

THURSDAY, MAY 25, 2023

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His Majesty issues two Royal Decrees

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued two Royal Decrees on Wednesday reading as follows:

Royal Decree No 32/2023 ratifies the air services agreement between the governments of the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Tajikistan signed in Muscat on March 15, 2023.

Article 1 ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree.

Article 2 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 33/2023 endorses the Sultanate of Oman joining the protocol that supple-

ments the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft signed in Beijing on September 10, 2010.

Article 1 endorses the Sultanate of Oman joining the protocol that supplements the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft in accordance with the version attached to this decree.

Article 2 instructs the departments concerned to deposit the official document for joining the aforementioned protocol in accordance with its provisions.

Article 3 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

ONA



His Majesty to visit Iran on Sunday

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will embark on an official visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran on Sunday, according to a statement issued by the Diwan of Royal Court on Wednesday.

'In culmination of the ties of friendship between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will go on an official two-day visit to Iran starting on Sunday, in response to an invitation from the Iranian President Dr Ebrahim Raisi,' the statement said.

'The visit stems from the fruitful relations and good neighbourliness between the two countries.'

'His Majesty's visit comes within the context of the continuous consultations and coordination between the two

'The visit stems from the fruitful relations and good neighbourliness between the two countries'

leaderships to discuss various developments at regional and international arenas. The visit will also touch on means of promoting cooperation between Oman and Iran in different spheres to serve current and future interests and aspirations.'

His Majesty the Sultan will be accompanied by a high-ranking official delegation comprising Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin

Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Nu'amani, Minister of Royal Office, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, Dr Hamad bin Said al Afi, Head of the Private Office, Abdussalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Salim bin Nasser al Afi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, Vice-Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Ra'eisi, Chief of Staff of Sultan's Armed Forces, Ambassador at Large Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Hinai, and Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Mu'aini, Ambassador of Oman to Iran.

ONA

GCC CELEBRATES 42ND ANNIVERSARY

'GCC a reliable partner for security, stability'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has emerged as a steadfast ally in promoting security and stability worldwide, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, stated on the occasion of its 42nd anniversary.

The GCC was established on May 25, 1981, during a period of regional tension and political and economic challenges, prompting member countries to unify efforts and cooperation to foster economic integration, political cooperation and regional development.

The primary goals of the GCC were to enhance coordination, integration and interdependence among member states across various sectors, such as economic, finance, commerce, transportation, education, culture, health, media, tourism, legislation and administration. The council also emphasised scientific and technical progress, industrial development, agricultural advancements and joint projects, while encouraging private sector cooperation.

Sayyid Badr highlighted His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's commitment to supporting the GCC's progress. In his first speech after assuming the reins of power, His Majesty the Sultan expressed desire to work alongside other GCC leaders to advance cooperation and fulfil the



aspirations of the people.

Recognising the notable achievements and developments of the GCC countries in various fields, Sayyid Badr emphasised the importance of highlighting these accomplishments to instil confidence and inspire further cooperation and development.

The Foreign Minister underlined the GCC's success in bolstering its regional standing,

GCC has succeeded in bolstering its regional standing, fostering international interaction, and becoming a trusted partner

SAYYID BADR AL BUSAIDI

fostering international interaction, and becoming a trusted partner in global efforts to strengthen security and stability. He emphasised that the current GCC stewardship, chaired by Oman, aims to foster economic integration and engage countries and international economic groups in free trade negotiations aligning with common interests.

Idris Abdul Rahman al Khanjari, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations, stressed on the importance of synergy and enhanced cooperation among GCC missions in Geneva. "This collaborative approach aims to achieve the goals and aspirations of member states, address emerging challenges, promote sustainable development, resolve conflicts, and contribute to global peace and stability."

The Gulf states have played a significant role in resolving regional issues, including the Yemen crisis, facilitating the Syrian Arab Republic's return to the League of Arab States, supporting the election of a president in Lebanon, and addressing the Palestinian and Sudanese issues, as highlighted by Khanjari.

SAYYID SHIHAB, INDIAN AMBASSADOR REVIEW TIES



H H Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of the Republic of India to the Sultanate of Oman, in his office at Al Murtafaa Garrison on Wednesday. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed relations between Oman and India and means of enhancing these, in addition to discussing several matters of mutual interest (ONA)

H M CONFERS MEDAL OF HONOUR ON MARK EVANS



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has conferred the Medal of Honour on Mark Evans, Executive Director of Outward Bound Oman, in recognition of his efforts to develop it as an international institution. The medal was presented by Sayyid Khalid Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of Diwan of Royal Court, when he received Evans in his office on Wednesday (ONA)

Muscat set on achieving renewable energy targets for 2040

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat governorate is set on achieving its target of 20 per cent electricity generation from renewable sources by 2040 in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040 and the National Energy Strategy.

The governorate saw an increase of 31.5 per cent in electricity production from renewables year-on-year in 2022, and now has an ambitious target of increasing it further by 118.5 per cent this year.

The number of solar photo-

voltaic (PV) projects increased 70 per cent from 70 in 2021 to 114 in 2022.

Muscat Electricity Distribution Company (MEDC), the sole entity responsible for electricity distribution in Muscat, stated in its 2022 Annual Report that it remains committed to support the renewable energy targets in view of its scope and regulatory obligations.

"We have connected 41 solar PV systems with DC capacity of 2,276.07kW compared to 27 last year. The total number of solar PV systems now stands at 114 with a total production ca-



capacity of 9,201kW," stated Salman Ali al Hattali, Acting CEO, MEDC.

Supporting the sultanate's vi-

sion and to encourage mass uptake by industrial and residential customers, the Authority for Public Service Regulations

31.5% rise in electricity production from renewables; targets further increase of 118.5% this year

(APSR) launched a scheme called SAHIMI for the roll out of solar PV system installations in 2017.

To meet renewable targets, APSR and distribution compa-

nies, including MEDC, are encouraging the installation of solar PV panels and use of clean energy.

MEDC is facilitating and assisting individuals and institutions that wish to connect their solar PV installations producing electricity for individual or industrial purposes to MEDC's Connection Application Process.

'Since the beginning of the Renewable Energy Implementation programme by MEDC in 2017, a total of 225 applications for solar PV connections have been received with project im-

plementation progress of more than 50 per cent in 2022. We forecast reaching 20,112kW generation capacity connected to the MEDC network by end of 2023,' a statement said.

MEDC informed that it is currently working alongside PDO and Hussam Technology Company to commission projects and supply solar energy to 65 residential systems across Muscat. 'As of now, nine systems have been approved, energised and connected to MEDC's network. Thirty-five solar PV projects are in the initial stage and 21 in the design stage.'

Pact inked to transfer technology, expertise in defence sector

Muscat - The Ministry of Finance, in collaboration with the Ministry of Defence, signed a partnership agreement on Wednesday with Safran Group, a leading aerospace engineering company, to implement economically and developmentally beneficial projects.

The agreement aims to contribute to the modernisation efforts of the Ministry of Defence and Royal Army of Oman, while also enhancing national capacities in the military sector.

Nasser Khamis al Jashmi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Partnership for Development (PFD) programme, and Frederic Fourciangue, Vice-President for Support in Safran Group, signed the agreement. The signing ceremony was held in the presence of Dr Mohammed Nasser al Za'abi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence.

Under the agreement, an advanced maintenance workshop will be established for Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) with



(Supplied photo)

The agreement aims to contribute to the modernisation efforts of the Ministry of Defence and Royal Army of Oman, while also enhancing national capacities in the military sector

training facilities for relevant personnel. Furthermore, the agreement includes the provision of necessary licences for the maintenance of helicopter engines.

These projects are of great significance for Oman's future, as they involve the transfer of mili-

tary and civil manufacturing and maintenance technology. Additionally, specialised and professional training will be provided in the fields of manufacturing and maintenance, contributing to the development of expertise in these areas, ONA stated.

MoH launches self-service medical fitness examination

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has introduced a new self-service medical fitness examination in an effort to combat counterfeiting and streamline processes.

The service was inaugurated at COMEX 2023 by H E Said Hamoud al Mawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and H E Dr Fatma Mohammed al Ajmi, MoH Undersecretary for Administrative, Financial & Planning Affairs, at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Wednesday.

The service caters to entrepreneurs, individuals seeking to employ expatriate workers, and private sector hospitals and centres providing medical examination services. Applicants can now register for the 'Medical fitness examination system for residency' through MoH's E-health portal or Sanad offices.

The service will be electronically linked with various authorities, including Royal Oman Police (ROP), the Ministry of Labour,



(Supplied photo)

the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and the Health Council of GCC states.

Highlighting the convenience of the service, Wissam Mohammed Abu Daraz, Director of Electronic Health Department at MoH's Directorate General of Information Technology, said it will enable residents and companies to easily access medical examination results required for initial visa applications, and new and renewal of resident cards.

"The service aims to enhance transparency, reduce counterfeit reports, and save time and effort by establishing electronic integration with ROP."

Daraz further added that the range of services offered include medical examination for technical teams and sailors, expatriates applying for residency and residency renewal, new or renewal of family visas, student visas, and obtaining new or renewing health cards.

Dr Mohammed Said al Yazidi,

Director of Occupational and Environmental Health in the Directorate General for Disease Surveillance and Control, emphasised the significance of the service in effectively monitoring, managing and controlling disease while obtaining vital data and statistics.

"It also simplifies procedures for citizens, residents and companies to obtain medical examination reports, ensuring transparency and reducing fraud," Dr Yazidi said.

Fight against Aedes aegypti continues in Muscat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Municipality, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health (MoH), is actively engaged in the ongoing fight against the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito.

Efforts are being exerted to control and eliminate these mosquitoes from homes, facilities and establishments across various

wilayats in the Governorate of Muscat.

Recently, the municipality launched a comprehensive vector control campaign to combat mosquitoes and create a healthier environment for both citizens and residents in different parts of Muscat.



In a statement released on Wednesday, the municipality emphasised the importance of citizens and residents cooperating with the fieldwork teams and allowing them to inspect potential breeding sites of mosquitoes. 'The municipality is

committed to conducting mosquito control campaigns that specifically target breeding sites. Furthermore, we encourage community members to adopt hygienic practices to eliminate environments that facilitate mosquito breeding.'

Typically, mosquitoes are found in industrial areas and places where water accumulates due to inadequate drainage.



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. 18 /2023

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following bidding :

Serial	Bidding No.	Bidding description	Document fee	Deadline for obtaining bidding docs.	Deadline for inquires submission	Deadline for Submission
1	AB/04/2023	Investment of Plot Number (146/1) at Al-Mabelah South at Wilayat Al-Seeb	220/- OMR	23/07/2023	02/08/2023	21/08/2023
2	AB/05/2023	Management and operation of containers in longitudinal garden in Al-Mabelah at Wilayat Al-Seeb	25/- OMR	03/07/2023	13/07/2023	23/07/2023
3	AB/06/2023	construction and operating a restaurant or cafe on plot No. (297) in Al Bustan in the Wilayat of Muscat	25/- OMR	03/07/2023	13/07/2023	23/07/2023

Registered companies with Muscat Municipality which are Specialized in above bid are invited to participate as per the following procedures

- Company registration with Muscat Municipality have to be valid as per note number one below, to be able to get the bid document.
- Pay the specified document fee for the requested bid via bank deposit to Muscat Municipality's Bank account as follows:

Bank Muscat	0423010702710024
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- A copy of the transaction's receipt MUST be sent to the following e-mail (MM.PC@mm.gov.om), provided with the company data (name and bid number, delegate name, office phone number, mobile number, email address approved by the company and commercial registration number of the company).
- The bidding documents will be sent to the company via email.
- 2:00 PM on the above submission mentioned dates, is the last timing for obtaining Bidding Documents. Any bid's document request received after the specified time will not be considered, even if the fee of the document is paid.

Documents must be enclosed in a plain closed envelope (without any company information) and drop in the box located in ground floor at Muscat Municipality, Head Office, Darsait.

NOTES:

- Companies which are not registered in Muscat Municipality or their registration has been expired shall register through the municipality's website (www.mm.gov.om). For technical support, please contact Muscat Municipality through email (crm@mm.gov.om).
- If the bidders have any inquiries regarding the scope of the work, they have to send their inquiries through the following e-mail (MM.PC@mm.gov.om).
- 10:00 AM on the above submission mentioned dates, is the last timing for receiving bids. Offers submitted after the above mentioned date & time shall not be accepted for any reason.
- Muscat Municipality has the right to accept or reject any offer without assigning any reason.

Website: www.mm.gov.om



SULTANATE OF OMAN

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects

Tender No.	Project Category	Grade In Tender Board Registration	Location	Last day to purchase tender documents	Last date of tender submission
4/2023	Consulting Offices	First	Consultancy Services (Design And Supervision) To Construction Of Residents For Security At The Ministry's At Al Khuwair	06/06/2023	03/07/2023
5/2023	Services	First	Luqat Al Athar Book Printing	30/05/2023	12/06/2023

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone 24402200 or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om



ROP arrests 12 infiltrators in Dhofar

Muscat - Twelve infiltrators were arrested for attempting to enter the sultanate illegally, Royal Oman Police (ROP) announced on Wednesday.

In a statement, ROP said, 'Coast Guard Police in Dhofar arrested 12 infiltrators of Arab nationality in Omani territorial waters while they were trying to enter the country illegally.'

It added that legal procedures have been completed against them.



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MOH No: 558/2023



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Oman, China seek to boost trade exchange

Muscat - H E Qais Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, on Wednesday received in his office Wang Yubo, Governor of Yunnan Province in China, and discussed issues related to trade and commerce.

The two sides reviewed the business and investment relations between the two countries and means of boosting trade exchange. They also discussed ways of enhancing joint cooperation in business, industry and investment sectors.

The two sides touched on the sectors of economic diversification within the framework of Oman Vision 2040 and attracting investments in various promising sectors.

H E Yousef highlighted investment opportunities in various governorates and free zones of Oman, as well as the facilities provided by the government to investors in various fields.

Sayyid Badr receives Yunnan governor
The Governor of Yunnan later met H E Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister.

China's Yunnan Province Governor Wang Yubo met with H E Qais Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in Muscat

The meeting reviewed relations between the two countries and means of promoting them in various fields. It also touched on cooperation with Yunnan Province in the economic, investment and tourism areas, in addition to organising joint exhibitions and exchanging expertise and visits between the two sides.

The meeting was attended by Khalid Hashel al Muslehi, head of the Minister's Office Department; Yousef Issa al Zadjali, head of the Asia and Pacific Department; Sheikh Salim Rabie al Sunaidi, Wali of Amerat; Li Lingping, Ambassador of China to Oman and a number of officials from both sides.

Oman finalises launch of National Qualifications Framework on May 31

Muscat - The Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance (OAAAQA) of education has announced the official launch of the National Qualifications Framework in the Sultanate of Oman.

Set to take place on May 31, the event will be held under the patronage of Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, Secretary General of the Ministry of Finance.

Dr Jokha bint Abdullah al Shukaili, CEO of the authority, announced this during a press conference held at the authority's headquarters on Wednesday.

The authority is responsible for governing, managing, and implementing the National Qualifications Framework as mandated by Royal Decree No 9/2021.

The National Qualifications Framework is an essential tool for classifying, comparing, and aligning national qualifications with international standards. It serves as a crucial component of education quality systems and positions Oman among 150 countries that have established



The framework is designed in consultation with authorities across educational and training sectors... it encompasses a broad scope to support national economic and educational needs and fulfill national goals

DR JOKHA BINT ABDULLAH AL SHUKAILI

their own national framework.

Dr Jokha said that the framework is designed in consultation with relevant authorities across educational and training sectors, and it encompasses a broad

scope to support national economic and educational needs and fulfill various national goals.

The official ceremony to launch the framework will highlight the significant milestones

achieved during its development and showcase the framework's practical applications and substantial benefits to the country and its citizens, stated Dr Jokha.

Additionally, the authority will unveil its future implementation plan, she added.

Fakhriya al Habsia, Director General of National Qualifications Framework, announced that alongside the inauguration ceremony, electronic services related to framework implementation will be launched.

"The National Qualifications

Register, an electronic system facilitating efficient procedures, will be showcased. This initiative aligns with the government's commitment to digitise services and streamline processes across all sectors."

By launching the National Qualifications Framework, Oman is taking a vital step towards aligning its qualifications with international standards and ensuring the quality and relevance of its education system to meet national goals and global expectations.

Wehaibi wins bronze in Arab Federation Cup for billiards

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Mubarak al Wahaibi, a national billiards player, won bronze in the 8-ball billiards in the just-concluded Arab Federation Cup for Billiards and Snooker held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Wehaibi won the bronze after his win in the round of 16 against Saudi Arabia's Khaled al Otaibi 6-7. He defeated Lebanese player Mazen al Berjawi 7-6 in the quarter-final, but

lost 5-8 in the semi-final against Ahmed al Dulaimi from Kuwait.

The 32nd round of the billiards tournament witnessed exciting competitions with participants coming from 12 countries that ended on May 22.

In the preliminary round of the eight-day event, Wahaibi defeated Youssef al Khelaiwi of Saudi Arabia 7-5, while Mohammed al Balushi - another national player of Oman - defeated Saud Amrat of Saudi Arabia 7-2. Hamza al Awaidi of



Oman defeated Fahd Aal Dayan from Saudi Arabia - 7-3.

In the round of 32, Wahaibi registered a hard-fought win against Iraqi player Karrar, 7-6. Mohammed al Balushi defeated Issa Hisham from Algeria 7-4, while Hamza al Awaidi defeated Abdul Karim from Bahrain 7-4.

Oman was represented by three players Mubarak al Wahaibi, Hamza al Awaidi and Mohammed al Balushi in the coveted cup.



Oman, Austria hold second round of political consultations

Vienna, Austria - The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Austria held their second round of political consultations in Vienna, Austria on Tuesday.

The Omani side was chaired by H E Sheikh Khalifa Ali al Harthy, Undersecretary for Political Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, while the Austrian side was chaired by Gregor W Koessler, Director of the Political Affairs at the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs.

The two sides discussed bilateral relations, as they displayed their keenness on expanding and promoting their ties across various fields.

They also exchanged views on a set of regional and international issues of common concern.

H E Yousef Ahmed al Jabri, Ambassador of Oman to Austria, attended the meeting along with a number of officials from both sides.

Separately, H E Sheikh Harthy

met with Alexander Schallenberg, Federal Minister for European and International Affairs and Peter Launsky-Tiffenthal, Secretary General of the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs.

The two meetings discussed aspects of the joint cooperation between Oman and Austria for boosting their ties. Views on various issues of common concern were also exchanged during those meetings.

Oman bans midday outdoor work from June 1

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) has announced a midday break for workers, banning work at construction sites and open areas from 12.30pm to 3.30pm for the coming three months starting from June 1. This is to

protect workers from intense summer heat.

"The break is in accordance with Article 16-3 of the Labour Law, which states that workers cannot work at construction sites or open areas under high temperatures during midday in the months of June, July and August. Inspection at work sites will be

intensified to ensure establishments enforce the midday break. Companies that violate the ban are liable to penalties," MoL said.

Urging companies to abide by its decision, MoL stated that fines for violating the ban range from RO100 to RO500 or, in some cases, a jail term of up to one month.

HILAL ONLINE

HILAL TARIQ AL BARWANI IS A YOUNG COMPUTER ENTHUSIAST WHO ENJOYS WRITING AND SPEAKING ON COMPUTERS AND TECHNOLOGY

Do our smart home devices spy on us?

It's amazing that smart home devices have been benefitting us and making it so much easier for us to control our home from many different aspects! A few examples of these smart home devices (or IoT devices) at my home are our security cameras, our water heater, and our smart locks. And what amazed me is that my father can access, control and monitor our smart home devices from wherever he is in the world! However, I had always wondered if these devices are capable of stealing data on what we do in our daily lives. Do all the benefits we receive from our smart home devices come at the cost of our privacy?

In simplified words, a smart home device is an Internet of Things (IoT) device that has the capability of enhancing and simplifying the way we monitor and control our home. They're usually accessible through various smartphone apps developed for the specific smart device. A few examples on how our smart home devices benefit us are: Smart cameras and motion sensors give us security by monitoring what happens in a house, thermostats give us comfort by allowing us to adjust the temperature in our homes, and smart coffee machines give us that necessary shot of caffeine every morning! It's pretty obvious that owning a few smart home devices are somewhat a necessity for us in today's world of technology!



However, concerns have been on the rise about how these devices could potentially be invading our privacy, and the facts support this claim. Firstly, since these devices are connected to the Internet, if a malicious hacker gained unauthorised access to our network and found any out-of-date software with vulnerabilities on any of our devices, they could hack the devices and receive a lot of personal information about us like our names, phone numbers, passwords, emails, and payment card information. And even worse, if they got access to our smart cameras, they could monitor each and every move we and our family make around our home without your consent. Smart home devices also monitor and track our activities daily, for example when we leave and enter home, when we

sleep and wake up, and how often we use certain devices. Companies could use this information and sell them to third-party advertisers worldwide.

So, with all the threats I've mentioned, how can we protect ourselves and still make best of our smart home devices? I'll give you some reliable ways to protect your devices from threats so that you don't fall victim to any of them. Firstly, ensure that all your devices are updated regularly to the latest software, as companies release these updates to patch security issues like bugs and vulnerabilities. You should also read reviews online on the device you're planning to purchase, and always purchase your devices from trusted, reputable brands and not from any shady businesses. You should also always make sure that your network is secured to the maximum. Use the highest wireless network security encryption protocols (WPA2 and WPA3), create difficult to crack passwords with numbers and special characters, and ensure your router's firmware is always up-to-date.

In conclusion, smart devices help us facilitate the way we monitor our home, and they are in fact very beneficial to us as long as we protect them and secure them in the right way to not expose our private information. I hope you benefited from this article and I can't wait for you to see what's coming in the next!

The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Muscat Daily or Apex Press & Publishing. The writer can be reached at hilal@tariq.net



Ominvest-led consortium intends to acquire 75% stake in Ahli Bank under new offer

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The consortium led by Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest) has revised some of the terms of its acquisition offer recently made to acquire Ahli Bank.

The Ominvest-led consortium now intends to make an offer to acquire up to 75 per cent of the share capital of Ahli Bank, rather than the entire issued share capital, according to a disclosure submitted by Ominvest to the Muscat Stock Exchange on Wednesday.

As per the revised terms, the consortium will make an increased cash offer of 200bz per share to all the shareholders of

Ahli Bank, thereby providing a 'fair, equal, and attractive cash offer to all the shareholders of Ahli Bank to participate in and benefit from the offer'.

Ominvest, through its fully-owned subsidiary, currently owns an 8.68 per cent shareholding in Ahli Bank. The consortium intends to acquire up to 66.32 per cent of the issued share capital of Ahli Bank with the objective of owning up to 75 per cent of Ahli Bank. Ahli Bank shall maintain a minimum free float of 25 per cent of the issued share capital in accordance with the relevant regulatory requirements.

According to Ominvest's disclosure, Bahrain-based Ahli United Bank, as the strategic long-term investor of Ahli Bank,

shall be paid the offer price of 200bz per share in full for their 35 per cent shareholding in Ahli Bank, amounting to RO136.5mn.

All other shareholders of Ahli Bank will receive a minimum of 55.6 per cent consideration in cash (on a pro-rata basis), at an attractive offer price of 200bz per share, amounting to RO122.12mn. For the remaining portion, they will continue as shareholders in Ahli Bank during the intervening period before the intended merger of Ahli Bank with Oman Arab Bank, and the shares of Ahli Bank will continue to be traded on the Muscat Stock Exchange.

'The proposed offer shall be funded by the members of the consortium from their own

funding sources, thereby resulting in a positive foreign direct investment in Oman. This will mean that there is no constraint on Ahli Bank's or Oman Arab Bank's capital or lending ability as a result of the offer,' the Ominvest disclosure said.

Ominvest stated that the members of the consortium have significant experience in the financial services sector within the region. 'The consortium shall be a committed anchor investor who will support Ahli Bank's growth and provide further strategic direction.'

'The offer shall be pursuant to the Takeover Regulations and is subject to the approval of the shareholders, the Central Bank of Oman, and other applicable requirements,' Ominvest added.

BankDhofar intends to make acquisition offer for Ahli Bank

Muscat - Following its announcement of a revised non-binding merger offer to Ahli Bank on May 18 and after considering all its options, the BankDhofar board on Tuesday resolved to make an offer to acquire 100 per cent of issued share capital of Ahli Bank in a takeover pursuant to the Acquisition and Takeover Regulations and to therefore withdraw its merger proposal.

In a press release, BankDhofar said that the terms of its acquisition offer will be identical to the terms previously outlined in the revised non-binding merger offer. The terms are summarised below:

Offer structure

The offer provides all Ahli Bank shareholders with an option to elect to receive up to 25 per cent of their consideration in cash; the rest of the consideration will be paid in the form of newly issued BankDhofar shares. For Ahli Bank shareholders who are: (i) Sharia-compliant juristic shareholders; or (ii) subsidiaries of Sharia-compliant juristic shareholders, the cash component will be increased to 100 per cent of total consideration received, to reflect their (or their parent shareholder's) de jure inability to receive shares in a conventional bank.

BankDhofar envisages to fund the cash component of the offer from its existing liquidity and capital resources as well as a contribution from the bank's ex-



isting shareholders, if and as required.

Financial terms

The financial terms of the acquisition offer are set forth as follows: (i) 1.2910 BankDhofar ordinary shares per Ahli Bank share (swap ratio), valuing each Ahli Bank share at 200bz based on the BankDhofar closing share price of 155bz as at April 9 (ii) 200bz per each Ahli Bank share as the cash component.

The above terms represents: a premium of 15 per cent to Ahli Bank's closing share price of 174bz as at April 9; an implied price to Q1 2023 book value multiple of 1.30x.

Since the submission of its initial non-binding offer to the board of Ahli Bank on April 10, BankDhofar's share price has appreciated. As a result, for the share component, this appreciation translates into a significant

increase in the value of each Ahli Bank share under the agreed swap ratio of 1.2910.

As at closing share prices of Ahli Bank on May 17, the swap ratio of BankDhofar's revised offer now represents: a premium of 30.6 per cent to the Ahli Bank unaffected share price, valuing each Ahli Bank share at 227bz based on the BankDhofar closing share price of 176bz; an implied price to Q1 2023 book value multiple of 1.48x, by far exceeding the average price to book value multiple of the Omani banking sector.

For the avoidance of doubt, the cash component values each Ahli Bank share at 200bz.

After completion of the takeover offer, BankDhofar will look to effect a combination with Ahli Bank. The bank believes that a combination of BankDhofar and Ahli Bank is a compelling opportunity for Ahli Bank shareholders to create a leading domestically-focused wholly-owned Omani bank with a robust competitive position.

'The proposed transaction offers an immensely attractive opportunity for shareholders of both entities to benefit from value creation with significant synergy possibilities and to participate in the long-term growth story, whilst ensuring a strong and well capitalised bank on day one. We remain highly confident in our ability to successfully execute the contemplated transaction,' BankDhofar said.

Oil prices increase as Saudi Arabia cautions speculators ahead of OPEC+ meeting

Ankara, Turkey - Oil prices rose on Wednesday after Saudi Arabia's energy minister warned speculators to 'watch out', implying that a decision at next week's OPEC+ meeting would increase prices, combined with increased hopes for a demand rebound in the US, the world's largest oil consumer.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at US\$77.40 per barrel in morning trade in London, a 0.73 per cent rise from the closing price of US\$76.84 a barrel in the previous trading session on Friday.

The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at the same time at US\$73.60 per barrel, up 0.94 per cent from the previous session's close of US\$72.91 per barrel.

Prices rallied by more than US\$1 per barrel in early Asian



trade on supply concerns, as Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman warned

short sellers on Tuesday of the increased possibility of OPEC intervening in the oil market to

boost prices.

"Speculators, like in any market, they are there to stay. I keep

advising them that they will be ouching; they did ouch in April. I don't have to show my cards; I'm not a poker player... but I would just tell them to watch out," Salman said.

Prices also saw upward support late Tuesday when the American Petroleum Institute (API) announced an estimated decrease of 6.8mn barrels in US crude oil inventories, more than the market expectation of a 525,000-barrel rise.

A strong inventory decrease implies an uptick in crude demand in the US, easing market worries over falling demand.

The US Energy Information Administration's (EIA) data on oil stocks will be announced later on Wednesday, and if the increase in stock levels is confirmed, prices are expected to decline.

Anadolu Agency

IMF chief calls US debt battle 'unnecessary' for world economy

Doha, Qatar - International Monetary Fund chief Kristalina Georgieva said Wednesday that protracted domestic wrangling over the US debt ceiling was "unnecessary" for the world economy but should be settled.

Georgieva also told the Qatar Economic Forum that central banks must keep interest rates high to tame inflation but there should be improvement in 2024.

International markets have been unnerved by the battle between US President Joe Biden and opposition Republicans on US borrowing limits with an early June deadline looming.

Some Republicans have questioned whether a quick agreement with the US administration is necessary to avert a painful default. "History tells us that the US wrestles with this notional default," Georgieva said referring to past US showdowns over spending limits.

"At the 11th hour, it gets resolved and I have confidence we will see this play."

But she added that the Washington drama was "unnecessary for a world economy that is in



IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva

such high uncertainty".

"We always have to be mindful that the risk is there."

Georgieva said headline inflation in many countries was "peaking" because of central banks raising interest rates but "core inflation, primarily because of very stubborn food prices, is still not trimming down the way it should".

"Central banks have to stay the course, because, if they move back on interest rates prematurely, then tension may become a problem for growth for a longer period of time," she said.

"Interest rates are high, they will stay high for longer, but we are expecting 2024, early 2025, the picture to change."

AFP

White House rules out constitutional solution to US debt ceiling crisis

Washington, US - President Joe Biden is not planning to invoke the 14th Amendment to prevent a US debt default, the White House said Tuesday, ruling out a constitutional solution to the current debt impasse.

Biden and the Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives Kevin McCarthy have held three rounds of face-to-face talks to try and reach a deal to lift the current borrowing limit so the US can meet its existing spending commitments.

Invoking the 14th Amendment to the constitution,



US President Joe Biden

which some legal scholars have argued would allow the US Treasury to simply ignore the debt limit, "is not going to fix the current problem we have right now," White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters.

Biden previously said he was looking into whether he could invoke the 14th Amendment, but was concerned that could occur while any legal challenges played out.

The remarks from Jean-Pierre suggest he has parked any plans he may have had to use a constitutional mecha-

nism to resolve the debt crisis.

Jean-Pierre also appeared to rule out a short-term extension to the debt ceiling to allow Biden and McCarthy's teams more time to negotiate, telling reporters such a solution is "not on the table."

Debt limits are raised periodically to cover repayments on loans that have already been approved and spent, but House Republicans are insisting this time that averting a default must be paired with deep cuts to bring down the country's US\$31.8tn debt.

AFP



Indian Social Club Oman

TENDER NOTICE EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

The Indian Social Club Oman is planning to build its new club house at Al Amerat on DBF (Design, Build & Finance) basis. The total Built up area of the project is approx. 4,000 sq.mtrs. with associated facilities and car parking.

The ISC Oman invites interested companies with the relevant experience to send the expression of interest to eoiscoman@gmail.com

Bank Muscat wins MENA Banking Excellence Award

In recognition of its excellent banking products, services, and its customer-centric vision to serve its customers better every day, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, was awarded the prestigious Best Retail Bank – Oman Award for the second consecutive year, at the recently-held MENA Banking Excellence Awards 2023 instituted by MEED.

The award was received on behalf of the bank by Mohammed Sultan al Habsi, chief representative at Bank Muscat's UAE office, at a glittering ceremony held in Dubai and attended by a number of senior bankers from across the region.

The MENA Banking Excellence Awards celebrates the achievements of the best banks in the region, which are focusing on innovative solutions and international best practices to enhance the banking experience of their customers.

The recognition is an acknowledgement of the global best practices adopted by Bank Muscat, its customer-centric vision, and its large number of innovative, modern products and services.

These have been developed to suit a modern lifestyle and



provide more opportunities for its customers to enjoy a convenient and distinctive banking experience.

"We are delighted to win the MENA Banking Excellence Award for the second consecutive year. The accolades and recognition Bank Muscat continue to receive for its banking services come as a result of the great efforts made by its employees and the innovative products and services, which are being continuously developed by the

bank," said Abdulnasir N al Raisi, general manager - Personal Banking, Bank Muscat.

"We thank MEED for recognising us through this prestigious award and will work to further better our services based on our customer-centric vision. Bank Muscat will continue to launch new, innovative products and services, which add value to our customers and are in line with their varying needs."

Raisi underlined that the bank is keen to contribute to the ongoing digital transformation of Oman, strategised as a part of Oman Vision 2040, and this is reflected in the continuing launch of a diverse range of products and services for our different customer segments.

"We would like to extend our sincere thanks and gratitude to all our valued customers for their continuing trust and confidence in our services and products, and promise to keep developing more such innovative services in the future to fulfil their aspirations," he added.

Recently, Bank Muscat launched a new feature within its Internet and Mobile banking channels, which enables customers to submit applications for loans and credit cards digitally. The new feature enable customers to apply digitally for a number of loan facilities across various categories such as Personal, Vehicle, Marriage, Travel, Educational, and Health and Beauty loans.

Customers may also apply

online for a variety of credit cards including Visa Infinite credit card, Gold credit card, Oman Air credit card, Lulu credit card, Al Jawhar Visa Platinum credit card, Asalah Visa Signature credit card and the Private Banking Visa Infinite credit card according to the eligibility norms for the same. Through these cards, customers can enjoy a number of advantages and facilities that meet their various needs.

Bank Muscat's digital services are highly sought after by its customers who prefer to take advantage of the numerous innovative features and facilities available through Internet and mobile banking. Currently, more than 1.6mn customers benefit from these services, which are also helping enhance financial inclusion in the sultanate.

The bank's state-of-the-art technology enables customers to access services quickly and conveniently through a variety of e-channels including Internet and Mobile banking, the contact centre center and also through its more than 800 ATMs, CDMs and other electronic devices, which provide a variety of services around the clock.

The bank's many successes across different fields have been well recognised both locally and internationally, with it winning several regional and international awards in the recent past from international publications like *Global Finance*, *Euromoney*, *EMEA Finance* and *The Banker*.

Awards received in the past included being recognised by Forbes Middle East as one of the Top 50 banks in the region. Bank Muscat continuously endeavours to deliver best-in-class services to its customers in the future as well as build on its track-record of strong performance.



Ministry of Education's media skills programme to end today

The three-day training programme for the directors of the directorates general in the Ministry of Education's general diwan is coming to an end on Thursday under the auspices of H E Dr Madiha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniya, Minister of Education.

'The Official Spokesman and Skills of Dealing with the Media' training programme was organised by the Directorate-General of Administrative Affairs, Department of Training and Rehabilitation in the Minister of Education, as a practical simulation in managing permits, conferences, television, radio, and press interviews.

The programme included a

number of topics, including the one on how to deal with digital media, the role of digital media in shaping the future, importance of a spokesperson in the industry, during crises, and for the institution's relationship with the media.

It touched on the skills of dealing with the media of different types by reviewing the Omani experience, local laws and comparing them with the international media, and delving into the content of the interviews with a focus on the pitfalls, how to deal with them, and the agenda struggle: The agenda of the spokesperson versus the agenda of the journalist and broadcaster.

The training programme concluded with applied exercises

consisting of watching a press conference and evaluating it through an open discussion session on the most important results of the course, and how to build on them in the future.

"Such training programmes are very important for educating directors general in the Ministry of Education, as they deal with the media of all kinds, which is very important, especially in this era of digitisation and means of communication," said Yaqoub al Shehaimi, Director-General of Education in Dhofar.

The programme aims to help the concerned persons and officials to get acquainted with the basics and rules of dealing with the media in real circumstances.

Alizz Islamic Bank's sharia'a board members attend AAOIFI conference

As part of Alizz Islamic Bank's 'Empowering the Second Line of Sharia'a Supervisory Board Members' programme to nurture potential candidates for future roles, the two interns from the Office of the Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman participated in the Accounting and Auditing Organization for Islamic Financial Institutions (AAOIFI) conference held in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

The conference was attended by members of the Sharia'a Supervisory Board of the bank as well as the sharia'a compliance and audit department.

The annual AAOIFI conference is of vital significance within the Islamic financial industry. It serves as a platform to address crucial issues and developments pertaining to the industry.

The conference aims to enhance the state of the global Islamic financial industry, foster innovative opportunities, and facilitate its expansion worldwide. It also focuses on preserving the industry's authenticity and adherence to sharia'a principles.

The event featured over 35 speakers, including sharia'a



scholars, policymakers, and professionals in the field of global Islamic banking and finance, engaging in detailed discussions on a wide range of important topics.

Issa bin Salim al Riyami, head of the sharia'a compliance and audit department, said, "Conferences of this nature hold significant value in achieving harmony between international Islamic financial practices and the financial reporting of local financial institutions. They ensure adherence to the provisions and principles of sharia'a while providing essential guidance for the operations of Islamic financial markets and the preparation of financial reports in an appropriate manner."

"These conferences also play a crucial role in establishing standards for Islamic financial institutions, thereby supporting the growth and advancement of the industry."

In the context of his speech, Riyami also highlighted that these conferences aim to enhance the quality of auditing and governance practices in Islamic financial institutions.

Stating that "efforts are directed towards improving the standardisation of these practices through the development and issuance of standards in auditing and governance, along with their interpretation for these institutions", Riyami stressed on "ethical practices pertaining to the activities of Islamic financial institutions", which he said were targeted for improvement by the preparation and issuance of ethical charters, accompanied by their interpretation for these institutions.

AAOIFI, is an influential international non-profit organisation that plays a crucial role in supporting Islamic financial institutions.

Samsung announces early order for 2023 TV lineup

Samsung Gulf Electronics has announced that the 2023 TV lineup, consisting of the 65-inch Samsung OLED Smart TV and the 8K Neo QLED Smart TV, are now available for early order for customers across Oman until May 27 on 27 across Samsung brand stores and major retailers.

Customers, who pre-order the 2023 Neo QLED 8K, will enjoy up to RO1,218 in extra benefits, inclusive of a Samsung Soundbar worth up to RO421, instant cashback of up to RO450 and complimentary entertainment package worth up to RO347 from OSN Plus, Shahid, TOD or Starzplay.

Meanwhile, early customers of the 2023 OLED will benefit from up to RO492 in extra gifts, including up to RO145 instant cashback and a complimentary entertainment package worth up to RO347 from OSN Plus, Shahid, TOD or Starzplay.

Powered by Samsung OLED technology, the newly intro-



duced 65-inch OLED delivers bold contrast, vibrant colours and dramatic sound. On the other hand, the 8K Neo QLED TV 2023 creates a cinema experience right at home.

Both TVs feature high refresh rates that cater to demanding gaming environments and high-octane sports and movies on ultra-large screens without sacrificing picture quality. Function

and form blend seamlessly in this 2023 TV lineup, with edge-to-edge screens, creative design and inobtrusive cable management.

"Over the years, our customers in Oman have chosen Samsung TVs to enjoy memorable visual experiences. This year, we are offering even more value with our 2023 lineup. Our customers in Oman can enjoy their favourite shows and movies

in sharp detail and incredible sound powered by Samsung's advances in video and sound technology," said Nikola Aksentijevic, head of the Visual Display Division at Samsung Gulf Electronics. Samsung combines technology and lifestyle to usher in a new era in home entertainment. The 65-inch OLED features Samsung's Quantum HDR OLED+, boosted by Quantum Dots,

which delivers bold contrast, dramatic sound and vibrant colours while powerful AI processing technology transforms ordinary content into colourful 4K video. Dolby Atmos audio provides immersive surround sound.

Samsung's Infinity One Design delivers an edge-to-edge screen, a slim and sleek profile that combine to create an elegant, seamless aesthetic.

High-speed games and high-octane movies come alive thanks to the Motion Xcelerator Turbo Pro, which creates crisp 4K visuals at blazing-fast speeds up to 120hz, while Game Motion Plus goes up to 144hz with compatible PC-connected content.

The Samsung Neo QLED 8K delivers unparalleled picture quality and captivating sound. In addition, quantum Mini LEDs deliver a billion colours and intense contrast with 1.5 times more lighting zones than Samsung's Quantum Matrix Technology.



K M Trading announces winners of recent draws

K M Trading's 'Shop and Drive' car promotion, which was launched in connection with Eid al Fitr, ended in a grand draw on May 15.

The names of the winners of various prizes - from cash rewards to cars - were declared at various branches in Oman in presence of authorities which was witnessed by a huge crowd.

Promotion, which started on March 16, enjoyed high partici-

pation of customers that made this a talk of the town.

In connection with this promotion, 21,000 customers walked away with shopping vouchers worth RO110,000 in all, which were distributed through a 'scratch and win' system.

In the grand draw, K M Trading announced eight Suzuki Vitaras winners from K M Trading and Al Safa outlets in Sultanate of Oman.

China's Xi offers Russia 'firm support' on 'core interests'

Xi Jinping offered support at a meeting with Russian PM Mikhail Mishustin

Beijing, China - Chinese President Xi Jinping offered Beijing's support on Moscow's 'core interests' at a meeting with Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin on Wednesday.

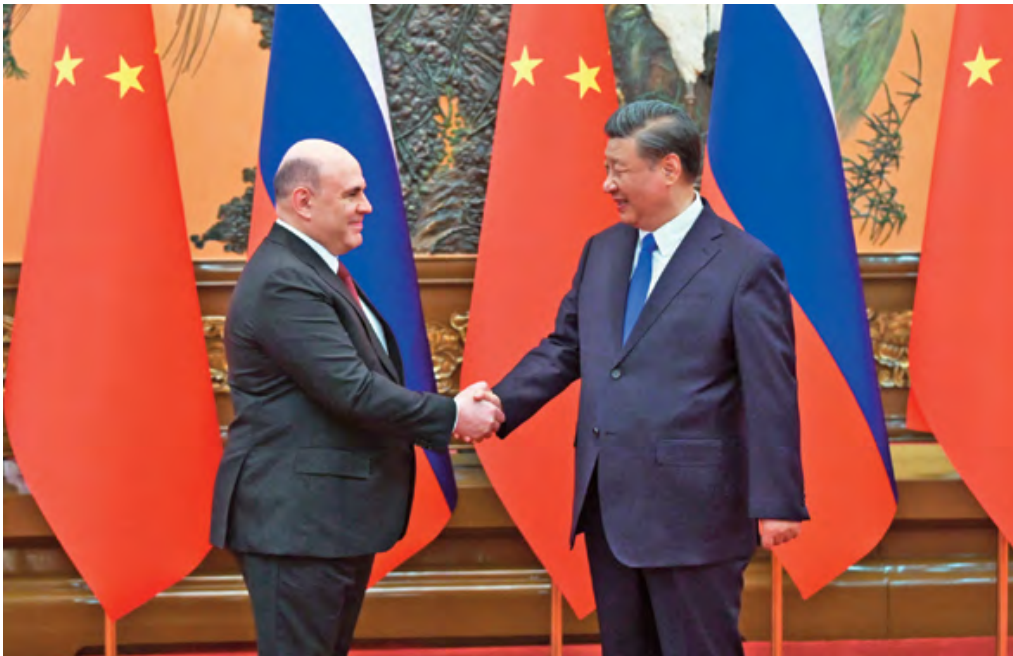
China and Russia have in recent years ramped up economic and diplomatic cooperation, growing even closer since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine despite Beijing's insistence that it is neutral in that conflict.

Mishustin's trip this week is the highest-level visit by a Russian official to China since last year's invasion of Ukraine.

Xi told Mishustin China and Russia would continue to offer each other 'firm support on issues concerning each other's core interests and strengthen collaboration in multilateral arenas', according to a readout by the official Xinhua news agency.

China and Russia should 'push cooperation in various fields to a higher level', he said, and 'raise the level of economic, trade and investment cooperation'.

Mishustin also met with Pre-



Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin meets with China's President Xi Jinping in Beijing on Wednesday (AFP)

China and Russia should push cooperation in various fields to a higher level and raise the level of economic, trade and investment cooperation

XI JINPING

mier Li Qiang on Wednesday, saying that 'relations between Russia and China are at an unprecedented high level' following a grand welcoming ceremony

outside Beijing's Great Hall of the People. "They are characterised by mutual respect of each other's interests, the desire to jointly respond to challenges, which is associated with increased turbulence in the international arena and the pressure of illegitimate sanctions from the collective West," he said.

Li, in turn, hailed the 'comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership between China and Russia in the new era'.

China is Russia's largest trading partner, with trade between them reaching a record US\$190bn last year, according to Chinese customs data. Li said bilateral trade had already reached US\$70bn so far this year.

"This is a year-on-year increase of more than 40 per cent," he said. "The scale of investment between the two countries is also continuously upgrading," Li said. "Strategic large-scale projects are steadily advancing."

Ministers from the two countries signed a series of agreements after the talks on service trade cooperation and sports, as well as on patents and Russian millet exports to China.

China's upper hand

Mishustin is accompanied this week by top officials including Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, who handles energy policy.

China last year became Russia's top energy customer as Moscow's gas exports otherwise plummeted due to a flurry of Western sanctions over the invasion of Ukraine.

And Novak told a Russia-China business forum in Shanghai on Tuesday that Russian energy supplies to China would increase by 40 per cent year-on-year in 2023, Moscow's state media reported.

Analysts say China holds the upper hand in the relationship with Russia, and that its sway is growing as Moscow's international isolation deepens.

The leaders of both countries are 'brought together more by shared grievances and insecurities than by shared goals', Ryan Hass, a senior fellow at Washington's Brookings Institution and a former White House official, told AFP.

"They both resent and feel threatened by Western leadership in the international system and believe their countries should be given greater deference on issues implicating their own interests."

In February, Beijing released a paper calling for a 'political settlement' to the Ukraine conflict, but Western countries said it could enable Russia to hold much of the territory it has seized. Xi invited Russian President Vladimir Putin to visit Beijing during their summit in Moscow in March.

AFP



Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaks during the budget session at the parliament in Jerusalem on Tuesday (AFP)

Israeli lawmakers pass budget with controversial cash for ultra-Orthodox

Jerusalem - Israeli lawmakers passed an annual budget on Wednesday with controversial allocations for ultra-Orthodox Jews, in a concession to a religious party in the governing coalition that drew protests from the opposition.

Thousands of Israelis marched through Jerusalem on Tuesday to demonstrate against the government's plans to hand more cash to the ultra-Orthodox minority, accusing the coalition of 'looting' state funds.

Earlier this week, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced the state would grant married ultra-Orthodox Jewish men engaged in religious study rather than work a total of 250mn shekels (US\$67.5mn).

The grant was part of an agreement with United Torah Judaism, one of the ultra-Orthodox parties in the coalition, to ensure its support for the budget.

The extra funds are in addition to other budget allocations traditionally made to the ultra-Orthodox through various government ministries.

ultra-Orthodox have sparked anger as Israelis of all backgrounds contend with soaring prices and increased interest rates.

In the Tel Aviv suburb of Ramat Gan, high-tech worker Sivan Aharon said: "It's sad that the taxes we pay are not redistributed to us."

"This money can be used to help the weakest populations, the soldiers, to go to health and education," the 38-year-old told AFP.

Opposition chief Yair Lapid said the budget amounted to 'endless extortion' which failed to address the high cost of living.

While you were sleeping, the worst and most destructive budget in the history of the country passed

YAIR LAPID



Climate activists from the 'Letzte Generation' (Last Generation) group address a news conference in Berlin on Wednesday (AFP)

Germany gets tough with climate activists

Berlin, Germany - German police on Wednesday raided homes of climate activists known for their controversial street blockade protests that Chancellor Olaf Scholz has blasted as 'completely nuts'.

The raids were ordered in an investigation targeting seven people aged 22 to 38 of the Letzte Generation (Last Generation) group, as Germany toughened its stance against their eye-catching action. From glueing themselves onto the asphalt to flinging mashed potatoes on paintings in museums or blocking airport runways, the activists have in recent months split public opinion with their protests to push the government to do more for the climate change.

Wednesday's raids were ordered over suspicions that the activists were 'forming or supporting a criminal organisation', said a joint statement by Bavaria's police and prosecutors.

Fifteen properties were searched, two accounts seized and an asset freeze ordered.

The suspects are accused of 'organising a donations campaign to finance further criminal acts' for the group via its website.

At least €1.4mn (US\$1.5mn) had been collected in the campaign, said the authorities, adding that 'these funds were according to current information

mostly used for the committing of further criminal action of the association'.

The authorities did not specify the 'criminal action' they were referring to but said two of the suspects are alleged to have tried to sabotage an oil pipeline between Trieste, Italy, and Ingolstadt, Germany, deemed 'critical infrastructure' in Bavaria.

At a press conference following the raids, the activists said they would not be cowed.

Spokeswoman Aimee van Baalen admitted that she was terrified when she learnt about the raids targeting her friends.

"They frighten us, but we must not persist in this fear. The government is steering us into a climate hell with our eyes wide open," she said.

"We must continue our resistance," she said, calling a demonstration next Wednesday.

Dozens of climate activists from the group have found themselves before the courts in recent weeks over their traffic blockade actions. Most have received fines for disrupting traffic or obstructing police work but some courts have begun toughening their sentences to also hand down jail time. Scholz and his coalition partners including the Greens have also expressed frustration at the activists.

AFP

COOLING OFF



Youths swim in the Shatt al-Arab waterway, formed at the confluence of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, in Iraq's southern city of Basra, on Tuesday (AFP)

Sudanese await relief on day two of ceasefire

Khartoum, Sudan - Fighting had eased but not stopped in Sudan on Wednesday, the second full day of a ceasefire that has raised cautious hopes among beleaguered civilians that aid corridors and escape routes will open soon.

Sporadic air strikes and artillery fire have still echoed across the capital, residents told AFP, but US and Saudi observers said 'fighting in Khartoum appeared to be less intense' since the one-week truce entered into force late on Monday.

Washington and Riyadh, which brokered the ceasefire deal between the forces of two rival generals, however pointed to reports 'indicating that both sides violated the agreement'.

Nonetheless, they stressed that preparations were underway 'to deliver lifesaving assistance' to the people of Sudan, who have endured more than five weeks of fighting that has claimed more than 1,000 lives.

The war broke out on April 15, sparking frantic mass evacua-



Men sit outside a burnt-down bank branch in southern Khartoum on Wednesday (AFP)

tions of thousands of foreigners and forcing more than 1.3mn Sudanese to flee their homes internally and across borders.

The chaos has left millions hunkering down in their homes to hide from the combatants and roaming looters amid power blackouts and desperate shortages of water, food, medicines

and other staples.

Khartoum resident Ali Mohammed said water supply 'still hasn't been restored' on Wednesday, 'but at least I was able to go out and buy water for my family'.

Mohammed Taher, 55, was finally able to 'go to Khartoum's central market five kilometres

(three miles) away to buy food and return without incident', he said.

The fighting pits Sudan's de facto leader, the army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, against his former deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, nicknamed 'Hemeti', who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support

Forces (RSF).

It has displaced more than a million people inside Sudan, the International Organization for Migration reported on Wednesday, with a further 319,000 people seeking refuge across borders.

Those unable to flee have run low on basic supplies, and more than half the population, 25mn people, are in need of humanitarian aid, according to the United Nations.

"The whole country has been taken hostage", said the UN's expert on human rights in Sudan, Radhouane Nouicer. "People feel alone and abandoned."

Hopes for quick relief from the fighting and suffering were dimmed by the fact that a series of earlier ceasefires were all quickly broken, with both sides trading blame for the violations.

Saudi and US mediators also voiced 'concern' that the warring sides had sought to gain military advantage in the lead-up to the truce.

AFP

Typhoon pounds Guam with destructive winds

Local authorities issued evacuation orders, while US President Joe Biden declared a state of emergency

Los Angeles, US - Typhoon Mawar roared over the US territory of Guam on Wednesday, bringing destructive winds to the Pacific military outpost.

The eye of the storm passed just north of the island, its governor said, after forecasters had warned that winds of up to 140 miles per hour (225km per hour) could cause major damage.

"What we are feeling right now is the eye going over the Rota Channel," Governor Lou Leon Guerrero said in a Facebook video, referring to the body of water between the islands of Guam and Rota.

Local authorities earlier issued evacuation orders and opened temporary shelters, while US President Joe Biden declared a state of emergency for the island of 170,000 people, paving the way for federal aid.

"I am in a concrete-reinforced house and my windows are shuttered. I did go outside briefly and winds are getting very gusty with intermittent rains," Beckie Merrill, a 46-year-old middle school teacher, told AFP from a southern area of the island.

After predicting a 'direct hit' on Guam, forecasters later said



Strong winds and precipitation from Typhoon Mawar blowing across Tumon Bay, Guam on Wednesday (AFP)

the typhoon had moved just north of the island.

"It looks like we are getting a near hit with the eye passing through the Rota Channel. The southern wall of the eye will pass over much of Guam. The worst winds will be in the northern third of Guam," the US National Weather Service told AFP.

Warnings of extreme winds and flash floods have been is-

sued for the island with wind speeds of 74 miles per hour already recorded, forecasters said.

"I am worried for the safety of our people. This is the first storm of this magnitude for 20 years," Guerrero said.

Coastal evacuations

Evacuations were ordered for low-lying coastal areas, especially in the flood-prone southern

villages. The NWS warned of the 'triple threats' of torrential rain, catastrophic winds and a life-threatening storm surge.

Winds near the eye wall could bring major damage to buildings and homes made of light materials such as non-concrete roofs and walls not made of reinforced concrete.

A calamitous storm surge threatens to wreak havoc on shorelines, and large boats 'could be torn from moorings'.

"Surge may reach to between 20 and 25 feet above normal high tide for the most vulnerable storm-surge-prone areas near the eye wall," the NWS said.

Forecasts predicted Guam will receive rainfall of 10 to 15 inches, with some areas seeing 20 inches or more, the NWS

said. This could trigger landslides in the central and southern parts of the island, the weather service warned.

'Frightening'

"Many of us right now are feeling the full strength of Typhoon Mawar, and although it is a

I am worried for the safety of our people. This is the first storm of this magnitude for 20 years

LOU LEON GUERRERO

frightening experience that hasn't been felt for over two decades, we want you to know that we are here for you," Guerrero said in a Facebook post.

"Even as the typhoon makes its initial landfall, we have multiple agencies coordinating response efforts and relaying helpful information to those in need."

People were told to stay inside

and away from windows, and not venture outside during temporary lulls as flying debris can cause serious injury.

Guam's Office of Civil Defense urged motorists to stay off the roads on Wednesday, saying 'winds are expected to intensify to typhoon force winds by midday'.

About 21,700 US military personnel and their families are based at or near several facilities on Guam, which routinely hosts nuclear attack submarines and long-range bombers.

The territory is also home to crucial electronic listening posts.

The US bases have some of the Pacific region's most significant ammunition and fuel storage facilities.

About 60 flights scheduled to depart or arrive in Guam between Tuesday and Thursday were canceled, A.B. Won Pat International Airport said.

Conditions in Guam are expected to improve on Thursday, but the storm is expected to intensify over the next few days, possibly becoming a super typhoon over the Philippine Sea, the NWS said.

AFP



Capsized Chinese fishing vessel (Lu Peng Yuan Yu 028) is seen in the Indian Ocean on Tuesday (AFP)

Sri Lanka navy finds 14 bodies in capsized Chinese fishing vessel

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka's navy said on Wednesday it had located 14 bodies inside a Chinese fishing boat that had capsized last week with 39 crew on board.

The grisly discovery came a day after a preliminary Chinese government probe concluded there were no survivors on the vessel that overturned on May 16.

The Lu Peng Yuan Yu 028 had on board 17 Chinese, 17 Indonesians and five Filipinos and was within Australia's vast search-and-rescue region, 5,000km (2,700 nautical miles) west of Perth.

The Philippine foreign ministry said the boat was located on May 18 about 1,000km south of Sri Lanka but that rescue efforts were hindered by bad weather.

The Sri Lankan navy said its divers had recovered two bodies and spotted 12 more on Tuesday, releasing photos showing the upturned red hull of the vessel and bodies being hauled out of the water. "Due to decomposition and the potential health hazards posed by operating in contaminated waters with limited protective gear, it was determined that retrieving those bodies would be exceedingly dangerous," the navy said in a statement.

It said the locations of the 12 bodies inside the boat were mapped and handed to Chinese authorities. The nationalities of the located bodies were not im-

mediately known.

The Sri Lankan navy statement came a day after a preliminary probe by the Chinese transport ministry concluded that all those on board had died.

Australia had sent three aeroplanes and four ships to help in the international search-and-rescue efforts. Rescuers had trawled an area of around 64,000sqkm (18,700 square nautical miles), and 'did not find any sign of survivors', according to the Chinese transport ministry.

The fishing vessel's distress beacon was first detected last week as Cyclone Fabian drove waves as high as seven metres (23 feet) and winds as strong as 120km per hour (75 miles per hour) through the area.

Rough weather held back rescue efforts, with the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC) in Canberra warning of 'challenging' survival conditions.

The vessel was owned by the Penglai Jinglu Fishery Company, one of China's major state-run fishing firms.

It was authorised to fish for neon flying squid and Pacific saury, according to the North Pacific Fisheries Commission.

It left Cape Town in South Africa on May 5 for Busan in South Korea, according to the Marine Traffic tracking website, which last located the vessel on May 10 southeast of Reunion, a tiny French island in the Indian Ocean.

AFP

South Korea postpones third launch of homegrown rocket

Seoul, South Korea - South Korea on Wednesday postponed the launch of its homegrown Nuri rocket after a technical glitch was detected just hours before lift-off, officials said.

It was the third planned launch of Nuri, following a failed first attempt and a successful second mission last year. A communication error between the launch control computer and another computer managing the launch pad was detected during preparation, forcing officials to postpone, said Oh Tae-seog, vice minister of science and ICT.

'It's currently believed there is no problem with the projectile itself, so it will remain erected' while scientists and software engineers try to resolve the issue, Oh said in a briefing.

If they find a solution by Thursday morning, they will hold a meeting to decide whether to carry out the launch that day, he added.

In previous tests the rocket carried payloads mainly designed for verifying the performance of the launch vehicle.



South Korea's homegrown space rocket Nuri is seen moving to its launch pad at the Naro Space Centre in Goheung on Tuesday (AFP)

This time, the rocket was set to be topped with eight working satellites, including a 'commercial-grade satellite', according to the country's science ministry.

The three-stage rocket, more than 47 metres (155 feet) long and weighing 200 tonnes, was supposed to be launched from the Naro Space Center in South Korea's southern coastal region at 6:24pm local time (0924 GMT).

Nuri was transferred and erected at the launch pad on Tuesday.

"The third launch is aimed at putting a domestically developed

satellite with observation missions into the target orbit," Ko Jeong-hwan, director of the Nuri rocket project at the Korea Aerospace Research Institute (KARI), told reporters earlier.

The 180kg NEXTSat 2 satellite, developed by the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, is the first and main payload meant to be placed into orbit at an altitude of 550km, KARI said.

The satellite has a small synthetic aperture radar that can capture high-resolution images regardless of weather conditions.

AFP

'Unusual' level of aircraft maintenance in N Korea

Seoul, South Korea - Recent satellite imagery shows an 'unusual' level of aircraft maintenance at North Korea's main airport, a monitoring group said, a possible sign Pyongyang is moving to resume international flights.

North Korea has effectively sealed its borders since early 2020 as part of its drive to deal with the coronavirus pandemic, with all flights cancelled. It has resumed some cross-border trade with China by train, and recently allowed Beijing's new ambassador to Pyongyang into the country, but has not yet resumed regular international travel.

Several passenger jets operated by North Korea's Air Koryo have 'cycled through maintenance hangars' at Sunan International Airport since early May, the respected North Korea-monitoring 38North website said, citing satellite images.

Such aircraft have only very infrequently undergone such maintenance over the past

three years, so the recent level of activity is 'notable', it said.

38 North said no cross-border air travel service is 'believed to have taken place' throughout the entire pandemic period. "It is unusual that such a large number have been serviced in such a short period of time," 38 North said, warning that the flurry of activity did not guarantee any immediate or near-term resumption of air travel.

Speculation over Pyongyang's possible reopening spiked after China's new ambassador arrived in Pyongyang to begin his official duties last month, more than two years after he was appointed.

One Chinese tourist agency has also been reportedly preparing to re-launch tours to North Korea in mid-June, according to the Seoul-based specialist site NK News.

It added, however, that 'false rumours of reopening have circulated near border for months'.

AFP

'Pupil started Guyana dorm fire over confiscated phone'

Georgetown, Guyana - The weekend school dormitory blaze that killed 19 minors in central Guyana is believed to have been started by a disgruntled pupil angry at having her mobile phone confiscated, a government source told AFP on Tuesday.

Sunday's inferno gutted the building in the regional capital of Mahdia, which housed girls aged 11-12 and 16-17. Some are still hospitalised.

An official police report confirmed that 'a female student is suspected of having set the devastating fire because her cellular phone was taken away'.

The government source, speaking anonymously, said the teenage pupil in question had admitted to the arson attack and was under police guard at the district hospital in Mahdia.

Police are seeking advice on whether to charge her, the official said.

On Monday, Guyana Police Commissioner Clifton Hicken had already stated that investi-



Relatives and friends of the victims of a fire on the eve that killed at least 19 youths and injured about 20 others in a schoolgirls' dormitory, speak with authorities in Mahdia, Guyana, on Monday (AFP)

gators believed the fire was 'maliciously set'.

According to the government source, students aren't allowed to have phones in the dormitory.

After the staff took away the girl's phone, she 'threatened the same night that she will burn down the building and everybody

heard her', the government source said.

The official said that minutes later the girl went to the bathroom area and sprayed insecticide on a curtain before lighting a match.

Several pupils had recounted the same version of events, the

official said.

Locked inside

The girls were locked in for the night, and a house mistress told police that in her panic she could not find the front door key. The building had metal bars on the windows preventing pupils from

escaping through them.

The house mistress 'locks up every night at nine o'clock to ensure the girls don't get away from the building', the official said.

"According to the female students, they were asleep and were awakened by screams," said the police report.

Despite efforts by other students to extinguish the blaze, the official said the fire quickly swept through the wooden ceiling and eventually engulfed the entire building.

Some pupils, including the girl who allegedly started the fire, managed to escape when some men broke down a door.

"Upon checking, they saw fire/smoke in the bathroom area, which quickly spread in the building, causing several students to receive burns to their bodies and smoke inhalation, while several managed to escape," the police report said.

The police report said there were 57 pupils in the dormitory.

AFP

INDIA

'Separatists must not harm Australia ties'

Narendra Modi warned that 'separatist elements' should not be allowed to hurt India-Australia relations

Sydney, Australia - Prime Minister Narendra Modi warned on Wednesday that 'separatist elements' should not be allowed to hurt India-Australia relations, after he was lavished with a rockstar welcome in Sydney.

Lured by the world's most populous market and the promise of a counterweight to a rising China, Australia has batted away questions about India's treatment of opponents and minorities, suggesting they are domestic issues.

Modi appeared to have no such qualms.

The Indian leader hit out at recent 'attacks' on Hindu temples in Australia - vandalism allegedly committed by Sikh separatists - after his summit with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese at Admiralty House on Sydney Harbour.

"We will not accept any elements that harm the friendly and warm ties between India and Australia by their actions or thoughts," Modi told reporters, saying the pair had discussed 'activities of separatist elements' in the past.

"Prime Minister Albanese has once again assured me today that he will take strict actions against such elements in the future," Modi said according to an official translator.

Anti-Modi graffiti has this year been painted on a half-dozen temples in Australia, allegedly by those seeking the creation of a Sikh homeland known as Khalistan, in incidents widely reported by Indian media.

Protests by the Sikh diaspora erupted across the globe last month after a lengthy manhunt for a firebrand separatist that saw thousands of Indian police mobilised and mobile internet access cut for days across Sikh-majority Punjab state.

Albanese, who has previously



India's PM Narendra Modi speaks with Australia's PM Anthony Albanese and Australia's Governor General David Hurley in Sydney on Wednesday (AFP)

condemned the graffiti incidents in Australia, made no mention of them in his remarks, instead hailing a new deal promoting the exchange of students, researchers, academics and business people with India.

The centre-left leader said he had joined 'a rather extraordinary event' the previous evening, referring to Modi's 12,000-strong, campaign-style rally at a Sydney arena.

'Respectful' relationship

"Prime Minister Modi is the boss!" Albanese had told the crowd of enthusiastic Modi supporters at the event, declaring the Indian leader a 'dear friend'.

Albanese has given short shrift to questions about his

support for Modi - a nationalist leader who faces re-election next year and has been criticised for sustained democratic backsliding and discrimination against India's hundreds of millions of non-Hindus.

Asked if he was troubled by such accusations against Modi, Albanese told a radio interviewer: "Well, India is, of course, the world's largest democracy."

"Australia will always stand up for human rights, wherever it occurs anywhere in the world," he added. But asked if he planned to raise those issues with Modi, the Australian leader said he engaged with people on a 'one-on-one' basis and would not be leaking details of his 'respectful' relationship.

But as Australia struggles with a more assertive China, the country is looking for economic and political partners in an increasingly rough-and-tumble neighbourhood.

India's economic performance has been mixed in the past decade, with missteps curbing growth. It is now the second-fastest growing economy in the G20 and a multi-trillion-dollar market.

AFP

Opposition to boycott inauguration of glitzy new parliament building

New Delhi - India's opposition parties on Wednesday said they would boycott the inauguration of a glitzy new parliament building, accusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi of a 'grave insult' to democracy by excluding the president.

Construction of the building is part of a Central Vista project aimed at revamping or replacing British colonial-era government facilities, including a new residence for the prime minister.

Work on the parliament building began in January 2021 and is estimated to have cost around 12bn rupees (US\$145mn), according to media reports.

Since the project was announced, it has faced criticism over a lack of transparency and high costs. It has also been hit by allegations it violated environmental and land laws.

On Wednesday, 19 opposition parties criticised the gov-



This file photo shows workers standing next to the 'National Emblem' installed on the roof of the new Indian parliament building in New Delhi on July 12, 2022 (AFP)

ernment's decision to exclude Indian President Droupadi Murmu - the head of state - from an inauguration event set for Sunday in New Delhi.

"Prime Minister Modi's decision to inaugurate the new parliament building by himself, completely sidelining President

Murmu, is not only a grave insult but a direct assault on our democracy which demands a commensurate response," the parties said in a joint statement.

"When the soul of democracy has been sucked out from the parliament, we find no value in a new building. We announce

'No saffronisation, moral policing in Karnataka': CM Siddaramaiah

Bengaluru, Karnataka - In a veiled attack on Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the newly elected Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday said that the senior police officials have been instructed to ensure no 'saffronisation' and 'moral policing' in the state.

"That is what we have instructed all the senior Police officials - no saffronisation, no moral policing..." Siddaramaiah told media persons after attending a Congress legislature party meeting at Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru. He also said that action will be taken against such people who are making false news. Congress in its manifesto for the Karnataka election said that the party is committed to taking firm and decisive action against individuals and organisations spreading hatred among communities on grounds of caste and religion.

"We believe that law and Constitution are sacrosanct and



The senior police officials have been instructed to ensure no saffronisation and moral policing in state

SIDDARAMAIAH

cannot be violated by individuals and organisations like Bajrang Dal, Popular Front of India (PFI) or others promoting enmity or hatred, whether among majority or minority communi-

ties. We will take decisive action as per law including imposing a ban on any such organisations," the manifesto said.

Soon after being sworn in as the chief minister, Siddaramaiah had said that the first cabinet meeting has issued orders for the implementation of five guarantees which were promised by the party before the elections.

All will be in force after the next cabinet meeting, he had said at a press briefing after the cabinet meeting.

The five 'main' guarantees are 200 units of free power to all households, Rs 2,000 monthly assistance to the woman head of every family, 10kg of rice free to every member of a BPL household, Rs 3,000 every month for unemployed graduate youth and Rs 1,500 for unemployed diploma holders for two years and free travel for women in public transport buses.

ANI

Suicide bomber kills four at Pakistan checkpoint: Police

Peshawar, Pakistan - A suicide bomber killed four people when he detonated a car bomb at a police checkpoint in a marketplace in northwest Pakistan on Wednesday, officials said.

Local police official Rasool Daraz told AFP two soldiers, a policeman and a civilian were killed when the bomber blew himself up in Liaquat Bazar of the Datta Khel subdivision of North Waziristan.

"The bomber blew up his vehicle while he was being searched at the check post," he said. "It seems the bomber wanted to reach another destination but blew himself up after he was stopped by police for a routine search."

Another five people were wounded in the blast.

A second police official,

Tariq Dawar, confirmed the incident and casualties.

Officials said on Tuesday six security personnel had been killed in a militant siege on a Hungarian-owned oil and gas exploration site around 70km (44 miles) northeast of Wednesday's blast.

The attack on Tuesday was claimed by the Pakistan Taliban, a chapter of the Afghan movement that splintered off in 2007 to focus its fight against Islamabad.

On Monday, officials said unidentified militants detonated explosives in two empty girls' schools in North Waziristan, destroying nine classrooms but leaving no casualties. North Waziristan has historically been a hive of militancy.

AFP

Greek president taps judge to lead interim government

Athens, Greece - A senior Greek judge, Ioannis Sarmas, was asked on Wednesday to lead an interim government tasked with organising a second national election by late June, the presidency announced.

Faced with 'the impossibility of forming a government' just three days after national elections 'the solution, according to the Constitution is the formation of an interim government', said President Katerina Sakellaropoulou during a meeting with Sarmas.

She referred to the fact that none of the three parties that led Sunday's polls was willing to form a coalition government, after failing to secure a majority.

Outgoing Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has called for a fresh election as early as June 25 after securing his party's biggest electoral triumph in years, but five seats short of being able to produce a single-party govern-



Senior Greek judge Ioannis Sarmas during his meeting with the Greek President in Athens on Wednesday (AFP)

ment. "It is a great honour, a constitutional obligation and my duty as a citizen to accept this responsibility," said Sarmas, 66.

Born on the Greek island of Kos, Sarmas followed a career in the courts after studying law in Athens and Paris, as well as completing a doctorate.

He will serve as prime minister until a government is de-

nation once known as an EU laggard.

Mitsotakis, 55, on Monday told Sakellaropoulou that he could not form a coalition and called for elections 'possibly on June 25'.

Tsipras, whose party Syriza won 71 seats for Mitsotakis's 146, also refused to form a coalition on Tuesday and has vowed to lead his party into the next battle.

Under a new electoral law that comes into play in the next ballot, the winner can obtain a bonus of up to 50 seats.

Based on Sunday's showing and that calculation, New Democracy is virtually assured of a victory.

In power over the last four years, former McKinsey consultant Mitsotakis steered the country through the pandemic which devastated Greece's vital tourism industry.

Mitsotakis' term was blighted,

however, by a wiretapping scandal as well as a train crash that killed 57 people in February.

The government initially blamed the accident - Greece's worst-ever rail disaster - on human error, even though the country's notoriously poor rail network has suffered from years of under-investment.

Nevertheless, neither the accident nor the wiretapping scandal appeared to have dented support for his conservatives - who scored a far bigger win than that predicted by opinion polls ahead of the vote.

In contrast, Tsipras' Syriza finished second even in his ancestral village in Arta, northwestern Greece.

For his part, Tsipras said he takes 'full responsibility' for the defeat, which he called a 'painful shock', while vowing to prevent the formation of a right-wing government in the next round.

AFP

MAQSOOD TO LEAD OMAN

Oman unveil 17-member squad for Cricket World Cup Qualifier

Muscat - Experienced all-rounder Zeeshan Maqsood will lead Oman at the forthcoming ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Qualifier, which will be held in Zimbabwe from June 18-July 9.

Oman Cricket unveiled the 17-member national squad at the Oman Cricket Academy Grounds in Al Amerat on Wednesday with the skipper expressing confidence in the team's hopes to qualify for the World Cup.

"We are ready for the challenge and it's a big opportunity for us to showcase our potential. We have the experience of playing against all the teams except for West Indies and Zimbabwe. We have to play to our best abilities and hopefully we can achieve the desired results," said Maqsood.

The ten-nation Qualifier will decide the remaining two spots for the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup in India 2023. Oman, who are aiming to qualify for the World Cup for the first time, will be heading to Durban in South Africa for a preparatory camp on May 28 where they will play five practice games before heading to Zimbabwean capital of Harare on June 11.

Oman's 17-member squad



Oman squad for World Cup Qualifier

will be trimmed to 15 for the Qualifier after the trip to Durban.

Flamboyant batter Aqib Ilyas has been named Maqsood's deputy with the squad consisting of a majority of all-rounders.

Leg-spinner Samay Shrivastav and all-rounder Rafiullah are the only uncapped players in the squad.

The batting responsibilities will be on the shoulders of Jatin-

der Singh, Kashyap Prajapati, Aqib Ilyas, Shoaib Khan, Zeeshan Maqsood, Mohammed Nadeem, Ayaan Khan and Sandeep Goud. The bowling attack will be spearheaded by left-arm pacer

Bilal Khan and the lanky Kaleemullah with Rafiullah, Fayyaz Butt, Nadeem, Goud and Shoaib in support roles as medium pacers.

The spin department will de-

pend on the guiles and the magic of Jay Odedra, Shrivastav, Maqsood, Ilyas and Ayaan.

With an average age of 32, the team will rely on the experience, which had come good during the ICC World Cricket League Division 2 where Oman finished second in the seven-nation tournament that featured 36 ODIs over the past four years.

Oman squad for World Cup Qualifier (Final 15 after Durban trip): Zeeshan Maqsood (captain), Aqib Ilyas (vice-captain), Jatinder Singh, Kashyap Prajapati, Shoaib Khan, Mohammed Nadeem, Sandeep Goud, Ayaan Khan, Suraj Kumar, Adeel Shafique, Naseem Khushi, Bilal Khan, Kaleemullah, Fayyaz Butt, Jay Odedra, Samay Shrivastav, Rafiullah.

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VINI, VIDI, VICI

Vinicius Junior developing into Madrid and Brazil superstar amid tide of racist abuse

Barcelona, Spain - Real Madrid winger Vinicius Junior has developed into La Liga's most devastating player on the pitch while his battle with racism is making a worldwide impact off it.

The 22-year-old Brazilian forward drew global support after making a stand against racist abuse he received on Sunday from Valencia supporters at their Mestalla stadium.

Vinicius faced off with home fans and pointed one out after being called a "monkey", later taking to social media to say La Liga "belongs to racists".

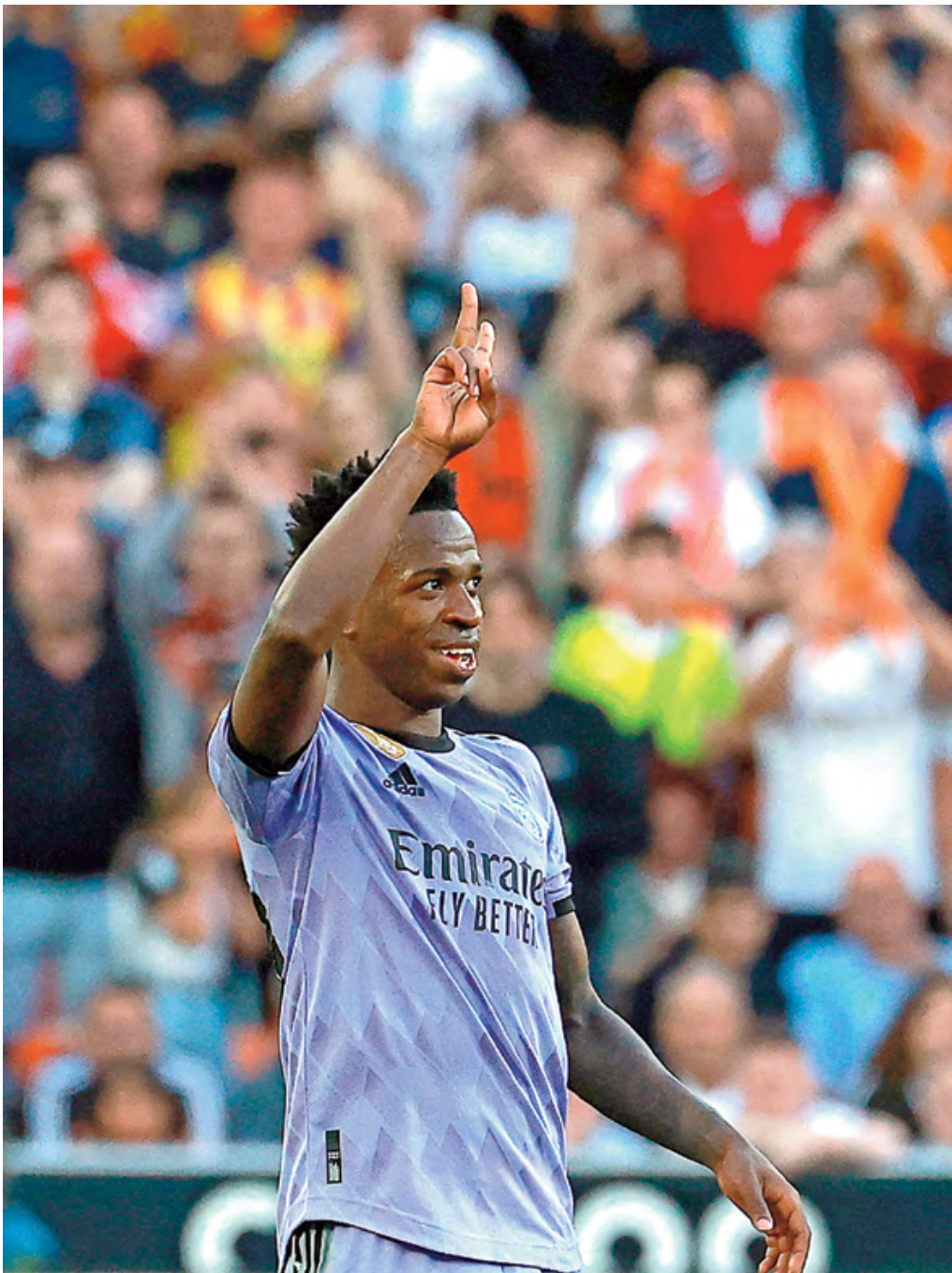
The Brazilian made several posts condemning his continuously vile treatment in Spain, provoking worldwide scrutiny of the situation.

Vinicius' rise to the game's peak in the past two seasons has been meteoric, since arriving from Flamengo in 2018 for 46 million euros (\$50 million).

Born in Sao Goncalo, in the state of Rio de Janeiro, Vinicius emerged as a teenage talent, boasting skill, rare dribbling ability and speed, becoming his club's then-youngest ever player at 16.

Los Blancos quickly struck for his signature in 2017, locking in his future arrival, looking to the Brazilian market after Barcelona's success with Neymar.

When Madrid's all-time top goalscorer Cristiano Ronaldo left for Juventus after the World Cup in Russia that summer, Vinicius was thrown into the team in his



Vinicius Junior

stead but the 18-year-old struggled initially to find consistency.

His erratic finishing drew mockery from opposition fans, managing only 14 goals in 118 appearances across all competitions in his first three seasons.

However in the 2021-22 campaign Vinicius improved drastically under returning Italian coach Carlo Ancelotti, netting 22 goals, including the winner against Liverpool in the Champions League final.

Vinicius has confirmed his rise was no false dawn in the current season, scoring 23 goals to date and wreaking havoc on defences

"To receive such criticism so young and to be among the three or four best in the world is something that I have seen very rarely.

"Everything he now is, is well-earned, he has worked hard physically and mentally."

Vinicius made his World Cup debut for Brazil in November last year and has been offered vigorous support from his homeland.

Unfortunately, Vinicius's soaring ascent in Spain has been accompanied with torrents of abhorrent abuse on away trips across the country.

The latest flashpoint may prove to be a pivotal moment,

To receive such criticism so young and to be among the three or four best in the world is something that I have seen very rarely. Everything he now is, is well-earned

DANI CARVAJAL

both domestically and in Europe.

"Vinicius is the most decisive player in world football today," said Ancelotti in April.

The Brazilian is the most fouled player in the league and the player with the most successful take-ons and progressive carries.

"When he arrived with us, especially during the first period, he was under tremendous pressure, he was fodder for memes," Madrid defender Dani Carvajal said earlier in May, before the Copa del Rey final.

with Ancelotti demanding "drastic measures" against racism and labelling FIFA protocol "obsolete".

La Liga have reported nine incidents of racism aimed at Vinicius over the past two campaigns and have pledged to do so again after investigating the incidents at Mestalla, although there has been little impact until now.

Spanish police arrested three supporters in Valencia as a result and four Atletico Madrid ultras in the capital, after they hung an effigy of Vinicius from a bridge.



Vinicius Junior

Vinicius spared red card ban

Barcelona, Spain - Real Madrid winger Vinicius Junior has been freed from suspension Tuesday after his red card against Valencia, in a match during which he suffered racist abuse from home supporters at their Mestalla stadium.

The Spanish football federation's Competition Committee said they accept Real Madrid's complaint against Vinicius' red card for hitting Valencia's Hugo Duro on Sunday after reviewing the video footage.

The committee also ordered the closure of the Mario Kempes stand at the stadium for five matches and imposed a fine of 45,000 euros on Valencia.

Vinicius faced off with fans at that end of the Mestalla stadium and pointed out one who had been abusing him.

Later in the game he was sent off for hitting Duro in a brawl, after the referee was shown footage on VAR.

AFP



Devon Thomas

West Indies batter Thomas suspended for match-fixing

Paris, France - West Indies batter Devon Thomas has been provisionally banned for match-fixing, the International Cricket Council (ICC) announced on Tuesday. Thomas, 33, who has represented his country in all three formats, has been charged with breaching rules by three governing bodies.

"The International Cricket Council (ICC), on behalf of Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC), the Emirates Cricket Board (ECB) and the Caribbean Premier League (CPL), has charged West Indies player Devon Thomas with seven counts under their anti-corruption codes and he has been provisionally suspended with immediate effect," the ICC said.

"Mr Thomas has 14 days from 23 May 2023 to respond to the charges," it added.

Thomas, has been named in the West Indies' squad for next month's one-day series with the UAE. "CWI (Cricket West Indies) is not directly involved in the process but remains firm in denouncing corruption in cricket, and fully supports the ICC ACU in its efforts to uphold the integrity of the sport," the body said. "In collaboration with ICC and the West Indies Players' Association (WIPA), CWI remains committed to sensitizing and educating our players and officials on anti-corruption in sports," it added.



Jordi Alba celebrates with the Champions League trophy in 2015

Alba leaving Barcelona after 11 years

Barcelona, Spain - Jordi Alba will leave Barcelona at the end of the season after 11 years at the club, the Catalan side said Wednesday.

"Barcelona and Alba have reached an agreement to release the player from the contract that he had until the end of the 2023-24 season," said Barcelona in a statement.

"Barcelona publicly expresses its gratitude to Jordi Alba for the professionalism, commitment, dedication and always positive and warm treatment he has always shown towards everything that makes up the Barcelona

Alba has played over 450 times for Barcelona, scoring 27 goals and providing 91 assists

family."

Alba joined Barcelona from Valencia in 2012 and won six La Liga titles and one Champions League among 19 trophies with the Catalan giants.

The 34-year-old veteran Spanish left-back lost his place in

the team to teenager Alejandro Balde this season.

Alba had one more year left on his contract, which expires in 2024, and Spanish reports say he will waive a significant percentage of the money due to help the club amid financial struggles.

The Spaniard follows in the footsteps of captain Sergio Busquets, who is also leaving the club this summer.

The pair will play their final home match at Camp Nou against Real Mallorca on Sunday.

Alba has played over 450 times for Barcelona, scoring 27 goals and providing 91 assists as

a vital outlet on the left flank.

The defender's recent goal against Osasuna earned Barcelona a 1-0 win and took them to the brink of the title.

He also won the 2012 European Championship with Spain, scoring in the 4-0 win over Italy in the final. One of his finest seasons came in 2015 under Luis Enrique, when he helped Barcelona win the treble.

The left-back has been linked with a move to Saudi Arabia like Busquets and Lionel Messi, the former Barcelona playmaker who is leaving Paris Saint-Germain in the summer.

Real Valladolid beat champions Barcelona to boost salvation hopes

Valladolid, Spain - Real Valladolid earned an important 3-1 victory over champions Barcelona to boost their La Liga survival hopes on Tuesday.

The hosts were good value for their victory and climbed to 17th, moving provisionally three points clear of the relegation zone.

Barcelona defender Andreas Christensen sent Valladolid on their way by heading into his own net in the second minute.

Canadian striker Cyle Larin added the second from the penalty spot after Eric Garcia tripped Gonzalo Plata in the area, with the Ecuadorian winger scoring the third on the break.

La Liga's top goalscorer Robert Lewandowski pulled one back for the Catalans in the final stages.

Barcelona winger Raphinha revealed a message of support for Real Madrid winger and Brazil compatriot Vinicius Junior in the second half when he was substituted. Vinicius was racially abused by Valencia fans on Sunday at their Mestalla stadium.



Real Valladolid players celebrate a goal against Barcelona on Tuesday (AFP)

"I didn't know he was going to do it but I think it's a good message, because racism has to end," Barcelona midfielder Frenkie de Jong told DAZN, after Raphinha took his shirt off to show the message after being substituted.

Players from both sides held

up a banner reading "racists out of football" before the game, as part of a La Liga and Spanish football federation initiative following the abuse on Sunday.

Young playmaker Pablo Torre started for the first time in La Liga for Barcelona and put in a bright

performance but his team were sluggish as a whole and fell to a second consecutive defeat.

Goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen is still chasing the La Liga clean sheet record of 26 - he has 25 with two matches remaining.

AFP

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All-round Jadeja leads Chennai into IPL final

Chennai, India - Ravindra Jadeja starred with bat and ball as Chennai Super Kings beat holders Gujarat Titans by 15 runs on Tuesday to enter the IPL final that could be skipper MS Dhoni's farewell.

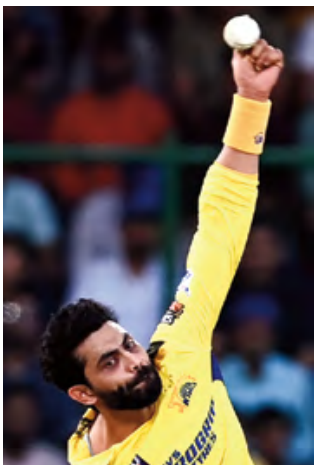
Four-time winners Chennai posted 172-7, a total their bowlers defended as they bowled out Gujarat for 157 in a play-off believed to be the last home match at the MA Chidambaram Stadium for the 41-year-old Dhoni.

The left-handed Jadeja returned figures of 2-18 with his spin bowling following his 22 runs, which boosted the Chennai total after Ruturaj Gaikwad's 60 on an awkward pitch for batting.

Fireworks lit up the sky as Chennai made their 10th Indian Premier League final. "IPL is too big to say it's just another final," the captain said on presenter Harsha Bhogle's question on the Sunday final being "just another final" for Dhoni's team.

"Used to be top eight teams to compete with the best players available in the world, but now it's 10 teams, so now it's tougher. It's hard work of two months because of which we are standing over here. Lot of character showed by the individuals."

Dhoni also stalled suggestions that he was about to retire, saying he will take "eight, nine months"



Ravindra Jadeja took two wickets for a miserly 18 runs in his four overs (AFP)

to decide on his IPL future. "The small auction will be around December, so why to take the headache right now. I have ample time to decide," he said.

Gujarat, led by Hardik Pandya, will have another shot at making the final, which is on Sunday in Ahmedabad, when they take on the winner of the second play-off between Lucknow Super Giants and five-time champions Mumbai Indians.

The spotlight remained on Dhoni, who is India's most decorated player, leading his country to two World Cup triumphs including the inaugural T20 crown in 2007.

AFP

AKASH DREAM SPELL HELP MUMBAI THRASH LUCKNOW

ELIMINATOR



Akash Madhwal (C) of Mumbai Indians celebrates with teammates after the dismissal of Lucknow Super Giants' Nicholas Pooran during their Indian Premier League eliminator match at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Wednesday. Akash took five wickets conceding just five runs to trigger a dramatic Lucknow middle-order collapse and help Mumbai storm into the second qualifier with an 81-run victory. Earlier fine knocks from Cameron Green and Suryakumar Yadav helped Mumbai make 182 for 8. Mumbai will now take on Gujarat for a place in the final.

CHENNAI SUPER KING

Dhoni looks to end with a bang in IPL final

Chennai, India - MS Dhoni is looking to bow out in style by winning the Indian Premier League with Chennai Super Kings for the fifth time - unless the 41-year-old cricket superstar stuns everyone and keeps going.

On Tuesday, skipper Dhoni's tactical nous - at times controversial - again sealed the deal as CSK overcame the fancied Gujarat Titans by 15 runs to book a slot in Sunday's final at the world's biggest stadium in Ahmedabad.

With his finishing skills on the wane, a dodgy knee and his place in the batting order increasingly hard to justify, Dhoni has suggested on several occasions his retirement is imminent.

He again kept fans guessing, saying on Tuesday he would take until the auctions for the 2024 IPL in December to make his final

decision. "I will always be there for CSK whether in playing form or sitting somewhere," he said. "I don't really know. But frankly, it takes a heavy toll."

Cool customer
Victory on Sunday against either Mumbai, Lucknow or Gujarat - depending on the remaining play-offs - would be a fitting final achievement for a player who is second only to Sachin Tendulkar when it comes to fan adulation in cricket-crazy India.

Hard-hitting and always unruffled, India's most successful skipper has many nicknames including "Captain Cool" and "Thala", which means "leader" in Tamil.

First and foremost, he is a run powerhouse and finisher par excellence, but it is Dhoni's style and humble beginnings that set him apart, and which were enough for a Bollywood biopic.

Dhoni spent his early years in a cramped one-bedroom government flat in Ranchi provided

by his pump operator father's employer.

The young Dhoni was passionate about sport and honed his skills playing tennis-ball cricket and borrowing bats and other kit from friends.

On his father's insistence, he took a job at Indian Railways but the hectic routine of juggling between collecting tickets

and won two home series against Australia, and in 2011 famously sealed winning the 50-over World Cup in India with a sumptuous, imperious six.

Along the way - with constant hairstyle changes, from shaggy to spiky to shaved - numerous endorsements saw Dhoni become one of world sport's best-paid athletes, earning an

I will always be there for CSK whether in playing form or sitting somewhere. I don't really know. But frankly, it takes a heavy toll

MS DHONI

and playing cricket finally saw him break free.

In 2004, he made his India debut and in 2007, took over from Rahul Dravid as India's one-day captain, the same year leading the national side to the inaugural Twenty20 World Cup in South Africa.

In 2008, he became Test cap-

estimated \$31 million in 2015.

'No CSK without Dhoni'

But he stunned the cricket world by quitting the five-day format in 2014 after finishing with 27 wins from 60 Tests as skipper.

He stepped down from the limited-overs captaincy in 2017

on the pretext of preparing Virat Kohli as leader, but continued to play a big part in the team's decision-making process.

His last appearance for India was in their semi-final loss to New Zealand in the 2019 ODI World Cup.

He then briefly served with an army reserve unit, where he is an honorary lieutenant colonel, before announcing his international retirement. But he hasn't quit the IPL, at least not yet.

He captained CSK from the IPL's first edition in 2008 and took the franchise to nine finals and four victories, most recently in 2021.

"There is no CSK without Dhoni and there is no Dhoni without CSK," N. Srinivasan, the industrialist who owns the franchise, famously said after the 2021 triumph.

For Chennai fans - who go wild when he strides out to bat and cheer every ball - Dhoni is their one and only leader and his retirement would be a tragedy.

AFP



MS Dhoni

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14

MANGO DELIGHTS

Enjoy mangoes in the form of delicious desserts during the current season



15

IN TOWN

Beach clean-up by Embassy of India and Let's Read prize meet



16

ENTERTAINMENT

A peek into tinsel town in Hollywood and Bollywood

India's
'MOON Man'

MYLSWAMY ANNADURAI,
FORMER DIRECTOR, INDIAN SPACE RESEARCH
ORGANISATION (ISRO) SATELLITE CENTRE, SHARES
SOME INSIGHTS ON THE MYSTERIES OF THE UNIVERSE

Anirban Ray

In the vast expanse of the cosmos, where celestial bodies drift across unfathomable distances, the Moon and Mars stand as distant neighbours, separated by thousands of light years from the Earth. Yet, in the intricate tapestry of the universe, their allure and mystery have always remained close to the heart of one man - Mylswamy Annadurai, a space scientist, affectionately known as India's 'Moon Man'.

Hailing from the ancient land of Tamil Nadu in India, Annadurai is an esteemed aerospace engineer who has left an indelible mark on the annals of space exploration. Throughout his illustrious career, he has held numerous esteemed positions within the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), an organisation at the forefront of scientific advancements and tech-

nological marvels.

With a mind attuned to the wonders of the cosmos, Annadurai has dedicated his life to unraveling the mysteries that lie beyond our blue planet. The Moon Man's unwavering commitment to scientific exploration has been instrumental in shaping the trajectory of India's space endeavours. Yet, amidst the grandeur of his accomplishments, Annadurai, like the wise star, remains a humble custodian of knowledge, always striving to inspire the next generation of dreamers and visionaries.

Muscat Daily caught up with the Moon Man for a down-to-earth chat and found that his story was a testament to the relentless pursuit of mankind to unravel the mysteries of the universe.

Life's lessons

I have always been fascinated by the universe, dark skies, moon and stars ever since I was a boy. I come from a humble background in Tamil Nadu like other scientists at ISRO.

The vast universe is fascinating and it teaches us to be humble as man is not even a particle in that scale – the very knowledge of that can get one grounded.

We need to engage people right from childhood to be aware of the vastness of the universe and the solutions that lie beyond human comprehension. This

will make humanity more responsible. Initially, we faced a lot of challenges but now our government is really serious on sending missions to the Moon or Mars.

Space tourism

Our mission Mangalayam concluded a few years back found that the planet Mars is not dead. This is the nearest planet to Earth that has a probability of human survival. It has been showing the processes of losing its atmosphere, and perhaps, indicatess the future of the Earth.

Mars may be good for life as it shows similar conditions that can be generated for human survival. With the vision and confidence of even Elon Musk, we can assume that soon space tourism will take off and soon man would set up a colony there. Akin to the historic migrations across continents, this time it will be through planets.

Chandrayan III, Aditya

We had a sad failure of our mission a few years back - basically, there were multiple engines that should have worked in unison, but unfortunately, did not. We had no choice but to destroy it, and sadly, we could not get any images. In a few weeks time, we will embark on Chandarayan III and hopefully have appropriate information for a successful launch. We also have lined up 'Mission Aditya' to study the sun.

Lengendary landing on Moon

Though there are many controversies regarding the first landing on the Moon, I don't think, it could've been staged. The first landing was more of a victory for a country, not for science, as America was more focussed on being a leading global power.

There have been some serious questions about the moon landing (like the fluttering US flag) and all have been logically and practically explained by the scientists. Also the samples that were brought from the moon showcase a different dimension.

Mars

The attention has now shifted to Mars. We had a launch in 2008 and were surprised to encounter water - this was also verified by the US mission in 2009. We have also seen water resources in the Moon, in the poles predominantly, in the form of ice where the Sun does not reach. In a span of last 60 years there must have been some massive changes and we need to find them out. With modern technology and remote sensors we can easily find more details about the surface, depths, and terrain.

Now, NASA is planning a big project to the moon called 'Back to the Moon' in which modern technology can make a difference. The years ahead will see more breakthroughs.

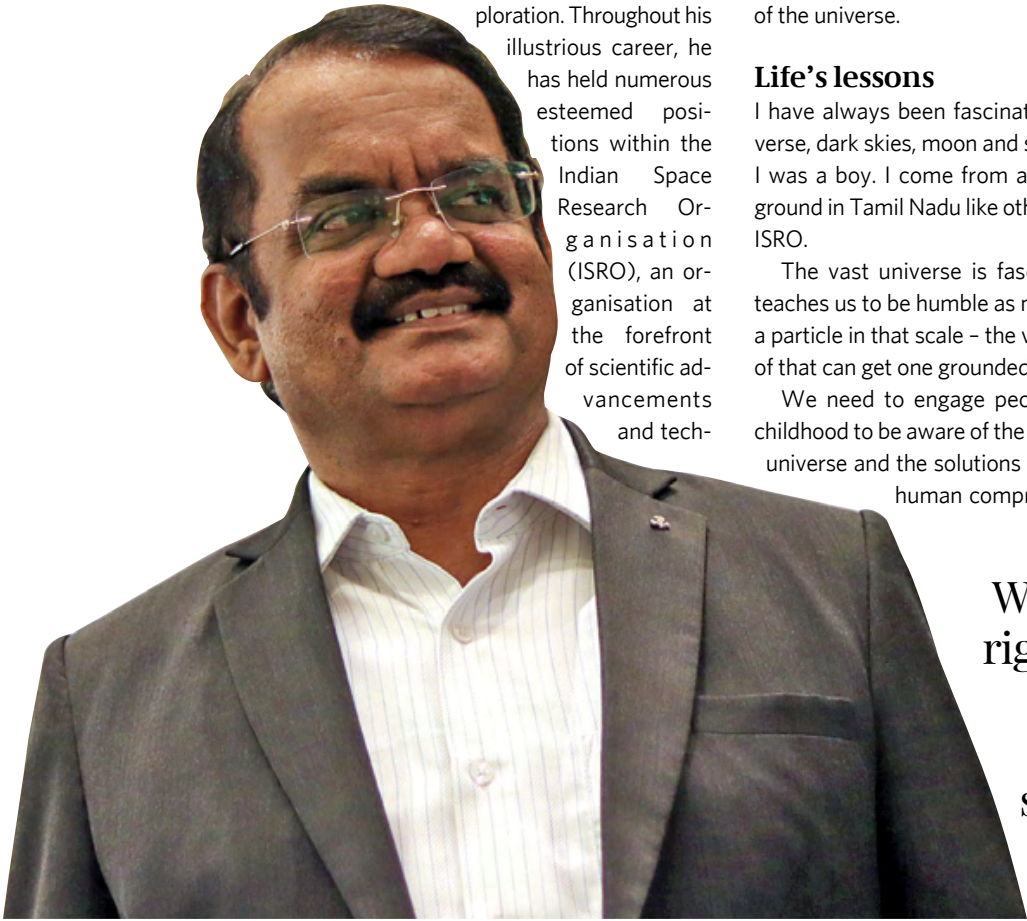
Aliens

If you consider the human being across the globe, you would find, that definitely life did not begin from one place on Earth. Similarly, I believe, that immediately after the so-called 'Big Bang', there must have been other big bangs that released gases, and with infinite time different constellations in the universe were created. So vast is this universe that there are mathematically huge probabilities that varied forms of life could exist.

We need to engage people right from childhood to be aware of the vastness of the universe and the solutions that lie beyond human comprehension



MYLSWAMY ANNADURAI



cook-up



Mango

Delights

Mangoes have arrived in the market - it's time for some mango desserts

Mango Lemon Bars

Ingredients

For the crust

- 1 cup salted butter room temperature
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 2 cups all-purpose flour

For the filling

- ½ cup diced mango
- 1tbsp fresh lime juice
- 1½ cups granulated sugar
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour
- 4 large eggs
- 1 cup fresh lemon juice
- 1tsp pure vanilla extract
- 1tsp confectioner's sugar - for garnish

Method

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a stand mixer, mix together butter, sugar and flour. Press into the bottom of a parchment lined 9x13 inch pan.

Bake for 15 to 20 minutes in the preheated oven, or until firm and golden then remove to prepare filling.

To make the filling, add diced mango and lime juice to heavy duty blender or food processor and puree until completely smooth.

In a medium sized bowl, whisk together granulated sugar and flour to combine dry ingredients. Next, whisk in the eggs, lemon juice, ¼ cup of the prepared mango puree, and vanilla extract. Pour over the baked crust.

Bake for 25-30 minutes or until no longer liquidy or jiggly. The bars will firm up more as they cool.

Once cooled to room temperature, dust with confectioner's sugar, cut, and serve.

Mangomisu

Ingredients

- 600ml thick cream
- 500g mascarpone cheese
- 2 egg yolks
- 1/3 cup (50g) pure icing sugar, sifted
- 1 vanilla bean, split, seeds scraped
- 3 mangoes, flesh sliced 1cm thick
- Juice of 2 oranges
- 300g savoiardi (sponge finger biscuits)

For raspberry sauce

- ¼ cup (55g) caster sugar
- 250g fresh or frozen raspberries
- Juice of 1 lemon

Method

Line the base of a 22cm springform cake pan with plastic wrap or baking paper, leaving 2cm overhanging. Place the thickened cream, mascarpone, egg yolks, icing sugar and vanilla seeds in a stand mixer fitted with the

whisk attachment and whisk on high speed until stiff and well combined. Chill until needed.

Pour the orange juice in a separate bowl. Dip half the sponge fingers into the juice mixture and layer in the base of the prepared pan. Spread with one-third of the mascarpone mixture, and top with one-third of the mango slices.

Repeat the process, then top with the remaining mascarpone mixture, reserving the remaining mango slices to serve. Cover the cake and chill for 2 hours or until firm.

Meanwhile for the raspberry sauce, place the sugar and 2tbsp water in a small pan over medium heat, stirring to dissolve the sugar. Add the berries and lemon juice, crushing berries slightly.

Stand to cool completely. Pass through a sieve set over a bowl and chill until ready to serve. (You can store the sauce, covered, in the fridge for 3-4 days.)

To serve, carefully remove the sides and base of the cake pan and transfer the mangomisu to a platter. Decorate with curls of the reserved mango, then slice and serve with raspberry sauce.



Mango Pudding

Ingredients

- ½ cup boiled hot water
- 1tbsp unflavoured gelatin (or agar-agar)
- ½cup (100g) granulated sugar
- A pinch of salt
- 1 cup (250ml) coconut milk, or table cream
- 1 cup (250ml) mango puree
- Diced mangoes and shredded coconut - for garnish

Method

In a medium bowl, whisk together the gelatin and boiled hot water until no lumps remain.

Whisk in the sugar and salt until dissolved fully and a smooth in consistency.

Stir in the coconut milk or cream, then mango puree, and mix until mixture is nice and smooth.

Pour into 4 ramekins or small bowls. Cover and chill for a minimum of 2 hours before serving.



Mango with Yoghurt and Almond Praline

Ingredients

- 4 ripe mangoes, peeled, cut into 3cm-thick slices
- ½ cup passionfruit pulp
- 2 cups Greek yoghurt

For almond praline

- ¾ cup caster sugar
- ½ cup flaked almonds - toasted

Method

Combine mango and passionfruit in a bowl. Spoon into eight 1-cup capacity cocktail or serving glasses. Top with yoghurt. Cover and refrigerate for 1 hour or until ready to serve.

Now, make almond praline: Line a baking tray with baking paper. Place sugar and 2 ½tablespoons cold water in a saucepan. Stir over low heat until sugar is dissolved. Increase heat to medium.

Cook, without stirring, brushing down sides of pan occasionally with a wet pastry brush, for 8 to 10 minutes or until deep golden.

Remove from heat. Stir in almonds. Pour toffee mixture in a thin stream onto prepared tray. Stand at room temperature until set.

Break praline into small pieces. Place on top of yoghurt. Serve. You can decorate it more creatively with other toppings.

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take a break

IN TOWN

BEACH CLEANING



The Embassy of India organised a beach cleaning programme at Shatti Qurm last weekend



(Photos: VK Shafeer)

Let's Read Prize Distribution



The prize distribution ceremony for the Let's Read story competition held at Avenues Mall last weekend



BOGGLER

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

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY:

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

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

Weird but True...or False?

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

Sound travels faster through steel than air - True or False?

True - Sound travels about 17 times faster through steel than through air. Molecules in a solid are packed closer together than they are in a liquid or a gas, which allows sound waves to pass more easily through them.

Interesting facts



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

Which body part does a fennec fox use to radiate heat and keep cool?

- a. Their ears
- b. Their tail
- c. Their nose
- d. Their nails

Answer - Fennec foxes - sometimes called 'desert foxes' because they live in desert zones of North Africa and the Sinai and Arabian peninsulas - use their bat-like ears to expel body heat and keep cool. They can also use their giant ears to hear tiny insects moving underground.

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

It might seem like things have gotten out of hand between you and someone close. It's too easy to get caught up in all the high emotion, but you should realize that you want to stop it before it gets too far away from reality. If the situation seems like a bucking bronco, you can either get thrown off or take hold of the reins.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

One of your friends is in quite a hurry to move forward on some plans, and you can expect them to put some pressure on you to commit today. If you're not ready, you're not ready. Tell them to give you more time and why. They should be cool with that as long as you can give them an idea of when you'll be able to give them an answer.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Focusing on what's holding you back or missing isn't going to get you anywhere! Right now, you need to forget about the things you don't like about your life, because the more you think about them, the more power you're giving them. So put a smile on your face and be confident. And if you can't feel confident, then fake it until you do!



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You're in a prime position to learn today. You're open to the unfamiliar, and your quick mind is ready to sort through a confusing matter. Go out and get busy looking for something that will keep your brain humming. A long historical novel, an intellectual foreign film, and an avant-garde art exhibit are the types of things that will feed your intellect and keep you thinking all day long.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You are in charge of teaching yourself new things and should be prepared to seize a learning opportunity when you see it. When you encounter an unfamiliar situation, don't freak out. Instead, mine the episode for insights that can enrich your life. Ask a lot of questions to orient yourself and figure out how to proceed. Don't take a simple yes or no for an answer.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You could find yourself with the interesting problem of having plenty of energy but nothing to do! Are you going to channel all of this energy toward cooking up some new adventure or jump into a coworker's stressful situation and help them sort it all out? It's basically a question of whether you feel selfish or selfless today.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You're approaching a critical point in one of your relationships. Things evolving toward the professional and away from the romantic, but where you would like them to go? You can still correct this course, and the sooner you realize this the better. But if you aren't certain, you need to have a tactful conversation soon.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Getting involved with a cause doesn't always bring you any reward other than the good feeling of helping others. If you're contemplating volunteering or giving your time to some type of charity, you can't expect to gain more than a feel-good vibe. If you do expect more, you just aren't doing it for the right reasons, and the Universe won't count these good karma points.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Something unexpected and exciting could be coming your way today. This could be a new romance, a new job opportunity that lands in your lap, or maybe some wonderful news you've been waiting for. No matter what it is, it will bring a lot of fun into your life. Any scheduling hassles it causes won't be a big deal.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Seek out the people you most respect. Being with them will provide you with positive reinforcement and remind you of what a special person you are. Make sure you have contact with these good people with some regularity. Why aren't they more integrated into your usual social group? It might be time to reconsider your key friendships.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Pay closer attention to your dreams. They may help you identify patterns that could shed a lot of light on your life. Your subconscious mind is working while you sleep, playing out different potential scenarios and showing you alternate ways of looking at the world. Sure, most of the images are weird or even disturbing, but sometimes being disturbed is the best way to wake up.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Veils are being lifted today, and quite a few juicy secrets are going to be shared with you! Unfortunately, most of what you hear will be things that you pretty much knew anyway, so don't expect to be shocked. Although you knew it all along, it's still nice to have your hunches confirmed.

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

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

entertainment



'LORD OF THE RINGS' COMPOSER DREAMS HIS SCORES

Oscar-winning composer Howard Shore has scored landmark hits from *Silence of the Lambs* to *Lord of the Rings*. He says the music emerges from his dreams.

"I like to improvise," Shore told AFP. "I like to read the novel, the play or the script and then I dream and go into a state of improvisational association with the world of the film."

"That's where the music comes from, from dreaming the story," he said. Shore, 76, was present at the Cannes Film Festival on Monday as part of the annual celebration of composers.



LILY-ROSE LAUDS DAD JOHNNY DEPP

Both, Lily-Rose and dad Johnny Depp made appearances at the Cannes Film Festival over the past week for the premieres of their respective projects - *The Idol* and *Jeanne du Barry*. And though the father-daughter duo have yet to make a joint red carpet appearance, Lily-Rose showed her support for Johnny while commenting on the standing ovation his movie received at its May 16 screening.

"I'm super happy for him. I'm super excited," Lily-Rose, 23, told *Entertainment Tonight* in an interview published May 23. "And it's so awesome that we get to do projects that we're super proud of."

FLORENCE PUGH SAYS HER JOINING MCU WASN'T RECEIVED WELL

Although many would look at joining the Marvel Cinematic Universe as a huge career achievement, Florence Pugh said not everyone thought the same when she landed her role.

During an interview with *Time* magazine, published online Tuesday, the actress, who joined the MCU as Yelena Belova with 2021's *Black Widow*, said some people in the independent film community were 'really p***** off'.

"They were like, 'Great, now she's gone forever'," she explained. "And I'm like, 'No, I'm working as hard as I used to work. I've always done back-to-back movies. It's just people are watching them now. You just have to be a bit more organised with your schedule.'"



COMING SOON

THE BOOGEYMAN



High school student Sadie Harper and her younger sister Sawyer are reeling from the recent death of their mother and aren't getting much support from their father, Will, a therapist who is dealing with his own pain. When a desperate patient shows up seeking help, he leaves behind a terrifying supernatural entity.

Genre: Horror

Starring: Sophie Thatcher, Chris Messina, David Dastmalchian

Language: English



COBIE SMULDERS ON WHAT TO EXPECT FROM 'SECRET INVASION'

Cobie Smulders is teasing what fans can expect from Marvel and Disney+'s upcoming series *Secret Invasion*. In a conversation with *People*, the *How I Met Your Mother* alum said that the show is much darker in tone than the previous Marvel Cinematic Universe ones have been.

"It's hard to know who to trust," Smulders said, pointing out that *Secret Invasion* provides insight into the lives of agents who are working to keep Earth safe.

KOURTNEY KARDASHIAN ENDS HER 'BLONDE' ERA

Maybe brunettes, not blondes, have more fun - just ask Kourtney Kardashian. The Kardashians star recently kissed her platinum locks goodbye and officially went back to her roots. Taking to Instagram on May 21, Kourtney unveiled a jet-black look, captioning her post 'brunette4lyfe'.



DICAPRIO PRAISES SCORSESE'S EPIC 'RECKONING WITH PAST'

Leonardo DiCaprio lauded Martin Scorsese's filmmaking 'ferocity' on Sunday as they basked in rave reviews at Cannes for their native American crime epic *Killers of the Flower Moon*, while the festival also bowed down before Jude Law as King Henry VIII. Scorsese's latest opus, about a wave of murders among oil-rich Osage Indians in the 1920s, was hailed as 'searing', a 'triumph' and a 'masterpiece' by critics who scored the Cannes festival's hottest ticket for the premiere the previous night.

DEFENDING THE UNIVERSE AGAIN



HOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOLUME 3

Genre: Fantasy, action

Starring: Chris Pratt, Zoe Saldana, Dave Bautista, Karen Gillan, Vin Diesel

Written and directed by James Gunn, *Guardians of the Galaxy Volume 3* is a 2023 American superhero film based on the Marvel Comics superhero team *Guardians of the Galaxy*, produced by Marvel Studios, and distributed by Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures. It is the sequel to *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014) and *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* (2017), and the 32nd film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU).

In this edition, the Guardians are settling in at Knowhere, a



community in the severed head of a celestial that serves as their home base. With Gamora gone, Peter (Chris Pratt) - Star-Lord - is still grieving, unaware of the fact that somehow Gamora - or, rather, a variant - is alive, sans her memories of him and the Guardians. When, a few minutes into the film, Rocket (voiced by Bradley Cooper) becomes victim to a deadly attack, the team is reunited with a hostile, partially amnesiac Gamora, who is reluctantly dragged into their plot to save him.

While Rocket is in critical condition, Peter and company do some risky snooping through Rocket's traumatic back story to figure out how to save his life and stop the man pursuing him, the High Evolutionary (Chukwudi Iwuj). A powerful god-figure, the High Evolutionary has genetically altered Rocket, other animals and even children to create a perfect race to inhabit his imagined utopia.

A series of scenes take place in a ship fashioned like viscera and innards, with fleshy globules and architectural dendrites, often in nude tones. Squishy sound effects add an unwelcome layer of grossness. MCU fan? Go watch.

Rating ★★☆☆☆