

NEP unveils strategy for Omanisation in logistics sector

Our Correspondent Muscat

The National Employment Programme (NEP) organised a workshop on Monday to devise a strategic approach for Omanisation within the logistics sector. This initiative drew participation of both government and private sector entities.

The workshop's primary goals were manifold - to expand Omanisation prospects in logistics, to nurture expertise tailored to the sector, and to address inherent challenges with solutions aligned to Oman Vision 2040 objectives.

Furthermore, the workshop aimed to define the envisioned Omanisation strategy, illuminating due diligence and sector analysis undertaken to find viable job opportunities.

Azhar bin Ahmed al Kindi, Technical Director of NEP, highlighted the collaborative efforts needed to achieve desired Omanisation levels.

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French govt sees Islamic clothing in schools as 'political attack'

SCHOOL IS IN SESSION

782,818 students to return to classes, 76,724 first-timers

Our Correspondent Muscat

On Tuesday, 782,818 school students will start the new academic year across Oman. A considerable part of this cohort - 76,724 - are first-timers, marking their foray into formal education. Significantly, 29 new schools have been inaugurated this year to accommodate this burgeoning student population.

The grade-wise breakdown shows 304,913 students are enrolled in Grades 1 to 4, 261,804 in Grades 5 to 8, and 120,101 in Grades 9 to 12. Special education programmes, a vital part of Oman's inclusive educational ethos, cater to 1,769 students.

In the context of manpower, the sultanate's government schools boast a substantial workforce of 60,840 teachers, bolstered by 11,509 administrators and technicians. Special education institutions employ an additional 284 teachers and 65 administrative staff.

In an address to the community, Dr Madiha bint Ahmed al Shibaniyah, Minister of Education, conveyed her gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for his unwavering support to the education sector. She congratulated the students and educational staff, and welcomed both domestic and international educators into the fold. "We have made great strides in teacher recruitment this year, hiring over



We have made great strides in teacher recruitment this year, hiring over 5,700 educators, a remarkable 41% increase from the previous year

DR MADIHA BINT AHMED AL SHIBANIYAH

5,700 educators, a remarkable 41% increase from the previous year."

A significant development is the ministry's focus on vocational and technical education. Adhering to global benchmarks, four schools in the governorates of Muscat and North Batinah have introduced courses in business administration and information technology for Grade 11 students. In cooperation with the energy

sector, plans are underway for specialised engineering and industrial courses in the coming academic year.

The minister emphasised a holistic revamp of academic curricula, particularly in science, mathematics, English and information technology.

The ministry is poised for a digital leap, gearing up for seamless integration of artificial intelligence applications into

educational processes. The minister also underscored the significance of extracurricular activities in nurturing well-rounded individuals.

Prof Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambosaidi, Undersecretary for Education in the Ministry of Education, highlighted several ambitious goals, including curriculum development, teacher empowerment and strategic partnerships with the private sector.

MoE to spend RO88mn to support school transportation sector

Muscat - In a push to enhance education sector infrastructure, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has announced significant investments in transportation and school buildings for the academic year 2023/2024.

Majid bin Said al Bahri, Undersecretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs in MoE, announced that an additional RO5mn has been set aside to introduce 800 new buses to the existing fleet.

Giving details, Khamis bin Mubarak al Hadidi, Director General of Projects and Services at the ministry, said, "With the efforts of various educational directorates, we've managed to renew contracts of 18,989 school transportation vehicles. Around RO88mn is channeled towards the school transportation sector for this academic year, with an additional RO4,800,000 allocated for 800 new buses."

Regarding infrastructure, Bahri informed that 39 integrated school buildings are in the pipeline. "Nine of these buildings will commence operations in the beginning of the first semester, followed by 23 in the second semester. The remaining will be operational as soon as these are complete."

Additionally, a sum of RO2,300,000 has been earmarked for educational directorates to rejuvenate existing school premises.

In an effort to create an environment conducive to learning, MoE is also setting aside RO23mn to replace 92,000 air-conditioners during the 10th Five-Year Plan. Furthermore, financial liquidity has been augmented by an additional RO11mn to expedite development projects.

MoE has collaborated with the private sector and Royal Oman Police to fund and implement awareness programmes, including a preventive driving course for school transport drivers.



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Fourth edition of Indian schools' science fest on September 8-9

Our Correspondent Muscat

More than 7,000 students from 21 Indian schools in Oman will take part in the fourth edition of a science festival at Indian School Maabala on September 8 and 9. Called Science, Technology and Innovation (STAI) - 2023, the festival is being held by the school under the aegis of Board of Directors (BoD) of Indian Schools in Oman. The tag line for this year's edition is 'Empower to Innovate.'

During a press conference held at Indian School Muscat, Dr Sivakumar Manickam, Chairman of BoD, Indian Schools in Oman, said, "This is the annual event for science enthusiasts in all Indian schools in Oman. The objective is to be inspired by science, to learn science beyond classrooms and to showcase the creativity of stu-

Child prodigy Soborno Bari, nominated for a Nobel Prize at age nine, will be keynote speaker of the event

dents in this field."

STAI started in 2018 in Indian School Muscat when 16 schools took part. Following a break due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was conducted virtually by Indian School Salalah in 2021. Indian School Darsait hosted it 2022.

"Indian School Maabala has been preparing for the festival for the last one month. The school has already organised similar mega events in the past; it has ex-

cellent experience in hosting such events. We are positive about the outcome."

Participants are expected to have exhibits related to robotics, codecs, Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality among many others. There will also be aptitude tests for interested participants.

Over 6,000 students have registered for the event to date.

The highlight of the event will be its celebrity guest and keynote speaker - the world's youngest professor Soborno Bari, aged 12.

In 2018, when Soborno was just six years old, he was recognised as a scientist by Harvard University. Hailed as 'Einstein of the 21st century,' the Bengali-American prodigy is a Nobel Prize nominee and author.

This edition of the fest will see six non-Indian schools taking part as guests.

MoCIIP works to revamp Oman's exhibition sector

Our Correspondent Muscat

In an effort to strengthen the synergy between public and private entities, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) on Monday organised a workshop to lay the groundwork to expedite development of the exhibition sector in the sultanate.

Central to the workshop was an understanding of the phases involved in amending regulations related to the organisation and management of exhibitions. There was also a comprehensive review of exhibitions held between 2021 and 2023. Particular emphasis was laid on innovative approaches in the industry, touching upon specialised, virtual and innovative exhibitions, with a focus on Gulf products and industries.

Discussions also delved into the complications of obtaining licences to organise events, while emphasising the imperative role of digital payment methods and reflecting upon the tangible economic reper-



cussions of the sector.

Mubarak bin Mohammed al Dohani, Director General of Commerce at MoCIIP, attended the inaugural ceremony with insightful remarks. He underlined the pivotal role of the exhibition sector, highlighting its contribution to Oman's economic landscape. "This sector has been instrumental in fortifying the SME market, enhancing the GDP, facilitating job opportuni-

ties, and fostering the expansion of various projects," Dohani elaborated.

He accentuated the workshop's objectives of illuminating the challenges faced by companies within the sector and charting out solutions. "Our focus is to acquaint attendees with the latest exhibition regulations, framed in Ministerial Decision No 527/2022, and to pave the way for organising companies to

broaden their horizons, thereby attracting a diverse array of regional and international exhibitions and conferences to Oman," he informed.

Recent statistics show the sector's vibrancy. By the close of July 2023, 143 exhibitions had been registered. These included 49 exhibitions dedicated to Omani products and industries, 47 specialised showcases and seven charitable exhibitions.

Event highlighting confluence of cultures in September

Our Correspondent Muscat

Al Falaj Hotel will host a grand cultural soirée on September 28 with an expected audience exceeding a thousand enthusiasts. The highlight of the evening will be the presence of Ramesh Chennithala, Member of Legislative Assembly of Alappuzha,

Kerala gracing the event as chief guest.

Called 'Mizhiv 2023,' it is being organised by Haripad Pravasi Association. The four-hour programme promises a rich tapestry of performances. Notable artists like Abhaya Hiranmayi, Bhagyaraj, Shyam Thrikkunnappuzha, Sumesh Chandran and Rajesh Panavalli

are slated to perform and mesmerise the audience with an array of musical and entertainment acts.

Kailash Nair, President of the association, expressed his enthusiasm, saying, "It's a landmark event for us, not just because we're honouring a legislative member but also due to the variety of socio-cultural presenta-

tions lined up. A special aspect of Mizhiv 2023 is the collaboration between Omani artists and visiting performing maestros, offering a truly distinctive experience. Moreover, our decision to have an Omani lady anchor the event underscores our commitment to intercultural appreciation."

The event is Haripad Pravasi Association's first in Oman.



Pakistan School Muscat

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TRA holds workshop to ease shutdown plans of 3G

Muscat - A workshop was organised by Telecommunications Regulatory Authority on Monday to discuss the shutdown of third-generation mobile services.

The workshop focused on sectors such as banking, public services, and oil and gas, which are likely to be affected by the service discontinuation.

The workshop aimed to raise awareness on the reasons behind ending 3G services and enhancing coordination with various sectors. It also aimed to address major challenges and strategies to ease the transition to 4G and 5G. This approach will help minimise impact of suspension on different sectors in Oman.

The workshop looked into global examples of ending 3G services, and participants received information and relevant statistics. These figures included the number and types of devices functioning solely on 3G technology.



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Two Omani documentaries win international awards

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Two Oman TV productions have been chosen for awards at the joint Arab-European television production festival named ‘Between the Banks’.

The first film *Katm al Anfas* or ‘Holding Breath’ was directed by Issa al Subhi on a script written by Hilal al Zaidi, while the other film *Bawabat Al Jumaa* or ‘Friday Gate’ is a production under Abeer Nasser al Hajri as the director-cum-scriptwriter.

“We are proud of this win,” Issa al Subhi told *Muscat Daily* in his immediate reaction.

The 13-minute film revolves around renowned Omani diver Omar Abdullah al Ghailani, who achieved many international awards in free diving competitions.

The biopic highlights Omar al Ghailani’s 15-year career, the swimming sport - which he in-



(Supplied photo)

herited from his grandfather, the challenges he faced and how he overcame them, Subhi said.

“Cinema in general plays a big role in bringing countries closer together and helps to understand diverse cultures,” he felt. Given that, the film director asserted “the Omani cinema needs a lot of

financial support so that the sultanate can emerge as a soft power with its films”.

“We need to bring more international filmmakers for seminars and workshops on cinema, besides organising international festivals to promote our works as well as broaden our horizon.”

Oman TV’s *Bawabat Al Jumaa* won the Best Documentary Award in the joint Arab-European TV production programme.

The film by Abeer al Hajri topped the productions of 13 Arab and European TV houses.

The documentary was done with Mus’ab al Rawahi as the

cameraman, assistant director Asaad al Busaidi, aerial photographer Mohammed al Hadhrami and editor Alya al Braiki.

Bawabat Al Jumaa is based on events at Souq Nizwa (Nizwa marketplace) on a Friday. “The film documented traditional sale activities at the fruit and vegetable market, auctioning at the livestock market, and accompanying artisanal activities. We have also incorporated popular folklore in the film,” said Abeer.

The documentary is focused on typical personalities in the market, among them Ibrahim al Amri due to his great attachment to his store, which he inherited from his ancestors in Nizwa market, she said, while elaborating on the theme of the film.

The woman director pointed out that the idea behind choosing Nizwa market as the setting was to portray the significance of this place as a social and economic hotspot.

Gulf forum highlights importance of responsible citizenship

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Social Development, in partnership with the Executive Office of the Council of Ministers of Social Affairs from GCC countries, inaugurated the third ‘Gulf Forum for Family Policies’ on Monday in Salalah, Dhofar.

The theme was centred around ‘Exercising Responsible Citizenship and Identity in the GCC Countries’.

Presided over by Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the three-day event witnessed presentations of diverse working papers by prominent experts hailing from Oman and GCC nations.

Mohammed Humaid al Kalbani, Director General of the Directorate General of Social Development in Dhofar Governorate, shed light on the forum’s

The forum has consistently been an influential platform, fostering mutual exchange of knowledge and vision across the GCC

MOHAMMED AL KALBANI

legacy. “The Gulf Forum for Family Policies has consistently been an influential platform, fostering mutual exchange of knowledge and vision across the GCC, particularly concerning family and societal policies.”

Further emphasising the commitment towards societal cohesion, he stated, “In collaboration with pertinent entities, MoSD prioritises examining social phenomena and challenges. Our goal is to devise effective initiatives and solutions that safeguard societal well-being.”

SIA to increase network frequency

Muscat - Singapore Airlines (SIA) will ramp up frequency to destinations across its network during the Northern Summer 2024 operating season - March 31 to October 26 - supporting the strong demand for air travel to its key markets.

This includes increasing flight frequencies to pre-pandemic levels across multiple points and exceeding them in some.

Destinations include Dubai; Beijing and Shanghai in China; Da Nang in Vietnam; Darwin, Melbourne and Perth in Australia;

Tokyo in Japan; and many others.

From March 31, 2024, SIA will mount a new four-times weekly service between Singapore and Dubai with the A350-900 medium-haul aircraft. This will bring services between the two cities from seven-times weekly to 11-times weekly.

JoAnn Tan, Senior Vice-President - Marketing Planning at Singapore Airlines, said, “With the release of SIA’s Northern Summer schedules, our customers can plan ahead and start making their travel plans for 2024.”

Shyamaprasad Kallat, General Manager of Mezzoon Travel, said that the company takes immense pride in representing the world-renowned brand as an airline partner for over 50 years in Oman. “We would carry forward this legacy with a connectivity option through codeshare partners to travel beyond Dubai on Singapore Airlines. With this additional frequency, the airline offers more seamless connections to the rest of the world, catering to elite and premium traffic out of Oman.”

NEP unveils strategy for Omanisation

Continued from Page 01

The efforts include NEP joining forces with stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, the Oman Logistics Centre, and the private sector. These collaborative efforts are channelised towards fostering competency development within the logistics sector, and ensuring Omani talents are primed for roles therein.

Kindi elaborated on the significance of professional standards in logistics, describing it as a key-stone national endeavour. “Omanisation efforts in the logistics sector form a vital bridge between academic institutions and the workforce, enhancing labour market governance and infusing it with a homegrown talent pool versed in sector-specific expertise,” he stated.

He informed that a forthcoming economic study would gauge the ripple effects of Omanisation in the logistics sector.

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- Auction Guarantee:** The guarantee must be transferred along with the auction fee. If the guarantee is not transferred, the bid will be rejected; additional details can be found in the auction form.
- Submission Location:** The bid should be deposited in the tender box at Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG head office located in Ghala before 01:00 PM on the submission date.
- Any bid received after the specified date or if it does not meet the conditions will not be considered.
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BRIEFS

DP World to develop mega terminal in India

DP World recently signed a concession agreement with India's Deendayal Port Authority to develop, operate and maintain a new 2.19mn TEU per annum mega-container terminal at Kandla in Gujarat on India's western coast.

The Deendayal Port Authority awarded the concession in January to develop the mega-container terminal to Hindustan Infralog Private Limited – a joint venture between DP World and National Investment and Infrastructure Fund, India's collaborative investment platform anchored by the Government of India.

The project involves the construction of a mega-container terminal at Tuna-Tekra near the existing Deendayal Port, at a cost of approximately US\$510mn through a Public Private Partnership (PPP).

GCC bank lending remains resilient despite decades-high interest rates

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Bank lending growth in the GCC countries remained strong during the second quarter of 2023 despite interest rates reaching decades-high levels following rate hikes by the US Federal Reserve, indicating strong economic activity and business confidence in the region.

Data from GCC central banks showed growth in lending activity across the region during the second quarter, although the rate of growth decelerated in several other markets. Saudi Arabia recorded the strongest quarter-on-quarter growth in outstanding credit facilities during Q2 2023 at 2.5%, while growth in Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman was below one per cent, according to a report released by Kuwait-based Kamco Investment.

'Aggregate outstanding credit facilities in almost all the countries in the GCC showed sequential growth during the second quarter, mainly led by a robust project market pipeline as well as government efforts to reduce the impact of higher interest rates. Moreover, several new big-ticket projects and reform initiatives were announced in the GCC, giving further boost to corporate



Aggregate gross loans of GCC banks reached a new record high of \$1.91tn at the end of Q2 2023, up 1.9% quarter-on-quarter and 6.5% year-on-year, backed by growth in all markets in the region

lending,' the report said. GCC banks continued to record strong growth in lending during the second quarter,

up 1.9% quarter-on-quarter and 6.5% year-on-year, mainly led by strong growth in banks in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain, according to Kamco Investment.

Net incomes rise

Total net income of GCC banks reached \$13.7bn in the second quarter of 2023, with a quarter-on-quarter increase of 3.5%, supported by both higher net interest income and non-interest income

during the quarter.

'Higher interest rates supported net interest income during the quarter. A decline in loan loss provisions from \$3bn to \$2.7bn also supported the bottom-line performance,' Kamco Investment said.

Meanwhile, rising interest rates had a twin impact on banks globally. On one hand, higher interest rates affected lending, especially in the mortgage market, and at the same time, higher interest rates affected banks' bond holding value, resulting in the failure of some banks in the US and Europe as investors became alert.

In GCC region, Saudi-listed banks once again reported the strongest quarter-on-quarter growth in lending at 2.7% to reach \$640bn at the end of Q2 2023. Bahrain-listed banks were next with a growth of 2.5% in gross loans that reached \$58bn, followed by UAE-listed banks with a growth of 2.1% to reach \$529bn. Banks in Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman reported slightly smaller growth in gross loans during the second quarter.

In terms of types of banks, GCC conventional banks once again recorded a bigger growth in lending during the second quarter, with a growth quarter-on-quarter of 2.2% to reach aggregate conventional loans of \$1.3tn, while Islamic lenders' lending grew at almost half that pace of 1.3% to reach \$596bn.

Deposits grow

Total customer deposits reported by listed GCC banks continued to show growth for the ninth consecutive quarter during Q2 2023, reaching a new record high of \$2.3tn compared to \$2.28tn at the end of Q1 2023.

However, the quarter-on-quarter growth in deposits was the smallest since Q2 2021 at 1.0%, as country-level data showed mixed trends during the quarter.

Bahraini banks reported the biggest quarter-on-quarter increase in customer deposits, reaching \$86bn with an increase of 5.4%. Saudi and UAE banks were next with growth of 1.8% and 1.4%, but with much larger deposits of \$730bn and \$715bn at the end of Q2 2023, respectively.

Qatari and Kuwaiti banks reported a decline in deposits during the quarter, contracting by 0.8% for both countries. Deposits in conventional banks in the GCC grew by 1.1% during the quarter, reaching \$1.64tn, while those in Islamic banks increased at a smaller rate of 0.6% to reach \$660bn.

5 companies shortlisted for Salalah-Thumrait truck road project

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Finance (MoF), in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT), has qualified five companies to compete for the design, construction, financing, operation, and maintenance tender of the Salalah-Thumrait Truck Road (STTR).

The 67km road project, to be developed under a public-private partnership (PPP), will be the first of its kind in Oman, specifically designed for heavy vehicles.

The Ministry of Finance disclosed on Monday that 33 companies participated in the 'Expression of Interest' process, while eight companies took part in the Request for Qualification (RFQ) process.

From the eight firms that expressed interest in the RFQ process, MTCIT has now shortlisted five companies as 'qualified bidders'. The shortlisted companies are Vinci Highways, Strabag Motorway GmbH, China Communications Construction Company Limited,



Plenary Middle East Limited in alliance with international companies, and Bouygues Travaux Publics in alliance with a local company.

The Ministry of Finance had highlighted an additional expressway alongside the existing Salalah-Thumrait road as one of the key projects for implementation in the 2020 budget statement. It was said that trucks will be required to pay a service fee to use the expressway.

In 2022, H E Said bin Hamoud al Ma'awali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, clarified that the toll road system would not be implemented on existing roads used by regular motorists.

In a response to a query by Majlis A'Shura, H E Ma'awali said, "Alternative roads for trucks will not cause any financial burden on citizens. The focus will be on trucks only."

ADES plans IPO on Saudi exchange

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia – ADES Holding Company Group, a leading oil and gas drilling and production services provider in the Middle East and North Africa region, on Monday announced its intention to proceed with an initial public offering (IPO) and the listing of its shares on the Saudi Exchange's Main Market.

On June 21, 2023, the Saudi Capital Market Authority (CMA) approved the company's application for registering its share capital and offering 338,718,754 ordinary shares of the company's total capital by way of sale of 101,615,626 existing shares by ADES Investments Holding Ltd, the Public Investment Fund (PIF) and Zamil Group Investment Ltd (in proportion to their existing shareholding).

The sale shares represent 9% and the new shares represent 21% of the company's issued share capital upon completion of the offering, totalling 30% of the issued share capital. The final pricing of the offer shares will be announced on September 18, 2023, according to a press release.

The IPO of ADES comprises an offer of 338,718,754 ordinary shares, representing 30% of the company's issued share capital (after the increase) through the sale of a mix of existing shares and newly issued shares.



ADES Group has an aggregate fleet of 85 rigs in seven countries

The offer shares will be listed and traded on the Saudi Exchange's Main Market following the completion of the IPO and listing formalities with the CMA and the Saudi Exchange.

ADES's evolving portfolio of services primarily includes onshore and offshore contract drilling and workover services, which include maintenance, repair, and enhancement of oil healthy production.

The group has global-scale operations across seven countries: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, and India.

ADES's key clients are Saudi Aramco, Kuwait Oil Company and North Oil Company in Qatar, which in aggregate represent more than 95% of the group's total backlog as of December 31, 2022 and 82% of revenue from contracts with customers for the year ended 2022.

The group has an aggregate fleet of 85 rigs in seven countries (including three rigs that will be operating in India), including a total of 36 onshore drilling rigs, 46 jackup offshore drilling rigs (of which four are leased), two jackup barges, and one mobile offshore production unit.

Ayman Abbas, chairman of ADES Holding, said, "Since inception, ADES has grown from a local driller operating predominantly in North Africa to one of the largest drilling operators in the MENA region with a fleet of 85 rigs and operations spanning seven countries, including India where three rigs will be operating in 2023. We are now present in the most attractive drilling markets globally and partner of choice for the largest and most reliable energy suppliers around the world."

Oman's fish exports hit RO140mn in 2022

Muscat – Oman's total fish exports by the end of 2022 stood at about 281.601 tonnes, generating RO140.089mn revenue and posting a growth of 15.8% compared to 2021.

The figures issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information indicated that Omani fish exports to the GCC countries stood at about 74,323 tonnes at the end of last



year.

As many as 2,372 tonnes of fish were exported to Europe, 18,996 tonnes to America and 185,909 to other countries.

The sultanate's fish exports varied between fresh fish (64,545 tonnes), frozen fish (200,763 tonnes), crustaceans and molluscs (15,240 tonnes) and other fish (1052 tonnes).

ONA

CBO issues RO23mn treasury bills

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) this week issued two tenders of government treasury bills worth a total RO23mn.

The value of the allotted treasury bills in the first tender amounted to RO21mn, for a maturity period of 91 days.

The average accepted price reached RO98.709 for every RO100 worth treasury bill, and

the minimum accepted price arrived at RO98.705. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 5.17704% and 5.24474%, respectively.

For the second tender, the value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO2mn, for a maturity period of 28 days.

The average accepted price reached RO99.660 for every RO100 treasury bill, and the minimum accepted price also arrived at RO99.660. The average dis-

count rate and the average yield reached 4.43214% and 4.44726%, respectively.

The government treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance. These instruments provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds. The Central Bank of Oman acts as the issue manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through repo.

US, China agree to set up working group to solve commercial issues

Beijing, China - The United States and China will set up a new working group for discussing trade tensions, Washington said Monday, as the world's largest economy seeks to cool tensions with its strategic competitor.

Washington's Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo reached the agreement with her Chinese counterpart in Beijing on Monday, during the latest in a series of high-level trips to China by US officials.

The trips could culminate in a meeting between leaders, with US President Joe Biden saying recently that he was expecting to sit down with China's Xi Jinping this year.

Raimondo met on Monday morning with Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao, describing the economic relationship between the two countries as "the most significant in the world".

The two sides agreed to set up a working group to "seek solutions on trade and investment issues and to advance US commercial interests in China," according to a readout from the US Commerce Department.

The working group is set to meet twice annually, with the US hosting the first meeting next year, according to the readout.

They also agreed to establish what Washington called an "export control enforcement infor-



Gina Raimondo (2nd right) speaks during a meeting with Chin's Wang Wentao (2nd left) at the Ministry of Commerce in Beijing on Monday (AFP)

mation exchange" - described as a platform to "reduce misunderstanding of US national security policies".

The first meeting of the group, to be conducted by assistant secretary-level officials, will take place in Beijing on Tuesday, Washington said.

China and the United States will also aim to have annual meetings between the Commerce Secretary and their Beijing counterpart, Washington said.

"We share \$700bn dollars of trade and I concur with you that it is profoundly important that

we have a stable economic relationship," Raimondo told Wang, according to a separate readout.

"It's a complicated relationship; it's a challenging relationship," she told Wang.

"We will of course disagree on certain issues, but I believe we can make progress if we are direct, open, and practical."

Wang, in turn, told Raimondo it was a "great pleasure to conduct dialogue and coordination with you in the field of economy and trade".

Raimondo arrived in Beijing on Sunday and was met by Lin Feng, the director of the com-

merce ministry's Americas and Oceania department, as well as US Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns.

In posts on the social media platform X, Raimondo said she was "looking forward to a productive few days".

Monday also saw her visit a showcase of US beauty products for the Chinese market at a Beijing hotel, accompanied by Ambassador Burns.

She will later travel to China's economic powerhouse Shanghai, before leaving on Wednesday, the US Department of Commerce said.

Trade tensions

Relations between the United States and China have plummeted to some of their lowest levels in decades, with US trade curbs near the top of the laundry list of disagreements.

Washington says they are crucial to safeguarding national security, but China sees them as seeking to slow its economic rise.

This month, Biden issued an executive order aimed at restricting certain US investments in sensitive high-tech areas in China - a move Beijing blasted as being "anti-globalisation".

The long-anticipated rules,

expected to be implemented next year, target sectors such as semiconductors and artificial intelligence.

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen sought to reassure Chinese officials about the expected curbs during a visit to Beijing last month, promising that any new moves would be implemented in a transparent way.

And Raimondo on Monday told Chinese officials that while there was "no room to compromise or negotiate" on US national security, "the vast majority of our trade and investment relationship does not involve national security concerns".

"We believe a strong Chinese economy is a good thing," she said.

"We seek healthy competition with China. A growing Chinese economy that plays by the rules is in both of our interests."

In June, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken travelled to Beijing, where he met Xi and said progress had been made on a number of key sources of contention. US climate envoy John Kerry also visited China in July.

But none of the visits led to major breakthroughs, and a recent Camp David summit between the United States, South Korea and Japan aimed in part at countering China sparked condemnation from Beijing.

AFP



Mukesh Ambani

Ambani's children to join Reliance board

Mumbai, India - The three children of Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani will become directors of the board of his Indian oil-to-technology conglomerate Reliance, the company said.

Isha Ambani, Akash Ambani and Anant Ambani are already "leading and managing key businesses" of Reliance including in retail, digital services and energy, the company said.

Their names were submitted to shareholders for approval at the annual general meeting on Monday.

India's most valuable company by market capitalisation, Mumbai-headquartered Reliance's multibillion-dollar enterprise has been driven by its oil and petrochemicals businesses. In recent years, the company has diversified into new areas including retail and its telecoms arm Reliance Jio.

AFP

China developer Evergrande plunges 80% as Hong Kong trading resumes

Hong Kong, China - Shares in troubled Chinese property giant Evergrande plummeted nearly 80% in Hong Kong on Monday after the end of a 17-month trading suspension.

The resumption of trading came after the company said in a filing on Friday that it had met guidelines set out by the bourse, including belatedly publishing its financial results and complying with other listing rules.

Once China's largest real estate firm, Evergrande defaulted in 2021 and is saddled with more than \$300bn in liabilities, becoming a symbol of the nationwide property crisis that many fear could spill over globally.

Its shares plunged as much as 87% during morning trading, slashing its market value from a peak of more than \$50bn in 2017 to less than \$600mn.

It finished the day down 79.4%.



A general view of the China Evergrande Centre in Hong Kong (AFP)

The company on Sunday reported fresh losses for the first half of the year amounting to 33bn yuan (\$4.53bn) - an improvement on the 66.4bn yuan in losses reported in the same period last year.

But its cash assets fell from \$2bn last year to \$556mn, reflecting its dwindling liquidity.

China's property market

"cooled down significantly" in the first six months of the year and saw new defaults in the sector, "further exacerbating the volatility in the market", Evergrande said.

"Based on the principles of respecting international restructuring practices and treating the rights and claims of all creditors in a fair and equitable manner,

the company steadily pushed forward the work related to the restructuring of its offshore debts," the firm added.

In March 2022, the Hong Kong stock exchange suspended trading in Evergrande shares after it failed to publish its 2021 financial results.

Its earnings for 2021 and 2022 were published last month, showing a net loss of more than \$113bn over the two-year period.

The company risked being delisted if its shares were suspended from trading for 18 months, according to Hong Kong stock exchange rules.

Evergrande was supposed to hold creditor meetings on Monday on its offshore debt restructuring proposal, but it announced in the afternoon the meetings were delayed - just hours before they were set to take place.

AFP



Shanghai exchange was boosted Monday by China's decision to slash the tax paid on stock trades

Stock markets rise on Fed chief's comments, China boosted by duty cut

Paris, France - Global stock markets advanced Monday on positive sentiment on interest rates and Chinese stimulus measures.

Trading was still animated by Friday's message from US Federal Reserve chief Jerome Powell that left the door open for further increases in interest rates also the possibility they may have reached their peak at a 22-year high of 5.25-5.5%.

While inflation is coming down, a run of strong economic data - particularly on jobs - has been seen by markets as putting pressure on the Fed to keep hiking interest rates.

The Fed's data-dependent approach makes inflation and jobs data out this week even more important before the Fed's next rate-setting meeting next month.

"If the data continues to show an ease in labour market tightness and price pressures, then the Fed is likely done with its tightening cycle," said National Australia Bank's Rodrigo Catril.

"If the data doesn't play ball, then further tightening should be expected. Thus, upcoming key market data releases (inflation and labour market) are likely to set the tone for markets over coming months."

Wall Street opened higher, with the Dow adding 0.5%.

In Europe, both Frankfurt and Paris stocks were up more than one per cent in afternoon trading. London was closed for a public holiday. Asian markets mostly closed higher.

'Positive signal'

Shanghai was boosted 1.1% by China's decision to slash the tax paid on stock trades for the first time since 2008 as authorities battle to support the world's second-largest economy.

Officials also said they would slow the pace of new listings, which usually suck up market liquidity, following a series of pledges from the authorities that have failed to lift optimism.

Analysts at China International Capital Corp said the latest measures beat expectations.

"The increasing force of the policy tools will lift market confidence, amplifying the positive signal for the market," they said.

But Stephen Innes at SPI Asset Management was more sceptical about their potential impact.

"While the emergence of more accommodative measures is encouraging, the reality remains that these interventions seem somewhat fragmented, particularly within the broader context of the substantial property market downturn," he said.

Investors were also keeping tabs on US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo's talks with Chinese counterparts in the latest bid to ease trade tensions between the world's two largest economies.

They agreed to set up a working group on bilateral trade and investment issues.

AFP

Foxconn's billionaire founder Terry Gou announces Taiwan presidential bid

Taipei, Taiwan - Foxconn's billionaire founder Terry Gou announced Monday that he will run for president of Taiwan as an independent candidate.

Gou made his fortune turning Foxconn into the world's largest contract producer of electronics, including for Apple's iPhones.

He has a long-running ambition to become the leader of the self-ruled island, failing this year in an attempt to become the opposition Kuomintang party's nominee for the January election.

"I have decided to join the 2024 presidential race," Gou said at a press conference.



Terry Gou

"I implore the people of Taiwan to give me four years. I promise that I will bring peace to the Taiwan Strait for the next fifty years and lay the deepest

foundation of mutual trust between the two sides."

China considers Taiwan its territory, to be taken one day by force if necessary.

President Tsai Ing-wen, who is wrapping up her second and final term, refuses to accept that position and Beijing has ramped up diplomatic and military pressure on Taiwan since she came into office in 2016.

"The Democratic Progressive Party has been in power for more than seven years, and it has brought the danger of war to Taiwan," Gou said Monday, referring to Tsai's party.

He said he would "never let

Taiwan become the next Ukraine", referring to Russia's ongoing invasion.

But Gou's Foxconn has built huge factories in China, and critics have alleged that he has a cosy relationship with the leadership in Beijing.

In 2019, he stepped down as Foxconn's chief for a failed presidential run.

When asked Monday about his links to the Chinese government given Foxconn's extensive investments in the mainland, Gou said he has not been involved in the firm's management for four years.

AFP

‘Back to School’ season stirs up excitement for all at Mall of Muscat

It is time to celebrate the enchanting flavour of new beginnings and the thrill of learning with ‘back to school’ season. Oman’s leading/preferred shopping destination, Mall of Muscat, the ultimate destination to kick-start the new school year is bursting with excitement as the management announced exclusive promotional activities linked to education and children’s growth.

‘Join the mall in embracing the boundless possibilities of knowledge and growth with its exclusive ‘back to school’ promotion, a tribute to the pursuit of education,’ the mall management stated.

The captivating in-mall activation promotion aims to captivate the hearts of both parents and children, further enriching the shopping extravaganza.

At Mall of Muscat, a realm of imaginative incentives awaits discovery, promising to kindle curiosity and transform the shopping experience into an unforgettable journey.

Amidst the excitement of shopping for school essentials at great prices, an immersive activation centre awaits visitors at the main atrium on the ground floor of Mall of Muscat till August 31. Delighting both parents and children, this hub of engage-



ment promises an array of activities from 4pm to 10pm daily, making each moment a memory to cherish.

Additionally, the weekends are coming alive with captivating performances including enchanting magic shows, delightful clown performances, and mesmerising balloon twisting games that are sure to leave all spell-bound.

Further elevating the campaign brands including Matalan, Skechers, Children International Centre, and Centrepoint are exclusively showcasing their captivating ‘back to school’ merchandise at a special promotional space.

Taking it up another notch, Mall of Muscat has introduced a Kids Discount Card. With this card in hand, young visitors par-

taking in the mall’s immersive activities can receive exclusive benefits at Aquarium, Charley’s Grilled Subs, Cinnabon, Tjewins, Fabyland, and Xtreme Zone.

“We invite everyone to engage, and relish every moment, as Mall of Muscat transforms shopping into a captivating experience for all,” a spokesperson for Mall of Muscat said.

‘Back to school’ season marks a significant milestone for students as well as parents across Oman. “In the spirit of this occasion, we are thrilled to host the highly anticipated ‘back to school’ promotion. Through this initiative, our aim is to instill the upcoming academic year with an extra dose of excitement while providing families with valuable opportunities to save and shop,” he further stated.

Calling it a wonderful chance for families to gather all the essentials for the forthcoming school year, the spokesperson hoped that the parents and guardians would “embrace the savings and the exhilarating atmosphere that this campaign brings”.

“As we embark on this exhilarating ‘back to school’ journey, our vision covers a seamless fusion of shopping, winning, and pure delight for each of our esteemed shoppers.”



Dubai Airshow 2023 to showcase innovations, sustainable future

As the aerospace and defence industries continue on their pathways to net zero, this year’s Dubai Airshow will be the ultimate platform for players from across these industries to convene, bringing the latest solutions that will help advance these crucial economic sectors towards a sustainable future.

The upcoming edition of the airshow will take place from November 13 to 17 at Dubai World Central (DWC), Dubai Airshow Site under the theme of ‘The Future of the Aerospace Industry’.

The industries have taken bold steps towards decarbonisation, with innovation accelerating at an exponential rate. As Dubai Airshow leads up to the United Nations’ annual global climate change conference, COP28, which is also taking place in Dubai towards the end of the year, industry stakeholders will take the opportunity to show-

The upcoming edition of the airshow will take place from November 13 to 17 under the theme of ‘The Future of the Aerospace Industry’

case their latest solutions towards net zero emissions, discuss collaborations and gain new insights.

The aviation industry contributes approximately 2% to 3% of all global CO₂ emissions but with a constant increase in passenger demand, this could rise to 25% to 30% by 2050 if no actions are taken, according to a new report by Frost & Sullivan titled ‘Sustainable Technologies in Aviation’, which raises the ur-

gency on manufacturers, airlines and airport operators to undertake sustainability initiatives.

Additionally, global production capacity for Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) needs to exceed 30bn litres by 2030 and 450bn litres by 2050 for airlines to be able to achieve net zero targets.

In 2020, SAF production was just 450mn litres, according to IATA, which is less than 0.05% of the global demand of jet fuel.

Several initiatives are already underway in the Middle East region. Recently, Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company (Masdar) signed an agreement with Airbus, to support the development and growth of the global SAF market. The agreement will also see the entities collaborating on Green Hydrogen, and Direct Air Capture technologies.

Qatar Airways signed a deal with Shell to source 3,000 metric tonnes of neat SAF.



ahlibank organises summer camp for kids of staff

As part of its endeavours to support a healthy work-life balance for its employees, ahlibank held a summer camp initiative for its employees’ children. This is in line with the bank’s efforts to engage its staff and their families in joyous and meaningful activities, thereby keeping them motivated.

Recognising the need to utilise the summer school holidays in an effective way, ahlibank imple-

mented such initiatives - like the summer camp - to provide engaging fun and educational activities for employees’ children.

Such summer camps aim to offer a chance for children to stay active in safe environments, urge them to be creative, as well as engage and spend quality time with their parents.

Such initiatives fall in line with the bank’s commitment to nur-

turing a positive and stress-free environment for its employees.

Most parents look for productive ways to keep their child busy during long holidays and by offering them an option of a summer camp at work, ahlibank has gone a step ahead in maintaining a stress free and highly driven environment for its employees who are parents.

ahlibank’s summer camp tar-

geted children of different ages, with plenty of edutainment activities. While it is fun, it is also project based and about collaborative effort. It offered a wide array of activities that children took part in. It taught skills that are useful to enhance children’s knowledge on savings, inspiring them to find solutions to problems by action.

ahlibank’s people engagement initiatives have always

been inclusive of its employees. This unique and transformative initiative by ahlibank underscores its unwavering commitment to fostering holistic growth and development in the communities it serves.

The bank remains committed to supporting individuals, and creating a healthy environment for growth, while keeping its employees at the heart of it.

Oman Air further reduces on-board plastic usage with latest initiative



As part of its commitment to sustainable living, Oman Air replaced the plastic used to wrap blankets and mattresses in its premium cabins with an eco-friendly paper-based alternative.

All duvets and mattresses across the airline’s fleet will now be presented to the guests with slim, branded paper bands, resulting in the reduction of up to 21.6 tonnes of plastic per year. The initiative is the latest step for Oman Air as it continues to work towards phasing out the use of single-use plastics on board.

Captain Nasser bin Ahmed Salmi, Acting Chief Executive Officer at Oman Air, said, “In a concerted effort guided by our in-house experts and bolstered by collaborations with partners and vendors, we have successfully achieved another milestone in our sustainability efforts.

“This pivotal step aligns seamlessly with our corporate strategy to reduce waste and choose more environmentally friendly products, reflecting our commitment to national sustainability goals.”

Oman Air has been making steadfast strides in reducing its on-board plastic consumption over the last few years, including removing the plastic sleeves used to load cutlery and reducing

This year, Oman Air has also replaced 80% of its in-flight service carts with lightweight alternatives, providing a considerable boost to fuel efficiency

plastic water bottles and cuplets by up to 50% on certain routes.

This year, it has also replaced 80% of its in-flight service carts with lightweight alternatives, providing a considerable boost to fuel efficiency.

Oman Air’s continual efforts to minimise its environmental impact is demonstrated through a range of initiatives that underscore its dedication to promoting sustainable aviation practices.

Ooredoo joins IoT World Alliance to drive IoT connectivity

Ooredoo Group, a leading enabler of IoT solutions, announced on Monday joining the IoT World Alliance as their newest member and the sole operator representing the Middle East and North Africa region within the Alliance.

The IoT World Alliance is the world’s largest Mobile Network Operator cooperative. Acting as a global forum of telecommunications providers, it is dedicated to tracking IoT connectivity trends and sharing expertise with partners and customers to help reduce the complexity associated with worldwide deployments of connected devices.

As an Alliance member, Ooredoo is now an integral part of global IoT discussions, sharing valuable insights from its extensive presence in the region and gaining access to a powerful programme for exchanging knowledge and experiences. The company’s deep understanding of local regulations, particularly in critical areas of compliance, enhances the Alliance’s knowledge base and strengthens its ability to navigate the complexities of regional markets.

Ooredoo Group will also be able to assist other operators in facilitating seamless connectivity for customers entering the

‘Ooredoo region’. This strategic advantage positions Ooredoo as a key partner for operators looking to expand their IoT services into new markets.

“We firmly believe that strong international cooperation among operators is paramount to driving IoT development worldwide. We are thrilled to join the IoT World Alliance, and we are committed to sharing our extensive know-how gained from successful IoT deployments in our markets,” said Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulla al Thani, Deputy Group Chief Executive Officer.

“By collaborating with the Alliance, we aim to contribute our

expertise in complying with local regulations in the Middle East, North Africa, and Southeast Asia. Together, we will simplify the deployment of connected devices in more countries, empowering businesses to harness the full potential of IoT solutions on a global scale.”

Ooredoo’s membership in the Alliance marks a significant milestone in the group’s commitment to advancing IoT connectivity and collaboration across the globe. Being the sole operator representing the MENA region, Ooredoo will enable the Alliance to expand their coverage to previously untapped regions, unlocking new

opportunities for collaboration and growth.

Mark van den Berg, IoT World Alliance Chairman, said: “We are pleased to welcome Ooredoo as our latest Member of the Alliance, expanding our footprint and knowledge base so businesses can seamlessly deploy connected devices in more countries. Ooredoo will be of great value helping us comply with local regulations in the Middle East, North Africa, and Southeast Asia.”

With the entry, the company reaffirms its commitment to upgrading people’s worlds through innovation and customer-centric solutions.

French govt sees Islamic clothing in schools as ‘political attack’

Paris, France - The wearing of abaya dresses by some Muslim women in French schools is a ‘political attack’, the government’s spokesman said on Monday as he explained a ban announced on the clothing.

Education Minister Gabriel Attal said on Sunday that the long, flowing dresses that originated in the Middle East would no longer be allowed in schools when the new term begins next week because they violate secular laws. Government spokesman Olivier Veran said it was ‘obviously’ a religious garment and ‘a political attack, a political sign’ which he saw as an act of ‘proselytising’ or trying to convert to Islam.

“School is secular. We say it in a very calm but firm way: it is not the place for that (wearing religious clothing),” he told the BFM TV channel.

Attal said on Monday that the government was clear that abayas ‘did not belong in schools’. “Our schools are being tested. These last few months, violations of our secular rules have considerably increased, particularly with regard to the wearing of religious clothing such as abayas or qamis which



French Education Minister Gabriel Attal (centre) attending a meeting at the Bourbon high school in Saint-Denis-de-la-Reunion on August 17 (AFP)

have appeared - and remained - in some establishments,” he told reporters. Attal’s decision to ban abayas has sparked a new debate about France’s secular rules and whether they are used to discriminate against the country’s large Muslim minority.

A law of March 2004 banned ‘the wearing of signs or outfits by which students ostensibly show a religious affiliation’ in schools. This includes large Christian crosses, Jewish kippas and Islamic headscarves.

Unlike headscarves, schools had struggled to regulate the wearing of abayas which were

seen as being in a grey area.

The government has sided with politicians on the right and far-right who had pushed for an outright ban, arguing that they are part of a wider agenda from Islamists to spread religious practice throughout society.

But politicians on the left and many Muslims see France’s secular rules - known as ‘laicite’ - as a front used by conservatives for Islamophobic policies.

They say some women choose to wear abayas, or headscarves, to signal their cultural identity, rather than out of religious belief.

Many conservative politicians have pushed in recent years for the ban on the wearing of religious symbols to be widened to universities and even parents accompanying children on their school outings.

Far-right leader Marine Le Pen campaigned in last year’s presidential election to ban veils from all public streets.

The country’s constitution guarantees citizens the right to practice religion freely, but it imposes an obligation on the state and state employees to respect neutrality.

AFP

Libyan foreign minister suspended over talks with Israeli counterpart

Tripoli, Libya - The leader of Libya’s government said on Sunday that he had suspended his foreign minister after her Israeli counterpart announced he had held talks with her last week in Rome.

Najla al-Mangoush has been ‘temporarily suspended’ and will be subject to an ‘administrative investigation’ by a commission chaired by the justice minister, Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah said on Sunday evening in an official decision posted on Facebook.

The Libyan foreign ministry described it as a ‘chance and unofficial encounter’, but news of the meeting had already led to street protests in several Libyan cities.

The political row broke out on Sunday after Israel’s foreign ministry said the two countries’ foreign ministers had met the previous week.

The statement said Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen and Mangoush, his Libyan counterpart in the Tripoli-based administration, spoke at a meeting in Rome hosted by Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani.

The Israeli statement described it as the first such diplomatic initiative between the two countries. “I spoke with the foreign minister about the great potential for the two countries from their relations,” Cohen said in the statement from Israel’s foreign



Libyans burn tyres as they protest in Tripoli on Monday, following an informal meeting between the country’s FM and her Israeli counterpart (AFP)

ministry.

But the Libyan foreign ministry said Sunday evening that Mangoush had ‘refused to meet with any party’ representing Israel.

“What happened in Rome was a chance and unofficial encounter, during a meeting with his Italian counterpart, which did not involve any discussion, agreement or consultation,” the ministry said in a statement.

The minister had reiterated ‘in

The Libyan foreign ministry described the talks by Najla al-Mangoushit as a ‘chance and unofficial encounter’, but news of the meeting led to street protests in several Libyan cities

a clear and unambiguous manner Libya’s position regarding the Palestinian cause’, the statement added.

News of the meeting had sparked protests in some Libyan cities and a letter from the country’s Presidential Council re-

questing clarification.

The Libyan foreign ministry accused Israel of trying to ‘present this incident’ as a ‘meeting or talks’.

In the Israel foreign ministry statement, Cohen was quoted as saying that the two discussed ‘the importance of preserving the heritage of Libyan Jews, which includes renovating synagogues and Jewish cemeteries in the country’.

“Libya’s size and strategic lo-

cation offer a huge opportunity for the State of Israel,” he added.

There was no immediate confirmation of the meeting from Rome.

Street protests

Earlier on Sunday evening, Libya’s Presidential Council requested ‘clarifications’ from the government, according to Libya al-Ahrar TV, citing correspondence from spokeswoman Najwa Wheba.

The Presidential Council, which has some executive powers and sprang from the UN-backed political process, includes three members representing the three Libyan provinces.

The letter said that this development ‘does not reflect the foreign policy of the Libyan state, does not represent the Libyan national constants and is considered a violation of Libyan laws which criminalise normalisation with the ‘Zionist entity’.

It asked the head of government ‘to apply the law if the meeting took place’.

On the streets of Tripoli and its suburbs, protests erupted on Sunday evening in a sign of refusal of normalisation with Israel. The protests spread to other cities where young people blocked roads, burned tyres and waved the Palestinian flag.

Like several other North African countries, Libya has a rich Jewish heritage.

AFP

Israel strikes force closure of Syria airport, says state media

Damascus, Syria - Israeli air strikes on Aleppo airport in northern Syria caused the grounding of flights on Monday, Syrian state news agency SANA reported, citing a military source.

During more than 12 years of civil war in Syria, Israel has launched hundreds of air strikes on its territory, primarily targeting Iran-backed forces and Lebanese Hezbollah fighters as well as Syrian army positions.

“At about 4:30am (0130 GMT) this morning, the Israeli enemy undertook an aerial aggression from the direction of the Mediterranean west of Latakia, targeting Aleppo International Airport,” the source said, adding that this resulted in damage to the runway.

Israel rarely comments on strikes it carries out in Syria, but has repeatedly said it will not allow its arch-foe Iran to expand its presence in the country.

An Israeli army spokesperson on Monday told AFP: “We do not comment on reports in the foreign media.”

Syrian transport ministry official Suleiman Khalil said the damage centred on the only functioning runway, adding that ‘maintenance teams will start repair work today to return the airport to service as quickly as possible’. Flights were diverted to Damascus and Latakia airports, he told AFP.

AFP

Eight US Marines in hospital after deadly Australia crash

Darwin, Australia - Eight US Marines were in hospital on Monday - one of them in intensive care - following a military aircraft crash in northern Australia that killed three of their comrades, authorities said.

Twenty-three Marines were on board the Boeing MV-22B Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft when it crashed on Melville Island, north of Darwin, on Sunday morning during a military exercise for locally based troops.

Northern Territory Chief Minister Natasha Fyles said eight Marines were still receiving treatment and that she wanted to ‘assure their families that they are getting the best care possible and we’re working to ensure they’re supported’.

Authorities have launched an investigation into what caused the crash and efforts are also under way to recover the remains of the three dead marines.

An exclusion zone has been established around the crash site. Northern Territory Police Commissioner Michael Murphy told reporters the recovery and



Police personnel push equipment on trolleys on the tarmac of the Darwin International Airport in Darwin on Monday (AFP)

investigation would be ‘prolonged, enduring and complex’, adding that officials were expecting to be at the crash site for ‘at least 10 days’.

‘Absolutely everything’ was being dedicated in terms of resources, he said.

He had earlier told local media that the aircraft hit the ground in ‘heavy bushland’ but emergency responders were helped in their initial efforts by the location of a nearby airstrip.

Being able to land so close to

the crash site had allowed casualties to be treated more quickly and ‘probably saved some lives’, he said.

Air traffic control broadcasts from Darwin airport after the incident included communications from the site describing dark smoke and a ‘significant fire’, but Murphy said he could not comment on why the Osprey had crashed. US President Joe Biden led tributes to the troops involved in the incident.

AFP

New airport sparks unlikely global dreams in isolated north Cyprus

Nicosia, Cyprus - Isolated for almost half a century, the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus has just opened a half-billion-dollar airport terminal in the hope of boosting tourism.

Only Ankara recognises the statehood of the TRNC, whose sole source of flights is Turkey, but the new terminal has left it dreaming of international connections. Cyprus has been divided since 1974 when Turkey invaded the east Mediterranean island in response to a Greek-sponsored coup.

The northern third is inhabited by Turkish Cypriots, Turkish colonists and the military, while Greek Cypriots are the majority in the internationally recognised south. United Nations peacekeepers patrol a buffer zone that divides the two parts of the sun-drenched resort island.

Its airspace is also split.

The International Civil Aviation Organization, a United Nations agency that coordinates standards in the sector, does not



Travellers walk at the duty-free shops area at the newly-inaugurated terminal of Ercan airport (AFP)

recognise the TRNC.

Mustafa Sofi, the north’s director of civil aviation, said it controls the northern part of the Nicosia Flight Information Region (FIR), as well as Ankara FIR under ‘special arrangement’ for a total of 92,500sqkm (35,714 square miles). Ercan airport and its new terminal, on the edge of north Nicosia, is ‘not recognised by the

international aviation community’ in accordance with UN resolutions, officials from the Republic of Cyprus Department of Civil Aviation told AFP. The officials, who declined to be identified, said there is not even indirect communication with Ankara FIR since Turkey ‘cut the direct telephone line’ after the invasion.

The Republic controls airspace

only over the southern part of the island, whose Nicosia international airport is decaying inside the buffer zone, unusable since the invasion.

Larnaca hosts the main airport in the south, where aircraft bringing tourists land alongside a popular beach in the European Union member state.

AFP

Niger: Deadline looms for French envoy's exit

Thousands of people demonstrated on Sunday near Niamey airport in support of last month's coup

Niamey, Niger - Thousands of people demonstrated on Sunday in Niger in support of last month's coup, a few hours before the deadline given to France's ambassador in an ultimatum to leave the country.

Demonstrators gathered near the French military base in the capital Niamey, some waving Nigerien or Russian flags, others with placards calling for the departure of French troops.

Former colonial power France still has 1,500 soldiers based in Niger. They had been helping the deposed President Mohamed Bazoum in the fight against militant forces active there - before military officers toppled him in the July 26 coup. The National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland (CNSP) led by General Abdourahmane Tiani has detained him and his family at the presidential palace.

Sunday's rally started at dawn on a roundabout near the Niamey airport by the Nigerien air



Supporters of the Niger's CNSP gather at a demonstration outside the Niger and French airbases in Niamey on Sunday (AFP)

The French say that Niger is a poor country, but when we tell them to go home, they refuse

ADAMA ASSANE

base where the French force is located, as demonstrators answered an appeal from organisations backing the country's new rulers.

"We don't want the French army in Niger," said one demonstrator, Abou Kountche. "Let the French leave."

"The French say that Niger is a poor country, but when we tell them to go home, they refuse," said restaurateur Adama Assane.

48 hours to leave

The demonstration comes after a month of rising tensions and anti-France protests in Niger.

On Friday, Niger's foreign ministry announced that French ambassador Sylvain Itte had 48 hours to leave, saying he had refused to meet with the new rulers and citing French government actions that were 'contrary to the interests of Niger'.

Paris has rejected the demand and said the 'putschists do not have the authority to make this request', insisting that the government of Bazoum that they had overthrown remained the legitimate authority.

On Saturday some 20,000 people rallied in the Seny Kountche stadium to support the country's new military rulers and call for the removal of French soldiers. France has consistently backed calls by the West African bloc ECOWAS for the reinstatement of president Bazoum. A hostile rally outside the French embassy on July 30 prompted Paris to organise the voluntary evacuation of its citizens.

AFP

Tropical Storm Idalia forms near Mexico, heads to Florida

Miami, US - Tropical Storm Idalia formed on Sunday in the Caribbean, buffeting southeastern Mexico with wind and rain, as forecasters predicted it will strengthen to a hurricane before reaching Florida later in the week.

The storm, which is not forecast to make landfall in Mexico, will travel across the Gulf of Mexico before reaching north-west Florida, the US National Hurricane Center said.

Idalia will create 'increasing risk of life-threatening storm surge and hurricane-force winds along portions of the west coast of Florida and the Florida Panhandle beginning as early as Tuesday', the NHC warned.

"There is considerable spread in the model intensity guidance, ranging from minimal to major hurricane status before landfall on the northeast Gulf coast," the NHC added.

The NHC predicted Idalia will have made landfall in Florida by 7am (1100 GMT) on Wednesday, in an image showing the storm's likely path.

At 0300 GMT on Monday, Idalia was swirling in the Caribbean, headed northeast with maximum sustained winds of 60 miles (95km) per hour, the



This image obtained from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration shows Tropical Storm Idalia off the coast of Mexico (AFP)

NHC said.

Storm surge and hurricane watches have been issued for parts of Florida's coast and scattered flash flooding can be expected, the NHC said.

Governor Ron DeSantis has declared a state of emergency in 33 counties in preparation for the storm's arrival.

In the Mexican state of Quintana Roo, home to Cancun and other coastal tourist resorts, Idalia dumped rain and put a damper on one of the last weekends of summer vacations.

Heavy rainfall is expected across parts of the eastern Yu-

catan in Mexico and western Cuba.

A week ago, Hilary, which at one point rose to a Category 4 hurricane on the five-point Saffir-Simpson scale, hit the state of Baja California on Mexico's Pacific coast as a tropical storm, causing one death and damaging infrastructure.

Hurricanes hit Mexico every year on both its Pacific and Atlantic coasts.

Scientists have warned that storms are becoming more powerful as the world gets warmer due to climate change.

AFP

Japan postpones launch of 'Moon Sniper' for third time

Tokyo, Japan - Japan's space agency on Monday postponed for the third time the launch of its 'Moon Sniper' lunar mission due to strong winds just half an hour before launch.

The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) gave no new date for the launch, which comes after India successfully landed a probe on the Moon last week. The rocket, set for launch from the southern island of Tanegashima, will also carry a research satellite developed by JAXA, NASA and the European Space Agency. Tatsuru Tokunaga, a Mitsubishi Heavy Industries official in charge of the launch, told reporters the mission was postponed as 'upper winds did not meet the launch conditions' and that it would take 'at least three days' to prepare for another attempt.

The firm said the launch needs to happen before the current window expires on September 15. Last week, India landed a craft near the Moon's south pole in a historic triumph.

Previously, only the United States, Russia and China had managed to put a spacecraft on the lunar surface, and none on the south pole.

India's success came days



'Smart Lander for Investigating Moon' (SLIM) at satellite fairing assembly building at the Tanegashima Space Center

after a Russian probe crashed in the same region, and four years after a previous Indian attempt failed at the last moment.

Japan has also tried before, attempting last year to land a lunar probe named Omotenashi, carried on NASA's Artemis 1 mission, but the mission went wrong and communications were lost with the craft.

In April, Japanese start-up ispace failed in an ambitious attempt to become the first private

company to land on the Moon, losing communication with its craft after what the firm called a 'hard landing'.

The 'Moon Sniper' is so called because JAXA is aiming to land its lightweight 'Smart Lander for Investigating Moon' (SLIM) within 100 metres (330 feet) of a specific target on the Moon.

This is far less than the usual range of several kilometres.

Using a palm-sized mini rover developed with a toy company,

SLIM aims to investigate how the Moon was formed by examining exposed pieces of the lunar mantle. Japan has also had problems with launch rockets, with failures after liftoff of the next-generation H3 model in March and the normally reliable solid-fuel Epsilon the previous October. Last month, the test of an Epsilon S rocket, an improved version of the Epsilon, ended in an explosion 50 seconds after ignition.

AFP

Federal judge to set date for US versus Trump trial

Washington, US - A federal judge is expected to set a date on Monday for what could be one of the most momentous trials in American history: the United States of America versus Donald J. Trump.

Special counsel Jack Smith has asked for the trial of the 45th US president - who faces charges of conspiring to overturn the 2020 election which he lost - to begin on January 2, 2024.

Trump's attorneys have countered with a proposed date of April 2026 - well after the November 2024 election in which the real estate tycoon is seeking to return to the White House.

US District Court Judge Tanya Chutkan is to entertain the arguments of both sides at a 10am (1400 GMT) hearing on Monday at a federal courthouse in the nation's capital.

Chutkan's trial date decision could have a pivotal impact on Trump's hopes of capturing the 2024 Republican presidential



(L-R) Judge Tanya Chutkan, former US President Donald Trump and special counsel Jack Smith (AFP)

nomination and the White House.

The 77-year-old Trump has been slapped with four criminal indictments this year - twice by Smith and once each by state prosecutors in New York and Georgia.

But the case before Chutkan may pose the greatest legal peril to Trump - particularly if it ends up being the first on what is shaping up to be a busy legal calendar for the former president.

"Judge Chutkan will likely set

the trial to begin closer to the January 2, 2024 date that Smith proposed than the spring 2026 date that Trump proposed," said Carl Tobias, a law professor at the University of Richmond.

"She already warned Trump in open court that she would start the trial earlier if he did not stop making remarks that could intimidate or threaten jurors and witnesses," Tobias told AFP.

Whit Ayres, a veteran political consultant, said the order of the trials is very important.

"If she sets the trial date for January 2, as she might, then I think it becomes a major, major event in the presidential race," Ayres said in an online interview with Bill Kristol, a conservative Republican commentator turned staunch Trump critic.

"That would allow a trial, if it lasts four to six weeks, to finish before Super Tuesday (March 5, 2024), before the vast majority of Republican primary voters vote," Ayres said.

Trump is to go on trial in New York in March on charges of paying election-eve hush money to a porn star and in Florida in May for allegedly mishandling top secret government documents.

Trump and 18 co-defendants also face racketeering charges in Georgia over their efforts to overturn the 2020 election result in the southern state.

The judge presiding over the Georgia racketeering case has not yet set a firm date for that trial to begin.

The case before Chutkan accuses Trump of conspiracy to defraud the United States and conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding - the January 6, 2021 joint session of Congress that was attacked by a mob of Trump supporters.

Trump, the sole defendant in this indictment, is also accused of seeking to disenfranchise American voters with his false claims he won the 2020 election.

Ayres said that if Trump, who currently enjoys a commanding lead over the Republican 2024 field, is acquitted in his first trial he would be all but certain to win the party's presidential nomination. "I don't know any way you'd stop him," he said.

"But if he gets convicted of a serious felony charge, I don't know how people would react to that, because we've never had anything remotely close to a similar situation," the Republican pollster said.

AFP

Japan summons China ambassador over Fukushima crank calls

Tokyo, Japan - Japan summoned China's ambassador on Monday to protest against a flood of nuisance calls from China to local businesses following the release of water from the Fukushima nuclear power plant.

Deputy Foreign Minister Masataka Okano told ambassador Wu Jianghao that China should properly inform the public 'rather than unnecessarily raising people's concerns by providing information that is not based on scientific evidence', the foreign ministry said in a statement.

Last week, China banned all seafood imports from its neighbour after Japan began releasing cooling water from the stricken Fukushima plant in an

operation that Tokyo and the UN's nuclear watchdog have said is safe. Since then, apparently randomly chosen Japanese businesses ranging from bakeries to aquariums have received reportedly thousands of sometimes abusive crank calls from Chinese numbers.

Social media users in China have posted recordings and videos of these calls, some of which have attracted tens of thousands of likes and a large number of comments.

"Since the start of the discharge... there have been numerous phone calls and other harassment regarding the discharge that are suspected of originating from China," Okano told Wu.

AFP

Ukraine says recaptured village on southern front

Kyiv, Ukraine - Ukraine announced on Monday it had recaptured a village on the southern frontline, where its forces are hoping for a breakthrough in their grinding offensive against entrenched Russian positions.

Kyiv launched its pushback in June after stockpiling Western-supplied weapons, building up assault battalions and attacking Russian positions. But officials in Kyiv have acknowledged that progress has been slow and Moscow says Ukrainian forces are running out of resources.

"Robotyne has been liberated. Our forces are advancing south-east of Robotyne and south of Mala Tokmachka," Deputy Defence Minister Ganna Malyar said on television.

Both settlements are in the southern region of Zaporizhzhia, one of four that the Kremlin claimed to have annexed last year despite not having military control over any of them.

Ukraine's limited advances on the southern front have spurred a political debate in Western capitals over political and military support for Kyiv.

Compared to previous offensives in the Kherson and Kharkiv regions, Ukrainian forces are crashing into Russian defensive lines of trenches and minefields that are kilometres deep.

But experts say that the capture of Robotyne is evidence Ukrainian force can puncture Russian lines as they move towards the Black Sea.

'Intense' fighting
The US-based Institute for the



Ukrainian law enforcement officers stand next to the burning industrial facility following a missile strike in the village of Hoholeve on Monday (AFP)

Robotyne has been liberated. Our forces are advancing southeast of Robotyne and south of Mala Tokmachka

GANNA MALYAR

Study of War said Russia had 'committed a considerable amount of materiel, effort, and manpower to hold the series of defensive positions that Ukrainian forces are currently penetrating'. Apart from clawing back several hamlets in the south, Ukrainian forces have pressured

the flanks of Bakhmut, a war-scarred town in the east captured by Russia in May.

Malyar said on Monday that Ukrainian troops were advancing south of Bakhmut and that they had recaptured one square kilometre (around one-third of a square mile) there over the last

week of fighting.

She also acknowledged a Russian push to take back territory in the northeast of Ukraine, describing fighting in the Kharkiv region as 'very intense' over the past week.

Ukrainian officials have estimated that Russia has committed around 100,000 additional troops to frontlines in the northeast to pressure defensive lines.

British intelligence services have said Russia could try to divert Ukrainian military resources by solidifying their positions in Kharkiv.

While movement on the frontline has been stilted, both sides have pursued aerial assault campaigns.

A Russian missile strike overnight on an industrial facility in the central region of Poltava had left two dead and several wounded, Ukraine's presidency said.

Images released by Kyiv showed law enforcement officials standing next to a large blaze engulfing part of a factory with plumes of black smoke billowing into the sky.

AFP

Zimbabwe leader contests official re-election of Mnangagwa

Harare, Zimbabwe - Zimbabwe's opposition leader Nelson Chamisa on Sunday contested the official re-election of President Emmerson Mnangagwa and claimed victory in an election which international observers said fell short of democratic standards.

Mnangagwa, 80, won a second term with 52.6 per cent of the ballots against 44 per cent for his main challenger, Chamisa, 45, according to official results announced late on Saturday by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC).

The opposition Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) refused to ratify the results, asserting that they were 'false'.

"We have won this election. We are the leaders. We are even surprised why Mnangagwa has been declared a leader," Chamisa, a lawyer and pastor who heads the CCC, told a press conference in the capital Harare.

Zimbabweans voted on Wednesday and Thursday for a president and new parliament, in polling marred by delays that sparked opposition accusations of rigging and voter suppression.

"We knew we were going into a flawed election. We have a flawed voters roll, a flawed delimitation report. We had a flawed ballot. It was a flawed electoral environment," Chamisa said. Earlier in the day at the presidential palace, Mnangagwa challenged those who contested his re-election to go to court.

"Those who feel the race was not run properly should know where to go to," he said.

The vote has been watched



Nelson Chamisa (AFP)

across southern Africa as a test of support for Mnangagwa's ZANU-PF party, whose 43-year rule has been accompanied by a moribund economy and charges of authoritarianism.

The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres voiced concern on Sunday about 'the arrest of observers, reports of voter intimidation, threats of violence, harassment and coercion'.

Guterres issued a statement urging all sides to 'peacefully settle any disputes through established legal and institutional channels' and resolve disputes 'in a fair, expeditious, and transparent manner to ensure that the results are a true reflection of the will of the people'.

Foreign monitors announced on Friday that the elections had failed to conform to regional and international standards.

Observer missions from the European Union, the Commonwealth and the 16-nation Southern African Development Community (SADC) listed a number of concerns, including the banning of opposition rallies.

AFP

India's Chandrayaan-3 rover in a race against time

Bengaluru, India - Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on Monday informed that Pragyan Rover came across a 4-metre diameter crater on the lunar surface on Sunday.

Taking to X (former Twitter), ISRO said: "Chandrayaan-3 Mission: On August 27, 2023, the Rover came across a 4-metre diameter crater positioned 3 metres ahead of its location. The Rover was commanded to retrace the path."

ISRO said that the rover is now safely heading on a new path.

Earlier, Nilesh M Desai, the director of Space Applications Centre (SAC), said that the Chandrayaan-3's rover module Pragyan, moving on the surface of the moon, is in a 'race against

time' and that the ISRO scientists are working to cover a maximum distance of the uncharted South pole through the six-wheeled rover.

He said that the moon mission's three main objectives were: soft landing on the lunar surface, movement of the Pragyan rover and obtaining science data via payloads, attached to the six-wheeled rover and lander Vikram.

"Our two main objectives have been accomplished successfully, but our third objective is underway," the scientist said.

Observing that the Pragyan rover is in a race against time, he said: "Our focus is to make the rover cover as much distance of the moon's South pole as possible so that it conducts

more experiments and we obtain data here on earth."

"We have only 14 days in total for this mission, which is equal to one day on the moon, so four days have been completed. The more experiments and research we can do in the remaining ten days will be important. We are in a race against time because in these 10 days, we have to do maximum work and all the ISRO scientists are working on it," Desai said.

India took a giant leap on August 23, as the Chandrayaan-3 lander module successfully landed on the moon's South pole, making it the first country to have achieved the historic feat.

ANI

Rights groups slam 'cruel' Taliban ban

Kabul, Afghanistan - Rights monitors condemned on Monday a ban on women visiting one of Afghanistan's most popular national parks, the latest curb shutting women out of public life under Taliban government rule.

The Taliban government's morality ministry closed the Band-e-Amir national park to women at the weekend, claiming female visitors were failing to cover up with proper Islamic dress.

The park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site 175km (110 miles) west of Kabul, is renowned for its striking blue lakes surrounded by sweeping cliffs.

The Bamyan province park is a hugely popular spot for domestic tourism and is regularly swarmed with Afghans relaxing at the shore or paddling the waters in rented boats.

Human Rights Watch's Associate Women's Rights Director



This file photo shows people sitting on paddle boats at the Band e-Amir lake on October 4, 2021 (AFP)

Heather Barr told AFP the decision to ban women was 'cruel in a very intentional way'.

"Not content with depriving girls and women of education, employment and free movement, the Taliban also want to take from them parks and sport and

now even nature," she said in a separate statement. "Step-by-step the walls are closing in on women as every home becomes a prison," she said.

The Minister for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice Mohammad Khalid Hanafi

justified the ban on Saturday on the grounds women were failing to wear hijabs properly.

"We must to take action from today. We must prevent the non-observance of hijab," he said during a visit to Bamyan province.

AFP

Migrants' perilous trip past buoys, razor wire to reach Texas

Eagle Pass, US - With their two children on their shoulders, Wilfredo Riera and Nataly Barrionuevo waded into the Rio Grande from the Mexican shore, the water soon reaching their waists.

Avoiding the string of large orange buoys placed by Texas authorities to block their passage, they slog on towards the United States.

From their starting point at Piedras Negras in Mexico's Coahuila state, they cross to Eagle Pass in south Texas, where that state's governor, Greg Abbott, has deployed the military in an effort to stem the

migrant flow.

It is 2pm (1200 GMT) on a Friday, with the heat index hovering above 105 degrees Fahrenheit (40 degrees Celsius). The US military vehicle that had been guarding the area earlier has left.

The buoys extend for nearly 1,000 feet (300 metres). They are designed to spin if someone tries to climb onto them, and have sharp, serrated metal disks on either side. The lifeless body of one person was found caught in the buoys in recent weeks.

Riera, a 26-year-old Venezuelan, crosses the river with his family and more than a



A mother helps her child over the barbed wire fence in Eagle Pass, Texas, after crossing into the US from Mexico on August 25 (AFP)

dozen other migrants, far from the buoys.

They had been warned about the buoys, he said, but were told 'there was a way around them'.

The crossing takes about 10 minutes. Then the group encounters a seemingly endless barrier of razor-wire fencing.

Finding a weak spot, they clamber over.

'To give ourselves up'
"We want to give ourselves up," Riera says. But there are no guards.

A hot wind blows. The only sound is the faint chirping of lizards in the riverside vegeta-

tion. The group encounters another fence, 10 feet high. The migrants throw pieces of clothing atop its barbs so they can climb over.

Perched atop the fence, Barrionuevo, 39, waits for her husband to catch up along with Nicolas, seven, and two-year-old Yeiden.

The razor wire rips into their clothes - but now they are smiling, finally in the United States.

The family had left Ecuador six weeks earlier in search of a better life. The journey included a rugged passage through the notoriously hazardous Darien Gap in the mountains between

Colombia and Panama.

But now a border police van has pulled up. An officer gets out and asks the group, in Spanish, to show their documents.

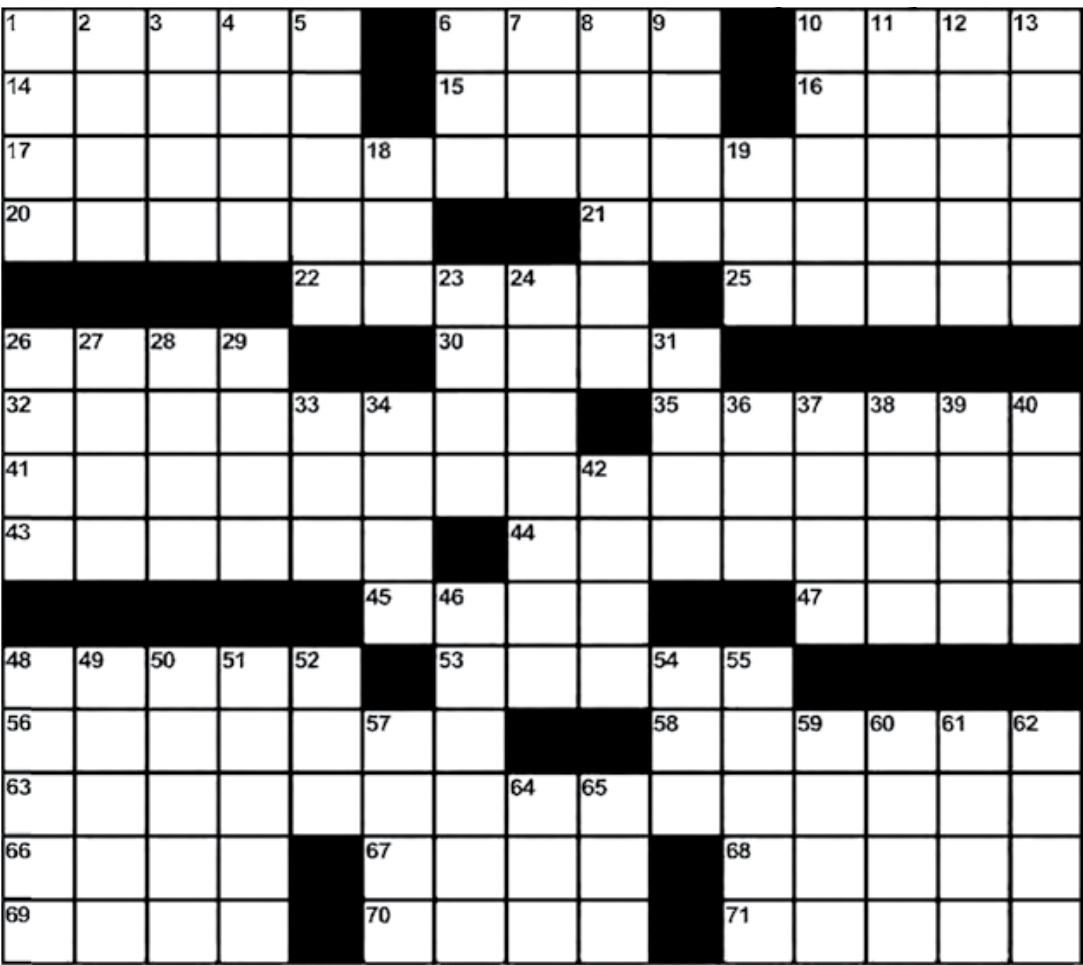
The men are searched. Then the group is placed in a van to be taken to a detention center.

There, officials will assess their asylum requests - either they will be allowed to enter the country until a judge hears their case, or else they will be deported.

"We want to work, to make a future for them," Barrionuevo says, looking at her boys, her voice breaking.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Luxurious country dwelling
6) "Touched by an Angel" star Downey
10) Having wings
14) Dodge
15) Some small batteries
16) South American nation
17) Shortened weapon
20) Went after
21) College course outlines
22) Even a trey beats it
25) "Blowin' in the Wind" singer Bob
26) Autumnal birthstone
30) Verbal feistiness
32) Backslides
35) Freetown currency units
41) Gulf Coast fish
43) Bone-related
44) Electric-motor part
45) Volcanic output
47) Chilly powder?
48) '70s dance ha! I
53) Computer language
56) "1984" location
58) Motley, as an army
63) Became important to the police

DOWN

- 1) Ming valuable
2) Three-time French Open champ Lend!
3) Rock-bottom prices
4) In_ of (rather than)
5) Tacked on
6) Churchill's "so few" (Abbr.)
7) Clumsy guy
8) Holy Communion celebrations
9) Covered with soot
10) In a fitting way
11) Permitted by law
12) Caribbean cruise stop
13) Encounter with the law
18) "To a " work
19) Like an octogenarian
23) Like auction merchandise
24) Source of tapioca
26) Approximately
27) Invigorates (with "up")
28) What little things mean?
29) "Better_ than never"
31) In baseball, it's grand
33) Bake sale sponsor, sometimes
34) Be a successful pitcher?
36) Airport listing, for short
37) Doggie-bag contents
38) Sentence necessity
39) Money of the Continent
40) Beef dish
42) Important times in history
46) Degraded
48) Seek water, in a way
49) More frosty and slippery
50) Brief brawl
51) Tilts to a side
52) _ in a million
54) Keogh plan relative
55) Source of chocolate
57) Land in the ocean
59) Snatch
60) It can wear on you while traveling
61) "Famous" cookie maker

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

It is easier to just go where you're told to go and do what you're told to do in life, but if you do that you'll never know if where you end up was where you really wanted to be. Today, it's important for you to get back in control of the choices you're making. Don't give the decision-making power over to someone else just because doing the necessary research is too much work or the choice you really want to make might alienate some people. You have to go your own way!



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Your support means a lot to a friend who's just started something new in their life. A lot of people are skeptical about this person's latest venture, so hearing from you that you're wishing them well could boost their spirits quite a bit. Share your feelings with them, and watch the look on their face turn from doubt to hope in front of your eyes. They've been there for you so many times, now be there for them. Don't forget that you are connected to your friends in a very deep way.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You're working on too many good ideas right now to be held back by anyone or anything, so if people are trying to put restrictions on what you can do today, work your way around them. Unless it's the big boss dictating a firm rule, you don't have to obey anyone today except yourself. You are the captain of your ship, and you get to steer it wherever you want to go. Just fulfill your own goals. Worry about following all the rules later.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

There are so many reasons for you to think positively about your life, so try not to focus on just the bad stuff. If you can just stop and let yourself see your life with clear eyes, you should be able to sense a new beginning coming, one that will give you the confidence you need to move into a new direction. Why not take a chance on someone who's new to the scene? Add a bit of risk to your life right now, and you'll embark upon a very exciting path.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Determination is your middle name today, so if you encounter any obstacles on your path, you'll be able to treat them like minor setbacks and then move on full steam ahead! Nothing is going to stop you. This is especially good news if you have a busy day planned, because even one distraction could disrupt your entire schedule. Stay alert, and at the first sign of trouble figure out your plan of attack. And keep in mind that sometimes the best plan is to just walk away.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

When opinions are bandied about today, make sure yours are included in the mix. Your thoughts are just as valuable as anyone else's, probably more so. You are closer to this issue than most people. Someone in authority is trying to make an important decision, and your insight could provide them with the missing information they've been looking for. It just goes to prove that when you share your thoughts, you're not just thinking out loud. You could be helping someone.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

It might not be your first choice to work with a partner today, but it could actually turn out to be an extremely rewarding experience for you, especially if you focus on what they offer to the project or task at hand. Sure, there could be one or two conflicts between you, but if you put your ego aside, you'll come to understand that what they bring to the table is pretty innovative and intelligent. Be humble and don't get in your own way today.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

After a series of odd surprises, you might have to adapt your plans. Luckily, you'll be with people who aren't too set in their ways, and an alternate set of plans can easily be improvised. Where you wind up at the end of the day is probably going to be far from where you thought you'd be but nicer than you'd hoped for. This could be the Universe tapping you on the shoulder and saying sometimes an unexpected journey is the most rewarding.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Someone from a different culture could help you experience something new today. It could be food, it could be art, or it could be a new kind of fashion perspective. You're in a very open-minded phase of life, which means you're going to soak up every bit of new information that comes your way. At first it might be overwhelming, but soon you'll see how truly stimulating it can be to see how other people in other parts of the world live. It will inspire a change in you.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

One of your relationships should be your biggest focus today, and it's not the romantic one! Another one of your partnerships is going through a state of confusion because you two aren't thinking the same thing. You both need to get on the same page before it's too late. Things will only get more complicated the longer you assume nothing is wrong, so have a conversation today. It won't take long to get things back in harmony.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Is someone pushing you to make a decision or do something right now? If you're not ready, then you need to push them right back. But don't get too dramatic about it. You'll only make them defensive. Just be firm and stand your ground, that's all. People will respect your boundaries if you make it clear where they are. You have the right to do things your own way, on your own schedule, no matter what other people say. Don't forget that.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

There's nothing wrong with being indecisive per se, but if you make a habit of putting off making a choice for too long, your reputation could suffer. Today, make a concerted effort to be more decisive. Instead of deliberating over every little selection you have to make or path you need to take, just pick one and go with it. Don't worry if it's the wrong choice until you discover it's the wrong choice. Why look for problems that aren't there?



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. What effect do anthocyanins have on the part of a plant in which they are abundant?

- A. They colour it red, purple, blue, or black
B. The part shrivels
C. They boost the action of chlorophyll
D. They boost the plant's toxic defences against attack

02. Argentina invaded UK's Falkland Islands, Israel invaded Southern Lebanon, Canada became officially independent of the UK, Leonid Brezhnev, leader of the USSR, died, all in what year?

- A. 1980
B. 1982
C. 1985
D. 1975

03. Which of these countries has a border with France?

- A. Austria
B. Australia
C. Germany
D. Greece

Answers: 1. A 2. B 3. C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

O	R	E	R
D	Y	S	E
A	M	E	O
P	I	L	E

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

GOLDEN THRONE

India’s Chopra adds world javelin gold to Olympic crown

Budapest, Hungary - India’s Neeraj Chopra added a javelin world title to his Olympic gold on Sunday, recording a best throw of 88.17m in Budapest.

The 25-year-old took silver last year but he stamped his mark on the final early on with his winning throw coming in the second round.

Pakistan’s Commonwealth Games champion Arshad Nadeem took silver with a throw of 87.82m with the Czech Republic’s Jakub Vadlejch taking the bronze in 86.67m.

The flamboyant Chopra - one of three Indians to reach the final - fell to the ground after his final throw and kissed the surface before charging towards the crowd.

Germany’s Julian Weber finished fourth and held his hands to his face in disappointment, as his country finished the championships without a medal.

At the first world championships in 1983, communist East Germany topped the medals table.

Ingebrigtsen retains 5,000m title

Norway’s Jakob Ingebrigtsen produced a perfectly-timed sprint for the line to retain his world 5,000m title on Sunday, pipping Spain’s Mohamed Katir to gold.

Ingebrigtsen, who had to settle for 1500m silver on Wednesday, this time got it right in the

home straight to win in 13min 11.30sec while Katir took silver in 13.11.44. Kenya’s Jacob Krop claimed bronze in 13:12.28.

“I used my energy a little bit better than in the 1500m!” said Ingebrigtsen after his sensational finish, having himself been out-sprinted by Briton Josh Kerr for gold in the 1500m.

“To win another world title is great of course. But I was very tired,” he said. “This title means a lot to me after losing again in the 1500m. I haven’t been at my best but I had the motivation and I had great support.

“I knew that if my tactics were better than my competitors I would have a chance to win and that’s what happened. It worked out absolutely perfectly.”

Canada’s Mohammed Ahmed led the field off at a sedate pace in sweltering conditions at a packed National

Pakistan’s Commonwealth Games champion Arshad Nadeem took silver with a throw of 87.82m with the Czech Republic’s Jakub Vadlejch taking the bronze in 86.67m

Athletics Centre in the Hungarian capital.

Race tactics, however, started soon after as Kenya’s Ishmael Rokitto Kipkurui surged, quickly building up a 50-metre gap on



India’s Neeraj Chopra celebrates his victory in Budapest on Sunday (AFP)

peloton in pursuit.

The trio of vaunted Ethiopians - Berihu Aregawi, Hagos Gebrhiwet and Yomif Kejelcha - then took over, successfully reeling Kipkurui in with six laps to go of the 12-and-a-half lap race.

Gebrhiwet went through the

3km mark in 8:13.11 as the field began to string out into Indian file.

Aregawi took up the lead, accelerating away with a pack of eight including Ingebrigtsen.

As the bell for the final 400 metres ran, the Norwegian was

in fourth spot as the runners jostled for the optimum position to attack. Suddenly Katir bolted into the lead down the far straight. Ingebrigtsen moved wide around the traffic and the pair hit the home stretch together.

With the eyes of both athletes

fixed on the big screen just beyond the finish line, Katir gritted his teeth in a bid to hold on for victory.

But Ingebrigtsen kept his cool and in the most dramatic fashion pipped the Spaniard to the line in the last 10 metres.

Noah Lyles takes tentative steps into Usain Bolt’s big shoes

Budapest, Hungary - The departure of Usain Bolt into his well-deserved retirement in 2017 left a gaping hole at the heart of track and field.

The Jamaican sprinter left having won 11 world and eight Olympic golds, but now, six years later, it looks as if a rightful successor has emerged: Noah Lyles.

The American, excitable and increasingly outspoken, is hardly a new face on the blocks - the 26-year-old is currently in his eighth year as a professional having signed with Adidas the year before Bolt retired.

But after clinching a memorable 100m/200m double plus gold after anchoring the US team

to glory in the 4x100m relay at the World Athletics Championships in Budapest, Lyles looks ready to bring track back into the wider public consciousness.

“I wanted to show I am different. I came out and showed it. I am double champion,” Lyles said.

“Usain Bolt has done it and him saying to me that he sees what I am doing and he respects it, it is amazing.”

Lyles, who became just the fifth sprinter to claim a world sprint double, a feat last claimed by Bolt in 2015, added: “I am ready to transcend the sport.

“I am the guy who wants to move past being track-famous. I want people to see me on the



Noah Lyles

track, but in GQ and my docu-series, and realise I’m a cool guy too.

“Medals are the first step because then people pay attention to you. Then you can go into different directions: fashion, music. You can start collaborating with other people, artists and the world.”

Star of the screen

It might be the kind of pep talk track and field needs in an ever-expanding world of entertainment options. Lyles is also being filmed for an NBC Sports documentary and will also feature in a Netflix series on the 100m currently in production.

Although it is difficult to quantify potential market reaction or even increased public participation, there can be no denying that the Netflix series on Formula One and tennis reflected those sports in a way that made them interesting and seemingly more accessible.

While Lyles is revelling in the added attention, he has also spoken out against track and field’s inability to hit the mainstream.

“We’ve got to do more. We’ve got to be presented to the world. I love the track community, but we can only do so much within our own bubble. There’s a whole world out there,” he said, lining up the NBA in his crosshairs.

Ukraine’s Yaroslava Mahuchikh wins women’s world high jump title

Budapest, Hungary - Ukraine’s Yaroslava Mahuchikh earned her war-afflicted country its first gold medal of the World Athletics championships in Budapest when she won the women’s high jump on Sunday.

Mahuchikh, who fled the Russian bombardment of her native city of Dnipro last year, managed a best of 2.01m for gold.

Defending champion Eleanor Patterson took silver with a best of 1.99m on countback from Australian teammate Nicola Olyslagers.

“I am so proud to win this gold for my country. I can’t wait to go back and show this medal to my coach,” said Mahuchikh. “I (had) to win this gold for my country and all Ukrainian people who are still fighting for peace in Ukraine and for our independence.

“Thanks to them we have this unique possibility to compete at the international arena and to raise our flag.”



Ukraine’s Yaroslava Mahuchikh celebrates after winning the women’s high jump final (AFP)

The 21-year-old missed out on gold at last year’s world championships in Eugene, losing to Patterson on countback, the same result she achieved in Doha in 2019. Because of the war, the Ukrainian had to make a six-day car journey to Belgrade last year where she added the world indoor high jump title to those two

world silvers and Olympic bronze she had already collected.

“Silvers from Doha and Eugene definitely were not enough for me,” Mahuchikh said.

“I have been one of the best woman high jumpers over the last few years and I badly wanted to become the best in the world officially.”

Superb Bol strikes double gold after anchoring Dutch team to relay title

Budapest, Hungary - Femke Bol produced an astonishing anchor leg for the Netherlands in the women’s 4x400m relay on Sunday to claim her second gold medal of the World Athletics Championships. in Budapest.

Bol began the championships in disastrous fashion by falling and dropping the baton as she closed in on the line in the 4x400m mixed relay.

She went on to totally dominate the 400m hurdles event, easily taking gold.

On Sunday, in the final event of these championships and her seventh time on the track, Bol took the baton well down in third place for the fourth and final lap and gradually made up ground on Jamaica’s Stacey Ann Williams and Britain’s Nicole Yeargin.

Entering the home straight, the crowd rose to their feet as Bol accelerated past Yeargin and in a dramatic finish pipped Williams to the line.



Femke Bol celebrates after anchoring the Netherlands to victory in the 4x400m relay final (AFP)

She literally staggered from there into the arms of her three relay teammates, collapsing to the track after her breathtaking effort. “The first three legs went so well, I felt like I had to finish as strongly as I could!” said Bol.

“I wanted to stay patient, but in the last metres I said ‘No, we have to take it’. It was one of my

most important runs ever, but it is the first time we became world champions so it applies for all of us.

“Every tenth and hundredth of a second was needed. We had good exchanges and still barely won it.”

The Dutch team, also comprising Eveline Saalberg, Lieke

Klaver and Cathelijn Peeters, took gold in 3min 20.72sec, with Jamaica claiming silver in 3:20.88 and Britain rounding out the podium in 3:21.04.

Third-leg runner Peeters said she had been ready to accept that the Dutch team would finish in third spot.

AFP



Trent Alexander-Arnold

One of the best comebacks, says Alexander Arnold

Newcastle, United Kingdom - Trent Alexander-Arnold hailed Liverpool's comeback from 1-0 down to win 2-1 at Newcastle with 10 men on Sunday as one of the Reds best ever wins under Jurgen Klopp.

Alexander-Arnold was fortunate to escape a red card after just six minutes before his mistake allowed Anthony Gordon to open the scoring for Newcastle.

Virgil van Dijk was then dismissed inside the opening half hour for bringing down Alexander Isak.

However, the Magpies failed to make their man advantage count and were punished when Darwin Nunez came off the bench to score twice in the final nine minutes plus stoppage time.

"We had to do it the hard way, the very hard way. But we all pulled together, dug deep and delivered something for the ages," Alexander-Arnold told Sky Sports.

"One of our best performances since the manager has come in, and we've had some outstanding performances as a team. We'll look back on this game as something very, very special."

AFF

DARWIN TO THE RESCUE

Super sub Nunez strikes twice as Liverpool stun Newcastle

Newcastle, United Kingdom - Darwin Nunez came off the bench to score twice in the final 10 minutes as 10-man Liverpool came from a goal down to stun Newcastle 2-1 at St. James' Park on Sunday.

Anthony Gordon had pounced on a Trent Alexander-Arnold mistake to put the Magpies in front before Virgil van Dijk was sent off for bringing down Alexander Isak inside half an hour.

But Newcastle failed to make the man advantage count and were punished when Nunez produced two moments of rare quality so far in his Liverpool career to turn the game on its head.

"With 10 men in my history, 1,000 games (as a manager), I have never had something like that. At Newcastle, in this stadium with that atmosphere, it is crazy," said Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp.

Liverpool spent a club-record £85 million (\$107 million) on Nunez just over a year ago, but the Uruguayan has found himself behind Diogo Jota and Cody Gakpo in the battle to be Klopp's preferred number nine early in the season.

Nunez was unleashed from the bench 13 minutes from time and made the most of his opportunity as he was twice released



Liverpool's Darwin Nunez celebrates after scoring against Newcastle United on Sunday (AFP)

behind the Newcastle defence and kept his nerve to fire low and hard beyond Nick Pope.

"We calmed the game down and brought on Darwin. He was obviously fired up from not starting," added Klopp.

"It's clear he's not happy but it's early in the season, we need to find stability and results.

"We need to find a way of playing. This is a new team with new key players. It needs time. He scores two goals and can't get the smile off his face."

Victory keeps Liverpool two points behind leaders Manchester City and lays down an early-season marker after Newcastle

bench, referee John Brooks did not produce a second yellow card.

Joe Gomez was sent out by Klopp to warm up with one eye on replacing Alexander-Arnold to keep him out of further trouble.

The Liverpool boss might have wished he had made that change as Alexander-Arnold's failure to control Mohamed Salah's pass allowed Gordon to run clear on goal and score just his second Newcastle goal since a £45 million move from Everton in January.

Things went from bad to worse for the Reds when Brooks

We calmed the game down and brought on Darwin. He was fired up from not starting. It's clear he's not happy but it's early in the season, we need to find stability and results

JURGEN KLOPP

usurped the Reds to secure Champions League football last season.

"We should have put the game to bed and that's the thing we are kicking ourselves about," said Newcastle boss Eddie Howe.

Alexander-Arnold escapes early red

Liverpool were lucky not to be a man down after just six minutes.

Alexander-Arnold had already been booked for throwing the ball away when he pulled down Gordon as the Newcastle man tore down the left wing.

But to the astonishment of the home crowd and Newcastle

did produce a red card, Van Dijk's first of his Liverpool career, on 28 minutes.

The Liverpool captain was deemed to have denied a clear goalscoring opportunity when he kicked through Isak on the edge of the area.

Only some brilliance from Alisson Becker kept Liverpool in the game before half-time as the Brazilian turned Miguel Almiron's fiercely struck volley onto the crossbar. Almiron came even closer after the break as some mesmeric wing play scythed through the Liverpool defence, only for his shot to come back off the post.

AFF

Teenager Yamal shines as Barcelona edge seven-goal thriller at Villarreal

Barcelona, Spain - Barcelona starlet Lamine Yamal shone in a thrilling 4-3 win for the Spanish champions at Villarreal on Sunday in La Liga.

The 16-year-old winger, making only his second start for the club, hit the woodwork twice and set up the opening goal for Gavi in an impressive performance which stood out amid a chaotic battle.

Veteran Polish striker Robert Lewandowski tapped home the winning goal, his first of the season, after Yamal's drive hit the post, to send Barca provisionally third.

With coach Xavi watching on from high in the stands, serving a suspension, his charges took an early two-goal lead against the run of play.

Villarreal started brightly and Barcelona goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen did well to cut out Alexander Sorloth's cut-



Barcelona's Lamine Yamal celebrates after a goal

back. The Norwegian forward also had a goal strike out for off-side.

However Barcelona pounced after 12 minutes when Yamal crossed to the back post to find fellow academy graduate Gavi, who headed home.

Just three minutes later Frenkie de Jong rolled home the

Catalans' second. Alfonso Pedraza tackled Lewandowski but the ball rebounded kindly into the Dutch midfielder's path and he finished calmly.

Barcelona were missing injured midfielder Pedri and left-back Alejandro Balde, and Villarreal soon hit back.

Juan Foyth's produced a bullet

header from Alex Baena's corner to earn the hosts a foothold at the Estadio de la Ceramica - it was the first goal Barcelona have conceded this season.

The second soon followed with Sorloth tapping home Pedraza's cross after a sublime pass by veteran forward Gerard Moreno helped create the chance. Villarreal went ahead early in the second half after another impressive surge from Pedraza, who teed up Baena for a clinical finish.

Captain Sergi Roberto struggled badly at right back for Barcelona, who are close to signing Joao Cancelo from Manchester City on loan to occupy that position.

Barca winger Yamal crashed an effort against the crossbar as he frequently pried at Villarreal's defence, looking to drag the visitors level.

AFF

Kane scores twice on home Bundesliga debut as Bayern extend winning start

Berlin, Germany - England captain Harry Kane scored twice on his home Bundesliga debut as Bayern Munich defeated Bavarian neighbours Augsburg 3-1 on Sunday.

Kane, who was on target in his league bow at Werder Bremen last weekend, converted a first half penalty on Sunday and added another goal after the break. The win sees Bayern with a maximum six points from two games and second in the table behind Union Berlin who also have two wins.

"A really good win," Kane, 30, told DAZN after the match.

"The first league game in our stadium - I wanted to make sure we got the three points."

Augsburg defended well under relentless Bayern pressure but they went behind on 32 minutes when Felix Udoukhai put through his own goal.

A VAR intervention found an Augsburg handball just inside the



Harry Kane (R) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Augsburg

box minutes later, bringing Kane to the spot.

Kane, who has shown no signs of being burdened by his 100-million euro (\$110 million) transfer fee, blasted the ball nervelessly down the middle to double Bayern's lead. Kane scored another midway through

the second half, expertly dinking a pass from Canada wing-back Alphonso Davies over Augsburg 'keeper Finn Dahmen.

Bayern manager Thomas Tuchel toasted a "good win, a clear win, a deserved win" but said his side still had "real potential to improve."

Perfect Napoli see off Sassuolo, Juventus survive penalty controversy

Milan, Italy - Napoli continued a perfect start to their Serie A title defence with Sunday's 2-0 win over 10-man Sassuolo, while Juventus survived penalty controversy in a 1-1 draw with furious Bologna.

Victor Osimhen netted his third goal of the season from the penalty spot 15 minutes into Napoli's first home match since lifting the league title in front of their fans for the third time back in June.

And captain Giovanni Di Lorenzo made sure Napoli would make it six points from six in the 64th minute, not long after Maxime Lopez was sent off and Giacomo Raspadori -

who had hit the post seconds after kick-off - blasted a penalty into the stands.

"I think we played well, kept hold of the ball, we're happy to have won the match in front of our fans," said Di Lorenzo. "We played well as a team. We've started well and the attitude is right so we've got everything for us to have a good season."

Di Lorenzo's first goal of the campaign came after some magical play from the returning Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, who made his season debut an hour into a one-sided contest at the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona.

Kvaratskhelia scored 14 times last season and set up the



Napoli's Giovanni Di Lorenzo scores against Sassuolo

same number again, and he made his mark just three minutes after replacing Italy forward Matteo Politano. The Georgian was surrounded by defenders near the penalty area but took a couple of steps forward before slipping in Di Lorenzo for a simple finish.

It's early days but Napoli already look a dangerous proposition under new coach Rudi Garcia, who has a tough act to follow in new Italy boss Luciano Spalletti, the architect of the Scudetto triumph.

Next week Napoli, who are level with leaders AC Milan and Verona at the top of the table, host Lazio who are yet to get off

the mark.

Lazio finished second last season but were seen off at home thanks to Italy forward Mateo Retegui's first Serie A goal after signing from Boca Juniors this summer.

It was a good sign for Spalletti who will need goals when Italy face North Macedonia and Ukraine in Euro 2024 qualifying next month.

Outraged Bologna held Juventus in Turin but were left wondering what might have been after being denied what looked to be a clear penalty moments before Dusan Vlahovic salvaged a point for the underwhelming hosts.

ONE STEP AT A TIME

Djokovic looking no further than his opening match as he eyes US Open title and No 1 spot

New York, United States - Novak Djokovic launches his quest for a 24th Grand Slam singles title on Monday as the US Open gets underway with the Serb needing only a first round victory to reclaim the world number one ranking.

The 36-year-old Serbian star makes a long-awaited return to the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center after missing the 2022 tournament due to his refusal to get vaccinated.

Second seed Djokovic headlines the night session on the 23,000-seater Arthur Ashe Stadium with what should be a straightforward opener against France's world number 84 Alexandre Muller.

A victory will guarantee Djokovic returns to the top of tennis's global rankings, regardless of how the rest of the US Open fortnight pans out.

Djokovic needs just 20 points to regain the No.1 ranking after defeating current No.1 and defending US Open champion Carlos Alcaraz in the Cincinnati Open earlier this month.

Alcaraz, who defeated Djokovic in a five-set Wimbledon final classic in July, opens his



Novak Djokovic

It's also in a way disrespectful to your next opponent if you're already thinking about your finals matchup...that kind of mindset never really resonated with me

NOVAK DJOKOVIC

US Open campaign on Tuesday.

While most neutrals are hoping that Alcaraz and Djokovic can progress through to another blockbuster showdown in the men's final on September 10, Djokovic says he is looking no further than Monday's opener.

"You can't really be thinking about what happens in three or four days," Djokovic said on the eve of the tournament.

"It's also in a way disrespectful to your next opponent if you're already thinking about your finals matchup...that kind of mindset never really resonated with me."

History suggests however that Djokovic's opener on Monday should be a formality: the Serb has not lost in the first round of a Grand Slam since the 2006 Australian Open.

Tiafoe takes on compatriot Learner Tien, while Fritz faces Steve Johnson in another all-American match-up.

In the women's draw meanwhile, defending champion and world number one Iga Swiatek faces Sweden's Rebecca Peterson in her opener on Arthur Ashe as she sets out her bid for a fifth career Grand Slam.

Swiatek went out in the semi-finals of the lead-in tournaments in Montreal and Cincinnati, but believes she is better prepared this year than in 2022.

"I get more positive vibes, for sure than before last year's tournament," she said.

"But being the defending champion is not easy, so I'm kind of taking it easy, trying to do everything step by step."

Elsewhere in the women's draw on Monday, US teenager Coco Gauff takes center-stage with a night game against German qualifier Laura Siegemund, looking for a breakthrough first major win.

The 19-year-old American arrives in New York in blistering form after winning titles in Washington and Cincinnati.

Gauff's win in Cincinnati - her first WTA 1000 title - also included a psychologically useful first ever win over Swiatek, who she could meet in the quarter-finals in New York.

"I think now I'm going in with a lot more confidence," Gauff said of her recent resurgence in form. "I feel like no matter the scoreline in the match, I can be able to problem solve and troubleshoot my way out."

Hovland beats Schauffele to win PGA Tour Championship

Atlanta, United States - Viktor Hovland outdueled Xander Schauffele through Sunday's storm-hit final round to win the US PGA Tour's season-ending Tour Championship, capturing the \$18 million FedEx Cup top prize by five strokes.

The 25-year-old Norwegian fired a bogey-free seven-under par 63 to stand on 27-under after 72 holes at East Lake in Atlanta while American Schauffele was second after matching his season-low round with a 62. "It's just pretty surreal standing here right now, playing basically my best golf the last two weeks," said Hovland as he held the playoff trophy. "It couldn't have happened at a better moment."



Viktor Hovland of Norway celebrates with the FedEx Cup after winning during the final round of the TOUR Championship

World number five Hovland shook off a storm delay of one hour and 53 minutes early in his round that dumped nearly half an inch of rain, making four birdies in the first six holes to fight off the reigning Olympic champion.

Starting scores in the FedEx Cup playoff finale were staggered based on season points, with top-ranked Scottie Scheffler at 10-under, Hovland next at 8-under and Schauffele on 3-under.

Hovland made up the deficit in the first round and charged from there.

Schauffele, winless this season, opened with seven birdies in the first 12 holes but settled for the \$6.5 million runner-up prize from a \$75 million bonus pool.

"The game plan before starting today was middle of the green, make a lot of pars and make Xander get after it, which he did early so I had to change my game plan a little bit," Hovland said.

Schauffele sank an 18-foot birdie putt at the par-3 11th and a 12-foot birdie putt at 12 to pull within three. Hovland stayed three ahead by sinking a pressure-packed 23-foot putt to save par at the 14th.

"I was happy I didn't make a bogey," Hovland said. "I was starting at five on 14. When that putt went in, that was just huge for momentum because two shots with four holes to go is a lot different from three shots."



Megan Khang of the United States poses with the trophy after winning the CPKC Women's Open

Khang captures first LPGA title at CPKC Women's Open

Vancouver, Canada - American Megan Khang captured her first LPGA title after 190 starts, defeating former world number one Ko Jin-young in a playoff on Sunday to win the CPKC Women's Canadian Open.

Khang's long-sought breakthrough victory came with a par on the first extra hole, the 25-year-old from suburban Boston saying the eight-year wait made the triumph all the sweeter.

"It's tough to win out here," she said. "Eight years is a long time. It's great to get the first."

Ko fired a three-under par 69 Sunday while Khang needed a tense four-foot birdie putt at the 18th to shoot 74 and finish dead-

locked after 72 holes on nine-under 279 at Shaughnessy Golf and Country Club.

The playoff began at the par-4 18th as fourth-ranked Ko hooked her tee shot left into a bush beyond a cart path while Khang found the fairway and the fringe of the green.

Ko took a penalty stroke and blasted from the concrete into a greenside bunker, then punched onto the green and two-putted for double bogey, leaving Khang three putts from victory.

Khang's first stopped inches from the hole and she tapped in the next for the title just before friends raced onto the green to spray her with champagne.

Thailand's Kunlavut spills blood to claim badminton world crown

Copenhagen, Denmark - Thailand's Kunlavut Vitidsarn spilt blood, sweat and finally tears as he became badminton world champion after an attritional 19-21, 21-18, 21-7 victory over Japan's Kodai Naraoka in Copenhagen.

The 22-year-old world number three, who was runner-up a year ago, is the first Thai to win the men's singles title at the

World Championships.

World number four Naraoka, also 22, put Kunlavut through an excruciating match of marathon rallies that lasted 109 minutes on Sunday - one of the longest men's singles matches ever.

Kunlavut's blood had to be wiped off the court several times as he threw himself around to keep the shuttle alive in a series of lengthy rallies.

"I'm very happy, this has been a dream for me since I was a child," said an emotional Kunlavut. "When I was young I'd promised my coach that I would get the gold medal. He passed away and I dedicate this gold medal to him."

"I had three targets when I was young - Olympic Games, world championships and All England (championships). Now I



Kunlavut Vitidsarn

have achieved one of those, so two are left."

It was the second longest world championships men's singles final, eclipsed only by the 124-minute epic between China's Sun Jun and Denmark's Peter Rasmussen in the inaugural world championships in 1977.

"I needed to be prepared for a long match with Kodai," added Kunlavut.

Oval Invincibles win men's Hundred tournament

London, United Kingdom - Oval Invincibles won the men's edition of The Hundred for the first time as they recovered from a rocky start to beat Manchester Originals by 14 runs in Sunday's final at Lord's.

Reduced to 34-5 in their innings, the Invincibles hit back thanks to dashing displays from Tom Curran and Jimmy Neesham.

Curran and New Zealand all-rounder Neesham shared an unbeaten partnership of 127, which ranks as the highest for any wicket in the history of the men's Hundred. Curran was the catalyst with five sixes in his 67 not out from 34 balls, while Neesham added an unbeaten 57 from 33 balls as the Invincibles reached 161-5 from their 100 balls.

Manchester captain Jos Buttler, who had starred with a brilliant innings against the Brave, was bowled by Danny Briggs for just 11 to give the Invincibles a huge boost.

Max Holden's brisk 37 kept the Originals in the hunt as they chased 32 from the final 10 balls. But Curran conceded only nine from the first five and his brother Sam closed out the game.

In the women's final, Danni Wyatt starred as Southern Brave's 34-run win over Northern Superchargers gave captain Anya Shrubsole a memorable send-off. Wyatt's brilliant 59 from 38 balls took her past fellow England star Tammy Beaumont as the top scorer in this year's women's event with 295 runs in total.

AFP



Oval Invincibles, who won the men's edition of The Hundred, with women's champions Southern Brave

'It's time to make history with Saudi'

Roberto Mancini named new coach of Saudi Arabia

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Roberto Mancini was on Sunday named as the new coach of the Saudi Arabia national team after he controversially quit the Italy job earlier this month.

The Saudis, who beat eventual champions Argentina at last year's World Cup in Qatar, have been without a coach since Herve Renard left to take charge of France's women's team.

Mancini, 58, led Italy to the Euro 2020 title but failed to qualify for last year's World Cup.

"I am immensely honoured to be offered the position as Saudi Arabia national team manager," said Mancini who has signed a four-year contract.

"I believe this is a great opportunity for me, to experience football in a new country, especially with the growing popularity of football in Asia."

He added: "The presence of top players in the Saudi Pro League indicates the potential for growth in the national football scene."

Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest crude oil exporter, has

I believe this is a great opportunity for me, to experience football in a new country, especially with the growing popularity of football in Asia

ROBERTO MANCINI

made waves this summer by buying a host of players from European clubs for teams in the Saudi Pro League.

Brazil star Neymar was the latest in a growing list of big names to be attracted by the huge sums



Roberto Mancini poses for a picture in an office in Rome after being named as the new coach of Saudi Arabia (Photo by Saudi Ministry of Sports / AFP)

offered by the Saudis after Cristiano Ronaldo kicked off the trend by moving to Al-Nassr in January.

Newspaper *La Gazzetta Dello Sport* reported on Sunday that Mancini's contract would come with an annual salary of 25 million euros (\$27 million).

The federation's statement did not disclose his salary.

"The appointment confirms the new era of growth for the Saudi Arabian national team and marks a new milestone in Mancini's distinguished career," the Saudi federation said in a statement confirming Mancini's appointment.

Mancini was due to arrive in the Saudi capital Riyadh on Monday to be presented to the media.

His first match with the team is set for September 8, an international friendly against Costa Rica at St James' Park, home of Newcastle which is owned by the Saudi sovereign wealth fund.

Another friendly against South Korea is scheduled to be held in the English city on September 12.

Horner hails Verstappen's ability to perform under pressure



Max Verstappen celebrates with the trophy

Zandvoort, Netherlands - Red Bull boss Christian Horner marvelled at Max Verstappen's ability to focus and "get the job done" after another majestic display from the double world champion in Sunday's Dutch Grand Prix.

A ninth win on the bounce drew him level with the record established by a former Red Bull driver, Sebastian Vettel, in 2013.

But it was by no means as

easy as a picnic in the Zandvoort dunes, with Verstappen's home fans turning up in their tens of thousands to see him perform.

"The expectation, how much noise and support that he's had - everyone feels that, we feel that within the team," said Horner.

"But he's in the zone, he can focus on himself and get the job done." He added: "To match Sebastian, nine straight victories, to do it twice as a team is really in-

credible."

The Verstappen roadshow moves on to Monza next weekend where he will line up 138 points clear of teammate Sergio Perez in the championship.

That gap would have been less but for Perez picking up a five-second time penalty in Sunday's race, knocking him off the podium into fourth.

Looking ahead to his shot at a 10th consecutive win Verstap-

pen said: "I'll think about that next week, I just want to enjoy this one." He revealed Vettel had messaged him after he had notched up his fifth win in a row.

"Seb texted me and said: 'Well done what you're doing. Keep it up - you're going to do it.'"

"I was like: 'That's nine wins in a row; that's something very impressive.' And I never thought I would be already on eight. But it's not something that's con-

stantly in my head.

"I am not in the sport to try and break records, I'm just here to win in the moment."

His prospects of claiming a third straight driver's crown look nailed on, with the clever money suggesting he could well seal the deal in either Japan or Qatar.

Such is his supremacy he can still clinch it even if he never wins another race all season.

AFP

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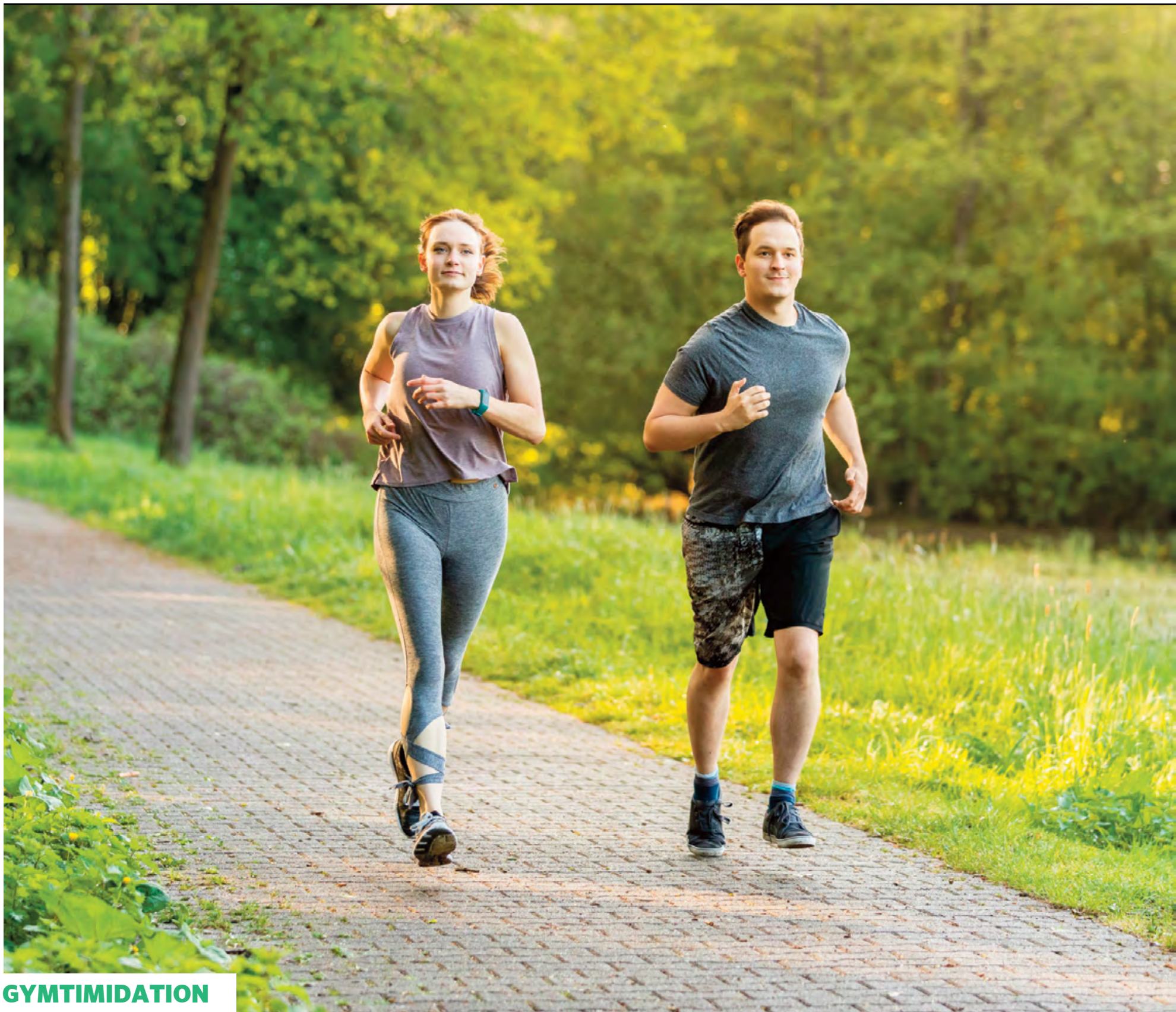
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GYMTIMIDATION

AWAY FROM THE GAZE

Are you afraid or shy of going to a gym despite your craving to keep fit? Do you feel intimidated by the gazes from people who look more fit and committed than yourself in a gym? Do you prefer to workout outdoors at your own convenience when no one is watching. You could be among those who are 'gymtimidated'.

Gymtimidation is definitely common, although not many people talk about it, says Dr Erin Nitschke, a certified health coach and programme director of sciences at Laramie County Community College in Cheyenne, Wyoming, United States. "Anyone who is new to a gym atmosphere, experiences body image concerns or body dissatisfaction, or who generally feels uncomfortable in crowded spaces may experience this," he asserts

Anxiety about working out in a gym can also be traced to the fact that the gym is actually a unique environment. While people go to a coffee shop for a cup of joy or to the movies to be entertained, people head to the gym for a variety of reasons. Gymgoers may be there for the health benefits, to address a health concern, to achieve a specific athletic goal, or for social acceptance and respect, according to an article in CNN Style. People in close proximity in a gym

come with various goals. This ambiguity can lead to feeling judged or being inadequate, especially if you're not able to achieve what others can or aren't sure how to use a piece of equipment. Feelings of insecurity and a fear of others' opinions often leads to gymtimidation and many people prefer to workout on their own, at their own convenience, and in a chosen environment (indoors/outdoors) far from the roving eyes of others.

There are, however, a number of ways you can try to make a trip to the gym more enjoyable. But first you need to identify exactly what is making you uncomfortable. One way to do this is by pondering on a few simple questions - How would I describe my concerns about the gym? What are my main fears? What would help boost my confidence in the gym and help me feel like I belong? Once you identify your concern, you can work on it.



I follow my own fitness regime, which suits me best. It includes walking, stair climbing, hill climbing, swimming occasionally, and my own weights training at home, which I do with an online instructor

DR DIPALI JAJU



I do my own pole fitness exercises. Pole fitness is a full-body workout that increases strength and flexibility. The uniqueness of this fitness is that it is challenging and you never get bored, and always crave to achieve more

NUSAIBA AL MASKARI



DRESS FOR SUCCESS
Wear comfy clothes that you feel good in, no matter what styles are trending at the gym — especially tight or revealing.



GET AN ORIENTATION
Most gyms explain how to use particular equipment. You can elect to go when the crowds are absent or get lost in it.



GO WITH FRIENDS
Some people feel less visible and more at ease if they work out with a friend or two, which also provides accountability and social support.



NON-GYM OPTIONS
If the gym just doesn't feel right to you, there's always personal training, online workouts, and outdoor exercises.



On my own...

Ali Al Barwani, a young, busy professional, who does not prefer going to a gym says he has been following his own fitness regime for some years and has noted great results.

"I do have my own fitness regime, which I follow in place of going to the gym. It's simple but effective, and it's based on the following principles:

- GET ENOUGH SLEEP**
I make sure to get at least 7-8 hours of sleep per night. This helps me to recover from my workouts and have more energy throughout the day.
- WAKE UP EARLY**
I wake up early in the morning, even on weekends. This gives me time to exercise before the day gets busy.
- GO FOR WALKS**
When the weather is good, I try to go for a walk at least 3-4 times per week. This is a great way to get exercise and enjoy the outdoors.
- PLAY FOOTBALL**
I play football with friends twice a week. This is a fun way to get exercise and socialise.
- TRACK MY STEPS**
I use a digital watch to track my steps throughout the day. This helps me to stay motivated and make sure that I'm getting enough exercise.



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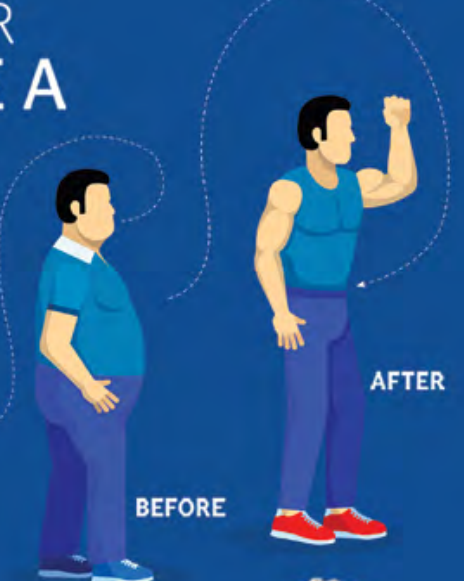
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BEFORE **AFTER**

Cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia (C.B.T.I.) is considered the most effective treatment for people who continually struggle to fall or stay asleep

C.B.T.I.



CBT TREATMENT

What you can expect to see from a CBT treatment programme:

STRUCTURED AND EDUCATIONAL

CBT sessions are well structured and meant to be educational. This means there is as much emphasis on work outside of your therapy session as during.

COLLABORATIVE

Your therapist will work with you and expect active participation and commitment to see positive changes.

GOAL-ORIENTED

Your therapist will work with you to define specific goals that solve your existing problems.

TIME-BASED

Most people can expect their programme to have 6-14 sessions. CBT is not meant to be continuous, rather you are expected to learn the skills to be your own therapist.

CAN'T SLEEP?

After a tiring day at work, hitting the bed might be the most sought after activity after an early dinner and quickly getting things sorted out for the next day. But, do you often toss around in bed until you hear the crows heralding dawn?

About one in four adults in the United States develop symptoms of insomnia each year. In most cases, these are short-lived, caused by things like stress or illness. But one in 10 adults are estimated to have chronic insomnia, which means

difficulty falling or staying asleep at least three times a week for three months or longer, a recent article in *New York Times International* states.

Sleep deprivation doesn't just create physical health problems, it can also harm our minds. A recent poll from the National Sleep Foundation found a link between poor sleep health and depressive symptoms. In addition, studies have shown that a lack of sleep can lead otherwise healthy people to experience anxiety and distress.

Fortunately, there is a well-

studied and proven treatment for insomnia that generally works in eight sessions or less - cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia - C.B.T.I.

If you cannot find a provider, C.B.T.I. instruction is easy to access online. Yet it is rarely the first thing people try, said Aric Prather, a sleep researcher at the University of California, San Francisco, who treats patients with insomnia.

C.B.T.I. does use a series of treatments to target behaviours that are inhibiting sleep, like daytime naps or using digital de-

vices before bed, and replaces them with more effective ones, like sticking to a consistent wake time. But it also aims to address anxieties and negative beliefs about sleep.

It is especially important that people with insomnia learn to view their bed as a place for restful sleep rather than associating it with tossing and turning. Patients undergoing C.B.T.I. are asked to get out of bed if they are not asleep after around 20 or 30 minutes and do a quiet activity in dim lighting that does not involve electronics.

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