



Hon Lady lauds GED students for stellar result

Muscat - Honourable Lady Sayyida Ahad bint Abdullah bin Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, congratulated students on their success in the General Education Diploma (GED) examinations on Friday.

In a statement, the Honourable Lady said, "We are pleased to congratulate our sons and daughters who have achieved outstanding results in the General Education Diploma. We also extend our congratulations to their families and faculty members, who were supporters and motiva-

tors in achieving this goal that we are all proud of.

"We wish our sons and daughters to fulfil all their aspirations and desires at the university level.

"You have persevered for this achievement, so may God Almighty bless your efforts. We pray to the Almighty to always grant you success in your future life to contribute to the service of your country and to raise its flag high."

The results of GED were declared on Thursday. Close to 51,010 male and female students appeared for the exams, with a success rate of 82.64%.

India-GCC free trade deal may become reality 'soon'

Our Correspondent Muscat

The long-awaited conclusion of a free trade agreement (FTA) between India and the GCC is expected to become a reality soon, bringing new opportunities for businesses on both sides, according to a senior Indian government official.

Ausaf Sayeed, Secretary at India's Ministry of External Affairs, informed of the resumption of discussions on the free trade deal between India and the GCC at the 6th India Arab Partnership Conference held in New Delhi last week, Indian news agency ANI reported.

Ministers, senior officials and businesspersons from the Arab states and India participated in the conference.

"India and GCC have resumed discussions on concluding the Free Trade Agreement. We have exchanged preliminary documents, and the delegations have been meeting. We hope this will soon become a reality, bringing newer opportunities for businesses on both sides," Sayeed said during his special address.

He also alluded to discussions on exploring alternative forms of trading between India and the GCC countries.



There are discussions with our bilateral partners, talks about rupee trading, barter trading and many other things, especially under the circumstances where most countries are facing challenges of foreign currency

AUSAF SAYEED

"There are discussions with our bilateral partners, talks about rupee trading, barter trading and many other things, especially under the circumstances where most countries are facing challenges of foreign currency," he noted.

According to the ANI report,

the India Arab Partnership Conference is the flagship initiative of both sides to provide an institutional platform for robust engagement between business communities. The previous five editions of the conference have guided in laying the foundations of a roadmap and synergising the

economic cooperation between India and Arab League countries.

V Muraleedharan, India's Minister of State for External Affairs, inaugurated the conference and delivered a keynote address. From the Arab side, the conference was led by Ali Ibrahim al Malki, Assistant Secretary Gen-

eral and head of the Economic Affairs Sector of the Arab League.

The conference was rich in content with a ministerial-level inaugural session, followed by special sessions in which discussions were held on investment climates and opportunities. Speakers elaborated on the present state of India-Arab cooperation in various sectors including healthcare, food and energy security, and means to further enhance these, including by sharing expertise and best practices. The meeting also stressed the important role of the private sector to push trade and investment relations to wider horizons.

The conference was jointly organised by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India and the Arab League countries, in partnership with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Federation of Arab Businessmen and Union of Arab Chambers.

In conclusion, participants conveyed their sincere appreciation to all stakeholders for the excellent coordination in putting together a substantive programme.

They agreed to convene the seventh edition of the India Arab Partnership Conference in the Arab world in the year 2025.

NEWS BRIEF

HEAVY RAINS, FLOODING LEAVE 22 DEAD IN SOUTH KOREA

Seoul, South Korea - At least 22 people have died and 14 are missing after heavy rains caused flooding and landslides in South Korea, officials said on Saturday, with thousands more ordered to evacuate their homes.

South Korea is at the peak of its summer monsoon season and there has been heavy rainfall for the last three days, triggering widespread flooding and landslides, and causing a major dam to overflow.

The interior ministry reported that the majority of the casualties - including 16 dead and nine missing - were from North Gyeongsang province, largely due to massive landslides in the mountainous area that engulfed houses with people inside.

See also Page 07

Youth crucial in Oman's economic vitality: UN

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman's young demographic - approximately 64% of the population under 30 years - is predicted to positively impact the country's economy, according to a senior United Nations official.

Rola Dashti, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), ranks Oman among the nations with an exceptionally high percentage of young people. She believes this demographic will inject vibrancy into Oman's economy and diversify income streams for citizens.

Rola commended the sultanate's substantial progress towards comprehensive and sustainable development in line with Oman Vision 2040. She also highlighted the successful outcomes already evident, such as Oman's improved ratings,

strong credit position and an esteemed financial and investment status within the region.

These remarks were made during her visit to Oman delegation's headquarters at UN, where she met H E Dr Mohammed bin Awad al Hassan, Permanent Representative of the sultanate to the UN.

The meeting explored aspects of cooperation between Oman and ESCWA in several sectors. Discussions included improvements in the statistics sector, women and children's empowerment, youth capability enhancement, and fostering Oman's competitive edge in science and technology.

In closing, Rola conveyed the UN and ESCWA's anticipation of increased cooperation with Oman and other GCC states and noted the growing interconnection of these economies with the global market, which presents opportunities for collaboration.

OMANI-SWISS RELATIONS CELEBRATED AT 2023 BASEL TATTOO



Represented by Royal Cavalry of Royal Court Affairs and Royal Guard of Oman, the sultanate participated in the opening ceremony of 2023 Basel Tattoo in Switzerland on Friday. Elite military bands from around the world participate in the event. The variety of musical formations presented by Oman showcased the rich civilisational and cultural heritage of the sultanate, and celebrated 50 years of Omani-Swiss relations (ONA)



Oman Sail claims five medals at Pan Arab Games in Algeria

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman Sail capped off an excellent week of racing at the 2023 Pan Arab Games by claiming five medals across all classes.

The Omani team occupied the top four spots in the Optimist class with Tameem Suleiman al Balushi taking gold after eight superb races, Hassan Nasser al Wahaibi winning silver, Feras Haitham al Nabhani picking up bronze and Soud Talib al Shaqsi winning the last race of the competition to move up to fourth. The team scored an overall team gold in the Optimist class following its fantastic performance.



Tameem al Balushi, Hassan al Wahaibi and Feras al Nabhani claimed podium finishes in the Optimist class in 2023 Pan Arab Games

This success was followed by an equally impressive performance in ILCA 4, where Hatem

teammate Abdullatif Zaid al Qasmi ended the race in fourth.

Ahmed Hassan al Balushi finished fourth in the ILCA 7 competition, level on points with Boussouar Abdelkhalid of Algeria in third. The event was won by Abdulla Janahi of Bahrain who won eight of the ten races to seal victory with a day to spare.

The Oman sailing team ended the 2023 Pan Arab Games in Algeria with one gold medal, two silver medals and a bronze, as well as the team prize, after what was an incredibly successful campaign. Abdulaziz al Shadi and Nawaf al Ghadani from Oman Sail were also selected to be part of the race committee.

Dr Khamis al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, praised the team's efforts. He said, "We are very proud of the entire team. This is an excellent achievement for the sailors, the technical staff, coaches and everyone at Oman Sail who has supported its journey. Competition within the region is very tough and it takes strong character to maintain such a high level of performance day after day. We hope this is just the start of a successful career on the water for our young talents and will serve as motivation to reach the very top of the sport."

Following conclusion of racing in Algiers, the fleets came together to celebrate each other's

achievements at a prize giving ceremony attended by H E Saif al Badai, Oman's Ambassador to Algeria, and Sheikh Khalifa Abdullah al Khalifa, President of Arab Sailing Federation.

The 15th edition of the Pan Arab Games featured 3,800 athletes from 18 countries competing in 20 sports across five cities.

Upon returning to Oman, the busy season will continue for the youth squad. First on schedule is the Oman Sailing Championship in Ras al Hadd from August 24 to 28, 2023, and then the team will prepare for this year's Musannah Race Week taking place from October 18 to 24, 2023 at Barceló Musannah Resort.

WORLD YOUTH SKILLS DAY

Youth Ambassadors Programme launched

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth's Directorate General of Youth has launched the Youth Ambassadors Programme to promote youth involvement in socio-economic development.

The initiative is a collaboration with the Foreign Ministry and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research.

Focused on bolstering young Omanis' participation in global and regional events, the programme is a platform to equip them with the essential skills and knowledge required to represent the sultanate effectively.

The programme aims to not just increase youth engagement, but also cultivate competent young leaders who can make meaningful contributions in various international forums, including United Nations



organisations.

The experience gained from participating in official delegations, alongside frequent interaction with international and regional organisations, will provide youth opportunities to step into leadership and community roles that align with the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040.

Elaborating on its objectives and operations, Hilal bin Saif al Siyabi, Director General of General Directorate of Youth, said, "The Youth Ambassadors Programme is designed for individuals aged between 18 and 25 years, offering them diverse opportunities to improve their skills through various channels."

The programme has three primary components - first, to launch a digital platform offering a variety of registered training courses in diplomacy, leadership, media and cultural identity. Second, organisation of a training simulation for regional and international meetings such as the Model United Nations (MUN),

which tackles pressing global and regional issues faced by young people worldwide and explores potential solutions. The third component involves facilitating interaction between young people and diplomatic leaders in the sultanate.

Siyabi explained that introducing participants to MUN is

meant to educate them on the fundamental workings of the United Nations and its councils. "It will also enhance their understanding of a broad spectrum of topics including economic, social, political and environmental issues."

The programme aims to prepare the young people for high-level meetings, fostering critical thinking, public speaking and negotiation skills. "It will also promote awareness about international and regional organisations, creating a bridge between Omani youth and the world of international diplomatic relations."

According to Siyabi, the programme's ultimate objective is to develop a pool of skilled young individuals in the field of diplomacy and create a database of empowered youth ready to represent the sultanate on regional and international stages.

Mobile phone subscriptions nearing 7mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

By the end of May 2023, active mobile broadband Internet subscriptions in Oman increased 9% to 5,851,173 compared to the same period last year.

The total number of Internet protocol-connected fixed line telephone subscriptions also grew - rising 6.1% to 275,607 subscriptions - according to National Centre for Statistics and Information's latest data.

The figures highlight an upsurge in mobile phone subscriptions. By the end of May 2023, the figure stood at 6,953,100, up 12.4%.

Within mobile phone subscriptions, the prepaid category emerged as the most populous - 5,229,350, a growth of 9.5%. But there was a noticeable drop - 13.1% - in the number of analogue fixed line subscriptions.

World's largest floating library Logos Hope docks at Port Sultan Qaboos

Muscat - *Logos Hope*, described as the world's largest floating library, docked at Port Sultan Qaboos on Thursday. Welcoming book enthusiasts aboard, the ship will remain at the port till July 22 opening its extensive book collection to visitors daily from 4pm to 10pm. It will anchor in Salalah for a week after setting sail from Muscat.

This visit to Muscat and Salalah marks the ship's final stop in the Arabian Peninsula before continuing its journey to Seychelles.

At a press conference, Edward David, Managing Director of the ship, said, "Over 150,000 individuals climbed the gangway of *Logos Hope* in 2011 and 2013, relishing the chance to browse its extensive book collection before leaving with their chosen literary treasures."

David noted that *Logos Hope* transcends the concept of a mere floating book fair. The ship represents a mission to catalyse positive change, enhancing global well-being through multiple avenues, such as providing quality books, fostering hope, endorsing ethical values, and acknowledging the inherent worth of every human being.



"The name *Logos Hope* carries profound significance. 'Logos' represents the word of God, and as a community onboard, we endeavour to live in obedience to God. This dedication brings us the divine peace that bestows hope," David added.
Capt Amur al Hoqani of Port

Sultan Qaboos' harbour and marine services graced the opening ceremony as chief guest. Capt Ionut Vlad from Romania, who has been living on *Logos Hope* with his family for the past seven years, welcomed guests saying, "This ship is our home."

David, Capt Vlad and Capt

Hoqani together opened the library's current visit with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Martin, a crewmember from the UK, was delighted to be in the sultanate. "This is my first visit to Oman. It's good to see everyone wearing smiles and radiating happiness."

Built in 1973 and acquired by non-profit charity organisation GBA (Good Books for All) Ships in 2004, *Logos Hope* has visited 480 ports in 150 countries, welcoming approximately 49mn individuals. The ship's crew includes 400 volunteers, hailing from more than 70 countries.

(Contributed by Deeba Parween)

S Batinah invites bids for 16 development projects

Our Correspondent
Muscat

South Batinah Municipality has invited bids for 16 development initiatives in the governorate. The range of projects includes public parks, commercial units and slaughterhouses.

An official from South Batinah Municipality disclosed, "The tenders include setting up a slaughterhouse and animal pens in

Rustaq and enhancing and expanding the existing Musannah slaughterhouse."

The municipality is looking for advisory services for the design of internal roads in various areas of the governorate. It is also focusing on completing walkways in Wadi al Maawil, Nakhl and Barka.

Additionally, the tenders include construction of 60 kiosks aimed at supporting productive

families. The wilayats of Nakhl, Wadi al Maawil, Barka and Musannah will see construction of 12 kiosks each, and nine in Rustaq and three in Al Awabi.

Discussing the plans for the parks, the official said the municipality is accepting bids for the development of Nakhl Public Park and creation of a new park in the Widam al Sahel area.

"The central objective of these projects is to stimulate commer-

cial and tourism activity while providing recreational spaces for families in all areas of the governorate," he said.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq has increased funds allotted to the Governorate Development Programme, doubling the amount from RO10mn to RO20mn for each governorate for the ongoing Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), effective from 2022.



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Companies specialized in the field and registered with Tender Board, may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender Number	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
2022/MM/QS-85 PRE/22/158	Manufacture and Supply of Safety Barrier 2023 (Re-Tender 2)	25	26/07/2023	31/07/2023	Specialist
PRE/23/063 2022/MM/QS-37	Construction of Proposed Solution to Resolve Water Stagnation at Boshier (35) (Re Tender)	25	05/08/2023	28/08/2023	First
2023/MM/HQ-31 PRE/23/001	Development of traffic light Operating System in Muscat Governorate	50	05/08/2023	28/08/2023	Specialist
2023/MM/QS-50 PRE/23/122	Beatification & Construction of Proposed Road With Concrete Pavement in Fiq at Quriyat	25	05/08/2023	28/08/2023	First
2023/MM/QS-51 PRE/23/123	Design & Construction of Concrete Road at Salamah in Qurayyat	25	05/08/2023	28/08/2023	Forth
2023/MM/QS-52 PRE/23/137	Construction of Irish Crossing in Abayah at Quriyat	25	05/08/2023	28/08/2023	First
2023/MM/HQ-32 PRE/23/138	Maintenance of the official Muscat Municipality website, the Muscat Municipal Council website and the governorate of Muscat website	25	05/08/2023	28/08/2023	Specialist
2023/MM/QS-53 PRE/23/143	Consultancy Services for Supervision of Construction of Slope Protection Works on Al Jabal Road at Al Amirat	25	26/07/2023	31/07/2023	First
2023/MM/QS-54 PRE/23/153	Maintenance Works at different locations at Muscat Governorate	25	05/08/2023	28/08/2023	Specialist
2023/MM/QS-55 PRE/23/163	Maintenance of Water Dispenser and Filters	25	05/08/2023	28/08/2023	Specialist

1- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.

2- Clarification and Support:

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Omani discusses climate change with King Charles

Hubert Vaz
Muscat

Dr Lamya al Haj, Associate Professor at Sultan Qaboos University, recently had the privilege of attending a meeting with King Charles III on 'Green transition innovation', as part of the London Climate Action Week.

The invitation for the Climate Innovation Forum, a flagship event of London Climate Action Week on June 28, was received by Lamya, an award-winning scientist in renewable energy, with great pride. The fact that King Charles would be attending the forum at Guildhall, to hear about what more can be done to transition to a sustainable future, was a big motivating factor for her participation.

"I was thrilled, honoured and humbled to receive an 'in-person' invitation from Buckingham Palace to meet King Charles. The invitation requested that I join His Majesty at a private roundtable discussion which is part of London Climate Action Week, a key marker on the road to COP28," Dr Lamya said. The 28th Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change will be hosted by the UAE in November.

The fact that Lamya is a young global leader, an advisor at the World Economic Forum and an advocate for science and youth empowerment from the Middle East went in her favour for being chosen to attend the prestigious annual roundtable with King Charles - a keen torchbearer for global action towards climate change. She was among 20 key invitees, all climate change stalwarts from around the world, who met on the sidelines of the



(Supplied photo)

What is needed to accelerate the speed and scale of such projects globally are more clear policies regarding renewables, more collaborative planning and bigger investments

DR LAMYA AL HAJ

forum.

The forum brought together 700 policy makers, investors, climate-tech solution providers, business leaders and innovators to catalyse the fulfillment of the UK's climate commitments, and drive radical collaboration, finance and innovation needed to deliver on climate goals.

The action-orientated event was called to build upon the conclusions of the Net Zero Review and shine a light on the pro-growth opportunities that net zero presents within the UK and on a global stage. During the private interaction, King Charles heard discussions on financing, replicating and scaling innovation at speed, as well as proposed technological solutions which will help move towards a more sustainable future globally.

Invited participants included Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London, Graham Stuart, Minister of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, vice-chancellors of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and CEOs of HSBC, AstraZeneca, OVO Energy, and GRIDSERVE. Sultan al Jaber, president of the upcoming

COP28 Summit and UAE's Special Envoy for Climate Change, also attended.

Lamya, who has a PhD in Structural & Molecular Biology from University College London, responded to a few key queries about her participation in the forum:

Did you put forth any suggestions at the forum?

Yes, I was privileged to be able to share multiple suggestions that, in my humble opinion, may accelerate the speed and size of projects related to renewable energy globally.

What, according to you, is the need of the hour for tackling global climate change?

What is needed to accelerate the speed and scale of such projects globally are more clear policies regarding renewables, more collaborative planning and bigger investments. Multilateral engagements and collaboration, such as those exemplified by the UK, which strives to bring together scientists, business leaders and policy makers, will increase innovation and shorten the value chain of renewable energy projects.

Are there any specific concerns about climate change and the human response in the Arab world?

I believe the Arab world, especially the Gulf region, is working seriously towards shifting to a more cleaner and sustainable energy. Yet, I believe, we need more policies in place to speed

up the process and attract more international investments in order to meet our ambitious goals and hit our targets.

What efforts has Oman taken regarding conservation of the environment, sustainability etc?

Prior to Cop27, Oman has committed to achieve net zero by 2050 making the sultanate the third country to sign this pledge in the Middle East. Oman's vision is to have 20% renewable energy by 2030, and it is on track to achieve this commitment with the current development of multiple renewable energy projects across the country.

What are Oman's strengths in this regard?

According to the International Energy Agency, Oman is expected to be the sixth largest producer of renewable hydrogen globally by 2050 due to the natural strengths it is blessed with, namely high quality solar PV and onshore winds; geographical location between exporting countries (Europe and Japan) and political stability; current infrastructure that supports renewable hydrogen projects; and vast amounts of arid flat lands for large-scale renewable energy projects - the land Oman has dedicated for RE projects is equivalent to the size of Slovakia.

Hence, I reiterate, what is needed to accelerate the speed and scale of such projects globally are more clear policies regarding renewables, more collaborative planning and bigger investments.



(Supplied photo)

Oman Across Ages Museum marks Foundation Day

Our Correspondent
Muscat

On Friday, Oman Across Ages Museum marked the anniversary of the laying of its foundation stone with a special screening of a documentary film titled 'The Eternal Foundation'. The event took place under the patronage of H H Sayyida Meyyan bint Shihab al Said.

Reflecting on the significance of the day, Al Yaqdhan bin Abdullah al Harthi, Director General of Oman Across Ages Museum, said, "We commemorate a historic moment today. It was on July 14, 2015, when the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said laid the foundation stone of the museum. This institution, a testament to modern architecture in Oman, was born out of that profound act."

He recounted how the museum's striking design was the culmination of a global architectural competition, one that was personally endorsed by the late Sultan. The gesture, according to Harthi, underscored Sultan Qaboos' deep commitment to preserving Omani history, illuminating the accomplishments of Oman's Blessed Renaissance, and inspiring Omani youth to take pride in their cultural heritage.

"The foundation stone marked the inception of a national endeavour. Immense efforts were poured into this project. Omani youth were given a platform, and our ultimate goal was realised when the museum was officially inaugurated this year under the patronage of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. His Majesty stressed the need to anticipate a future that fulfils every Omani's dreams," Harthi said on the occasion.

The documentary offered a glimpse of the stages of construction of the museum. It vividly portrayed the design process of the various halls, which are equipped with state-of-the-art systems and technologies, curation of the knowledge content, historical storytelling, image and film material selection, and display methodology.

Harthi concluded by noting that the museum strives to put the spotlight on the history of Oman through audio-visual storytelling, showcasing the nation's journey through different eras, culminating in the Blessed Renaissance period. The museum primarily targets the younger generation, encouraging them to appreciate the achievements of their forebears while contemplating their role in shaping Oman's future.

MTCIT ensures road accessibility, transportation services to Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has confirmed the readiness of roads leading to Dhofar governorate. This follows a comprehensive



maintenance and traffic safety operation to address issues resulting from climatic conditions.

In a statement, MTCIT informed that the maintenance activities included repair of damaged roads, upkeep of mountainous and dirt road networks in deserts, filling potholes,

removing debris and leveling.

To ensure safety, ministry personnel monitor roads around-the-clock. There is particular focus on removal of sand that accumulates due to monsoon winds, maintaining clear and safe passage for travellers.

On the matter of public trans-

portation, the ministry highlighted the operations of Mwasalat, which has started several internal and external routes to and from Dhofar. These services are complemented by several private sector operators.

MTCIT's statement also added that licensed taxi applica-

tions in Dhofar will provide 'on demand' services. These services offer immediate or advance booking options, allowing users to track and monitor their journey. 'With prices set before the trip begins, these applications ensure transparency, privacy and security for all users.'

Tenders for key road projects in Dhofar, S Sharqiyah announced

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has announced tenders for two crucial road dualisation projects.

Of these, one project is in Dhofar, focusing on the Raysut-Al Mughsayl route, and the other in South Sharqiyah involves completion of the road from the LNG Roundabout to Bilad Sur Roundabout in Sur.

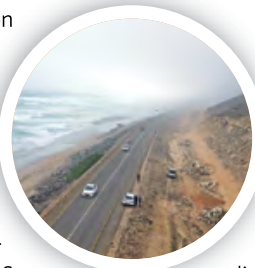
In an official statement, MTCIT detailed the scope of the Raysut-Al Mughsayl dualisation project. The 27km project will commence from the Raysut roundabout, near the Port of Salalah, and conclude in the Al Mughsayl area of Salalah.

This project's goal is to enhance infrastructure by developing the dual carriageway,

connecting it to November 18th Road (Ring Road) via a double lane approximately 5.5km long. This connection will increase the project's total length to 33km. Additional features include a 1.5km service road, three inter-sections, five livestock crossings and two roundabouts.

Each traffic lane on the main road and the Ring Road will be 3.65m wide, with an outer shoulder of 2.5m, an inner shoulder of 1.5m, and a median island of 5m. The project's execution is anticipated to span a period of 30 months from commencement of works.

The tender for dualisation of the road from LNG roundabout to Bilad Sur roundabout will include completion of the remaining 3km to the Bilad Sur roundabout, service roads spanning 6km and implementing protection works on both sides of the road.



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Global oil demand to grow by 2.4mbpd: OPEC

Vienna, Austria - World oil demand is expected to grow by 2.4mn barrel per day (mbpd) in 2023, following an upward revision of about 0.1mbpd from last month's assessment, mainly due to higher demand seen in China in 2Q23.

'Based on the initial world oil demand and non-OPEC supply forecast for 2024, demand for OPEC crude is expected to reach 30.2mn barrel/daily, 800,000 higher than the 2023 level,' OPEC stated in its monthly report.

Demand for OPEC crude in 2023 has been revised up by 100,000 barrel from the previous month's assessment to

stand at 29.4mn barrel/daily, the report noted. This is around 1mbpd higher than what was in 2022.

The OPEC Reference Basket (ORB) declined by 63 cent, or 0.8%, M-o-M to average US\$75.19/b in June.

The ICE Brent front-month contract fell by 71 cents, or 0.9%, M-o-M to US\$74.98/b, and the NYMEX WTI front-month contract declined by US\$1.35, or 1.9%, M-o-M to average US\$70.27/b. The DME Oman front-month contract rose by 13 cents, or 0.2%, M-o-M to settle at US\$74.91/b.

The front-month ICE

Brent/NYMEX WTI spread widened by 64 cents M-o-M to average US\$4.71/b in June.

The futures forward curves of ICE Brent, NYMEX WTI and DME Oman weakened during the month, and hedge funds and other money managers heavily cut bullish positions in ICE Brent and NYMEX WTI, extending the previous month's selloffs.

World economic growth in 2023 remains broadly unchanged at 2.6% and the initial forecast for 2024 economic growth is expected at 2.5%.

US economic growth for 2023 is revised up slightly to stand at 1.4%, followed by 0.7% for 2024.

Euro-zone economic growth for 2023 is revised down slightly to stand at 0.7%, while growth in 2024 is forecast at 0.8%.

Japan's economic growth for 2023 is revised up slightly to 1.1%, while growth in 2024 is forecast at 1.0%. China's 2023 economic growth remains at 5.2%, with economic growth forecast in 2024 at 4.8%.

India's economic growth remains at 5.6% in 2023 and is expected to expand by 5.9% in 2024.

For 2024, world oil demand is forecast to grow by a healthy 2.2mbpd, reaching about 104.25mbpd.

Volume of personal loans in Oman hits RO9bn in Q1

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In the first quarter of 2023, commercial banks in Oman experienced a surge in bank credits - touching RO24.288bn. This marks a significant increase from the previous year's RO23.01bn, demonstrating an impressive growth of 5.5%.

The personal loan sector dominated the bank credit landscape, absorbing RO9.046bn or 37.2% of the total credit.

The Central Bank of Oman detailed this and other findings in its recently published quarterly statistical bulletin.

It reported that the services sector acquired RO2.0655bn, comprising 8.5% of the total credit. Not far behind, the construction and industrial sectors received RO1.8871bn and RO1.8815bn, making up 7.8% and 7.7% of the total bank credit respectively.

According to the bulletin, the electricity, transport, and water sectors collectively received RO1.6699bn, which represents 6.9% of the total credit in the first three months of 2023.

Additionally, the transport and communication sector accounted for 6.2% of the total credit volume, having received RO1.4972bn.

Other sectors such as financial institutions and mining attracted RO1.3416bn and



Of the total credit component, the services sector got RO2.0655bn, while the construction and industrial sectors received RO1.8871bn and RO1.8815bn

RO1.1828bn respectively. In total, these sectors made up 5.5% and 4.9% of the bank credit.

CBO's bulletin further specified the credit volumes received by various sectors. The import sector saw a receipt of RO932.8mn, while the govern-

ment sector got RO710.7mn. These sums represent 3.8% and 2.9% of the total bank credit respectively.

Interestingly, sectors like agriculture and its related activities, and exports secured less credit.

They received RO54.3mn and RO36.1mn respectively, translating to 0.2% and 0.1% of the total bank credit for commercial banks.

The bulletin highlighted that other economic activities in the sultanate secured about RO655.4mn of bank credit, equating to 2.7% of the total.

Bank credit volume for non-residents was comparatively lower, standing at RO197.8mn or 0.8% of the total volume of bank credit.



ENGIE, PIF to jointly develop Hydrogen projects in Saudi

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - ENGIE, the leading provider of low-carbon energy services and solutions for integrated utilities management, has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Public Investment Fund (PIF) for the joint development of green hydrogen projects and its derivatives in Saudi Arabia, exploring opportunities that can contribute to enhancing the energy transition within the objectives of the Saudi vision 2030.

The MoU was signed by Frederic Claux, Managing Director, Flexible Generation and Retail, AMEA from ENGIE and Yazeed

Alhumied, Deputy Governor and Head of MENA Investments from PIF, paving the way for the two parties to explore opportunities to jointly develop projects for green hydrogen and derivatives production for export.

Frédéric Claux said, "The MoU between ENGIE and PIF will foster strategic partnership in developing green hydrogen projects in the Kingdom."

"We, at ENGIE, are proud to contribute to driving the energy transition in the Kingdom and achieving its aspirations and goals in the green hydrogen sector. Our partnership with PIF will contribute to laying robust founda-

tions for the green hydrogen industry, enabling the Kingdom to be one of the top exporters of green hydrogen worldwide," Claux added.

PIF and ENGIE are to evaluate the feasibility of co-development opportunity. Additionally, the two parties will jointly formulate a strategy to best approach the international market and secure offtake arrangements.

The MoU will enable ENGIE to work closely with PIF in Saudi Arabia in diversifying the kingdom's economy and to strengthen its global competitiveness in producing and supplying hydrogen and derivatives.

Oman-Syria joint committee winds up 6th session of meetings in Muscat

Muscat - Tasks of the sixth session of the Omani-Syrian Joint Committee concluded in Muscat on Thursday.

During the meetings, the two sides explored cooperation in economic, investment, industrial, agricultural, cultural and media fields.

The Omani side was headed by H E Dr Said Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, while the Syrian side was led by H E Dr Mohammed Samer al Khalil, Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade.

Saqri said in a speech that the volume of commercial exchange between Oman and Syria grew by 18% over the past five years, from 2018 to 2022.

He pointed out that the two countries share great potential for augmenting trade in the field of goods and services, among other spheres.

The Syrian minister said that the round of talks covered a review of memoranda of under-



standing (MoU) and agreements, which were inked in a bid to boost joint cooperation.

Three MoUs and an executive programme in the field of media were signed on the sidelines of the 6th session's meetings.

The first MoU and executive programme was aimed at consolidating ties of cooperation in the field of media, notably between the two countries' news agencies and in technical and engineering fields, as well as joint production of radio and television programmes, drama, e-media,

foreign media, media content production and media training.

The second MoU dealt with developing small and medium enterprises (SMEs), with a view to establishing a strategic economic partnership, encouraging investment in media-related SMEs and enhancing bilateral cooperation between SMEs from both sides.

In particular, this MoU focuses on establishing business incubators and technology support centres, furnishing a suitable environment to stimulate inno-

vation and invention, organising seminars and exhibitions and exchanging visits and training courses.

The third memorandum dealt with the mutual recognition of certificates of competence and eligibility for seafarers. Emphasis was laid on mutual recognition of the maritime education and training systems, including the accreditation of certificates of competence issued to captains, officers and operators of the global safety and relief system.

ONA

COMMENTARY

Reforms in GCC showing big impact: Reflecting on my 5 years in Gulf

I moved to Riyadh in August 2018. In that period a major socio-economic transformation had already started under Vision 2030 of the Kingdom. Today, Riyadh is a different city than the one I moved in. The vision in Saudi Arabia, as well as the rest of the GCC countries, aims mainly at improving the standard of living of the people in the countries and at diversifying the economy while moving the majority of it from the public to the private sector. I can write a book on this which I will probably do in the future. However, in this piece I will talk only about few things.

Last month, Rayyanah Barnawi made a remarkable step as the first Saudi female ventured into space. I was not surprised hearing this news. Since

the time I was appointed as the World Bank Country Director of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries in 2018, I have met energetic youth and ambitious women in this region. In the past five years, I have seen GCC countries make milestone changes in many different areas like health, education, women empowerment, and tourism.

One area which saw immense progress among the many reforms made in this region is women's economic inclusion. First, supporting women's economic participation was vital to reaching the goals set in the different visions of the GCC countries. Thus lifting legal barriers was an important reform undertaken. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have been at the forefront of this movement,

introducing groundbreaking legal changes that eliminated many barriers to more women getting jobs and joining the economic activities.

Saudi Arabia introduced a historic



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set of legal reforms in 2019-2020 such as the civil status law, labor law, enforcement law, and laws on access to finance. And the results are showing women's labor force participation

(WLF) increased from 22% in 2019 to almost 37% today, exceeding the target of 30% set by the Saudi Vision 2030.

The UAE, guided by their Gender Balance Council, has also been a pio-

neer in its efforts to eliminate legal barriers for women and moving towards gender neutral ecosystem. The UAE opened up many new social, educational, and economic opportunities for

women and unsurprisingly has one of the highest WLF rates in the MENA region - at 55%. The average WLF for MENA is 19%.

The UAE has also undertaken a role as a regional leader. We recently launched a World Bank-UAE Gender Center for Excellence. The Center will serve as a platform for knowledge exchange on gender issues in the MENA region and beyond through research, innovation, and knowledge exchange.

Bahrain has also moved on several fronts to make it easier for women to be part of the economic activities on the country. Kuwait passed a law combating domestic violence as well as prohibiting gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment at the workplace in 2020 and 2021.

In other areas, the GCC has been focused not only on women but on empowering its people, its human capital. The GCC's engagement in Human Development (HD) has substantially strengthened health, education, social protection and jobs systems. Regarding social protection and jobs, some key achievements made across the GCC include effective support on the broad range of labour, skills, and social protection transformational reforms.

I am so proud of all these successful reforms and this special journey.

The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Muscat Daily or Apex Media Publication

Bank Muscat reports net profit over RO104mn in 1st half of '23

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Bank Muscat, the flagship financial institution in the sultanate, announced its preliminary unaudited results for the first six months of 2023.

The bank recorded 5.1% higher net profit, which now stands at RO104.32mn for the period compared to RO99.26mn reported during the same period in 2022.

Net interest income from conventional banking and net income from Islamic financing stood at RO184.71mn for the first six months of this year compared to RO166.25mn for the same period in 2022, an increase of 11.1%.

The bank further informed that the non-interest income was RO66.48mn for the six month period of 2023 as compared to RO71.04mn for the same period last year. Non-interest income for the previous comparative period included a one-time gain from sale of investments of RO7.9mn. Excluding this, non-interest income has witnessed an increase of 5.3%.

Operating expenses for those six months was RO97.44mn as compared to RO92.30mn for the same period in 2022, an increase



Net loans and advances including Islamic financing receivables increased by 9.7% from RO9,002mn during period starting from January to June in 2022 to RO9,878mn for the same period this year

of 5.6%. According to Bank Muscat, its net impairment for credit and other losses from January to June was RO30.11mn as against RO28.40mn for the same period in 2022.

Net loans and advances including Islamic financing receivables increased by 9.7% from

RO9,002mn during the January-June period in 2022 to RO9,878mn for the same period this year. Customer deposits including Islamic customer deposits increased by 2.8% to RO9,083mn this year as against RO8,834mn last year for the period of first six months.

Renew commercial agency contracts before expiry: MoCIIP

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has urged commercial agents - registered with the ministry's Register of Commercial Agencies and Agents - to renew their commercial agency contracts one month before the expiry.

The ministry asked them to submit applications for renewal of registration of their commercial agency contracts in order to avoid penalties as stipulated in Article 19 of the Commercial Agencies Law, perambulated by the Royal Decree No. 26/77.

MoCIIP underlined the importance of submitting the necessary documents indicating the continuity of these contracts, stressing that, the agency registration will be cancelled in the event that 90 days have passed from the date of its expiration.

Yaqoub bin Shayikh al Dabouni, head of the Commercial Agencies Registration Department in the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at MoCIIP, emphasised that the ministry monitors commercial agencies and determines the levels of their compliance with the law.

He pointed out that, the sub-



Yaqoub bin Shayikh al Dabouni

mission of a commercial agency registration request is being done online through the 'Invest Easy' portal with the aim of facilitating the process of registering investors and following up their transactions easily, or through service-providing offices such as Sanad, law firms and auditing offices.

Dabouni clarified that the total commercial agencies submitted during the first half of the present year of 2023 reached to 853 commercial agencies, including 183 new commercial agencies, 458 renewed commercial agencies, 38 amended commercial agencies, and 174 cancelled commercial agencies.

The commercial agency is protected in accordance with the regulations and laws in force internationally, Dabouni added.

5th GPCA Responsible Care Conference to be held in Sept

Manama, Bahrain - The Gulf Petrochemicals and Chemicals Association (GPCA), the voice of the chemical industry in the Arabian Gulf, will hold its 5th biennial GPCA Responsible Care Conference in the Ritz-Carlton, Manama, Bahrain from September 5-7.

The conference will be inaugurated by Kamal bin Ahmed Mohammed, President of Electricity & Water Authority (EWA), Bahrain and Chairman of GPIC. He will address the audience on the September 6 - main day of the event.

According to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), by 2030 cumulative investments in the energy transition must amount to US\$44tn, with transition technologies representing US\$35tn.

However, investment in technology alone will not be enough to achieve net-zero in the next decade. Government and industry would need to work together to make technologies more affordable and improve transparency and accountability in the path to lowering emissions.

The 5th GPCA Responsible



Kamal bin Ahmed Mohammed

Care Conference will assess how the digital transformation and compliance technologies can work together to streamline and complement EHS&S reporting processes, and harmonise practices across different sectors and regions.

To be held under the theme 'Shaping A Sustainable Future with Innovation Solutions', the conference will begin with opening remarks by Abdel Hadi al Suhaimi, Advisor, Board's Executive Committee, S-Chem and Chairman, Responsible Care Committee, GPCA, followed by welcome remarks by Yasser Abdulrahim Alabbasi, CEO, GPIC.

"The role of innovation and technology adoption will be essential in the industry's journey towards decarbonisation and



Dr Abdulwahab al Sadoun

raising Environment, Health, Safety and Security (EHS&S) standards across the region. We set out on this journey over a decade ago, with the adoption of the Responsible Care programme in the Arabian Gulf, and ever since then we have witnessed a tremendous transformation in the industry's EHS&S performance," said GPCA Secretary-General Dr Abdulwahab al Sadoun.

"We are pleased to welcome the chemical industry for the first time in Bahrain to share lessons learned and look towards the future as the industry works towards reducing its impact on the environment and contributing to the fight against climate change," the association's Secretary-General added.

'Artificially high' growth predicted for China in Q2

Beijing, China - China's economic growth is expected to have surged in the second quarter, an AFP survey has forecast, but analysts say Monday's figures will be misleadingly inflated given the low base of comparison with pandemic-wracked 2022.

A year ago, with restrictions such as sudden lockdowns, travel curbs and factory shutdowns the norm, China posted 0.4% on-year growth, one of its lowest quarterly readings in recent years.

This year, an average of predictions from a group of 13 experts suggested the economy expanded 7.1% in April-June.

But this figure is "artificially high because of the low base" in 2022, said Gene Ma from the Institute of International Finance.

The same period last year notably included a lockdown in Shanghai that saw the financial capital of 25mn people completely closed off for two months.

The quarter-on-quarter growth figures, which will also be released on Monday, should give a more realistic view of the world's second largest economy.



From holiday travel to shopping for cars and homes, the macroeconomic data shows Chinese people are now just afraid to open their wallets too widely

STEWART PATERSON

In the first three months of this year, it grew 4.5% on-year, reflecting a resurgence in activity after the abrupt end of the COVID policy in December.

day when June figures are announced.

Low demand means companies are hesitating to hire, taking a 'wait-and-see' attitude before expanding operations, said Harry Murphy Cruise, an economist at rating agency Moody's.

Memories of 2022's repeated lockdowns and suddenly changing policy shifts were adding to their hesitancy, he said.

"Unfortunately... a revival in business activity is needed for broader demand to lift. That stalemate is keeping business activity weak," he added.

That in turn raises the spectre of deflation, a decrease in general prices, which would further add to China's economic woes.

Inflation was flat last month, while producer prices sank more than expected, a further sign of weak demand. Growth is already being hampered by a crisis in the real estate sector.

Once a driving force behind the economy, many developers are now fighting for their survival, exacerbating a crisis of confidence among potential buyers. AFP

Global stocks mixed as Wall Street rally shows signs of fatigue

New York, US - World stock markets were mixed on Friday as a Wall Street rally showed signs of fatigue, despite solid bank earnings and improving inflation data.

The European single currency meanwhile struck US\$1.1248, the highest level since February 2022, and oil prices slid before the weekend.

The US corporate earnings season entered full swing with big-hitting banks Citigroup, JPMorgan and Wells Fargo all reporting better-than-expected results or outlooks.

Their reports showed a lift from the industry's ability to charge higher rates on credit

cards and other loans, while not yet suffering as much of a hit from elevated interest payments to depositors.

But while JPMorgan and Wells Fargo both scored jumps in earnings, Citi's profits fell 36 percent to US\$2.9bn as it suffered due to weakness in its investment banking division.

The broad-based S&P 500 closed at 4,505.42, down 0.1% for the day but up 2.4% for the week.

After US stocks ended higher for four straight days, Friday's mixed session "should be expected", said Adam Sarhan of 50 Park Investments.

He considers the lackluster



session the result of "a little bit of profit taking after a very strong rally".

This week, traders welcomed more data showing falling US inflation, giving the Federal Re-

serve room to bring the curtain down on over a year of rate increases.

Global equities have been bubbling on hopes for an end to monetary tightening aimed at taming inflation - which was fueled by the post-COVID reopening, supply chain snarls and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

That came just as China pledges to introduce measures to kickstart its stuttering economy and bring an end to a painful crackdown on the huge tech sector.

Wall Street cheered news on Thursday that wholesale prices rose less than expected in June. That followed Wednesday's report showing the consumer price index below forecasts.

While the CPI remains above

the Fed's target, analysts said there is growing confidence that officials were winning their battle and the economy could avoid a feared recession.

Fed governor Christopher Waller said on Thursday that he still expects two more interest rate hikes this year.

But despite Waller's remarks, the "market still believes it is one-and-done for the Fed", said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare.

Thursday's upbeat mood filtered through to Asia, where Hong Kong rose for a fifth successive day thanks to a bounce in Chinese tech giants.

AFP

Grenadier at Goodwood Festival of Speed

Following the start of series production of the Grenadier 4X4 last year, INEOS Automotive is now making its mark across this year's Goodwood Festival of Speed, which began on Thursday.

The all-new Grenadier Quartermaster, a double cab pick-up variant of the award-winning Grenadier, made its global debut at the festival that will conclude on Sunday, the company informed through a press release.

'This will be shortly followed by a very special appearance on the famous hillclimb with some familiar Goodwood faces to celebrate two 75-year automotive anniversaries - motorsports at Goodwood and the Belstaff Trialmaster Jacket that lends its name to one of Grenadier's trims,' the company further said.

Also making its first-ever public appearance is the Grenadier Hydrogen Fuel Cell (FCEV) Technology Demonstrator, which will show how well-suited the zero-emissions technology is for a future long-range 4X4 off-roader.

Both the Grenadier Quartermaster and FCEV Demonstrator will be showcased in the First Glance Paddock and will be driven up the hillclimb route on each of the four days of the festival.

In an exciting exclusive for the Goodwood Festival of Speed, adventurous visitors will be able to get behind the wheel of the



Grenadier Station Wagon on a challenging off-road course at the Goodwood Hainaker Chalkpit neighbouring the main event site.

Hundreds of slots are available throughout the four days of the festival for those wanting to put the 4X4 through its paces.

In 2017, INEOS Chairman Jim

Ratcliffe, a car enthusiast and experienced adventurer, identified a gap in the market for a stripped back, utilitarian, hard-working 4x4 engineered for

modern day compliance and reliability. INEOS Automotive Limited was formed and a senior team of automotive professionals assembled to bring the vision

to reality with a fresh perspective of 4x4 development and manufacturing.

Combining rugged British spirit and design with German

engineering rigour, the Grenadier will be a truly uncompromising 4x4 built from the ground up. Engineered to overcome all conditions, it will provide best-in-class off-road capability, durability, and reliability to those who depend on a vehicle as a working tool, wherever they are in the world.

INEOS Automotive is a subsidiary of INEOS (www.ineos.com), a leading manufacturer of petrochemicals, speciality chemicals and oil products. It employs 25,000 people across 39 businesses, with a production network spanning 183 sites in 29 countries.

From paints to plastics, textiles to technology, medicines to mobile phones, materials manufactured by INEOS enhance almost every aspect of modern life. In 2021, INEOS had sales of US\$65bn.

MHD Automobiles LLC is one of the main operating divisions under MHD LLC. and represents premium automotive brands.

MHD LLC is a key contributor to the economy of Oman committed to the progress of the country in accordance with the government's vision for capacity building, human capital creation and efforts towards Omanisation.

With the strength of rich history and a firm belief for the future with able leaders at the helm MHD LLC is looking to power the future of Oman.

MoCIIP to execute resolution on ‘restricted products’ by end of ’23

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) will from December 8 start implementing a ministerial resolution to check those products listed for the second phase (A) of action to ensure the safety and quality of those products.

The Ministerial Resolution No. 190/2021 was issued to enforce technical regulations for the conformity system, which include the requirements for energy efficiency labels for water heaters, washing machines, refrigerators and freezers.

The implementation of this regulation aims at ensuring the safety and quality of products in the local markets, while MoCIIP calls on the manufacturers and the importers of these products to adhere to the regulation and to reconcile their statuses before the end of the specified period.

The technical regulations for the conformity system also aim



Imad bin Khamis al Shukaili

at regulating the procedures taken to verify that the imported products into the local markets are meeting the requirements stipulated in the technical regulations and to verify that they do not pose a threat to the human health, the environment and the public safety.

Imad bin Khamis al Shukaili, Director General of Standards and Metrology at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, pointed out that the technical regulations of the conformity system, con-

tribute to simplify customs clearance procedures for restricted products and encouraging the manufacturing of local products that are capable of competing in the local and foreign markets.

"It also aims at reducing the displaying of unsound products which contribute to damage, destruction and impact on the environment, and to reduce the time spent in issuing certificates and customs clearance," he added.

He pointed out that, the regulation also encourages the small and medium enterprises to develop the manufacturing of local products in accordance with the in forced specifications and technical regulations, so as to be able to compete in the local and foreign markets.

Shukaili clarified that the energy efficiency card is a sticker that is placed on the devices and through which an idea is given about the level of electrical energy consumption of the device,

compared to other devices.

He emphasised that, the energy efficiency cards aim at achieving high quality in the performance of these devices, increasing their life span, and reducing their monthly electricity bill, that will reflect positively on the consumers budgets and increasing the efficiency of applying the product control system through the integrated application of safety requirements and requirements of energy efficiency cards, to ensure high levels of consumer and environmental safety.

The implementation of the regulation also contributes to speed up the customs clearance time for conforming products, avoiding shipment rejection, saving costs, reducing the increasing demand for energy, reducing electronic and electrical waste, reducing carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions, and rationalising energy consumption.



ITHCA Group to invest at InnoTech

ITHCA Group has announced its investment at InnoTech company, with the goal of expanding the use of 3D printing technology in real estate development.

This investment will enable the exploration of innovative solutions and the integration of knowledge and technology to enhance the real estate sector.

InnoTech is a specialised company that focuses on innovation, 3D printing services, and educational technologies. It has achieved a significant milestone as the first company in the Middle East to construct a building using a locally developed 3D printer and building materials sourced from the local market.

Saif bin Abdullah al Abri, the Senior Director of Investments

and Business Development at ITHCA Group, emphasised the group's intention to invest in InnoTech, which specializes in 3D printing technology.

The aim is to revolutionise the industry by deviating from conventional methods. This technology presents various advantages, including the localisation of specialised technicians in real estate development, support for workers in the sector, and keeping pace with global technological advancements.

By leveraging the technologies of the fourth industrial revolution, ITHCA Group aims to contribute to economic growth and expedite project completion.

Eng Othman bin Maktoum al Mandhari, the Founder and CEO

of InnoTech, expressed satisfaction with the partnership and investment from ITHCA Group. They look forward to expanding the utilisation of 3D technology in real estate development.

Considering that cement is one of the most extensively used materials in construction globally, the field of real estate development faces significant challenges, such as high labor costs and expensive traditional building materials. Consequently, there is now a global race to automate this sector.

InnoTech has taken on the responsibility of becoming the pioneering company in the Middle East by developing this technology, aiming to become one of the leading companies in the field.

Khimji Ramdas ICT enters into new alliances in education sector

Khimji Ramdas ICT, one of the leading IT and Information security solutions companies and a part of Khimji Ramdas Group, a 150-years-old business conglomerate in the Sultanate of Oman took a significant stride towards transforming the educational landscape of Oman with a momentous signing ceremony.

Held at the KR Infrastructure campus, the event marked the establishment of strategic partnerships with two prominent principals, Academia-Serosoft and OneScreen. The signing ceremony was graced by the presence of KR directors, Hritik Khimji and Varun Khimji.

With these alliances, KR-ICT aims to bolster KR-ICT's capabilities in serving the educational industry in Oman.

KR-ICT firmly believes in the power of digital transformation



to revolutionise the educational sector, ensuring enhanced access to knowledge for every student across the sultanate. To achieve this vision, KR-ICT has strategically partnered with world-leading technology providers, Academia, Serosoft, and OneScreen.

OneScreen Solutions, a prominent player in the field of video conferencing and collabo-

ration platforms, offers a comprehensive solution that addresses the evolving needs of educational institutions.

Recognising that transforming the teaching methods alone may not be sufficient, OneScreen Solutions ensures equal access to education by connecting students both physically and remotely.

The platform's interactive

whiteboarding feature fosters active participation and engagement, creating an inclusive learning environment.

Additionally, the user-friendly interface consolidates all necessary tools onto a single interactive screen, simplifying the learning experience and eliminating the need for multiple devices.

Whereas, Academia ERP provides a complete enterprise so-

lution designed to automate academic and administrative processes in colleges and universities. Built on cutting-edge Java technology, Academia ERP streamlines the entire student lifecycle, from initial inquiry to graduation, while also managing key administrative functions such as inventory, hostel, library, and human resources.

By minimising manual inter-

vention, Academia ERP enhances efficiency, providing greater control over the system and ensuring smoother execution of processes.

Mujtaba Hassan-Managing Director, OneScreen Solutions-GCC stated, "OneScreen Solutions streamlines the learning experience for teachers and students alike, making it easier and better than ever before. With the flexibility to create multiple accounts, each teacher can enjoy a customised experience tailored to their specific needs and preferences.

"And here's the best part: Whenever teachers find themselves in need of assistance, the OneScreen Gurus are just one tap away. Thousands of successful case studies demonstrate how OneScreen Solutions empowers educational institutions to prepare future leaders while

enabling teachers to seamlessly transfer their wisdom."

Serosoft founder Arpriti Badjatya said, "We consider our partners as a logical extension of our organization providing tools, Support, and Knowledge transfer to jointly address the needs of our clients. Our partners are selected and certified to ensure that Academia software solution gets implemented smoothly."

Meenal Madavi-HOD KICT mentioned, "Technology integration offered by the new-age tech ecosystem can plug some of the gaps in the present education system. As Oman witnesses a steady growth in the number of technology users, EdTech solutions can aid the country to get ahead of the curve by providing high-quality educational experiences to learners, cutting across economies, gender, region or age."

Heavy rains, flooding leave 22 people dead in South Korea

Seoul, South Korea - At least 22 people have died and 14 more are missing after heavy rain caused flooding and landslides in South Korea, officials said on Saturday, with thousands more ordered to evacuate their homes.

South Korea is at the peak of its summer monsoon season and there has been heavy rainfall for the last three days, triggering widespread flooding and landslides, and causing a major dam to overflow.

The interior ministry reported that 22 people had been killed and another 14 were missing in the heavy downpours, mostly buried by landslides or after falling into a flooded reservoir.

The majority of the casualties - including 16 dead and nine missing - come from North Gyeongsang province, largely due to massive landslides in the mountainous area that engulfed houses with people inside.

South Korea's Yonhap News Agency had earlier reported 24 deaths, citing local disaster relief officials. In the most severely affected areas, 'entire houses were swept away whole', one emergency responder told Yonhap.



South Korean emergency workers searching for survivors at a house destroyed by flood waters after heavy rains in Yecheon on Saturday (AFP)

More than 6,400 residents in the central county of Goesan were ordered to evacuate early on Saturday as the Goesan Dam began overflowing and submerging low-lying villages nearby, the interior ministry said.

Some of the people who have been reported missing were swept away when a river overflowed in North Gyeongsang province, the ministry said.

Rescue workers were battling to reach some 19 cars which were trapped in an underground tunnel in Cheongju, North Chungcheong province, where one person was

found dead, according to Yonhap.

Flash flooding swept through the area too quickly for people to escape, but water levels remain high and it is unclear how many people were trapped inside their vehicles, Yonhap reported. The number of deaths is expected to rise as local government agencies assess the damage nationwide, the news agency said.

All regular train services nationwide were suspended as of 2pm (0500 GMT), although KTX high-speed trains remained operational with potential schedule adjustments, according to the

Korea Railroad Corporation.

Roads were closed and trails in national parks shut due to the rain and flooding.

The Korea Meteorological Administration issued heavy rain warnings, saying more rain was forecast through to Wednesday next week, saying the weather conditions pose a 'grave' danger.

South Korean Prime Minister Han Duck-soo urged officials to preempt river overflows and landslides, and requested support for rescue operations from the defence ministry.

AFP

Heatwaves sweep the world from US to Japan via Europe

Rome, Italy - Record heat is forecast around the world from the United States, where tens of millions are battling dangerously high temperatures, to Europe and Japan, in the latest example of the threat from global warming.

Italy faces weekend predictions of historic highs with the health ministry issuing a red alert for 16 cities including Rome, Bologna and Florence.

The meteo centre warned Italians to prepare for 'the most intense heatwave of the summer and also one of the most intense of all time'.

The thermometer could hit 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) in Rome by Monday and even 43C on Tuesday, smashing the record 40.5C set in August 2007.



A delivery man drinks water in Thessaloniki on Friday, as Greece is hit by a heatwave (AFP)

Italy faces weekend predictions of historic highs with the health ministry issuing a red alert for 16 cities

Monday, with the meteorological agency warning temperatures could hit previous records.

But relentless monsoon rains have reportedly killed at least 90 people in northern India, after burning heat.

The Yamuna river running through the capital New Delhi has reached a record high of 208.66 metres, more than a metre over the flood top set in 1978, threatening low-lying neighbourhoods in the megacity of more than 20mn people.

Major flooding and landslides are common during India's monsoons, but experts say climate change is increasing their frequency and severity

Americans are watching as a powerful heatwave has stretches from California to Texas, with its peak expected this weekend.

A heat dome has been baking the southwestern states all week, posing serious health risks.

In Arizona, one of the hardest-hit states, residents face a daily endurance marathon against the sun. State capital Phoenix was to record its 15th straight day above 109 degrees Fahrenheit (43C) on Friday, according to the National Weather Services.

Deadly danger

Authorities have been sounding the alarm, advising people to avoid outdoor activities in the daytime and to be wary of dehydration.

The Las Vegas weather service warned that assuming high temperatures naturally come with the area's desert climate

was 'a DANGEROUS mindset! This heatwave is NOT typical desert heat'.

"Now the most intense period is beginning," it added, as the weekend arrived with record highs threatening on Sunday.

California's famous Death Valley, one of the hottest places on Earth, is also likely to register new peaks on Sunday, with the mercury possibly rising to 130F (54C).

Southern California is fighting numerous small wildfires.

Last weekend, sweltering temperatures killed 10 migrants along the US border with Mexico, the Border Patrol said.

River Tigris shrinking

In Iraq, where scorching summers are common, along with power cuts, Wissam Abed said he cools off from Baghdad's brutal summer by swimming in the Tigris river.

But as Iraqi rivers dry up, so does the age-old pastime.

As temperatures near 50C and wind whips through the city like a hair dryer, Abed stands in the middle of the river, but the water only comes up to his waist.

"I live here... like my grandfather did before me. Year after year, the water situation gets worse," said the 37-year-old.

While it can be difficult to attribute a particular weather event to climate change, scientists insist global warming - linked to dependence on fossil fuels - is behind the multiplication and intensification of heat waves in the world.

AFP



The United Nations headquarters building in New York (AFP)

Damascus conditions for cross-border aid 'unacceptable', says UN

United Nations, US - The United Nations is concerned about 'unacceptable conditions' set by Damascus for allowing aid to flow through its Bab al-Hawa crossing to rebel-held areas in northwest Syria, according to a document reviewed on Friday by AFP.

The delivery of humanitarian aid through the crossing has been stalled since Monday, when a 2014 UN deal expired.

A letter this week from Syrian authorities allowing use of the border crossing between Turkey and Syria 'contains two unacceptable conditions', according to a document sent to the UN Security Council from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

OCHA said it was concerned that the Syrian government had 'stressed that the United Nations should not communicate with entities designated as terrorist,'

The second condition it bridled at was that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) should 'supervise and facilitate the distribution of humanitarian aid' in northwest Syria. The UN says more than four million people in northwest

Syria are in need of food, water, medicine and other essentials.

Through an arrangement that began in 2014, the UN largely delivers relief to northwest Syria via neighbouring Turkey through the Bab al-Hawa crossing.

Syria announced on Thursday that it would authorise the UN to use Bab al-Hawa to deliver vital humanitarian aid to millions of people in rebel-held areas for six months.

Syria's ambassador to the UN Bassam Sabbagh told reporters on Thursday that his country had taken a 'sovereign decision' on allowing the aid to continue.

That announcement followed the expiration on Monday of a mechanism that has allowed UN convoys to use the crossing to rebel areas without authorisation from Damascus.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres's spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Friday that 'there's been no crossings in Bab al-Hawa with United Nations humanitarian aid', adding that authorities were reviewing Syria's authorisation.

"We're taking a look at... what exactly was expressed in the letter," he said.

AFP

NY architect charged in Long Island serial killings

New York, US - A New York architect was charged on Friday in connection with the long-unsolved murders of three women whose bodies were found near a beach on Long Island more than a decade ago.

Rex Heuermann, 59, is facing murder charges for the 2009 and 2010 deaths of the three women and is the 'prime suspect' in the murder of a fourth woman, officials said.

"Rex Heuermann is a demon," Suffolk County police commissioner Rodney Harrison told reporters. "A predator that ruins families." Heuermann, who lived in Massapequa Park, a town near Gilgo Beach, where the bodies were found, was arrested in Manhattan on Thursday evening.

All four women - Amber Costello, Melissa Barthelemy, Megan Waterman and Maureen Brainard-Barnes - were in their 20s and were sex work-

ers, according to prosecutors.

"Each of the four victims were found similarly positioned, bound in a similar fashion by either belts or tape, with three of the victims found wrapped in a burlap-type material," US District Attorney Ray Tierney said.

Tierney said the case against Heuermann was based on DNA evidence from a discarded pizza box, cellphone data linking him to the victims and a sighting of his vehicle at the home of one of the murdered women.

"For each of the murders he got an individual burner phone and used that to communicate with the victims," Tierney said.

"Then, shortly after the death of the victims, he would get rid of the burner phone." Heuermann also performed hundreds of internet searches about the investigation into the murders.

AFP

Tunisia rights groups urge aid, shelter for migrants

Tunis, Tunisia - Tunisian rights groups called on Friday for emergency aid and shelters for migrants expelled from Sfax last week, as dozens of people protested in Tunis in support of their plight.

Hundreds of migrants fled or were forced out of Tunisia's second-largest city after racial tensions flared following the July 3 killing of a Tunisian man in an altercation between locals and migrants.

The port of Sfax is a departure point for many migrants from impoverished and violence-torn countries seeking a better life in Europe by making a perilous Mediterranean crossing, often in makeshift boats.

Hundreds of migrants were forcibly taken to desert and hostile areas bordering Libya and Algeria after the unrest in Sfax.

Romdane Ben Amor, spokesperson for the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES), told reporters on Friday that between 100 and 150 migrants, including women and



Demonstrators lift placards and chant anti-racism slogans during a protest in Tunis on Friday (AFP)

children, were still stuck on the border with Libya.

He said about 165 migrants abandoned near the border with Algeria had been picked up, without specifying by whom or where they were taken.

"Migrants are transferred from one place to another while other groups hide out in the wild

in catastrophic conditions for fear of being detected and suffering the same fate as those stranded on the borders," Ben Amor said.

He called for emergency accommodation to be given to the migrants and said the authorities must send 'a clear message' to Tunisian citizens to help them,

regardless of their status.

Around 100 protesters demonstrated on Friday evening in Tunis at the call of an anti-fascist coalition, expressing their 'solidarity with undocumented migrants'. The demonstrators also slammed Tunisia's police for 'expelling you (migrants) and repressing us'.

"Tunisia is African.

No to racism, down with fascism," they chanted.

Meanwhile, the head of a Cameroonian association claimed police had carried out 'arbitrary arrests' of sub-Saharan Africans around the train station in Zarzis, south of Sfax.

"Around 300 have been arrested... just because of their skin colour," said Eric Tchata, who posted online a video taken by a fellow Cameroonian purporting to show a group of people, including women and children, packed into a warehouse in Medenine, also south of Sfax.

Ben Amor expressed fears that migrants could die if they are not immediately given aid and shelter, noting that the bodies of two had already been found.

Human Rights Watch has said the migrants had been left to fend for themselves without water or shelter in the border regions, where temperatures surpass 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit).

AFP

Striking actors take to picket lines as Hollywood shuts down

Los Angeles, US - Actors took to picket lines outside studio headquarters from California to New York on Friday as movie and television production ground to a halt in the most serious Hollywood strike in decades.

Hundreds of strikers marched with placards at the Netflix building on Los Angeles' famed Sunset Boulevard, as well as at Disney, Paramount, Warner and Amazon premises, with passing drivers honking their horns in support.

In New York, Jason Sudeikis and Susan Sarandon were among A-listers who showed up for demonstrations, triggered by the refusal of studio bosses to meet actors' demands for better pay and job security.

"The studios are tone-deaf and greedy, and they need to wake up - because we are the ones that made them rich," actress Frances Fisher, who starred in *Titanic*, told AFP while marching outside Paramount Pictures.

Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA) members joined writers who have been on strike for weeks, triggering the first industry-wide walkout for 63 years and effectively shutting down Hollywood.

"We've been out here for about 80 days... The fact that SAG-AFTRA went on strike brought a lot of energy, and there's incredible solidarity," said *Friends* co-creator Marta Kauffman. The studios 'look like the devil', she told AFP, at the picket



Members of the Writers Guild of America and the Screen Actors Guild walk a picket line outside NBC Universal in New York City on Friday (AFP)

The studios are tone-deaf and greedy, and they need to wake up - because we are the ones that made them rich

FRANCES FISHER

line outside Netflix.

Actors formally went on strike at midnight on Thursday after negotiations to reach a new deal with production studios ended without an agreement.

The union's demands have focused on dwindling pay in the streaming era, and the threat posed by artificial intelligence.

"We're in this for the long haul, but this is a historic moment," said Vera Cherny, 44, who has had roles in *The Americans* and *For All Mankind*.

"It is time for us to lock down the contracts that are going to serve generations of actors to come. Just like they did in 1960."

Blockbusters delayed?

Protesters came out in force on both coasts for Friday's protests. In Manhattan, 36-year-old ac-

tress Casey Killoran told AFP that actors are 'just trying to make a minimum wage, a living wage in New York City'.

"We want to be able to live in the place that we work," she said.

But for now, the 'double strike' has essentially shut down all US productions, with limited exceptions such as reality and game shows.

TV shows that had continued to shoot amid the writer's strike, such as *Star Wars* series *Andor*, will shut down.

Ongoing production of movies including superhero flick *Deadpool 3* and historical epic se-

quel *Gladiator 2* were also expected to shutter, and their release dates could be postponed if industrial action drags on.

Actors are now prohibited from promoting some of the year's biggest movies, at the peak of the summer blockbuster season.

The A-list cast of Universal's *Oppenheimer*, a much-hyped wartime biopic from Christopher Nolan, walked out of their London premiere on Thursday.

SAG-AFTRA represents actors from mega-stars such as Tom Cruise to day-players who take small roles on television series. Top stars enjoy individual contracts with studios that far exceed the union minimums which are the focus of the actors' strike, but their presence on picket lines over the coming weeks could help draw attention to the dispute.

"We're part of an industry that has so many people that are front-facing, so that extra PR is gonna be helpful," said Tien Tran, star of sitcom *How I Met Your Father*, who was picketing outside Paramount.

The last time the actors' union went on strike, in 1980 over the advent of pay television and home video, it lasted more than three months.

This time, the union says actors' pay has been 'severely eroded' by streaming and has warned that artificial intelligence poses 'an existential threat'. AFP

Thailand: Pita says only one more shot at forming govt

Bangkok, Thailand - The liberal frontrunner to become Thailand's next prime minister said on Saturday he would withdraw his candidacy if parliament did not endorse him next week, after military-appointed lawmakers foiled his first attempt.

Pita Limjaroenrat's Move Forward Party (MFP) won the most seats in May elections, buoyed by young Thais eager for progressive reforms after nine years of army-backed rule in the kingdom. But the Harvard-educated millionaire's campaign to lead the next government was knocked back on Thursday by senators in parliament who consider his pledge to reform strict royal defamation laws a red line.

The legislature holds its second ballot for a new prime minister on Wednesday, and Pita said he would support a candidate from coalition partner Pheu Thai if he again failed to win the needed votes. "I'd like to apologise that we haven't succeeded," he said in a video address posted to social media.

"I'm ready to give a chance to Thailand by letting the party that has the second most votes... be the one to form the coalition."

Pita was 51 votes short of the 375 lawmakers he needed to support his candidacy during the first ballot.

Just 13 senators voted for him, with many voicing their opposition to MFP's pledge to soften



Pita Limjaroenrat (AFP)

the kingdom's royal defamation laws.

After the first ballot, the party ruled out compromising on its proposed revisions to the laws, which currently allow convicted critics of the monarchy to be jailed for up to 15 years.

All 250 senators were appointed under the junta-drafted constitution, which political analyst Thitinan Pongsudhirak said was a reliable impediment to MFP's reformist platform.

"It is a way for the authority and the regime to stay in power in the long term and to prevent a pro-democracy government that can stand against them," he told AFP on Friday.

Pita urged his supporters on Saturday to get 'creative' in urging senators to throw their support behind him in the next round. "I alone can't change the senators' mind. Therefore, I ask everybody to help with this mission," he said.

AFP

Colombian children rescued after 40 days in jungle leave hospital

Bogotá, Colombia - Four Indigenous children who survived 40 days in the Colombian Amazon have been released from a military hospital after a monthlong stay, authorities said on Friday, adding that the siblings were doing 'very well'.

Lesly (13), Soleiny (9), Tien Noriel (5) and baby Cristin (1) were the only survivors after the small plane they were flying in crashed in the jungle.

All three adults on board, including their mother, died.

They were rescued on June 9, and taken to a military hospital in Bogota to recover.

The four were discharged on Thursday night, said the Colombian Family Welfare Institute,



ICBF Director Astrid Caceres (AFP)

which will temporarily take custody of the children.

"They have recovered... weight, they are actually very well," institute director Astrid Caceres told reporters.

The children show no physical effects from the 40 days they spent wandering the Amazon, she said, adding that even little Cristin is 'completely recovered in terms of physical development'.

The children appeared emaciated in photos taken shortly after they were found, and in the hospital they were given food typical of the Huitoto Indigenous group to which they belong, such as cassava flour.

Relatives say the children managed to survive thanks to Lesly's deep knowledge of survival in the jungle, with its many inherent dangers - including snakes, predatory animals and armed criminal groups.

It took nearly 200 military and Indigenous rescuers with search dogs to track them down. The Colombian Family Welfare Institute said it will maintain custody of the children for at least six months, as authorities investigate their family background.

After their rescue, a custody battle ensued between the maternal grandparents and the father of the two younger children.

The siblings will live with other children in a shelter, whose location was not disclosed. Caceres said the children will be in a rural area where they will feel 'comfortable'.

AFP

CELESTIAL BEAUTY



Fireworks explode next to the Eiffel Tower and the Seine river as part of the annual Bastille Day celebrations in Paris, on Friday (AFP)

All aboard: Grocery bus caters to isolated German villages

Lohne, Germany - In the western German village of Lohne, where the only grocery store closed its doors earlier this year, residents now do their food shopping on board a red-and-green supermarket bus that rolls into the main square once a week.

For 90 minutes, locals get a chance to buy the essentials without having to get into a car to drive to the nearest store.

The supermarket-on-wheels is a pilot project between Germany's third-largest food retailer, REWE, and the Deutsche Bahn rail and transport company.

The bus began plying its route in March, catering to rural villages in the state of Hesse where brick-and-mortar stores have become an increasingly rare sight, turning some areas into so-called food deserts.

For the roughly 600 inhabitants of Lohne, where the bal-

conies are dotted with colourful geraniums, the arrival of the REWE shopping bus is a welcome sight after the village's only mini-mart closed for good in the spring. "I can get the basics here," said 90-year-old Inge Nehreng, who rode her electric trike for three kilometres (1.8 miles) to join the weekly bus rendez-vous. "If I need something special, I go to a department store," she added. Parked on the village square, the 18-metre (60-foot) long bendy bus carries over 950 everyday products.

Fresh fruit and vegetables are on display outside the bus, while inside the choice ranges from food items to cigarettes, newspapers, soap and condoms.

"The only things missing are nappies and wet wipes," said Yasmine Schneider, 34, who was shopping with her toddler Felix. The mobile supermarket has



A REWE shopping supermarket bus delivering daily needs is stationed at a place in Haddamar near Fritzlar, central Germany, on July 6 (AFP)

also become a popular meeting place, a chance for the often elderly residents to catch up while getting their weekly groceries.

"After shopping, we sit on a bench and talk a bit," said 85-year-old Ursula Sauer, who lives alone.

Keeping villages connected

From Monday to Saturday, the supermarket bus covers a 600-

kilometre route, stopping at 23 villages.

The prices on board 'are the same' as in the REWE supermarkets, said Joern Berszinski, who manages the supermarket bus.

Deutsche Bahn provides the driver for the project, while the onboard cashier is employed by REWE. Despite its appeal, it remains to be seen how profitable the bus service will be.

"It takes three years for a stationary shop to turn a profit, the bus could also take a few years," said Berszinski, who has run franchises under the REWE banner for 30 years. A key selling point for the mobile supermarket is that REWE can reach more customers with a single sales team.

"At a time when there's a shortage of skilled workers, that's an advantage," said Frank Klingenhoefer, in charge of mobility services at Deutsche Bahn

Regio. The bus project has not gone unnoticed in Germany, where nearly 2,000 supermarkets of fewer than 400 square metres (4,300 square feet) have closed over the past decade, according to the EHI retail research group.

"Many communities in other regions have expressed an interest," said Klingenhoefer.

The REWE supermarket group plans to wait until the end of the pilot project in March 2025 before deciding whether to expand. Deutsche Bahn already has eight 'medical buses' crisscrossing the countryside to tend to Germany's ageing population in remote areas.

It also has plans for a bus offering banking services. Klingenhoefer said he could imagine services like shoe and clothing repairs on wheels as well.

AFP

INDIA

PM Modi feted in France during tense Bastille Day celebrations

Paris, France - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was honoured during France's Bastille Day celebrations on Friday, which are taking place under tight security two weeks after riots swept the country.

Around 45,000 police were deployed while firework sales have been banned as the government aims to prevent a repeat of the urban violence seen at the end of June following the police killing of a teenager.

The annual Bastille Day festivities, which mark the storming of the Bastille prison at the start of the French Revolution in 1789, kicked off with a traditional military parade in the morning.

Tanks, planes, infantry soldiers and even cavalry swept down the Champs Elysees, while an aerobatics team flew overhead. Several hundred Indian soldiers also took part, and three of the 36 French-made Rafale fighter jets acquired by New Delhi as part of a sweeping military overhaul also flew over Paris.

"We were all able to see a marvellous image of our cooperation on sea, land and in the skies," Modi told Macron during a joint statement by the leaders following talks at the presidential palace.

The Indian defence ministry on Thursday announced its intention to procure another 26 Rafales for use on its new aircraft carrier, as well as three more



French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife Brigitte welcome India's PM Narendra Modi (C) at The Louvre Museum in Paris on Friday (AFP)

We were all able to see a marvellous image of our cooperation on sea, land and in the skies

NARENDRA MODI

Scorpene-class submarines, a deal expected to be worth billions of euros.

Top award for Modi

Macron's red carpet welcome comes weeks after Modi was given the rare honour of a White House state dinner in Washington. Despite differences over the war in Ukraine and concerns over human rights in India, Western democracies are courting New Delhi as a military and economic counterweight to China.

"We share concerns over the risks of fragmentation of the international community" over the

war, said Macron, while Modi said India was ready to 'contribute to restore lasting peace'.

Macron referred to a 'convergence' between France and India 25 years after they first signed a strategic partnership deal.

"We defend the same idea together of the Indo-Pacific, a space that must remain open and free of all hegemonic power," he said during the press conference with Modi, in a veiled reference to Beijing.

Ahead of the parade, Macron

awarded Modi the grand cross of the Legion of Honour, the country's top order of merit.

Modi and Macron signed a raft of deals that would see increased co-operation in the space industry - with a joint satellite maritime surveillance system - plans to develop helicopter engines and initiatives to fight plastic waste and develop solar power.

'Loss of confidence'

Bastille Day was a more sober

affair than in previous years following five nights of rioting from June 27 after the fatal shooting by police of a teenager in a Paris suburb.

The most intense urban clashes in nearly two decades saw thousands of cars torched, public property destroyed and more than 3,700 people arrested, many of them minors.

Some towns have cancelled their traditional firework displays. Far-right opposition leader Marine Le Pen said the measures were 'an admission of a total loss of confidence in the state'.

After a banquet with 200 guests at the Louvre Museum Friday evening, Macron and Modi watched the Paris fireworks display marking the end of Bastille Day.

Amid the diplomatic courting of Modi, a resolution from the European Parliament on Thursday served as a reminder that he and his Hindu nationalist agenda have garnered critics at home and abroad.

EU parliamentarians approved a motion urging India to end violence in northeastern Manipur state and protect minorities there.

Clashes between the majority Meitei, who are mostly Hindus, and the mainly Christian Kuki tribe have left at least 120 people dead, 50,000 displaced and more than 1,700 houses destroyed, the parliament said.

AFP

Rahul Gandhi moves apex court over conviction

New Delhi - Top Indian opposition leader Rahul Gandhi appealed to the country's highest court on Saturday over his conviction for defamation, days after a lower court refused to intervene, media reports said.

Gandhi was sentenced to two years' jail for comments he made in 2019 which a court ruled were insulting to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and those sharing his last name.

That made him ineligible to remain a member of parliament, or to stand in next year's election.

Modi's government has been widely accused of using the defamation law to silence critics.

Gandhi filed an appeal asking the Supreme Court to stay his conviction, multiple Indian media reports said, a week after the Gujarat High Court refused to do so.

Officials of Gandhi's Congress party did not immediately respond to requests by AFP for comment.

But earlier this month, party spokesperson Abhishek Manu Singhvi told reporters: "We have no doubt that this intersection of arrogance and infallibility shown by this government of the day and ruling party of the day will be dealt with properly in the Supreme Court."

AFP

India, UAE sign MoU to establish IIT in Abu Dhabi, first in MENA

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Prime Minister Narendra Modi concluded his three-day visit to France and the United Arab Emirates.

In the last leg of the visit, Prime Minister arrived in Abu Dhabi to a warm welcome by Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi.

The prime minister also inspected the ceremonial Guard of Honour with Sheikh Mohamed at the magnificent Qasr Al Watani. The two leaders held wide-ranging talks on bilateral and global issues.

The India-UAE relationship is rapidly transforming in line with the Vision Statement unveiled by the two leaders during their virtual summit in February 2022.

During the visit, the two leaders witnessed the exchange of three Memoranda of Understanding (MoU).

An MoU was exchanged for the establishment of a campus of IIT Delhi in Abu Dhabi between the Indian Ministry of Education, UAE's Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge and the Indian In-



UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan welcoming India PM Narendra Modi at Qasr Al Watani in Abu Dhabi, on Saturday (AFP)

stitute of Technology, Delhi (IIT). This is the first ever IIT to be set up in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region. The idea behind setting up of IIT campus in Abu Dhabi is to bring the academic excellence of IITs to the wide international community.

The campus aspires to be a truly global campus which will also benefit the large Indian diaspora in the UAE and the region, as per the MoU.

"This marks a significant stride in our educational internationalisation and is testa-

ment to India's innovation prowess. Education is the bond that unites us, it's the spark that ignites innovation. Together, we will leverage this power for mutual prosperity and global betterment," Modi tweeted.

MoU on Local Currency Settlement (LCS) System was signed between the Reserve Bank of India and the Central Bank of the United Arab Emirates enabling the use of Indian Rupee and UAE Dirham for cross-border transactions.

This is India's first-ever LCS

and is expected to reduce transaction costs and time and increase reliance on local currencies. This will further add to the preferential terms accruing from Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). The traders can choose the payment currency based on mutual agreement.

Further, the surplus balance in local currencies can be used for investing in local currency assets like corporate bonds, government securities, equity markets etc.

ANI

China's top diplomat tells EU not to 'vacillate'

Beijing, China - The European Union must not 'vacillate', and needs to 'clarify' its strategic relationship with Beijing, top diplomat Wang Yi said during a meeting with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, China's foreign ministry said on Saturday.

Germany, Europe's leading economy on Thursday, announced plans to 'de-risk' ties with China.

Other EU leaders, weary of China's growing assertiveness and cosy relationship with Russia, have pushed to reduce reliance on Beijing. "The EU side should... clarify the positioning of the strategic partnership between the two sides, and promote China-EU relations to move forward," Wang told Borrell when they met on the sidelines of Southeast Asian talks in Jakarta on Friday, according to the Chinese foreign ministry statement.

"It should not vacillate, let alone encourage words and deeds that turn the clock back," Wang said.

Some EU member states worry about antagonising China and starting a trade war, while others argue now is the time to act to protect the bloc's economic security. Brussels wants to define its own approach to Beijing that balances concerns over relying too much on China with maintaining ties with the world's second-largest economy.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in January described the EU's approach to China as 'de-risking rather than decoupling' since the bloc still sought to work and trade with Beijing.

"There is no conflict of fundamental interests between China and the EU," Wang said.

AFP

'You have to kill': The new battle for Bakhmut

Bakhmut, Ukraine - Yuriy Korpan is 39 years old but looks a decade older, his face worn as he returns from a week of combat near Bakhmut.

The Ukrainian infantryman, a father of three, was fighting to re-take Bakhmut, a city which fell entirely into Russian hands in May after a battle that lasted nearly a year.

On his last day on the frontline before a week's rest, Korpan remembers 'the bombing started at four in the morning with mortar and artillery fire'.

"Then it calmed down a bit. Then an hour later, the enemy attacked," he told AFP.

"We fought back with machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades, grenade-launchers, mortar fire," said Korpan, who used to work in the construction industry before being mobilised in August 2022.

Since the start of a counteroffensive in June, Ukrainian forces have been advancing slowly to the north and south of Bakhmut in an attempt to surround Russian forces there in a pincer movement and eventually re-take the



Ukrainian servicemen of 22th mechanised brigade operate at a recaptured position near Klyshchiivka village, south of Bakhmut, Donetsk region on Thursday (AFP)

city. Ukraine's defence ministry frequently refers to fighting there as 'fierce'.

'Adrenaline starts pumping'

In the fighting 'the adrenaline starts pumping and you are kind of excited'.

"You are as tense as a rope and obsessed with a single idea -

- destroying the enemy who came onto our lands," Korpan said. "On the battlefield, you have to kill."

Korpan said he does not keep track of the number of Russian soldiers he has killed as there is 'no sense', adding that 'only beginners do that'.

Asked if he feels afraid, he replied: "Of course you are afraid

but you pull yourself together. And when you are fighting the fear disappears. In the actual fighting, you cannot be afraid, you have to overcome that and fulfil your task. Fear is also an enemy," he said.

On the southern flank of Bakhmut, Vitaliy Stolyarchuk, 31, heads up an infantry unit that has been fighting and advancing

around the village of Klyshchyvka.

"Of course it is scary, only a fool would not be afraid," said the bespectacled Stolyarchuk, who worked as a barman in the port city of Odesa before the war.

"I believe in God and I always pray that my brothers and I come out alive from the battle. You have to keep a cool head and a 360-degree view," he said, calling the Russians 'formidable adversaries'. Stolyarchuk pointed out the particular danger posed by anti-personnel mines laid by retreating Russian forces.

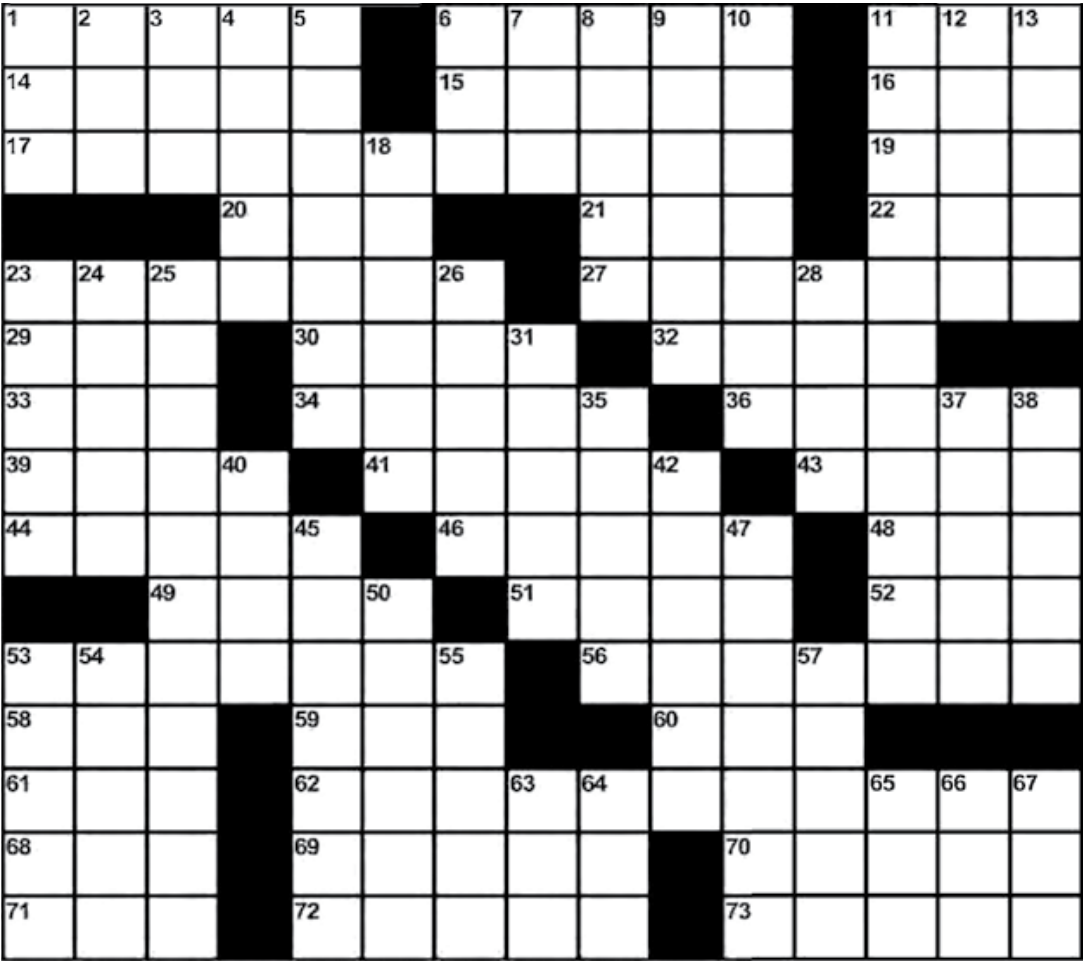
"The (Ukrainian) soldiers are inexperienced and fall into the trap."

Volodymyr Veselovsky, a volunteer medic at a first aid point for wounded soldiers, said he had noticed more mine blast injuries recently but most wounds were still from artillery fire.

"For several weeks, we have had more traumas caused by landmines. There are injuries to the feet and legs. One day we had five injuries that had to be amputated," he told AFP.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS
- 1) Give a lift up

6) Like some transit or fire

11) Having lived many years

14) Equestrian

15) Do a make-up job?

16) "Seinfeld" uncle

17) Broken-in slippers, a wellworn sofa, etc.

19) VHS successor

20) Pedal digit

21) "The Raven" writer's monogram

22) Gig segment

23) Succeed financially

27) Bit of slalom gear

29) Costa del_

30) Just makes, as a living (with "out")

32) Son of Isaac and Rebekah

33) Suffered with

34) "Jurassic Park" mosquito preserver

36) Artist Max

39) Advil target

41) Participate in a debate

43) Europe's tallest active volcano

44) Some impact sounds

46) Little kids

48) Be in a bad way

49) Cambodian currency

51) Poland's Walesa

52) Bar rocks

53) North American hawk

56) Gets smaller, as a sweater

58) Mythical monster

59)_Wee Herman

60) Christmas holiday drink

61) Sine_non (necessary condition)

62) Crumbly road part?

68)_and downs

69) Scalawag

70) Dinner-table protector

71) Ending for many ordinal numbers

72) Jacket material, sometimes

73) Amiens is its capital

DOWN

1) "My man!"

2) Black gold

3) Not even

4) Religious divisions

5) Highway cruiser

6) Churchill's "so few," briefly

7) From_Z

8) Small skin openings

9) Amount eaten

10) Really dislike

11) Ararat or Sinai?

12) Carpenter's tool

13) Artful move

18) More humble

23) "Don't give me that!"

24) Invasive household insect

25) Twenties from the '20s?

26) Change, as a clock

28) Reduce, as expenses

31) Female oracle

35) Cooks in the microwave

37) Small cut

38) Accounts

40) Give off, as light

42) Electronic music genre

45) Baltimore is one

47) Covers or hides

50) Remain in hiding

53) Mallet-and-ball game

54) Blow, as a volcano

55) Pigeon's city perch

57) Block house?
- 63) Take to court

64) Pronominal contraction

65) Like a faint light

66) "A Nightmare on_ Street"

67) Bread variety

NOTE PAD

TOGAALUMSTEAKSHAH
LIRECALLALAVAS
COUNTRYDOORDOWN
AURAEAGIST
FLABBYMIRE
ROILFLATE
ENDEASTENTRANCE
TEEETACKYIAMB
ARCHCARPET
OMANISLUSH
PACKPOCKETPEDAL
ARILMAUVEAONE
RIDEISLESADINE
TESTTALLYSTAR
- YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE
- ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19
Even if novels aren't quite your cup of tea, flipping through some books on the best-seller shelf or looking through a short story collection could give you a new idea for how to handle a real-life problem. There is a lot of inspiration in creative expression, especially when it encapsulates one special idea and conveys it in a way you've never considered before. Mysterious feelings can often be better understood if you can see them from a more dramatic point of view.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
Taking people at their word is not a very wise thing to do today, because all that glitters is definitely not gold! Turn up your skepticism a little bit, and don't hesitate to doubt what you hear. Especially if it sounds too good to be true! Keep your cards close to your chest and don't give anybody clues about what you are thinking. Being critical of someone doesn't mean that you don't like or trust them. It just means that you are tough to impress.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21
Your old ideas are getting musty! It's time to get a fresh perspective on your job, your family, and your relationships. It's not that there is anything wrong with any of them, it's just that every now and then you need to reevaluate things. New perspectives aren't always better ones, but they're always worth investigating. If someone introduces something that makes you ponder today, don't be afraid to explore it more deeply. Find out if you need to change the status quo.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
One of your friends is experiencing some relationship problems and they're letting them affect your friendship a bit too much, in your opinion. They're distracted when they're with you and can only seem to talk about what's bothering them. It's no surprise that your patience is running low. Don't feel guilty about your frustration. Start a conversation with them. Remind them how much you care about them, but show them that by alienating you they aren't going to help themselves.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Not everyone can be as informed and experienced as you are, and it's not always their fault. So cut some people some slack when they frustrate you with their questions. They're just working at their own pace and abilities and doing their best. You can't fault them if their best isn't good enough for you. Instead of getting frustrated, just go off and take care of other things. They'll feel less pressure and you'll feel less restricted.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
If you're hit with a financial windfall, you shouldn't invest it all in one place or spend it all on one thing! Show your gratitude to the Universe by spreading the love around. Give some of your money to a cause you feel is important for the future. Lend a friend in need some cash, even if it's just for lunch. You will get back way more than you give, maybe not today, but eventually. Karmic payoff isn't always instant, but it's always worth waiting for.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
Coworkers can certainly help you get ahead in your career, but as far as your social life is concerned, you shouldn't look to them for help right now. Sure, they might know someone you'd be interested in getting know, but it's not wise to mix the workday with your weekends at this point. This is not to say that you can't be friends with a coworker. You can. But you need to avoid blurring the lines between your private life and your professional life.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Chemistry is important, but you must be on the same level as the people in your life if you want to find complete harmony. So if you're finding yourself attracted to an opposite personality, be careful. When your energies are different from someone else's, it can be hypnotic and appealing, but these differences can also lead to a lot of conflict. Are you prepared for that? Just be aware that what you think is an intriguing quality now could turn into an annoying one later.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
Just because someone you know is looking for answers in their life doesn't mean that you need to provide them. You might know exactly what they need to do, but they might not agree. Be careful not to come off as preachy. After all, would you like someone else telling you how to run your life? Just listen to their complaints and instead of telling them what you think they should do, ask them what they would like you to do. They will appreciate your compassionate approach.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
There are going to be many tantalizing options for self-promotion today, but the question is will you be bold enough to grab them? If you're looking to gain a higher profile at school, on your team, or in the eye of that cutie, you need to do what it takes to get your time in the spotlight. Volunteer. Raise your voice. Make a scene. Do whatever you need to do to break through the crowd and show the world just who you are. No one else is going to do it for you.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
The only problems you'll have today will be caused by your unpredictable energy level. Your mood could be swinging a bit wildly, and it could be difficult for people to hang on for too long. Expect some folks to go their own way. But don't worry. These rapid changes are nothing that you can't get a handle on before the end of the day. If your mind wanders off like it's destined to, just go with the flow and try to enjoy the fact that you're active at all right now.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
This is a good day to play it cool. Be low-key and you'll end up getting much more attention than you would if you were running around schmoozing with everyone. You don't get yourself noticed by being loud and aggressive. You get yourself noticed by being different from everyone else around you. When they yell, you should whisper. When they're laughing, you should be serious. Make yourself contrast with the rambunctious people around you today and you'll become their leader.
-
- TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE
01. Which of these is an alternative medicine that means, in Japanese, "mysterious atmosphere"?

A. Tai Chi

B. Shiatsu

C. Reiki

D. Feng Shui
02. Topiary is practised on what objects?

A. Cooked poultry

B. Dead animals

C. Carcinogens

D. Plants
03. What are traditional ingredients of the dish known as coquilles saint jacques?

A. Scallops, potatoes and cream

B. Cream, wine, eggs, mushrooms, shallots and scallops

C. Minced chicken, cream, parsley and scallops

D. Scallops, burnt butter, brandy and cream
- Answers: 1. C 2. D 3. B
- KIDS COLOURING
-
-
- BOGGLER
- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| B | U | H | F |
| F | A | A | G |
| E | R | A | E |
| T | S | E | R |
- Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.

Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average
- DO YOU SUDOKU?
- LEVEL EASY: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number
- | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 8 | 4 | | 2 | | | |
| | 7 | | | 5 | | | 2 | |
| | | 9 | 3 | | 6 | 8 | | 1 |
| 7 | | 2 | | | | 4 | | 5 |
| | 8 | | | 4 | | | 3 | |
| 3 | | 4 | | | | 9 | | 7 |
| 8 | | 3 | 7 | | 1 | 2 | | |
| | 2 | | | 8 | | | 9 | |
| | | | 5 | | 4 | 3 | | |
- WORD BUILDER
-
- You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count
- SUDOKU EASY ANSWER
- | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 7 | 9 | 6 |
| 4 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| 9 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 7 | 3 | 4 | 8 |
| 7 | 8 | 6 | 9 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 5 |
| 2 | 3 | 1 | 7 | 4 | 6 | 9 | 8 | 5 |
| 5 | 9 | 4 | 8 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 7 |
| 1 | 4 | 1 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 3 | 6 | 2 |
| 3 | 2 | 9 | 6 | 5 | 1 | 8 | 7 | 4 |
| 6 | 9 | 7 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 8 | 3 | 4 |

DEMOLITION JOB

Ashwin dismantles West Indies as India secure innings win

Roseau, Dominica - Ravichandran Ashwin's seven-wicket second innings demolition job underlined his utter dominance of an inept West Indies team who crashed to defeat by an innings and 141 runs late on the third day of the first Test against India in Dominica on Friday.

It was India's largest margin of victory in a Test match in the West Indies and maintains an unbeaten run spanning more than 21 years against these opponents going into the second and final Test starting next Thursday in Trinidad.

After Rohit Sharma declared the tourists' first innings closed at 421 for five, 40 minutes into the afternoon session, first day destroyers Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja wasted little time in adding to that first innings success to skittle the Caribbean team for 130 in just over 50 overs.

Ashwin fittingly ended the match by trapping last man Jomel Warrican leg-before.

His haul of 7-71 lifted his match figures to 12 -131 -- his eighth match haul of 10 wickets or more in Tests -- while the support of Jadeja kept relentless pressure on a home side technically and temperamentally incapable of coping with such quality



Ravichandran Ashwin (R) and Yashasvi Jaiswal of India walk back to the pavilion after India's victory against the West Indies in the first Test in Dominica on Friday (AFP)

spin bowling on a helpful pitch.

Debutant Alick Athanaze was again the top scorer with 28 but his effort paled in comparison to his Indian counterpart as opening batsman Yashasvi Jaiswal led the way in India's only innings with a determined, dedicated innings of 171 which spanned more than eight hours and occupied 387 deliveries.

That effort earned him the man of the match award notwithstanding the fantastic bowling figures of Ashwin.

"This experience has been a special moment," said the 21-year-old left-hander. "I used to think about playing for my country when I was young. It is an emotional moment for me but this just the start."

'Let ourselves down'

For West Indies captain Kraigg Brathwaite, the emotions were the exact opposite on a forgettable day personally and for his team.

"I didn't think it spun a lot early on, we just let ourselves down with the bat," said the opener, a comment which immediately raised a few eyebrows given how

the pitch behaved virtually from the first session. "Senior guys, starting with myself, have to lead the way. We have to use the bat more instead of our pads."

As on day one, Brathwaite and opening partner Tagenarine Chanderpaul had to cope with spin just minutes into the start of the second innings and although he was dropped on nought Ashwin eventually put him out of his misery.

He had missed a straightforward chance at short extra-cover in the morning offered by Virat Kohli off left-arm spinner Warican.

Dropped at 40, Kohli went on to get 76 before falling to Rahkeem Cornwall just after lunch.

AFP

Schedule for India's South Africa tour released

Johannesburg, South Africa - The schedule for a multi-format tour of South Africa by India in December and January was released on Friday.

India will play three Twenty20 internationals from December 10, followed by three one-day internationals and two Tests, at six venues.

Cricket South Africa chairperson Lawson Naidoo said in a statement that "South Africa and India boast exceptional talent, and we can look forward to exciting cricket and thrilling matches".

India board honorary secretary Jay Shah said "The Freedom (Test) series is particularly significant.

"It features two excellent Test teams, (and) honours Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela, two great leaders who shaped our respective nations, and the world around them."

SOUTH AFRICA V INDIA TOUR SCHEDULE

T20IS

Dec 10: Durban;

Dec 12: Gqeberha;

Dec 14: Johannesburg

ODIS

Dec 17: Johannesburg;

Dec 19: Gqeberha;

Dec 21: Paarl

TESTS

Dec 26-30: Centurion;

Jan 3-7 2024: Cape Town

AFP

Justin Langer replaces Flower as Lucknow Super Giants coach

New Delhi, India - Former Australia coach Justin Langer has been appointed to replace Zimbabwe's ex-England coach Andy Flower at the helm of the Indian Premier League's Lucknow Super Giants, the team announced.

The Lucknow franchise only made their debut in the world's most valuable cricket tournament two years ago and have finished in the top four in both their seasons.

But Flower's two-year contract was not renewed, with the team tweeting a picture of him and the message: "Today it's farewell, but it'll never be goodbye because you'll always be one of our own. Thank you for everything!"

That was quickly followed with the news of Langer's appointment, along with a photo of him in front of one of the oldest tea shops in the heart of the northern city.

Langer said he was "thrilled" at the opportunity.

"I love the game of cricket. I



Justin Langer

love the passion of the Indian game of cricket," Langer said in a video posted by the team on Friday.

He coached the Australian men's national team for almost four years, restoring its morale after the 2018 "Sandpaper-gate" scandal in South Africa.

But he also came under mounting pressure over his management style and shifting moods, and resigned last year after failing to secure the support of key players and bitter conversations with Cricket Australia.

"I am looking forward to being a part of a team that can make a real difference in the IPL," he added. "It's going to be a lot of fun."

AFP

Bangladesh beat Afghanistan despite Janat taking hat-trick in final over

Sylhet, Bangladesh - Afghanistan's Karim Janat grabbed a hat-trick in the final over but Bangladesh held their nerve to sneak a two-wicket win with just a ball to spare in the first T20 international in Sylhet on Friday.

The hosts seemed to be cruising towards victory in the first encounter of the two-match series after Towhid Hridoy and Shamim Hossain put on 73 runs for the fifth wicket in reply to Afghanistan's 154-7.

Then drama erupted at the Sylhet International Stadium.

Rashid Khan removed Shamim for 33 to break the partnership, but Bangladesh were still favourites needing only six runs from the final over.

Instead Janat dismissed Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Taskin Ahmed and Nasum Ahmed with the second, third and fourth balls of the over, leaving the hosts still two runs away.

Shoriful Islam came in at number 10 to strike a powerful shot



Afghanistan's Karim Janat (C) celebrates with teammates after taking a hat-trick (AFP)

that raced to boundary, earning Bangladesh a dramatic win.

Hridoy remained unbeaten on 47 at the non-striker's end as Janat finished with 3-15.

"We had the belief, all our tailenders can bat. It was Shoriful's turn today but Miraz could have finished it," said Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan.

Rashid, the Afghanistan captain, lamented his side's inability to defend their total.

"With the bowling unit we have, that total was enough but in T20 one innings can take away the game from you," he said.

The visitors struggled at the start of their innings, losing their first four wickets for 52 runs after

Shakib won the toss and elected to bowl.

But Mohammad Nabi scored an unbeaten 54 from 40 balls to give Afghanistan a competitive score. He hit the first ball he faced for four to signal his intent and kept the scoreboard ticking over, with the occasional boundary.

AFP

McIlroy ready for anything after going into Scottish Open lead

North Berwick, United Kingdom - Rory McIlroy said he was prepared to take on the elements as well as the rest of the field after establishing a narrow lead at the halfway stage of the Scottish Open on Friday.

The Northern Irishman added a second round of 66 to his opening 64 at the Renaissance Club to be 10 under par, a shot ahead of his Ryder Cup teammate Tyrrell Hatton and South Korea's Tom Kim.

It was another encouraging display by the 34-year-old McIlroy,

who will return next week to the scene of his only British Open triumph at Hoylake in 2014 - the last of his four major wins. Friday's round meant that for the fifth time in his PGA Tour career - the event is co-sanctioned with the DP World (European) Tour - McIlroy has started a tournament with two scores of 66 or better.

Four of those previous occasions led to three tournament wins, including his British Open success of nine years ago.

"I hit the ball really well tee to

green, gave myself a ton of looks (at birdie)," McIlroy said. "Honestly it felt like four under was probably the worst I could have shot out there.

"But you know, it's swings and roundabouts. I holed a couple of long ones on Thursday to shoot a good score and then missed a couple today, but overall really pleased with how the last two days have went."

With thunderstorms forecast for Saturday afternoon, tee times have been brought forward by several hours, while winds of up



Rory McIlroy

to 40 mph are predicted to hit the course on Sunday.

"I don't really have any expectations," McIlroy said. "It would be silly of me to try to pick a potential target score to get to.

"So really just embrace the conditions and just sort of make the best of them." As for the British Open, he added: "I keep saying that yes, we are all looking forward to next week, but I want to go and win this tournament over the weekend."

Earlier, Hatton gave himself a chance of a first victory in two-and-a-half years with a second round of 62.

Hatton, asked if the round had been as easy as it looked, replied: "No, it was stressful at times, as most of my rounds are.

"But very happy with the chances I gave myself."

World number one Scottie Scheffler and three-time major winner Padraig Harrington are three shots off the lead after rounds of 65 and 66 respectively, with Harrington overcoming wet and windy conditions in the first group out at 0615 GMT.

SHOCK VICTORY

Unseeded Vondrousova stuns Jabeur to win Wimbledon title

London, United Kingdom - Marketa Vondrousova became the first unseeded woman to win Wimbledon in the Open era as the Czech swept to a shock 6-4, 6-4 victory over Tunisia's Ons Jabeur in Saturday's final.

As the first unseeded woman in the Wimbledon final in 60 years, Vondrousova was a heavy underdog against sixth-ranked Jabeur.

But the 24-year-old upset the odds on Centre Court to win her maiden Grand Slam title at the second attempt after losing to Ash Barty in the 2019 French Open final.

"After everything I've been through - I had a cast on this time last year - and now I can't believe I'm holding this trophy," said Vondrousova who was sidelined with a wrist injury in 2022.

"I don't know what's happening now."

Vondrousova joins Jana Novotna and Petra Kvitova as the only Czech women to win a Wimbledon title.

She is just the ninth unseeded champion at a Grand Slam tournament.

Vondrousova's triumph completed a remarkable comeback after a rash of injuries stalled her promising career.

Just 12 months ago, she was an injured bystander at Wimbledon, reduced to watching her best friend Miriam Kolodziejova attempt to qualify for the main draw.

Vondrousova's second wrist surgery had ruled the Olympic silver medalist out for six months, although her absence from the tour at least allowed her the space and time to get married.

She was the second-lowest ranked player to reach the Wimbledon final - only Serena Williams in 2018 was lower at 181.

So unexpected was her run that she told her husband Stepan Simek to stay at home in Prague to look after their cat Frankie until the final, when a pet sitter was found to allow her partner to

make the trip to Wimbledon.

The defeat was another heart-breaking blow for world number six Jabeur, who wept during an emotional post-match trophy presentation.

Jabeur was the first Arab woman to reach a Grand Slam final last year at Wimbledon, but losing to Elena Rybakina in three sets took the shine off that achievement.

She endured more misery just weeks later when she lost to Iga Swiatek in the US Open final.

"It's going to be a tough day but I am not going to give up," she said while wiping away her tears.

"It's the most painful loss of my career. but we're going to make it one day, I promise you I'm not going to give up."

Jabeur's bid to become the

After everything I've been through - I had a cast on this time last year - and now I can't believe I'm holding this trophy. I don't know what's happening now

MARKETA VONDROUSOVA

first African and Arab woman to win a Grand Slam singles title has ended in bitter failure once again.

Even for a player known as the 'Minister of Happiness', Jabeur's positive personality will be tested by her latest disappointment.

She fell well short of the standards shown in victories over four former Grand Slam champions on her way to the final.

Jabeur had already lost twice in 2023 to Vondrousova, at the Australian Open and in Miami, and she had no answer to the big-hitting left-hander despite the support of 15,000 partisan fans on Centre Court.

Under the closed roof, Jabeur drew first blood with a break in the second game when Vondrousova netted a nervous backhand.

But she immediately surrendered the initiative as Vondrousova broke back in the next game.



Czech Republic's Marketa Vondrousova celebrates with the trophy after beating Tunisia's Ons Jabeur in the Wimbledon final on Saturday (AFP)



TATTOOED AND TRIUMPHANT: FIVE THINGS ON VONDROUSOVA

London, United Kingdom - Marketa Vondrousova became the first unseeded player to win the Wimbledon women's title in the Open era when she defeated Ons Jabeur on Saturday. Here are five things to know about the Czech left-hander:

1 Childhood friends to sweethearts

Vondrousova married IT project manager Stepan Simek in Prague in July 2022. The couple have known each other since childhood and dated for seven years before their wedding.

"Marketa always said she was in love with me since she was 13, but I allegedly only noticed her when she was 15," said Simek. "We were at a training camp, we ran together and the suffering on the track brought us together."

Simek is 1.94 metres tall - 22 centimetres taller than Marketa.

2 Name game

Vondrousova has kept her surname in tennis after her wedding. "I didn't want to give it up, because it was my dad who led me to play tennis. And everyone knows me under this name," she said.

But she is "Simkova" on all her private documents, which sometimes causes problems - a messenger was looking for

Mrs Simkova at her tennis club and nobody was able to recall it was her.

3 Inking feeling

Vondrousova has tattoos all over her body. She has had her lucky number 13 tattooed, and after the Tokyo Olympics, where she won a silver medal, she added the five Olympic rings.

"For me, it's art. I appreciate the people that do this," she said after defeating Elina Svitolina in Thursday's semi-final.

4 'Maky' my day

Her nickname is "Maky", a popular short name for Marketa. Coincidentally, July 13 - the day of her semi-final win over Elina Svitolina - is the name day for Marketa (Margaret) in the Czech Republic. Every day of the year is someone's name day, on which the individual is wished "Happy Name Day".

5 No doubles trouble

Vondrousova reached the third round of the women's doubles at Wimbledon with compatriot and close friend Miriam Kolodziejova, but when Vondrousova reached the singles semi-final, Kolodziejova came up and said: "Don't play, it would be too much for you."

'Like Ons Jabeur': Young Tunisian girls dream of tennis glory now

Tunis, Tunisia - At a sporting club in Tunis, young girls enthusiastically hit yellow tennis balls across the court in the hope of one day making it to Wimbledon, like their idol Ons Jabeur.

As the tennis star fought valiantly in her second straight final at Wimbledon on Saturday, a tournament was underway earlier in the day at the Tennis Club of Tunis in the Alain Savary neighbourhood, near the Tunisian capital's downtown.

On the dozen sunny courts, surrounded by large trees, Tunisian boys and girls vigorously compete in several matches surrounded by their families.

Ibtissem Treimech, the mother of one player says, "when they see Ons Jabeur ... succeeding as a finalist, the children and parents are inspired, and the parents encourage their children to play tennis".

In a country where football reigns supreme, Jabeur has become a national icon and sparked a new found enthusiasm for tennis over the past three years, especially among young girls. Like Jabeur, many of them come from working-class backgrounds.

"I am capable of becoming like



Tunisia's Ons Jabeur (R) receives the runner up trophy from Britain's Catherine, Princess of Wales (AFP)

Ons Jabeur and participating in Grand Slam tournaments like Wimbledon and Roland Garros," Lina Chedli, a nine-year-old tennis player and Ibtissem's daughter, told AFP.

Yasmine Ben Mabrouk, also nine, has no doubts over her own talent. "I think I will become a

great tennis player like Ons Jabeur, and I will participate in very big matches," she said.

Not far away, 10-year-old Emna Bartagisse says she will "become better than Ons Jabeur."

Jabeur defines herself as a "100 percent product of Tunisia",

I think I will become a great tennis player like Ons Jabeur, and I will participate in very big matches

YASMINE BEN MABROUK

and her fans praise her for her dynamic game, which includes drop shots and approaches to the net, and her sense of camaraderie.

The star continues to push the limits, despite a sometimes difficult period following a series of recent injuries to her wrist and calf.

Before Saturday's final at the All England Club, in plush southwest London, Jabeur said she had "learned to be very patient and to accept everything that has happened to her regarding injuries."

From the suburbs of Sousse, a seaside resort town in Tunisia, Jabeur is adored by fans and spends time after each match signing autographs and taking selfies.

AFP



Serbia's Novak Djokovic (L) shakes hands with Spain's Carlos Alcaraz

'World watching' as Djokovic, Alcaraz clash for Wimbledon title

London, United Kingdom - Novak Djokovic says the "world of sport" will be watching when he faces Carlos Alcaraz in a Wimbledon final where history and a generational shift are at stake.

Djokovic is attempting to equal Roger Federer's record of eight titles at the All England Club and match Margaret Court's all-time mark of 24 Grand Slam crowns.

Having already pocketed the Australian Open and French

Open in 2023, victory on Sunday will put the 36-year-old just one major away from completing the first men's calendar Grand Slam since 1969.

"It's the ultimate showdown," said Djokovic, who will be playing in a record 35th Grand Slam final.

"Everything comes down to one match. All eyes of the tennis and sports world will be directed on this Sunday's Wimbledon final. It's probably the most watched tennis match globally."

At 20, Alcaraz is Djokovic's

junior by 16 years. When Djokovic captured the first of his 23 majors at the 2008 Australian Open, the Spaniard was still three months shy of his fifth birthday.

Djokovic can become Wimbledon's oldest champion while Alcaraz is bidding to be its third youngest after Boris Becker and Bjorn Borg. "I obviously have more experience. It can help a little bit in some important moments, beginning the match, managing the nerves, managing the occasion."

BLOCKBUSTER MOVE

England star Rice completes British record transfer to Arsenal

London, United Kingdom - Declan Rice became Britain's most expensive player on Saturday as Arsenal signed the England midfielder from West Ham for a reported £105 million (\$137.5 million, 122.4 million euros).

Rice's blockbuster move surpassed the previous record £100 million fee paid by Manchester City for Jack Grealish in 2021 as Arsenal continue their spending spree in a bid to challenge for the Premier League title next season.

The 24-year-old said in a letter to West Ham supporters his desire to play at the "very highest level" lay behind his decision to join Arsenal.

Rice's switch to the Emirates Stadium on a long-term contract comes just months after he lifted West Ham's first major trophy since 1980 in the Europa Conference League final against Fiorentina.

Having moved across London, Rice will now be competing for the Champions League rather than Europe's third tier trophy.

"In football, amazing opportunities arise. Big clubs, like Arsenal, have come for me and it's really hard to turn down," Rice told Arsenal's website.

"You only ever get one career



Declan Rice displays his Arsenal shirt

and I really believe in what Mikel (Arteta) is building here and the squad he's building. I'm really looking forward to the future with Arsenal."

Fuelled by their agonising failure to hold off champions Manchester City in the Premier League title race last term, Arsenal have already spent around £200 million since the end of last season in a bid to improve on their second place finish.

Arsenal have not won the title since Arsene Wenger's 'Invincibles' in 2004, but they made huge strides under Arteta last season.

They led the Premier League table for much of the season be-

come here really hungry to have more success and to spend my best years at this great club.

"I know he (Arteta) is going to get the best out of me. I know I've got more levels to go up in my game and I feel like he's the manager to take me to those next levels."

Jude Bellingham's transfer from Borussia Dortmund to Real Madrid could eventually beat Rice's record, depending on add-on clauses in the deal that may take it to £115 million.

For now Rice has a gigantic fee to justify after he joined Germany forward Kai Havertz and Netherlands defender Jurrien Timber as the new recruits in

I know he (Arteta) is going to get the best out of me. I know I've got more levels to go up in my game and I feel like he's the manager to take me to those next levels

DECLAN RICE

fore collapsing in the final weeks as City overhauled them.

Rice is confident the future is bright for a young Arsenal team featuring emerging stars like Bukayo Saka, William Saliba and Gabriel Martinelli.

'Really hungry'

"With Mikel and how he works, the squad, how young everyone is, the energy around the club and also the challenge of getting Arsenal back to where they belong, that means a lot to me," Rice said.

"I know the fans really want that. For me as a player, I've

Mikel Arteta's squad.

With Swiss international Granit Xhaka having left to join Bayer Leverkusen, Rice's arrival will bolster Arteta's midfield options.

"We're really happy that Declan is joining us. He is a player with tremendous ability, who has been performing at a high level in the Premier League and for England for a number of seasons now," Arteta said. "Declan is bringing undoubted quality to the club and he is an exceptional talent who has the potential to be very successful here."

AFF

Panama present tough final test for Lozano's Mexico

Los Angeles, United States - Mexico are aiming for a record-extending ninth CONCACAF Gold Cup title when they face Panama in Sunday's final at SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles and a victory would be particularly sweet for interim coach Jaime Lozano.

Lozano, known to fans of El Tri as 'Jimmy', was handed the reins of the team for this tournament after Argentine Diego Cocca was fired following a disappointing Nations League campaign.

In the semi-final last month, Mexico lost 3-0 in Las Vegas to the United States after one of their worst performances against their rival in recent memory.

Although they went on to beat Panama in the third-place game, that win was not enough to convince Mexican Football Federation president Carlos Rodriguez, who sacked Cocca the following day.

Lozano was put in charge as a stop-gap for the Gold Cup and given what was, on paper, a weaker team to work with. But the performances in the tournament have led many pundits to



Mexico will start the final against Panama as favourites

suggest he should be handed the job on a permanent basis.

"I came to win the Gold Cup and that's the only thing on my mind," Lozano said after his team's impressive 3-0 win over Jamaica in Wednesday's semi-final - back in Vegas.

The 44-year-old former UNAM Pumas player has side-stepped questions over his future despite four wins in five games in the tournament.

"We are going step by step and now comes the most important game. We will do everything

possible to bring the Cup back home," he said.

"I have enjoyed it a lot. I am truly very grateful for the opportunity, for what I have had to be with this national team and with these players", added Lozano.

AFF

Pakistan hope to end year-long winless run against Sri Lanka

Galle, Sri Lanka - The last Test Pakistan won began a year ago on Sunday against Sri Lanka in Galle, and captain Babar Azam hopes to finally record another win in the match starting on the same date and ground.

"Really excited to be back in red-ball format and all eyes are on the Galle Test as we are prepared and ready for the challenge," Azam told reporters on Saturday.

The batsman is the only cricketer in the world ranked in the top three in all three formats - third in Tests, first in ODIs and second in T20 internationals.

But his side's form is a marked contrast: they have won none of their last six Tests, and last year's Galle fixture was their only long-format victory since the start of 2022.

"We are taking one step at a time, but we have to be consistent across all formats," Azam said.

"One of the positives going into the Galle Test is that 13 of our players were here 12 months ago."

The two-match series marks the start of their ICC World Test



Sri Lanka captain Dimuth Karunaratne (R) and Pakistan skipper Babar Azam pose with the trophy ahead of their two-match series (AFP)

Championship 2023-25 participation, and Azam was delighted to have Shaheen Shah Afridi back in the side.

The fast bowler is sitting on 99 Test wickets and will aim to become the fourth-fastest Pakistan quick to complete a century of wickets.

He has been waiting to reach the mark for a year, after being injured at the same Galle ground.

"Besides his wicket-taking abilities, his presence always motivates and lifts the side. I know Shaheen has badly missed

red-ball cricket and is hungry for Test cricket," the captain added.

Pakistan will make full use of newly appointed team director Mickey Arthur -- a former Sri Lanka coach - as a source of information about the opposition.

"Like any host country, Sri Lanka will like to play to their strength, which is spin bowling," said Azam.

"We have had good feedback about the Sri Lanka side from their former coach and I think we are well prepared to take them on."

Alex Carey ready to repeat Bairstow dismissal despite Ashes furore

London, United Kingdom - Australia's Alex Carey insisted Saturday he would have no qualms over repeating his controversial stumping of Jonny Bairstow, should an unwary England batsman offer the chance in the final two Ashes Tests.

Wicketkeeper Carey was drawn into a 'Spirit of Cricket' row after he stumped Bairstow, who had carelessly wandered out of his crease believing the ball was dead, during this month's second

Test at Lord's.

Australia won that match by 43 runs despite Ben Stokes's stunning 155.

But the England captain's heroics were overshadowed by the fall-out from Bairstow's unusual exit.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese traded verbal bouncers after Bairstow's dismissal sparked a chorus of boos at normally sedate Lord's. Three



Australia's Alex Carey (L) celebrates a wicket with Pat Cummins

MCC members were suspended for abusing visiting players in the pavilion. There was, however, widespread agreement that Carey, according to the Laws of Cricket, had effected a legitimate dismissal.

With the series still in the balance after England's three-wicket win in the third Test at Headingley last week left Australia 2-1 ahead, the 31-year-old Carey was adamant he'd have no doubts about doing something similar in

either of the remaining matches at Old Trafford or The Oval.

"If there was an opportunity to get a stumping, I definitely would," he told reporters. "To see how much has played out since then it's been a little bit surprising. There's been some nasty stuff said but it is the Ashes. There was nasty stuff said before that as well. I feel really well supported, I think the whole group does."

"From Australia, I still think

we've got lots of fans and from England, I don't think we've made any, but we probably didn't lose any either."

Pretending to hold the ball and other forms of 'fake fielding' that might deceive a batsman are outlawed. But Carey's reaction after Bairstow ducked a Cameron Green bouncer was instantaneous. The batsman was in his crease when Carey threw the ball but out of it by the time the ball knocked off the bats.

Vingegaard hails Pogacar after latest Tour de France skirmish

Culoz, France - Defending champion Jonas Vingegaard hailed his rivalry with Tadej Pogacar after surviving the Slovenian's latest attack to cling on to the overall lead of the Tour de France on the Grand Colombier mountain on Friday.

Vingegaard finished just four seconds behind Pogacar after a sudden late attack that also earned the latter a four-second time bonus.

That left Dane Vingegaard with a wafer-thin 9sec overall advantage, after a stage won by Polish Ineos Grenadiers rider Michal

Kwiatkowski on a breakaway.

At the end of the stage Vingegaard was all smiles, while his Slovenian rival was po-faced despite his latest gain.

Vingegaard explained his mood by referring to the record books.

"In a final like this you can only be happy with how it worked out," said the 26-year-old.

"History has shown that the Tour rarely gets won by a few seconds," he said. "Maybe once or twice, maybe here too, who knows, but I don't think so."

For once, Vingegaard also

opened up about Pogacar after previously insisting he never thinks about him.

"It's a nice rivalry we have. He's one of the best, if not the best rider in the world and it's a nice fight we have going on," he said.

Pogacar and UAE set a blistering tempo from about halfway up the Colombier. Vingegaard said his Jumbo-Visma team expected the attack.

"We knew Team UAE would do this, so we told some of the guys to forget about it and not get involved and this is what hap-

pened. So I think our tactics worked well," said Vingegaard, who has had just one team-mate, Sepp Kuss, with him most of the way.

"It might have looked like I was alone but I never felt like that. I felt my tactics worked."

"This is how I planned to do it, just held on, that's our tactics and it suits me fine."

There are four Alpine stages to come. Two end in summit finishes, one downhill and there is a potentially decisive individual time-trial after Monday's rest day.



Jumbo-Visma's Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard wearing the overall leader's yellow jersey cycles to the finish line of the 13th stage of Tour de France on Friday (AFP)

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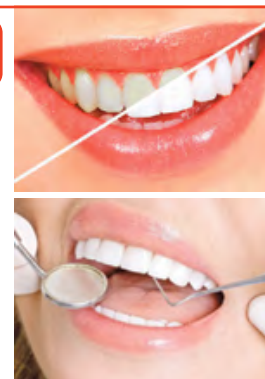
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CREATIVE touch-ups

Ancient Egypt artists altered

Ancient Egypt artists altered their work, study shows

From subtly shifting the position of Ramses II's sceptre, to touch-ups on a necklace or headdress, ancient Egyptian artists were more creative than previously thought, according to a study published Wednesday. Using new portable imaging and chemical analysis techniques, an international team of scientists took a fresh look at paintings in the Valley of the Kings - a royal burial ground for pharaohs and other ancient Egyptian elites.

Egyptologists have until now considered art in these tombs to be very conventional, adhering to certain rules and using predefined patterns which were transferred onto walls. However, a small robot moving in front of the painted walls used X-ray, ultraviolet, and infrared vision to scrutinize the art in-depth, much like a medical scanner, said Philippe Walter of the French centre for scientific research, CNRS, a co-author of the study published in the PLOS One journal.

On an image of Ramses II, decorating the tomb of the priest Nakhtamon, painted some 1,200 years BCE, the pharaoh is depicted in profile, wearing a necklace and headdress and holding a royal sceptre. However image analysis revealed a different composition, hinting at efforts to touch up the original work.

"We didn't expect to see such modifications of a supposedly very formal representation of a pharaoh," meant to be frozen in time, said Walter. Similar alterations were found on the tomb of the nobleman Mentuhotep, who died about 1800 B.C. and was stretched out towards the gods.

Analysis showed the position of one of the arms had been moved, while changes were made in the pigments used for skin colour. It is unclear how many years passed or why they were done, but it showed evidence of 'freedom of creation.'

Walter compared this 'personal touch' to that seen from the great painters of the Renaissance who were shown to make adjustments to their work. Philippe Martinez, the other co-author of the study with the CNRS, said that if this practice was shown to be commonplace, it would bring pharaonic art closer 'to our modern aesthetic standards'.

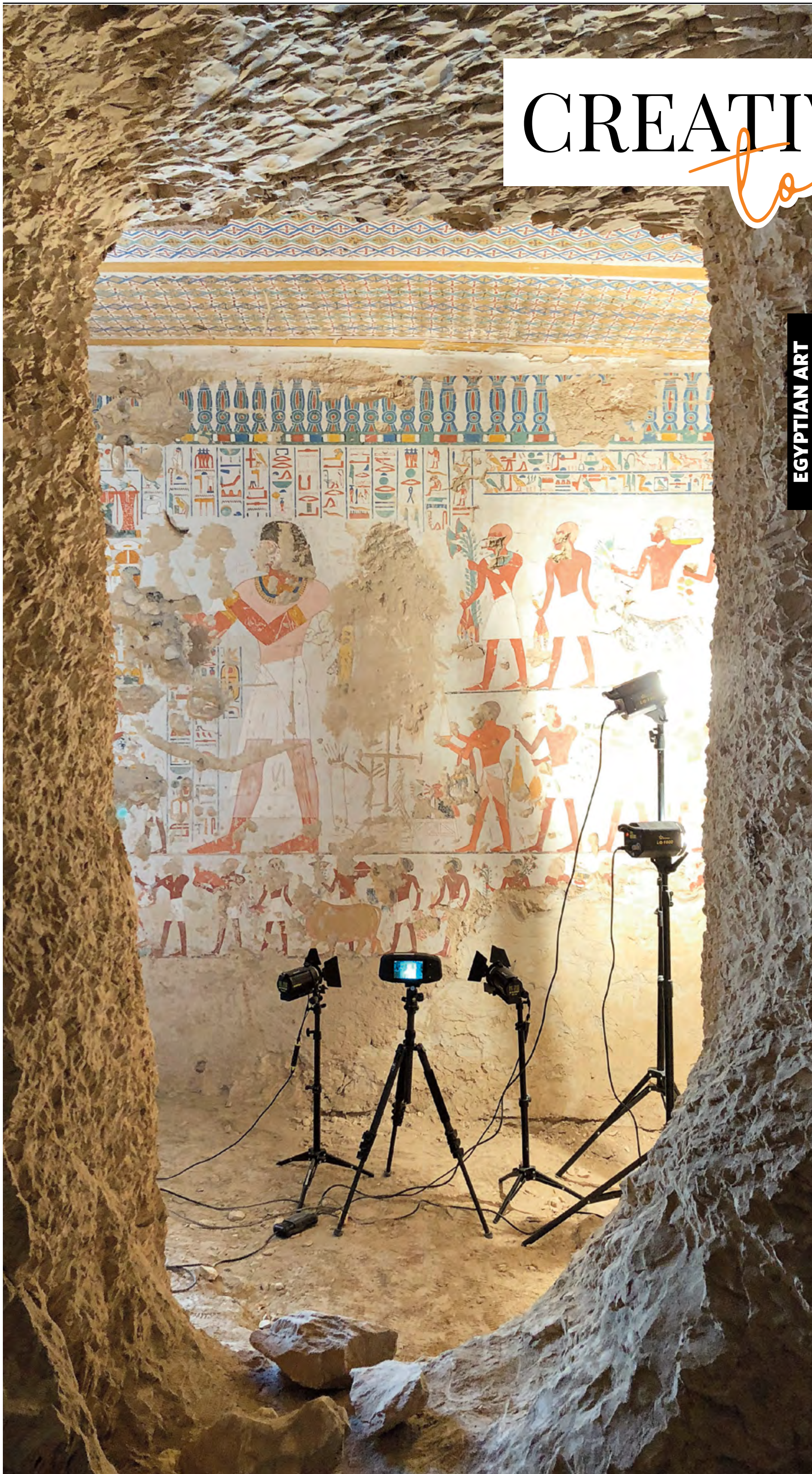
AFP



One of Italian contemporary artist Michelangelo Pistoletto's most famous works - Venus of the Rags - has been burnt to cinders in a suspected arson attack in Naples, authorities said Wednesday.

The installation, in which a statue of the Roman goddess of love, beauty and fertility stands next to a vast pile of coloured, discarded clothes, was destroyed where it stood on display near the town hall in the southern Italian city.

Naples Mayor Gaetano Manfredi said the fire in the early hours of Wednesday was 'an act of great violence which leaves us speechless'.



Studio lights illuminating a mural of the tomb of Menna, in Sheikh Abd el Qurnah, near Luxor, in Egypt



(From left) Dr Lucia Oliva and Dr Luca Moretti

For better or for verse

Italian artistic duo, Dr Luca Moretti and Dr Lucia Oliva, hosted a theatrical presentation of art – *Through the looking glass* – at Bait Muzna recently to get people to appreciate the nuances of art in an interesting manner

Hubert Vaz

Not everyone talks about art in a way that makes one sit up and smell the coffee... And when Dr Luca Moretti and Dr Lucia Oliva, an accomplished Italian couple in Oman (who love, live, and celebrate art every single day of their life) do it, the response from viewers is always overwhelming.

The artistic duo, who are well known in Oman for their offbeat presentations at every art exhibition hosted by them, took an elite audience of select invitees on a theatrical journey at Bait Muzna on June 20 wherein they seamlessly blended literature and poetry to convey the essence of an explicit exhibition of mesmerising optical effect artworks – sculpture-paintings with mirrors.

"*Through the looking glass* was a perfect key to tune into the artist's peculiar expressive philosophy which enhances the reality of the work of art beyond its tangible aspect," said Luca, adding, "The profound value is what is captured by crossing the confines of the 'looking glass'."

The chief guest for the evening was H H Basma al Said and guests of honour were Siham Ahmed al

Harthi, Co-founder, Siham Development and Investment, and Cinzia Farisé, CEO - Oman Cables, who took keen interest in the presentation and artistic activities.

The focus of the evening was an interactive presentation of art through its different languages, including literature and poetry in line with the theme, chosen by Luca and Lucia along with Leila al Bellucci, the new manager of Bait Muzna.

"We don't stop playing because we grow old, we grow old because we stop playing," Lucia said, quoting George Bernard Shaw, receiving a thunderous applause from the audience which lapped up the message of creativity that needs to be cultivated with child-like fantasies.

At the outset, when Luca quoted a paragraph from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* – about how Alice passed through the mirror into the 'looking glass room' – it heralded an evening of lucid literature in motion. And since the hosts themselves were in action on the floor, the invitees, too, were sporting enough to enjoy the various tasks handed out instead of being mere spectators.

Luca and Lucia have been doing interactive art events that engage their audience for the past two decades and this was yet another aspect of educating viewers as they

THE KEY GUESTS



Sayyida Basma al Said



Siham Ahmed al Harthi



Cinzia Farisé

“Through the looking glass' was a perfect key to tune into the artist's peculiar expressive philosophy which enhances the reality of the work of art beyond its tangible aspect

DR LUCA MORETTI

set out to appreciate art for what it is. The artistic duo shared some frank insights about their task:

HOW WELL WAS THE CONCEPT 'THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS' EXECUTED?

This concept perfectly connected to the philosophy of Lucia Oliva's works which were chosen to involve

the audience of VIPs and esteemed art-lover guests in an 'out of the ordinary' atmosphere, elegantly playing with art and culture. The theme from *Alice in Wonderland*, incredibly rich with many deep meanings, riddles and puns, was an invite to cross the normal vision of daily reality and dedicate a proper space to imagination and fantasy, as children

do while often adults don't. The novel contains famous quotes that stress this point - 'Imagination is the only weapon in the war against reality', 'The only way to achieve the impossible is to believe it's possible'

WHAT ACTIVITIES WERE CONDUCTED?

The event was conducted with theatrical moments combined with cultural games and riddles – right from the moment of cutting the ribbon, they were invited to 'cross the line' between reality and fantasy, as if they were at an opera. All the guests enthusiastically participated in the games which included engaging negotiations with cards with literary cues, riddles, and a quiz on what they observed around.

WHAT ARTWORKS WERE ON DISPLAY?

There were 16 artworks on display, many of them include optical illusion – a distinctive characteristic of Lucia's art. The titles included *Welcome*, *The mother*, *Light*, *Lights and flavours of a souq*, *Into the light*, *The power of hope*, *The majlis*, *Mirror of the soul*, *The holy moment*, *The hidden treasure*, *Door to Eden*, *They met at the fountain*, *Hands in hands – the kiss*, *From pain to light*, *Life under*, and

Heritage ladies' glance - Through the looking glass.

WHAT LITERATURE AND POEMS WERE TOUCHED UPON?

The choice of poems and quotes was conceived with the aim of creating bridges between different cultures and countries. So, apart from a rich range of quotes from Carroll's novel, many other poems by Rumi, Coelho, Gibran and Dante Alighieri played an important role in the evening, besides G B Shaw's emblematic quote.

WHY DO YOU ALWAYS MIX VISUAL ARTS WITH YOUR PERFORMANCES?

Sometimes artists are very confident in one discipline only but it is not rare to have artists who can dance, sing, paint, recite, compose, etc. Our experience taught us that audiences like cross-over art activities. Those who do not know us are surprised; the others, on the contrary, expect the surprises.

WHAT WAS YOUR KEY MESSAGE?

Our message was to let people appreciate culture and art in a joyful, not 'ordinary', way. This time, too, the show worked out beyond our expectations.



The exhibits of optical illusion by Dr Lucia Oliva - *Through the looking glass*