wanted to help me, you could see it today."

AFP

Champions Milan eye return to past glories

Milan, Italy - AC Milan announced their return to the big time on Sunday after winning their first Serie A title in over a decade and putting years of decline firmly behind them.

Seven-time champions of Europe, Milan are one of the continent's biggest clubs but spent most of the last 10 years in the doldrums as a shifting football landscape left them way behind.

Under flamboyant former owner Silvio Berlusconi Milan pioneered tactical innovations and - backed by the media magnate's open wallet - stacked the team with expensive foreign stars who pushed an already famous club into a new stratosphere.

Five of Milan's European crowns came in the Berlusconi



AC Milan players celebrate with the trophy after winning Italian Serie A title on Sunday (AFP)

era but the club was forced to tighten its belt in the years after their last league title in 2011, and in the same period a host of star names were either sold or stepped aside.

A new era may be around the corner with the arrival of new owners, American investment fund RedBird Capital Partners being touted this weekend as the firm ready to buy Milan from current owners Elliot for around 1.3 billion euros, beating Bahrain's Investcorp to the punch.

Rich owners willing to reinforce a thin squad lacking a consistent goalscorer would help Milan take the step from being a domestic force to challenging in Europe.

AFP



'KING' KOHLI TO 'BABY AB': Hits and misses of IPL 2022

New Delhi, India - The high-octane Indian Premier League moves into the playoffs this week with four teams left to battle for the glitzy Twenty20 championship and the winners to be crowned in Sunday's final. Gujarat Titans, Rajasthan Royals, Lucknow Super Giants and Royal Challengers Bangalore are all that remain standing from the 10 teams who embarked on a marathon season of 70 matches two months ago. Powerhouses Mumbai Indians and Chennai Super Kings, who have won three and four IPL titles respectively, finished at the bottom of the table, with just a superior net run-rate allowing MS Dhoni-led Chennai finish ninth and avoid the wooden spoon. Kolkata Knight Riders, who have won twice, in 2012 and 2014, and Sunrisers Hyderabad, the 2016 champions, also failed miserably, finishing seventh and eighth. Ahead of Tuesday's first playoff match when Gujarat Titans face Rajasthan Royals in Kolkata, AFP Sport highlights five players who grabbed the headlines this season in the world's most valuable cricket tournament.



VIRAT KOHLI
(Royal Challengers Bangalore)
The superstar's batting slump has been a constant talking point during the season as Kohli suffered three uncharacteristic 'golden ducks' - out on the first ball of his innings.
But 'King' Kohli bounced back just in time for his team's final league game with a match-winning 73 off 54 balls that helped the team make the top four. Kohli, 33, has endured a torrid 12 months that saw him replaced as Indian captain, give up the Bangalore armband and fail to score a century in more than 100 matches in all formats.
Now he and Bangalore stand just three wins from a maiden IPL title.



JOS BUTTLER
(Rajasthan Royals)
The England batsman has bossed this IPL with three centuries to help Rajasthan finish second in the table, awaiting table-toppers Gujarat in the first qualifier on Tuesday.
Buttler has been a smiling assassin, stroking 629 runs in 14 matches - the most of any player - while smashing 37 sixes at a strike-rate of 146.96.
Buttler has received praise from his rivals with Kolkata Knight Riders skipper Shreyas Iyer hailing the skill of the Englishman after he scored 103 against his team last month.
"The way he manoeuvres the ball, he is a classy batsman," said Shreyas.



UMRAN MALIK
(Sunrisers Hyderabad)
The young speedster took the IPL by storm and on Sunday earned his maiden India call-up for the Twenty20 series against South Africa.
The 22-year-old Malik, from the Jammu region of Indian-administered Kashmir, bowled the fastest ball of the tournament at 156.9 kph (97.5 mph) and took 22 wickets in 14 matches. He regularly clocked above 150 km per hour and also constantly troubled batsmen, both established stars as well as tail enders.
His thunderbolts won rave reviews from international cricketers, including Hyderabad's bowling coach Dale Steyn who said he was "blown away" by the youngster's pace.



RASHID KHAN
(Gujarat Titans)
Rashid was the key to his team starting with a bang as they remarkably topped the table in their debut season.
The Afghanistan wizard not only bamboozled the batsman with his leg-spin bowling but also provided some explosive batting.
He scored a whirlwind unbeaten 31, including two sixes from the last two balls, to pull off a stunning chase against Hyderabad. And his four wickets against Lucknow helped Gujarat become the first team to book a play-off spot.
Former England batsman Kevin Pietersen said Rashid "delivers whenever the captain looks at him."



DEWALD BREVIS
(Mumbai Indians)
The uncapped South African batsman made his presence felt with knocks to remember for wooden-spooners Mumbai Indians.
The 19-year-old scored 161 runs in seven matches for five-time champions Mumbai who brought the U19 World Cup star for \$389,610.
He capped off the IPL with a crucial 37 off 33 balls in Mumbai's win over Delhi and credited South African great AB de Villiers for his success. "He is such a great human being... and he is really one of the best," said Brevis. "Having him as a mentor is special to me," added the youngster who has been nicknamed "Baby AB".

Impressive Titans eye ticket to dream home final

Royals will be hoping for a repeat of 2008, when they won the first edition

Kolkata, India - And it's over to Eden Gardens in Kolkata for Qualifier-1. Two teams with similar approaches will want to give themselves a few extra days of rest ahead of the grand finale. For Gujarat Titans, it's the opportunity to play in front of a capacity crowd in Ahmedabad. For Rajasthan Royals, this is a chance to pay a perfect tribute to Shane Warne, who led them to their only title in 2008.
Royals have never finished in the top-two since the playoffs came into existence in 2011. Titans, meanwhile, were dismissed after the auction, and have exceeded expectations and pre-tournament billing to get here.
Both sides have punted on



Hardik Pandya

their six-batters and five-bowler strategy to the hilt. Their unshakable faith in this core philosophy that has brought them much success. That said, not everything is similar. Their approaches have varied. Titans have hit 69 sixes, the least for a team this season. Royals have hit 116, the most.
Titans were written off by many even before a ball was bowled. Their auction strategy was scrutinised.
They wondered if Hardik Pandya, fighting his own battles with form and injury, can inspire the new entrants. One of their openers pulled out of the tournament and their middle order had two rookie-batters and an overseas batter who had racked up

poor numbers season after season. Yet, nearly seven weeks later, they became the first team to enter the playoffs.
Royals have traversed a slightly trickier path. The early pacesetters had a mid-season wobble but gathered their wits towards the end to seal the top-two following a nervy win late last week against Lucknow Super Giants.
Their spin base is covered by potentially two of India's best, their top order has revolved around orange-cap holder Jos Buttler, whose late-season slump hasn't affected dynamics much because the others have stepped up. Ashwin has played finisher and anchor all while delivering his overs tactfully, while the pace battery has been operating at the kind of level expected of them.
Titans won the only outing between the two sides in the league phase. Hardik struck a bruising 87 to set up the game, before their pace battery of Yash Dayal and Lockie Ferguson snuffed out the Royals. It's payback time now.
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Oman’s Abdullah al Rawahi battles back to seventh in Jordan Rally



Abdullah al Rawahi

Dead Sea, Jordan - Oman’s Abdullah al Rawahi and his Jordanian co-driver Ata al Hmoud produced a superb fight back from first-day issues to finish seventh overall in the Jordan Rally, the round four of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC).

With his Oman Rally Team Skoda Fabia R2 evo back after repairs following an accident on the notorious Jordan River stage on Friday afternoon, the Omani restarted on Saturday under the Rally2 ruling and was in ninth place in the general classification heading into two passes through the Bahath, Suwayma and Ma’in special stages in the Dead Sea area.

He continued to show excel-



Abdullah al Rawahi negotiates a sharp turn

lent pace and set the outright fastest time in the ninth stage and second fastest times behind leader Nasser Saleh al Attiyah in the other five special stages on Saturday.

Al Rawahi’s finish ensured that Al Attiyah would not be able to win a record-breaking 18th regional title before the next round

in Lebanon.

Al Rawahi said: “Friday was disappointing for us. We had made a really good start to the rally. I was having a good pace and trying to be close to Nasser. Unfortunately, we could not finish the last two stages. We went off the track and we got stuck in a ditch and had to retire. Other-

wise, everything was okay. We had a bit of over steer through-out the weekend.

“It was important to gather some points, especially as we did not finish in Kuwait. This time we had a few dramatic moments, but we managed to come back and the second day was good and the set-up for the car was much better when we went softer. The pace was there as well. Having Nasser in the championship is a great benchmark.

“He is a world class driver. Every time I try and get closer and closer to him and that is happening and he is always there to support as well. Hopefully in the future we can do what Nasser has been doing,” Al Rawahi added.

Osaka, Krejcikova crash out

Paris, France - Former world number one Naomi Osaka and defending champion Barbora Krejcikova lost in the first round of the French Open on Monday, while women’s title favourite Iga Swiatek stretched her winning streak to 29 matches.

The unseeded Osaka, a four-time Grand Slam champion, was knocked out 7-5, 6-4 by Amanda Anisimova - the same player who ended the Japanese star’s title defence at the Australian Open this year.

An error-plagued Osaka served up eight double faults and committed 29 unforced errors on her return to Roland Garros, after withdrawing in 2021 when she refused to honour mandatory media commitments before revealing she had been suffering from depression.

“I thought I tried really hard, and I just feel like it was a bit unfortunate because I wasn’t able to play as many matches leading into this tournament,” said Osaka.

Anisimova, the 27th seed,



Japan’s Naomi Osaka returns the ball to Amanda Anisimova of the US during their first-round match at the French Open in Paris on Monday (AFP)

reached the semi-finals in Paris three years ago.

“It’s tough to see Naomi Osaka in the first round so I knew it wouldn’t be easy,” said the American.

“I knew I had to play my best tennis and the conditions were not easy.”

I love playing here even though the last couple of days it’s been raining
IGA SWIATEK

As rain stopped on the outside courts for two hours, Krejcikova followed Osaka in making an early exit, going down 1-6, 6-2, 6-3 to 19-year-old Frenchwoman Diane Parry in her first match since February following injury.

The Czech world number two had yet to play on clay this sea-

son after being sidelined by an elbow problem.

“It’s really a dream for me,” said Parry, spurred on by the home support under the roof on Court Philippe Chatrier. “I’m just the happiest right now.”

With Krejcikova, Osaka and Madrid champion Ons Jabeur all going out in round one, Swiatek required just 54 minutes to dispatch Ukrainian qualifier Lesia Tsurenko 6-2, 6-0.

The 20-year-old Swiatek, who took over as world number one following Ashleigh Barty’s shock retirement, has won her last five tournaments and is bidding for a second French Open in three attempts.

“Today was a pretty good match,” said Swiatek.

“I love playing here even though the last couple of days it’s been raining and pretty dark.”

Swiatek is unbeaten since February and has the longest winning streak on the WTA tour since Serena Williams won 34 matches in a row in 2013.

AFP

Last-day comeback seals PGA victory for Thomas after Pereira collapses

Tulsa, United States - Justin Thomas matched the greatest last-day comeback in PGA Championship history on Sunday, roaring back from seven strokes down at Southern Hills to capture his second major title.

The 29-year-old American defeated compatriot Will Zalatoris by one stroke in a tension-packed three-hole aggregate playoff after a heartbreaking 72nd-hole collapse by Chile’s Mito Pereira.

Pereira led all day only to hit his final tee shot into water and launch a double-bogey disaster at the 18th hole and hand Thomas the trophy.

“It was a bizarre day,” Thomas said. “I was asked earlier in the week about what lead is safe, and I said, no lead. This place is so tough. “But if you hit the fairways you can make birdies and I stayed so patient. I just couldn’t believe I found myself in a playoff.”

Not since John Mahaffey’s seven-shot rally at Oakmont in 1978 had anyone made such a fightback to win the PGA Championship.

Thomas, who also won the 2017 PGA title, fired a three-under-par 67 in Sunday’s final round and Zalatoris, last year’s Masters runner-up, shot 71 to finish 72 holes deadlocked on five-under 275.

Zalatoris and Thomas each



Justin Thomas of the USA celebrates with the PGA Championship trophy at Southern Hills Country Club in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on Sunday (AFP)

He (Mito Pereira) will be able to learn from it and be better from it. He played unbelievable golf this week. There’s no reason to hang his head.
JUSTIN THOMAS

birdied the par-5 13th to open the playoff. At the par-4 17th, Thomas drove the green and two-putted for birdie from 36 feet while Zalatoris chipped to seven feet but missed his birdie bid.

At the 18th hole, Zalatoris missed a 40-foot birdie try and finished on one-under while Thomas two-putted from 26 feet, tapping in for par and the victory on two-under.

“We just tried to play the golf

course for what it is, and this place is so tough,” Thomas said.

Zalatoris settled for his fifth top-10 finish in eight major starts and a sense he’s near a breakthrough.

“I can do it. I’m pretty close,” said Zalatoris. “I battled like crazy today. I’m close and super motivated. We’ll get one soon.”

Pereira shot 75 to share third with American Cameron Young on 276. “It’s really sad to not be in the playoff,” Pereira said. “I wasn’t even thinking about the water. I just wanted to put it in play and I hit it too far right.

“I guess you have so much pressure in your body you don’t even know what you’re doing.”

The fate of Pereira, who missed the 2019 US Open cut in his only prior major, recalled the epic watery last-hole collapse of Frenchman Jean Van de Velde to lose the 1999 British Open.

“I was really nervous,” Pereira said. “I tried to handle it a little bit, but it was really tough. Sad to hit it in the water. I wish I could do it again.”

The 27-year-old from Santiago twice squandered three-stroke leads before throwing away his chance at the last.

“He’ll be able to learn from it and be better from it,” Thomas said. “He played unbelievable golf this week. There’s no reason to hang his head.”

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Artiste's artiste

Punk laureate Patti Smith has been granted France's highest honour - *Legion d'Honneur*

As a child, punk-poet icon Patti Smith was instructed never to accept anything from strangers - which meant one day she was forced to decline a campaign button she coveted and everyone else had.

While dejectedly walking to her New Jersey family home, she vowed to her future self that she would soon acquire her own medals to add to her lapel.

On Saturday, the 75-year-old rock legend made good on that promise, as France's ambassador to the United States Philippe Etienne bestowed her with the Legion d'Honneur, his country's highest order of merit.

Smith regaled a rapt audience with that touching anecdote after her medal ceremony in central Brooklyn, where crowds gathered for the 'Night of Ideas',



ROCK LEGEND

French Ambassador to the US Philippe Etienne presents the highest French order of merit 'Legion d'Honneur' to US singer-songwriter Patti Smith

desire to become. In desiring to become, you begin to live.'

People make change

Following the ceremony Smith - donning her signature black blazer atop a black vest, along with combat boots and her long, gray hair flowing as a few small braids framed her face - delighted fans with a show that included her hit 'People Have The Power', which she wrote with her late husband, Fred 'Sonic' Smith.

Speaking to AFP, she said, "While artists can always inspire people, they can rally people, give people hope... In the end, it's not artists who make change, it's the people. Through voting, through initiative, through mass marches, it's the people that make change."

Citing the ongoing pandemic and the 'pain of war' Smith said, "we are living in a very troubled world," underscoring climate change as the great crisis of our time.

Smith is set in the fall to release a new book entitled "A Book Of Days," a visual collection inspired by her beloved Instagram account.

These days "I'm writing just as always," she said, "writing songs, writing poems, writing another book - I'm always busy, always doing something."

After her performance, Smith said the medal inspired her to do more work, better work, and "it felt very fitting to work right after I received it."

AFP

an annual marathon of philosophy and performance put on by the French Embassy's Villa Albertine in partnership with the Brooklyn Public Library.

"It's an indescribable honour, I understand the gravity of it," she said, after delivering a spirited performance alongside her daughter Jesse on piano and her long-time collaborator and guitarist Lenny Kaye.

"For someone... who has been greatly shaped by French culture, French literature, French art, and film, just my whole life - it's especially meaningful," she continued. "I embraced France my whole life, and to receive an embrace like this in return is a wonderful thing."

For more than half-a-century, Smith has been celebrated as an artiste's artiste, adored for her music, songwriting, poetry and deeply introspective, raw writing that in 2010 won the US National Book Award for her stirring memoir 'Just Kids'.

The book sees Smith excavate memories from her relationship with Robert Mapplethorpe, the late photographer with whom she shared a deep friendship, romance and creative bond.

"I feel like it's very fitting to have such an accolade here in Brooklyn - it's only a couple of subway stops away that Robert Mapplethorpe and I lived at 20-years-old," she told the audience. "At night, when Robert couldn't sleep, he would ask me to read him French poetry... I remember those nights so clearly."

Smith also felt a particular kinship to the venue of Saturday's ceremony.

"It's also fitting that it should be a library, because coming from a very rural area of South Jersey, with very little culture in the '50s and mid-'60s, I depended on the library to open and expand my world," she said.

In typical Smith fashion, she honoured the artists who came before her in closing her acceptance speech, having opened with a performance of her 1996 song 'Wing'.

The rock laureate read the final letter by spiritual-surrealist poet Rene Daumal, which he wrote to his wife before his death - 'Seeing that you are nothing you

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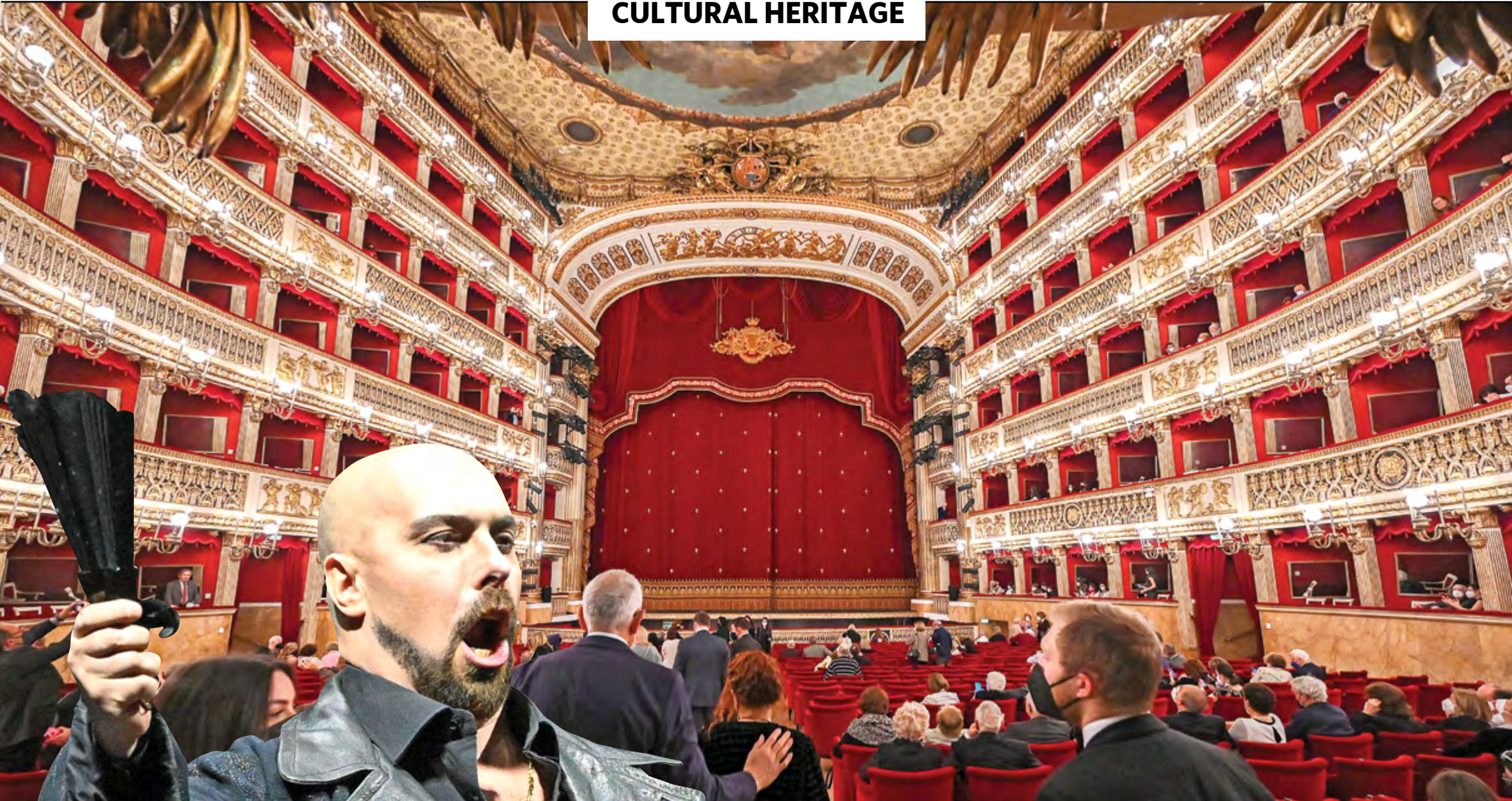
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CULTURAL HERITAGE



OPERA'S origin

Italian opera seeks UNESCO recognition

Opera originated in Italy, it was sung by Italian patriots and some of the world's greatest arias came from the peninsula. Now Rome wants credit where credit is due.

Home to Scarlatti and Verdi, Italy has put in a bid for UNESCO - the UN's cultural agency - to recognise the art of Italian opera singing on its list of intangible global heritage. A decision is due at the end of the year.

"Opera was born in Italy," said Stephane Lissner, the French director of the San Carlo theatre in Naples, which opened in 1737 and claims to be the oldest opera house in the world.

red velvet chairs, shimmering lights and gilding.

In his dressing room backstage, Italian baritone Gabriele Viviani practices his vocal exercises before taking to the stage in Puccini's *Tosca*.

"Without taking away anything from my colleagues, or from the French or German composers ... I think, Italian song has something extra, which is the ability to express emotions like no one else can."

A few minutes later, the audience spills into the foyer, chatting before taking their seats for the start of the performance.

Verdi in Odessa

Sumiko, a Japanese woman from New York cutting a dash in the crowd in a kimono, came to Naples especially for this performance - and is enthusiastic about Italy's UNESCO bid.

"The emotions which these composers give us is universal. It's beyond the history. It's beyond borders," she said.

For Culture Minister Dario Franceschini, opera is one of Italy's "most authentic and original cultural expressions", one that has spread worldwide.

He noted the moving scenes from the Ukrainian city of Odessa in March when locals took to the street to sing *Va, pensiero*, the stirring Hebrew Slaves' Chorus from Verdi's *Nabucco*.

He described this as 'yet more proof of how Italian opera singing is an integral part of the world's cultural patrimony, which provides light, strength and beauty in the darkest hours'. *Va, pensiero*, which was the hymn of Italian patriots battling the Austrian occupation in the 19th century, also illustrates popular support for opera.

"In the 19th century, when you arrived in any Italian town, the entire population sang opera arias. It was normal," Lissner noted. "Italy is different, Italian theatres are different... and if you go into the villages - they're not even towns - you find small theatres."

Today, there are around 60 opera houses across Italy - a global record - while opera singers such as 20th-century tenor Luciano Pavarotti have been venerated as major stars.

In Italy, lyrical music is not just reserved for the elite, said Lissner, adding, "The majority of the public cannot pay certain ticket prices and has been abandoned," which was a huge error.

This is a trend the San Carlo is trying to counter, by reserving reduced price tickets for young people.

AFP

Without taking away anything from my colleagues, or from the French or German composers ... I think, Italian song has something extra, which is the ability to express emotions like no one else can

STEPHANE LISSNER



Italian baritone Gabriele Viviani performs during a show of *Tosca*