

Unvaccinated can enter Oman

Registration through eMushrif, undergoing PCR test, need for quarantine removed

Our Correspondent Muscat

Visitors who are not vaccinated against COVID-19 can enter Oman without any conditions, according to an official in the Ministry of Health.

The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments arising from the COVID-19 pandemic lifted all precautionary measures in all places and for all activities.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, the ministry official said, “Passengers who are not vaccinated against COVID-19 can enter the sultanate without any conditions.”

He also informed that vaccines against COVID-19 are available in government and some private hospitals for free. “The field hospital at the old Muscat Airport is still providing immunisation services against



COVID-19.”

Prior to its dissolution on Tuesday, the Supreme Committee called on citizens and residents to take the booster dose of COVID-19 vaccine. It commended the constructive role of government, private and civil agencies in dealing with preventive measures and the contributions they made to limit the spread of the pandemic.

Meanwhile, Oman Air, the national carrier, announced that arriving international travellers no longer need to register through the eMushrif portal or undergo a PCR test before or upon arrival, as previously required.

Authorities have also removed quarantine requirements and the need to download the Tarassud+ Track & Trace app prior to departing for Oman.

FLYING SOLO AROUND THE WORLD, 16-YEAR-OLD PILOT LANDS IN OMAN



Teenage pilot Mack Rutherford, who took off in March from Bulgaria in an attempt to be the youngest pilot to circumnavigate the world solo, landed in Muscat on Wednesday. His record attempt will see him fly over 52 countries on five continents in an ultralight aircraft. Mack was welcomed at the VIP Lounge of Muscat International Airport in the presence of airport managers, media personnel and students. He later stopped by the Oman Air Flight Training Centre. ‘We wish Mack all the best on his journey to break the current world record of the youngest person to fly solo around the world,’ the national carrier stated. Mack flew from Seychelles to Socotra in Yemen - the second longest flight of about 2,000km over the sea in his record attempt - on May 31 en route to Muscat. “Don’t wait until you are 18 to do something special; do it even if you are young,” Mack said in a statement issued by his team.

OIA invests in US-based Crusoe Energy

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) announced an investment in US-based Crusoe Energy on Wednesday.

The move is seen as part of OIA’s efforts to diversify its international investments across different countries and sectors.

Through the investment, OIA aims to achieve optimal benefit for Oman in terms of return on

investment, attracting direct foreign investment and advanced technologies to be utilised locally.

‘This investment highlights OIA’s pioneering efforts in attracting advanced technologies to the region. Crusoe’s Digital Flare Mitigation technology will serve various sectors in our region, including oil and gas, power generation and ICT,’ the authority stated.

The company’s technology

helps in reduction of CO₂ by around 63 per cent in flares as well as 98 per cent reduction of methane.

‘The technology processes gas flaring emissions in an environment friendly and cost-effective manner. It generates enough power to operate energy-intensive computing applications in oil and gas fields far from main power grids. This includes powering data centres for high-performance cloud computing, for

applications such as graphical rendering, artificial intelligence research, machine learning, computational biology, therapeutic drug discovery, simulation and more.’

“We are proud of the pioneering role we played in bringing this technology to the region, which is home to some of the biggest oil and gas producers globally,” said Ismail al Harthi, senior manager in OIA’s Technology Investments department.

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Leadership course for young women launched

Muscat - Outward Bound Oman (OBO) and Lahunna Oman have joined hands to launch Sidrah, a first-of-its-kind leadership programme for young women aged 18 to 25 years.

Drawing inspiration from its resilient namesake, the local sidr tree, Sidrah is set to lay a solid foundation for participants to take a proactive role in identifying viable solutions to some of today's pressing youth concerns in line with the directives outlined in Oman Vision 2040. The pilot programme will run from June to December of this year.

Adopting a non-conventional learning model, Sidrah will allow participants to hone their employability skills, challenge their self-reliance and perseverance, and unleash their talents.

Phase I of the programme will see them spend four days in the rugged outdoors of Jabal Akhdar.

Taking their learnings from

We hope to cultivate their leadership and resilience through inspiring and challenging discoveries

MARK EVANS

the mountains, Phase II will further cement the growth of the young women through dedicated coaching with an international tri-sector coach from Singapore's prestigious National Youth Achievement Award - who will expand their horizons in the areas of strategy, innovation and entrepreneurship.

While undergoing this unique project-based learning exercise, Lahunna will curate their networks to expose a select group of participants to leaders from the

government, private and civil society sectors in Oman, some of whom will be invited to mentor the young women as they work on concept papers addressing some of today's pressing national concerns, and leading the way in overcoming them.

Launching the programme, Mark Evans, executive director of OBO, said, "We hope to cultivate leadership, resilience and connections of the youth through inspiring and challenging discoveries."

According to Shatha al Maskiry, founder of Lahunna, it was founded on a simple yet powerful premise - to spotlight the infinite possibilities of women in society. She described it is a platform to inspire, to challenge the status quo and nudge change simply by showcasing what is possible.

Women can register via <https://forms.gle/islobQm1Vu1oNngTA>

Madayn launches incubator in Sur to help SMEs, innovators

Muscat - The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), represented by Industrial Innovation Academy and in collaboration with Oman LNG, launched Sur Oasis Incubator at Sur Industrial City on Wednesday.

The launch ceremony was held under the patronage of Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of South Sharqiyah, in the presence of Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO of Madayn.

The launch of the incubator is in line with efforts to enhance the business climate in Madayn's industrial cities through the establishment of accelerators in various governorates, which will attract innovators, entrepreneurs and SMEs owners, as well as connect these with the industrial sector, a press release said.

Being the first incubator to be managed and operated by the Industrial Innovation Academy outside Muscat governorate, Sur Oasis Incubator will act as an ideal entrepreneurship platform



(Supplied photo)

featuring a line-up of services and facilities for businesses and innovators. 'These services include providing co-working space, private offices, advice, training programmes and technical support, among others. To enhance and expand business opportunities, the incubator will link the incubated companies to factories and companies in Sur Industrial City.'

The inauguration ceremony also marked the graduation of 30

participants of the Industrial Innovation Programme, financed and supported by Oman LNG. The programme targeted entrepreneurs and innovators in South Sharqiyah in the food and beverage industry.

Commenting on the value-add of Sur Oasis Incubator, Abdulqadir bin Salim al Balushi, director general of Sur Industrial City, said, "This incubator will serve as a leading centre for en-

trepreneurs, innovators and owners of SMEs in South Sharqiyah, and we will ensure linking the incubated projects with companies and factories operating in Sur Industrial City to expand their business opportunities."

He informed that Sur Industrial City is currently working on launching the second edition of the Industrial Innovation Programme before the end of the year in cooperation with Industrial Innovation Academy. The forthcoming edition will focus on one of the strategic sectors related to technology.

On his part, Dr Amor bin Nasser al Matani, CEO of Oman LNG Development Foundation, said, "The launch of this incubator reflects Oman LNG's constant efforts to support the Omani youth, develop the skills and capabilities of entrepreneurs, and provide training and advisory programmes to ensure the sustainability and long-term growth of SMEs."

KING OF BAHRAIN RECEIVES MAJLIS CHAIRMAN



(Supplied photo)

King Hamad Issa al Khalifa of Bahrain received Khalid Hilal al Ma'awali, chairman of Majlis A'Shura, at Sakhir Palace in Manama on Wednesday. During their meeting, Ma'awali conveyed the greetings and best wishes of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to King Hamad and the people of Bahrain. On his turn, King Hamad asked Ma'awali to convey his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan.



(Supplied photos)

Students from Shinas University create eco-friendly rubber-like material

Our Correspondent Muscat

Nine students of Shinas University of Technology and Applied Sciences have produced an environmentally friendly rubber-like material from palm waste.

The material has use in several industries, including manufacture of tyres, stadium flooring and medical instruments.

Ali Khalid al Saeedi, a member of the team, said it aims to provide the material to industries



and reduce the use of natural rubber. The demand for rubber outstrips the current supply threatening the existence of rubber forests.

"Our rubber is produced from organic waste. It will help reduce production of synthetic rubber that contains a large percentage of petroleum products, which are harmful to the environment," Saeedi said.

Obtaining raw materials and getting access to laboratories to test the product delayed the

progress of the project significantly. "Lack of financial resources and equipment was also challenging," Saeedi informed.

Confident of the product, he said the team aspires to become the first Omani company to manufacture high-efficiency environmentally friendly rubber and export it, too.

"This project will contribute to opening new avenues in manufacturing of environmentally friendly rubber in a competitive market," Saeedi said.

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French Museum closed for maintenance

Muscat - The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has announced that it will close the French Museum for maintenance works.

'The French Museum in the Governorate of Muscat will be closed starting from June 1 until further notice,' the ministry said in a statement.

It urged tourists not to include the museum in their itinerary.

Mid-day break from June 1

Muscat - The Ministry of Labour has announced the beginning of the mid-day break for outdoor workers starting June 1.

In a statement, it said, 'Starting today (Wednesday), a ban begins on engaging workers in construction sites and open areas from 12.30pm until 3.30pm for the months of June, July and August due to high temperatures.'

H H Sayyid Bilarab opens education forum

Muscat – H H Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said presided over the opening ceremony of Educational Initiatives Forum - Towards Achieving Oman Vision 2040.

The two-day forum is organised by the Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Education in the Governorate of Muscat.

The forum aims to keep pace with Oman Vision 2040 and strengthen the foundations of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, namely artificial intelligence, in the country.

It also presents an exhibition of the most prominent educational initiatives in some schools in the governorate while encouraging others to adopt and develop pioneering systems.

H H Sayyid Bilarab toured the exhibition accompanying the forum. Sixteen educational initiatives were selected from among 126 running in schools in Muscat

The Directorate-General of Education intends to fuel the spirit of competitiveness in order to create a fertile educational environment for innovation and continuous renewal

DR ALI AL JAHWARI

in the areas of innovation, technology, academics and community partnership.

On the first day, presentations were made on six educational initiatives; the remaining will be showcased on Thursday.

The opening ceremony was held at Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel, in the presence of ministers and members of State



(Supplied photo)

Council and Shura Council.

On the occasion, Dr Ali al Jahwari, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Education in the Governorate of Muscat,

said, "The ministry has created various training programmes for teachers and provided them with appropriate opportunities for creativity and innovation, as well

as finding modern educational methods that help them perform their duties to the fullest.

"The Directorate-General of Education in the Governorate of

Muscat intends to fuel the spirit of competitiveness in order to create a fertile educational environment for innovation and continuous renewal. This two-day

forum is a summary of the most successful educational initiatives applied that have proved their effectiveness in imparting education."

EA uses palm waste to help corals flourish in Musandam

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environment Authority (EA) has launched a unique project to protect coral reefs in Musandam governorate. It is developing artificial reefs, using palm tree waste, which will help in the growth of corals off the coast of the governorate.

In a statement, EA said that it is a first-of-its-kind project to boost coral reef growth in the region.

'The project aims to develop and protect the environment of coral reefs. Using palm waste helps as it is a natural material and hence not harmful to marine life. The authority has placed these artificial reefs at five sites in the wilayat of Khasab in Musandam governorate as a first stage.'

The project comes ahead of World Oceans Day, celebrated on June 8. This year, the day will be celebrated under the theme Revitalisation: Collective Action for the Ocean.



(Supplied photos)



Since recognition of the day in 2008, United Nations has celebrated the ocean and its importance to the planet and human beings, while raising awareness about the many threats it faces. 'As the challenges to the ocean continue to grow, so does the need to understand and mobilise globally,' UN stated.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has established large-scale artificial coral reef projects in 14 wilayats of the sultanate. A total of 13,906 artificial reefs were grown at these sites from 2003 to 2019. The development of these projects aims to increase fish stock, provide an environment conducive for fishing and, consequently, increase income of fishermen.

The ministry also aims to develop the tourism sector by creating an environment ideal for diving and related tourist activities, besides creating an environment suitable to carry out scientific studies.

In 2019, the ministry inaugurated its largest artificial coral reef off the coast of Suwaiq spread over an area of 20km x 7km. The project, called Suwaiq Marine Farm Artificial Reef Complex, has 4,280 coral reef units. Besides benefitting Suwaiq's fishermen, it is expected to boost tourism.

SQU-Khouth 6 road to ease traffic congestion

Muscat - Muscat Municipality has awarded a project to design and construct a dual carriageway from the roundabout of Khouth District 6 to Gate No 2 of Sultan Qaboos University.

The project will help ease traffic congestion in the area. Al Khouth has seen traffic increase in recent times, particularly around Sultan Qaboos University, the municipality stated.

'A dual carriageway will ensure smooth traffic flow in the area which has educational and health facilities, commercial es-

tablishments and residential neighbourhoods. Project completion is expected in the last quarter of 2023.'

The 3.5km project includes construction of two lanes in each direction, footpaths of a length of 7km and side barriers.

As part of the project, the existing roundabout in Khouth District 6 will be converted into a four-way intersection with traffic signals, in addition to construction of a new intersection at the entrance of Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	40	26
Doha	36	26
Kuwait City	40	29
Manama	37	26
Muscat	35	28
Riyadh	41	25

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	3.54am
Sunrise	5.20am
Duhr	12.10pm
Asr	3.29pm
Maghrib	6.55pm
Isha	8.16pm

Revised work visa fee implemented

Muscat - Following Royal Directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to reduce the fee for recruitment of expatriates, the Ministry of Labour implemented a revised fee starting Wednesday.

The ministry decision, which applies to both issuing and renewal of work permits for expatriates, will see a reduction of up to 85 per cent for companies committed to Omanisation. The new work permit fee for first class professions will be RO301 (previously RO2,001), which will be further reduced to RO211 if the company meets Omanisation targets.

Visa for specialised and technical positions has been reduced to RO251 (previously RO1,001-RO601), which will be reduced by 30 per cent to RO176 for companies meeting Omanisation rations. For unskilled jobs, the new visa fee is RO210 (previously RO301), and further reduced to RO141 in case of meeting Omanisation targets.

ANNOUNCEMENT

MID-DAY BREAK

The Ministry of Labour announces the beginning of the mid-day break for workers in construction sites and open areas due to high temperatures from 12.30pm until 3.30pm for the months of June, July and August.

This is based on the provisions of Article (16) Clause (3) of the regulation on occupational safety and health measures in establishments subject to the labor law issued by Ministerial Resolution No. 286/2008, which stipulates that 'workers shall not be employed in construction sites or open places with high temperatures in the afternoon hours.'

This is applicable throughout the months of June, July and August of every year.

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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 No.	No E-Tender	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/22/014	2022/MM/QS-8	RFP for Application and DBA Support for Orack EBS CRM (Re Call)(E- Tender)	Rial 25	09/06/2022	16/06/2022	Specialist
PRE/22/026	2022/MM/QS-16	RFP for Renewal of AMC for Muscat Municipality IT Infrastructure (Re Call)(E- Tender)	Rial 25	26/06/2022	17/07/2022	Specialist
PRE/22/046	2022/MM/QS-24	Construction of proposed solutions for water stagnation in different locations at Bausher (E- Tender)	Rial 25	26/06/2022	17/07/2022	First
PRE/22/036	2022/MM/QS-25	Construction of Proposed Solution for Water Stagnation at Quriyat (E- Tender)	Rial 25	26/06/2022	17/07/2022	First

Tender Conditions :-

- 1- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of a bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- 2- Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond and to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality.
- 3- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) .
- 4- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+96824402200).
- 5- For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+96824402200/24402330).

MARKET WATCH

MSX304,129.82

Sensex55,381.17

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

Indian Rs	201.38
Pakistani Rs	517.13
Bangladeshi taka	231.32
Philippines peso	136.29
Sri Lankan Rs	933.57

*Rates as on JUNE01

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Pfizer to exit GSK joint venture

US drugs giant Pfizer will exit its consumer healthcare joint venture with GlaxoSmithKline after the unit is spun off next month, the British drugmaker said Wednesday.

GSK will list the healthcare division on the London stock market on July 18 as it looks to concentrate on the pharmaceutical business, it said in a statement, according to AFP.

The London-listed firm currently owns a majority 68 per cent of the unit, with Pfizer holding the remainder.

"Pfizer intends to exit its 32-per cent ownership interest in Haleon in a disciplined manner, with the objective of maximising value for Pfizer shareholders," GSK said.

Covid jab maker Pfizer is seeking to pursue its focus on "innovative medicines and vaccines", it noted.

Al Mouj Muscat delivers impressive socio-economic impact for Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Al Mouj Muscat on Wednesday hosted a press conference highlighting the scale of the sustainable socio-economic impact the partnership behind this ocean-front lifestyle destination has brought to the sultanate.

Established in 2006, Al Mouj Muscat was tasked with establishing the nation's first Integrated Tourism Complex (ITC), with the aim of contributing to growth in tourism, employment, development, opportunities for enterprise and economic diversification.

Addressing the press conference, Nasser al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, said that 75 per cent of the project is complete and Al Mouj Muscat has exceeded expectations and delivered a remarkable impact for Oman and its people.

Al Mouj Muscat is a joint venture between Omran Group, Tanmia and Majid Al Futtaim, a partnership that combines the government's long-term strategic vision with private sector expertise in retail, leisure and communities.

Majid Al Futtaim shares the government's commitment to deliver the aims of Oman Vision



Nasser al Sheibani

With US\$3.5bn in total development costs, Al Mouj Muscat will provide 5,500 permanent jobs upon project completion

2040, and since 2001, it has been investing in shopping malls, leisure and entertainment experiences and retail destinations across the sultanate.

"To date, Al Mouj Muscat has created an impressive property portfolio, luxury hotels, business parks, 20,000 sqm of retail space and world-class amenities, which has seen the value of its assets grow by 777 per cent since 2006. With US\$3.5bn in total development costs, the

majority of which is spent in the local economy, its impact is securing the next chapter of growth for Oman," Sheibani said.

He said the premium lifestyle destination has also attracted foreign direct investment (FDI) of US\$844mn, encouraged by freehold home ownership. In addition, it has a prominent reputation when it comes to corporate social responsibility, totalling RO4.5mn through the



Hawazen Esber

years. People and knowledge transfer to Omanis remain at the heart of Al Mouj Muscat's mission. In 2022, the project recorded 2,200 permanent jobs, which is set to expand to 5,500 upon project completion. It boasts 75 per cent Omanisation, from which 40 per cent of the leadership team consists of women, giving Omanis the ideal platform to showcase talent and develop skills.

Al Mouj Muscat's impact on tourism has been significant, with growth in tourism a key component of Oman Vision 2040. The lifestyle destination now attracts almost 4mn visitors per year. The Kempinski Muscat and Mysk Al Mouj by

Shaza are two hotels currently operating with a total of 582 hotel rooms.

"Upcoming hotel projects in their opening phase, such as St. Regis Resort Al Mouj Muscat and Al Mouj Rayhaan by Rotana, will bring the grand total of rooms to over 2,000 post completion," Sheibani added.

Home to 8,000 residents

Al Mouj Muscat is now home to 8,000 residents from 85 countries. With world-class luxury amenities including a 400-berth marina, a world-renowned golf course, 85 retail outlets and a dedicated Community Hub, Masjid and nursery, residents

enjoy an unrivalled lifestyle.

Eng Saif al Hinaï, chairman of Al Mouj Muscat, said, "The joint venture between the Omani government and Majid Al Futtaim has showcased the socio-economic impact that a successful ITC can have in Oman. We promised to deliver a mixed-use destination that will position Oman as the ideal place for FDI and tourism. Through commitment and good governance, we have brought to life its potential and its unmatched success is a blueprint for growth."

Hawazen Esber, CEO of Com-munities at Majid Al Futtaim, said, "We are fully supportive of the government's plans to diversify the economy and through our partnership at Al Mouj Muscat, we have witnessed the incredible impact that a leading lifestyle destination can create for people and business. By working together, we have created something unique, a community with a true sense of belonging and of purpose, and one that will benefit Muscat and Oman for generations to come."

"Al Mouj Muscat has set a significant precedence. It is a blueprint for how joint ventures can impact so positively on people, on Oman and across the region," he added.

Alpek acquires Octal for \$620mn



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Mexico-based petrochemicals company Alpek on Wednesday announced that it has received all necessary approvals from the regulatory authorities and has finalised its acquisition of Salalah-based Octal.

Pursuant to the purchase agreement, Alpek acquired 100 per cent of the shares of Octal for US\$620mn on a debt-free basis, according to a press statement issued by Alpek.

Financing was secured through a mix of free cash flow

generated from existing businesses and dedicated bank loans, the company said.

Alpek will assume control of Octal's operations starting on June 1, 2022.

The company expects an accretive Ebitda effect of approximately US\$120mn from these assets throughout the remainder of 2022, largely based on the better-than-expected polyester market conditions prevalent in recent months.

"We are pleased to have concluded this acquisition ahead of the expected timeline," stated José de Jesús Valdez, Alpek's

CEO.

"We are excited to welcome Octal's management team and employees into our family, leveraging their long-standing relationships with customers, their diverse backgrounds, and technical proficiency to drive the company's long-term growth," he said.

Octal - the maker of PET sheets and a leader in the clear rigid packaging industry - in February had announced that the shareholders of Octal Holding entered into an agreement to sell a 100 per cent stake to Alpek.

With its proprietary direct-to-

sheet manufacturing technology and early adoption of advanced PET resin manufacturing processes, Octal has become a global leader in PET packaging.

Oman-based Octal is the world's largest PET resin and sheet producer on a single site. Operating from its main hub in Salalah, the company has successfully harnessed its strategic location with access to East-West shipping lanes and favourable trading regulations, coupled with unique-to-the-world manufacturing capabilities to meet the breadth and depth of customer demand.



Khazaen Dry Port signs service agreement with DB Schenker

Muscat - Khazaen Dry Port (KDP), a member of Asyad Group, on Wednesday signed a service agreement with DB Schenker - the global logistics giant - in Oman to use facilities and services provided by the dry port to enhance its customers' experience further.

The service agreement offers DB Schenker a range of KDP services and top-notch infrastructure to better serve its major clients, mainly oil and gas corporations and other heavy hitters in specialized industries. Services in the scope of the agreement include the handling and temporary storage of sensitive cargo and other shipments that require special processing.

In a press release, Juma al Maskari, executive director at KDP, highlighted the significance of partnering with such a household name in logistics. He said, "Sourcing new services to a top logistics player, like DB Schenker, is proof of the trust that a major company with high operational

standards has in the quality of our services and assets.

We are happy to conclude this agreement with DB Schenker and provide them with our customized, client-centric storage solutions and support that attract big clients looking for a new logistics base."

Speaking on behalf of DB Schenker in Oman (formally known as Schenker Khimji's LLC), Richard van Schie, managing director, said, "We believe this service agreement will help form synergies for our customers' trade and related activity in and out of Oman.

We are delighted to have access to Khazaen Dry Port's successful setup of facilities and services while leveraging Oman's strategic location that provides a gateway to regional and global markets."

In line with its strategic objectives to bring in additional foreign investment, Asyad Group continuously seeks to promote its integrated logistics solutions to

attract major global players, enhance economic and commercial activities and leverage Oman's unique position as the ideal hub to access global markets.

With more than 74,500 employees at over 2,100 locations in more than 130 countries, DB Schenker is one of the world's leading logistics providers.

The company operates land, air, and ocean transportation services, and it also offers comprehensive solutions for logistics and global supply chain management from a single source.

Khazaen Dry Port continues to attract major corporations and global players to set up shop in Oman, in line with the plans drawn by Asyad Group, the leading national logistics developer of the sultanate.

Asyad Group, acting through KDP and its multiple business units, is a key enabler of the Oman Logistics Strategy 2040 (SOLS 2040) and the logistics and supply chain themes of Oman Vision 2040.

Russia's Lavrov hails OPEC+ agreements

Moscow, Russia - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Wednesday reaffirmed Moscow's commitment to OPEC+ agreements during a visit to Saudi Arabia after the EU hit Russia with a partial oil ban over Ukraine.

OPEC+ is a group of 13 members of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), led by Riyadh, and their 10 partners led by Moscow.

European Union leaders agreed on Monday to ban more than two-thirds of Russian oil imports as part of a sixth package of crippling sanctions on Moscow.

The Wall Street Journal reported that OPEC was considering whether to remove



Russia from an agreement that has locked producers into limited output increases.

Speaking to reporters in Riyadh, Lavrov said the subject of Western sanctions came up within the context of OPEC+

cooperation.

"During discussions with my colleagues from Arab monarchies, we raised this subject, but only in the context of confirming the agreements on cooperation within OPEC+

that have already been agreed on and confirmed several times by our leaders," Lavrov told reporters.

"The principles of cooperation on this basis retain their significance and relevance," he said.

Moscow's OPEC+ removal would mean an early end to the pact and allow major crude nations such as Saudi Arabia to open the taps, analysts say.

Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, is currently benefiting from high oil prices that soared after Moscow sent troops into Ukraine on February 24 and the West slapped Moscow with unprecedented sanctions.

AFP

Russia moves to 'minimise' effects of EU oil ban: Kremlin

Moscow, Russia – Russia said Wednesday it was moving to limit the damage from an EU oil ban as its other key energy export, gas, has fallen after President Vladimir Putin sent troops to Ukraine.

At a summit on Monday, the EU agreed to a sixth package of sanctions on Moscow that will see the majority of Russian oil stopped, but exempted supplies by pipeline in a concession to Hungary.

"Sanctions will have a negative effect for Europe, us and the whole global energy market," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Peskov added that a "reorientation" was under way to find alternatives for the oil that will no longer be sold to Europe.

"These are purposeful, systematic actions that will allow us to minimise the negative consequences," he said.

After Putin sent troops into Ukraine on February 24, Russia was hit with a barrage of sanctions that targeted its economy and financial institutions.

The Wall Street Journal reported that OPEC was considering whether to remove Russia from an agreement that has locked producers into limited



output increases.

Moscow's removal would mean an early end to the pact and allow major crude nations such as Saudi Arabia to open the taps, analysts say.

Russian energy giant Gazprom said that gas deliveries to China via the "Power of Siberia" pipeline were increasing, but it did not provide any figures.

Moscow has demanded that clients from "unfriendly coun-

tries" – including EU member states – now pay for their gas in rubles.

The new requirement is seen as a measure to sidestep Western financial sanctions against Russia's central bank imposed over Moscow's offensive in Ukraine.

So far Poland, Bulgaria, Finland and the Netherlands have had their natural gas deliveries suspended over refusing to pay in rubles.

Danish energy company Orsted said that Gazprom Export would cut gas supplies to Denmark on Wednesday after the Danish company refused to pay in rubles.

EU countries have scrambled to reduce their dependency on Russian energy but are divided about imposing a natural gas embargo as several member states are heavily reliant on Moscow's energy supplies.

AFP

Russian gas exports drop 27% during five months

Moscow, Russia – Russia's Gazprom said Wednesday its gas exports to countries outside of the former Soviet Union dropped by more than a quarter year-on-year between January and May after losing several European clients.

Exports to countries outside the region totalled 61bn cubic metres, a 27.6 per cent fall from the same period last year, the energy giant said in a statement.

Gazprom added that gas deliveries to China via the "Power of Siberia" pipeline were increasing, but it did not provide any figures.

Since Russian President Vladimir Putin sent troops into Ukraine on February 24, Moscow has demanded that clients from "unfriendly countries" – including EU member states – pay for their gas in rubles.

AFP

Global chip shortage likely to last through 2023: US official

Washington, US – The global shortage of critical semiconductors is likely to last at least through next year and perhaps longer, US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo warned on Tuesday.

Shutdowns of key Asian suppliers due to the Covid-19 pandemic crippled supplies last year, just when American consumers, flush with cash from government aid, went on a spending spree buying cars and electronics, which depend on the chips.

"I do not unfortunately see the chip shortage abating in any meaningful way anytime in the next year," Raimondo told reporters following her recent trip to Asia.

She said she convened a dozen CEOs, including leaders of chipmakers, during her time in South Korea to discuss the shortage "and they all agreed that ... deep into 2023, possibly early '2024 before we see any real relief."

She repeated her call for Congress to act to provide funding for legislation that aims to stimulate domestic manufacturing of the computer chips that are key to a wide array of products, from



Gina Raimondo

smartphones to medical equipment to vacuum cleaners.

"We are really on borrowed time," she said.

"Every other country has subsidies on the table now, and if Congress doesn't act very quickly," key producers like Samsung, Intel and Micron "are going to build in another country and that be that would be hugely problematic."

The US Senate and the House of Representatives each have approved US\$52bn bills – the CHIPS Act and the America COMPETES Act – that would invest in domestic chip research and manufacturing, but so far have failed to agree on the final form of the legislation.

AFP

Inflation in bankrupt Lanka hits fresh record

Colombo, Sri Lanka – Cash-strapped Sri Lanka saw its highest inflation on record for the eighth consecutive month in May, official data showed Wednesday, as the island nation grapples with its worst-ever economic crisis.

The Colombo Consumer Price Index (CCPI) rose 39.1 per cent year-on-year last month, up from 29.8 per cent in April, according to the statistics department.

Food inflation in Colombo came in at 57.4 per cent, up from 46.6 per cent in April.

The price increases in May were yet to fully capture the sharp increases in fuel, one of the many vital commodities in scarce supply across the country.

Private economists say consumer prices are rising even faster than official records show, with one John Hopkins University analyst tracking March inflation at 133 per cent – more than six times the official figure.

Sri Lanka's import-dependent economy has been hammered by a critical foreign currency shortage, leading to months of acute shortages of food, medicines and other essentials.

Faced with a huge cash crunch, the government on



Tuesday raised taxes across the board by rolling back cuts ordered by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in November 2019.

Weeks of protests outside the president's seafont office have demanded his resignation over government mismanagement of the crisis.

Sri Lanka has defaulted on its US\$51bn foreign debt and is seeking international aid to revive its bankrupt economy, including from the International Monetary Fund.

AFP

Biden, Fed chief discuss US inflation at White House

Washington, US – US President Joe Biden held a rare White House meeting with the head of the Federal Reserve, Jerome Powell, on Tuesday to discuss soaring inflation and White House attempts to tame the politically damaging price surge ahead of midterm elections.

"I am meeting today to discuss my top priority: that is addressing inflation in order to transition from historic recovery to a steady growth," Biden said.

Also joined in the Oval Office by Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, Biden stressed to reporters that while the Fed has a "laser focus" on inflation, he does not intend to infringe on the central bank's traditional independence.

"It starts with a simple proposition: respect the Fed, respect the Fed's independence," he said.

The White House said that the first Biden-Powell meeting this year would focus on inflation but in general "discuss the state of the American and global economy."

This is Biden's "top economic priority," the White House said, "as we transition... to stable, steady growth that works for working families."

Inflation of more than eight per cent is casting a heavy



US President Joe Biden and Fed chair Jerome Powell hold a meeting in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, DC, on Tuesday (AFP)

shadow on Biden's claims to be steering the US economy to health after the Covid-19-induced crash.

Employment is back near pre-pandemic levels and growth is strong, but savage price increases for essentials including food and fuel are driving growing public dissatisfaction.

The Fed has raised rates three quarters of a percentage point, kicking off what central bank officials say could be a series of

hikes aimed at calming down the economy, although there are fears that the unintended result may be recession.

Federal Reserve Governor Christopher Waller said Monday that he backs several more half-point rate hikes – "until I see inflation coming down closer to our two per cent target."

According to a poll in mid-May by Pew Research Center, inflation is easily the biggest topic of concern for Americans, with

70 per cent making it number one, compared to 54 per cent listing violent crime.

Biden is scrambling to ease the pressure on American consumers ahead of November midterm elections in which his Democrats are forecast to lose control of Congress to the Republicans.

Biden's own approval ratings are barely in the 40 per cent range, reflecting his inability to sell voters on his upbeat mes-

sage of US economic recovery.

As the election approaches, Biden has pivoted to more aggressively trying to explain the inflation phenomenon as a byproduct of forces beyond his control.

These include the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which triggered Western sanctions disrupting the huge Russian energy industry, President Vladimir Putin's invading forces, meanwhile, have all but put a halt to Ukraine's important wheat exports.

Biden calls the effect "Putin's price hike." Writing in the Wall Street Journal on Monday, Biden underlined the importance of not interfering in the Federal Reserve's work.

Biden recalled that his predecessor Donald Trump frequently launched political attacks on the Fed and that other presidents had also "sought to influence its decisions inappropriately during periods of elevated inflation."

"I won't do this," he pledged.

In the op-ed, Biden said his longterm plan for economic health includes easing the pace of post-Covid recovery to more sustainable levels, boosting economic productivity and reducing the federal budget deficit.

AFP

Ukraine, West must act to resolve food crisis: Russia

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia – Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Tuesday it was up to the West and Kyiv to resolve a growing global food crisis provoked by the conflict in Ukraine.

Russia's offensive in Ukraine and Western sanctions have disrupted deliveries of wheat and other commodities from the two countries, fuelling concerns about the risk of hunger around the world.

Western countries "created a lot of artificial problems by closing their ports to Russian ships, disrupting logistics and financial chains," Lavrov told reporters during a visit to Bahrain.

"They need to seriously con-

sider what is more important for them: to do PR on the issue of food security or to take concrete steps to solve this problem," he added.

Lavrov also called on Ukraine to de-mine its territorial waters to allow the safe passage of ships through the Black and Azov seas.

"If the problem of de-mining is resolved... Russia's naval forces will ensure the unhindered passage of these ship into the Mediterranean and onwards to (their) destinations," Lavrov said.

Russia and Ukraine produce around 30 per cent of the global wheat supply.

President Vladimir Putin told his Turkish counterpart Recep



Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov meets with Bahrain's Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa in the capital Manama on Tuesday (AFP)

Tayyip Erdogan Monday that Moscow was ready to work with Ankara to free up maritime shipping from Ukraine and blamed global food shortages on "short-sighted" Western policies.

Turkey's top diplomat said Tuesday that Lavrov would arrive in Turkey on June 8 for talks on unblocking grain exports from Ukraine.

Following his stop in Bahrain, Lavrov flew Tuesday evening to Saudi Arabia's capital Riyadh, where he attended an official dinner with his Saudi counterpart, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, and met the head of the Saudi-headquartered Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, said his

spokeswoman Maria Zakharova.

Lavrov was due to meet Wednesday with foreign ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council, a Riyadh-based bloc that includes key members of the OPEC+ oil alliance, which Riyadh and Moscow lead.

Despite pressure from Washington to ramp up oil production amid spiking energy prices, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have stressed their commitment to OPEC+, underscoring Riyadh's and Abu Dhabi's increasing independence from long-standing ally Washington.

AFP



KR Eshraqa supports Oman Down Syndrome

With the aim to promote innovation among children with special needs, and reinforce their inclusion in society at all levels, Eshraqa, the Corporate Social Responsibility arm of the Khimji Ramdas (KR) Group recently lent its support to the Oman Down Syndrome Association's pioneering workshop on Robotics.

An approved project based on the material and instruction developed by NASA's neurodiversity network (N3), the workshop for children with special needs was held in collaboration with Prakramika Vocational Institute (India) and Edutech4Space (Dubai). The goal of the initiative was to promote an inclusive STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) environment in the sultanate, a press release said.

The workshop began with a brief introduction to space science, technology, and robotics; following which, the attending children were guided on the process of making a working robot. With the help of representatives from Eshraqa and volunteers from different non-governmental organisations (NGOs), each attendee was assisted in assembling robotic parts to make a robot. The excitement was evident, children loved the challenge when the robot made by them came to life and moved everyone at the end of the workshop.

Reaffirming Eshraqa's focus, Anil Khimji, director, Khimji Ramdas Group, said, "At Eshraqa, it is our earnest endeavour to promote innovation among children and robotics is a wonderful

learning activity that is apt for neurodiverse children. By training children with special needs in STEM subjects through hands-on application, and organising workshops of this nature, we help immensely in developing the analytical and social skills. It is Eshraqa's privilege to support Oman Down Syndrome association's robotics workshop."

"Robotics is a good way to focus on children's individual capabilities and help boost their confidence and self-esteem. It is a great teaching tool and develops problem-solving, teamwork, and personal skills among children. I would like to thank Eshraqa for their support in organising this workshop, as well as all the individuals and organisations that came together to make it a success," added

Ahmed Mohamed al Jabry, chairman of Oman Down Syndrome Association.

Highlighting the use of advanced robotics technology to empower the student-teacher learning curve, Dr Gayatri Narasimhan, founder and Director of Prakramika Vocational Institute, India, said "Robotics leverages a child's natural curiosity in the environment around them to nurture their interests, in developing their capabilities. It is also an important tool to help neurodiverse children integrate with mainstream students to create meaningful relationships, learn effective communication skills, and explore different learning pathways. The role of a teacher in guiding children with new techniques is also a critical success factor."

Ahlibank wins 'Excellence in Corporate Banking'

Ahlibank won the prestigious 'Excellence in Corporate Banking' Award at the recently concluded Oman Banking and Finance Awards ceremony that was held on the sidelines of the high-profile New Age Banking Summit, at the Al Bustan Palace.

Powered by Oman Economic Review (OER), the event awarded and felicitated top banking and financial institutions in Oman, a press release said.

Having established its credentials as one of the fastest growing banks in the country, Ahlibank topped its awards tally with the coveted 'Excellence in Corporate Banking' Award, setting a new benchmark in its Wholesale Banking segment. The award validates its customer-centric approach to banking and demonstrates its focused strategy to create and implement innovative banking products and services for the corporate segment.



Zaliya Lal Bakhsh al Balushi - DGM - Corporate Banking, at Ahlibank, accepted the award, on behalf of the Bank, from Tahir al Amri - executive president of Central Bank of Oman. The 7th edition of New Age Banking Summit had brought to the venue industry leaders from Oman and the GCC, showcasing fundamental and progressive developments that would impact the banking and financial sectors in the coming years.

Expressing pride and delight on winning the award, Zaliya stated, "At the outset, I would like to thank Oman Banking and Finance Awards for recognising our meritorious performance in the corporate banking segment with the marquee of 'Excellence'. This award is a testimony of our

team work, Ahlibank's vision to create exceptional avenues that meet customer needs and exceed their expectations, while delivering outstanding value to our stakeholders. In addition, winning this award specifically in the banking sector in Oman reflects the success of Ahlibank's strategies, and the ability to benefit from our traditional and digital channels that enhance customer experience.

"It also recognises the bank's efforts to provide flexible and fast services and keep pace with market developments in line with its plans to support and sustain local business activities, which play an active role in achieving development and the objectives of the Oman Vision 2040. We believe that the Bank's dedication to enhance the efficiency of its innovative banking products and services are among the most prominent factors that have contributed to this honor. This is, indeed, a proud moment for ahlibank."

Pointing out that the Award would mark a new milestone in the bank's impressive growth

trajectory, Zaliya added, "We have grown in leaps and bounds, especially in the last few years, to proudly accentuate our crucial role in redefining banking habits in the country. We have increased our footprints across the country and augmented our operational excellence with a policy of sustained and inclusive growth. We are also refocusing on increasing enhanced digital banking experience for our corporate customers. We have and continue to invest our resources in digital technology and all-round manpower development, thus underscoring our larger objective of becoming the bank of choice for both retail and wholesale customers. We will cherish the honour of winning 'Excellence in Corporate Banking'."

The New Age Banking Summit, organised with the support from Central Bank of Oman and Oman Banks Association, recognised the endeavours of organisations in the banking and finance industry, with distinguished awards marking the achievements of selected entities and setting a benchmark.



Madayn art show supports Child Care Centre

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates 'Madayn', represented by its Social Responsibility Department, organised on Wednesday 'Furshat Al Noor' fine art exhibition.

Organised in partnership with Alia Gallery, the exhibition displayed artworks of the children from the Child Care Centre affiliated to the Ministry of Social Development, a press release said.

The Department of Social Responsibility at Madayn had earlier launched the 'Furshat Al Noor' initiative with the aim of strengthening the role of social responsibility by adopting and engaging fine art talents from the Child Care Centre in art workshops. These workshops were also open to the children of employees of companies based at Madayn's industrial cities.

Sponsored by Muscat Steel

Industries and A'Saffa Foods, the exhibition presented a platform for investors, business owners and employees of the companies and factories in the industrial cities of Madayn to support and encourage these talents, as the proceeds from selling the displayed paintings will be dedicated to the Child Care Centre.

This initiative comes in line with Madayn's efforts to support social responsibility activities. Madayn launched several activities and initiatives in this regard to achieve its social responsibility objectives and contribute to sustainable partnership and development. Madayn's Social Responsibility Department works closely with the private sector, specifically the investing companies in the industrial cities, to strengthen the role of social responsibility in the Omani society.

INFINITI offers summer care for its vehicles

Taking care of your INFINITI vehicle is important year-round and particularly during the summer. As temperatures begin to rise in the region, cars require even more attention and care as the summer heat can cause some issues.

Experts at Infiniti urge owners to be aware of special care practices to keep their car running smoothly and safely this summer, a press release said. Owners are advised to check vehicle's oil the brakes and power-steering regularly. Basic maintenance services, such as oil changes, is recommended to be done before the summer.

A senior spokesperson at Infiniti Oman said, "Infiniti is renowned for its after-sales service with the aim of providing its owners a great ownership experience which is exclusive and rewarding. Our service experts are eager to assist you with your vehicle maintenance and repair needs at all times. Infiniti Oman strives to offer an excellent retail and customer service experience to every Infiniti owner. A crucial



point of differentiation for the brand amongst competitors is the top level of customer service it delivers. Infiniti Oman ensures that only genuine infiniti parts

are used, and highly trained technicians will complete the service and maintenance."

Auto specialists say since the car's AC system will be used

considerably during the summer months and it is vital to ensure that its system is working at the optimal level. AC filters need to be checked frequently, and quick action needs to be taken if these filters are unclean.

They also say it is necessary to ensure that tyres are suitably inflated to endure the rising temperatures. Under-inflated tyres can cause them to over-heat, making them weaker, more susceptible to damage. Tyre pressure should be tested at least once a month during the summer.

Since the summer sun can cause car battery to heat up and it may lead to internal rundown and ensuing battery failure. If the battery is more than three years old, it is a good idea to have it tested to determine how much it will last, experts insist, as car batteries are under pressure during summer.

United Securities awarded for excellence in asset management

The sultanate's leading Financial Investment Advisory and Securities business, United Securities has won the distinguished 'Excellence in Asset Management and Brokerage Award', at the recently organised New Age Banking Summit (NABS) that was held under the auspices of Tahir al Amri, executive president, Central Bank of Oman, who was also the keynote speaker of the event.

United Securities has won top honour at the awards for its exemplary performance in asset management and brokerage. The recognition comes close on the heels of its recent awards win at the 'Top Omani Brand' (Investments category) and 'Oman Forum Sustainability Award' (Leadership in Financial Investments) events. The award bears testimony to United Securities' solid track record and ability to deliver to clients healthy, risk-adjusted returns.



"The award reinforces our reputation as asset managers of choice for investors who are looking to invest not just in the sultanate, but in the region's most promising markets and

asset classes. We are both delighted and proud to win this award, and maintain our leadership position. To receive this recognition, among the most prominent asset managers, brokers, banks and financial institu-

tions, underscores the hard-work and consistent track record of our highly professional and experienced team," said Mustafa Ahmed Salman, CEO of United Securities. "We remain committed to diversifying our offering of products and services, and look forward to more success in achieving our clients' investment goals during the course of the year."

The New Age Banking (NABS) showcases the ever-evolving financial eco system in the digital age and how banks and financial institutions can be future-ready by adopting new strategies and innovating products and services.

Oman Sail celebrated as Best Sport Event Organiser

Oman Sail has been awarded gold in the category of 'Best Sport Event Organiser' and silver in the category of 'Best Sport Event of The Year' at the prestigious Middle East Sports Industry Awards 2022 (SPIA).

The awards were in recognition for successfully delivering three Asian and three world sailing championships during 2021. Joining the leading sports events, initiatives and organisers from across the region, Oman Sail CEO, Dr Khamis al Jabri received the trophies on behalf of the organisation at a gala reception at the W Hotel in Dubai, a press release said.

Dr Jabri said, "Winning two awards, judged by our industry peers, is a great recognition of the scale and quality of the work done by our entire team. We are rightfully proud of our achievement and the positive impact our work had on the nation in 2021. Oman's reputation as a world class destination for major events within the international sport industry has now been firmly established, and this re-



ward signifies the high level of expertise within the Oman Sail team, which is proudly 96% Omanised. The level of trust placed in us by the Class Association, sailing authorities and the global sailing community is now being shared by the industry."

Oman Sail was nominated for both 'Best Sports Event Organiser' and 'Best Sports Event' following an exceptional year. The organisation utilised over 13 years of international event management experience to deliver

nine major sailing events, a nationwide community sailing festival and an environmental protection programme that culminated in Oman Sail setting a new Guinness World Records. In the category of 'Best Sports Event of the Year, Oman Sail was awarded silver behind the Etihad Airways Abu Dhabi Formula 1 Grand Prix, who took the gold.

In total, Oman Sail's event hosting in 2021 attracted over 2,500 international competitors to the country, contributing over RO2.8mn to the economy.

Oman Sail are already deep in planning for events that will take place between October and December 2022, including the Arab Sailing Championships, the RS Venture Connect ParaSailing World Championships and the RC44 Oman Cup, ensuring that Oman will continue to showcase its world class venues for major global sports events.

Organised by Sport 360X, the Sport Industry Awards (SPIA) recognises the achievements of the sporting industry across the Middle East in 18 categories.

Bentley launches the 'most sporting' Bentayga S

With striking design cues and unique detailing, the Bentayga S is the latest version of Bentley's benchmark, go-anywhere luxury SUV, designed and engineered in the UK and manufactured in Bentley's carbon-neutral factory in Crewe, a press release said.

The S version reflects feedback from the huge number of customers that enjoy the dynamic performance of their Bentayga on-road. Building on Bentley's established 'S' brand, the new enhanced sports Bentayga provides an even more engaging drive, with Bentley Dynamic Ride active anti-roll control fitted as standard and an enhanced Sports chassis mode. A 15 per cent increase in damp-



ing stiffens the chassis and provides a platform for a more dynamic Sport mode ESC tune. Bentayga S also features a re-

ISM students bag best child actor awards

Students of Indian School Muscat (ISM), Adhrit Gautham of grade 6 and Adhi Krishna of grade 3, bagged Best Child Actor awards in a recent Malayalam drama competition held at Al Falaj Hotel.

The students were performing on behalf of a drama group registered for the competition which was organised by a prominent talent school in Muscat, a press release said.

The two-day event, saw the participation of ten theatre groups from Muscat and Sohar, with more than 120 artists and technicians engaged in a healthy competition. The event also had one drama staged by the organisers in a non-competing cate-



Adhi Krishna



Adhrit Gautham

gory. It was the first such event after COVID-19 protocols were lifted recently.

Adhrit Gautham and Adhi Krishna were adjudged for their exemplary performance in the play titled 'Pratheeksha' written and directed by Ajay Raj Menon.

The drama also won special jury awards for the best team performance and the best actor by Dr Rajgopal. It also had Devananda, grade 9 student of ISM, as its lead character who won the audience appreciation for her outstanding acting.

AlShawmikh, Hydrogen Center forge ties for a green economy

In an effort to search for environmentally friendly and clean renewable energy sources, and in compliance with this new approach, AlShawmikh Oil Services (AOS), one of the Super Local Community companies in the oil and gas sector, signed a cooperation agreement with the Oman Hydrogen Center (part of German University of Technology), within industrial projects green energy.

The MoU was signed by Dr Afrah bin Said al Hadhrami, CEO of AOS, and Dr Sauwsan bint Said al Riyami, director of Oman Hydrogen Centre, in the presence of a number of officials from both sides, at AlShawmikh Oil Services Head Office, a press release said.

The memorandum aims to attract global expertise in the field of green hydrogen and enhance the benefit of this promising sector, as hydrogen is a promising alternative to fossil fuels, and is environmentally friendly. The two sides also seek to benefit from the exchange of experiences and studies to contribute to the realisation of the Sultanate of Oman's ambitions towards a policy of transition to alternative energy as part of Oman's 2040 vision.

Dr Hadhrami said that the Sultanate of Oman is moving forward towards expanding proj-



ects in the green economy and renewable energy sector, which is a promising economic field to achieve sustainable economic growth, as the recent period has witnessed a significant increase in investments in this sector.

He added, "The cooperation agreement between Oman Hydrogen Centre and AOS comes as a continuation of the green hydrogen project marsh in the Sultanate of Oman to move at an accelerated pace towards achieving the aspirations of Oman in the policy of transition to alternative energy as part of the Oman 2040 vision for sustainability to reach 39% of the total energy generated by the year 2040," confirming that the agreement between the two parties will enhance research, development and localisation of technology in relation to renewable energies, especially hydro-

Ooredoo launches new international rates

The world just got smaller and the value just got bigger, with Ooredoo's revamped International Voice bundles. Offering even more benefits, the plans now come with all-new rates to India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, including a market-first RO5 bundle.

Available to all Hala prepaid and Shahry customers, customers can also choose from a range of add-ons, making it easier to stay in touch with family and friends back home without worrying about spend. With a selection of RO1, RO3, and RO5 add-ons, inclusive of VAT, customers can get up to 1,000 minutes to their country of choice, to use for four weeks.

Ooredoo's popular Hala plans come with a free SIM and offer a variety of add-ons for voice and data. Users can subscribe to a plan or add-on, change it, track their usage, recharge their balance and do lots more, anytime, anywhere, through the Ooredoo App. Combining seamless connectivity and an awesome customer experience, it's the latest way Ooredoo is enriching its customers' digital lives.

PFU (EMEA) brings ScanSnap in Arabic to Oman

PFU (EMEA) Limited today announced the launch of its ScanSnap personal document scanner devices in Oman.

The market leading devices are now available with Arabic language support with customer service, and with software and hardware capabilities on the full ScanSnap range available in Arabic, a press release said.

ScanSnap is the software and hardware solution dedicated to personal scanning that combines advanced yet simple and intuitive technology to cut office clutter and confusion. As the market leading personal scanner, it helps maximise efficiency, get the most from assets and opportunities, and protects against unexpected threats. ScanSnap features simple and intuitive technology that is easy to use, by quickly and simply converting documents into applications.



ScanSnap makes it easy to digitise at home, in the office or on the go.

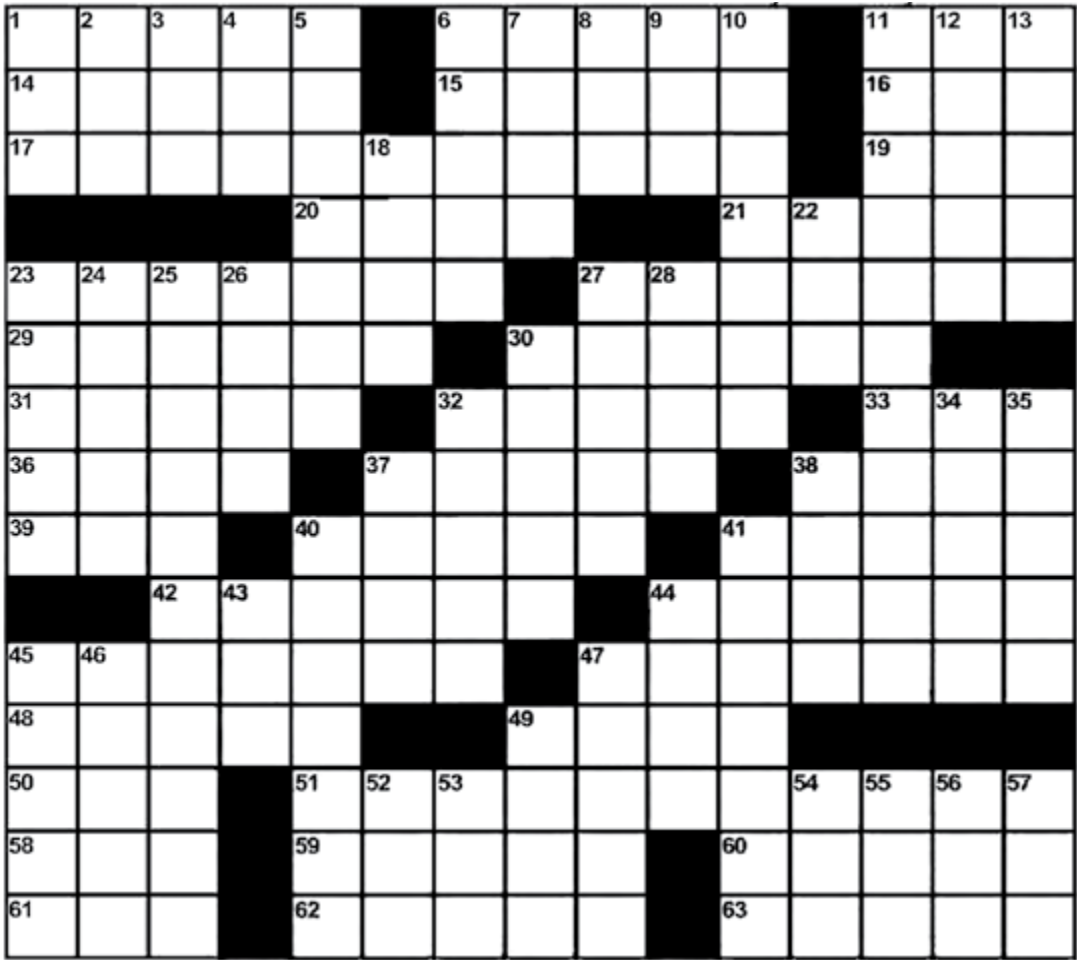
The devices, designed for small business owners, employees and individuals that want to

improve personal productivity, have already seen considerable success around the world with six million of them sold since the first ScanSnap device launched more than 20 years ago. Combining advanced technology with a simple and intuitive interface, the scanners help to maximise efficiency, capturing information with just a single touch of a button.

From today, Arabic becomes a core language within all ScanSnap products, meaning that channel partners and end-users in Oman can experience the full range of products and software services.

This includes the powerful ScanSnap Home software, enabling automatic capture of data from a wide range of documents, and direct scanning to mobile, or tools such as Microsoft Excel.

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**

 - 1) Killed, gangster-style
 - 6) Montezuma, for one
 - 11) Dashboard abbreviation
 - 14) Key in Florida
 - 15) _-cotta
 - 16) "I can't believe my eyes!"
 - 17) Prepare to stop crying
 - 19) Charged particle
 - 20) Bank heist units
 - 21) Indian social class
 - 23) _ oblongata (brain part)
 - 27) Simple shelters
 - 29) Humiliates
 - 30) Martin with an Oscar
 - 31) Easy wins
 - 32) Audacity
 - 33) Backstabber
 - 36) First-rate
 - 37) Ratty or flea-bitten
 - 38) Booby trap component
 - 39) Leave white tracks
 - 40) Dude kin
 - 41) Certain mast (var.)
 - 42) Arrange tidily
 - 44) Mum
- 45) Some socks
 - 4 7) Vast frozen expanses
 - 48) Runway figure
 - 49) Andean land
 - 50) Busy bother
 - 51) Be seductive, in a way
 - 58) Use a needle and thread
 - 59) Come to mind
 - 60) Spooky
 - 61) Member of the family, often
 - 62) Marina sight
 - 63) All-out attack

DOWN

 - 1) Way past voting age
 - 2) Wide's partner
 - 3) Swelter
 - 4) Teamwork inhibitor
 - 5) Computer attachments
 - 6) Baffled on the Pacific?
 - 7) Zorro's marks
 - 8) "Don't give up!"
 - 9) Before, in poetry
 - 10) Rush down in vast quantities
 - 11) Certain skin cream
- 12) Quick snap
 - 13) Fine-tunes
 - 18) Slithering sea creatures
 - 22) "Santa" tail
 - 23) Convenient places to shop
 - 24) Digital novel
 - 25) Discouraging or dissuading
 - 26) They often deliver good news
 - 27) The "L" of XL
 - 28) Jealousy
 - 30) He's there late in Red Square
 - 32) Directory contents
 - 34) "Gladiator" setting
 - 35) Army shelters
 - 37) Bit of dust
 - 38) Uncontrolled
 - 40) Bedroom separator, often
 - 41) Some simple math signs
 - 43) CBS logo
 - 44) "Certainly!"
 - 45) Accumulate
 - 46) Event with lots of bucks
 - 47) Article of faith
 - 49) Fancy-schmancy
 - 52) Victorian, for one
 - 53) First syllable of a simple game
 - 54) Hawaiian giveaway
 - 55) Anger
 - 56) County fair animal
 - 57) "Comprende?"
- NOTE PAD**
-

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

It's great that you're so darned good at concentrating! Despite all the fun and chaos going on around you, you're keeping your eye on the ball and impressing people left and right. This laser focus will continue for quite a while, but it's especially strong today. Take advantage of it. If you devote some time to working out an organizational scheme for an upcoming trip or social commitment, you'll get everything done with plenty of time to spare.

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

The activities of others around you are starting to overshadow your life. It's wonderful to support the people who are struggling or applaud the ones who are doing well, but are you reserving enough energy for yourself? Right now there's a lot of noise around you, and it's distracting you from what you really should be paying attention to: you. Today, get away on your own, even if it's just for an hour, and do whatever you feel like doing to relax.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Someone around you might be entering a new phase of struggle today, and it could affect you. Instead of trying to distance yourself from their stress or sorrow, get in there and show them that you're on their side. Other people might warn you about being taken advantage of, but you know what you're doing. This relationship is between you and the other person. The people living on the outside of the circle simply don't know what's really going on.

 TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. What did Napoleon Bonaparte I establish in 1804, a measure which has had worldwide effect?

A. Ecole Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr
B. Treaty of Amiens
C. Banque de France
D. Napoleonic Code

02. Which 1910 Murray and Weston song became a signature song of the music hall star, Harry Champion?

A. Any Old Iron
B. I'm (H)ENERY the Eighth, I Am
C. A Little Bit of What You Fancy Does You Good
D. Burlington Bertie from Bow

03. What wood or woods did the Stradivari family use in the construction of their exceptional stringed instruments?

A. Ebony and rosewood
B. Spruce, willow and maple
C. Sycamore
D. Beech and spruce

Answers: 1.D 2.B 3.B

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

It's a wise person who uses their wits to get through tough days, but it's an even wiser person who utilizes all the people and resources around them as well. So if you feel like your back is up against the wall at any point today, reach out for the help or guidance you need. There's nothing to be ashamed of when you need a helping hand! Put yourself in the other person's place: If you saw a friend or coworker struggling, you'd give them the help they needed, right?

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Any internal turmoil you're experiencing today will be muted by the drama going on with some of your friends. Their conflicts and announcements will be a welcome distraction from the stuff you're struggling with. It seems that by comparison your problems aren't so bad after all. Avoid getting too involved in their lives. Just observe and listen from a distance. Apply their experiences to your life and adjust your attitude accordingly.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

It's all about pushing boundaries today: Be the first person to bring up a taboo topic and watch how everyone reacts. Chances are they're not afraid to talk about it. You're able to trigger some interesting responses and get a long conversation going. This skill you have for inspiring others to talk may overlap into other areas of your life as well. Whether you share your tips on a hot new spot in town or post about a controversial political topic, get your controversial opinions out there.

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

You've become so engrossed in the exciting changes going on in your life lately that you could be missing some long-range opportunities. Try to move your focus away from current tasks and toward what's left to tackle on your ambitious to-do list. It's time to think about your future and start laying the groundwork for the new direction you want to take. The scope doesn't have to be too wide. Just contemplate where you'd like to be in a year.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

A sudden interest in the simple things in life is driving you into a simpler way of living. Toss out unused or worn-out items, and don't bother to replace them. Instead, learn to go without for a while. It will be a very educational experience. Once you go back to a more materialistic lifestyle (if you do), you'll truly understand the value of the things and people in your life. With just a little bit of imagination, small things can feel like very big luxuries.

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

The issue of control is a big one today. Someone wants some of the power you have, and you think you don't have enough. This struggle might make you feel protective of the control you do have, but holding on too tightly right now isn't wise. It's too short-sighted. If things aren't working out the way you want, or if people aren't acting in the manner you'd prefer, your lack of power isn't to blame. It's just the way things are sometimes. Respect that.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

While walking down the street or driving in your car today, you could feel a sense of peace in your solitude. Expand this feeling. Keep to yourself as much as you can today. It's a good idea to move away from the hustle and bustle of the rest of the world right now. There are trivial pressures that shouldn't be your concern, and it's too easy to get your priorities mixed up. You're in a highly suggestible phase of life, and you should count on your own compass for guidance.

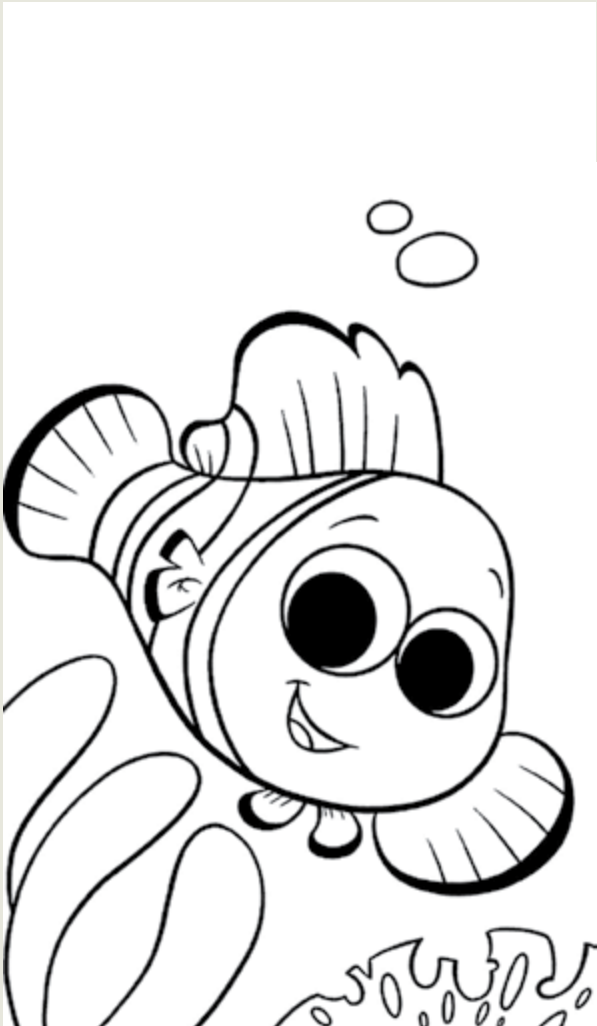
 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You're privy to a lot of secrets and insider information today, so use all of it wisely (which probably means you shouldn't use it at all). The bottom line is that you're in the center of a few potential firestorms, and you have the power to make things happen and the power to keep events peaceful and quiet. If you're in the mood for major drama, feel free to let some stuff spill and watch the fireworks. But if you're enjoying the harmony, keep quiet and just smile.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

A sweeping momentum carries you through the entire day, and it's quite a ride! But don't get too caught up in the excitement or laughter that surrounds you. There are many details you need to pay attention to if you want to keep on a positive track. Thinking big or getting distracted by long-range ideas won't help you right now. Instead, listen to the words people are using and the dates being chosen. These small details will have a huge influence.

KIDS COLOURING





BOGGLER

C	R	E	G
A	I	L	O
C	U	E	A
H	A	T	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.

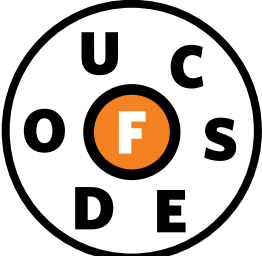
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Yemen truce hangs in balance

Talks on renewing the UN-brokered truce hit trouble, with just a day left for the truce to expire

Sanaa, Yemen - A fragile UN-brokered truce between the Yemeni government and Houthi rebels hung in the balance on Wednesday as talks on renewing it hit trouble, threatening the humanitarian gains of the past two months.

Aid agencies and Western governments have urged the Yemen's warring parties to extend the truce, which has significantly reduced the intensity of fighting in a conflict the United Nations says has triggered the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

But with just one day before the truce expires, there was no sign of any breakthrough in UN-backed talks.

A Yemeni aircraft left the rebel-held capital Sanaa for Cairo on the first commercial flight between the two cities since 2016, the latest gain from the truce deal.



Soldiers loyal to the Aden-based Yemeni government stand guard before a poster showing the chairman of the presidential council Rashad al-Alimi, while on guard duty during a demonstration demanding the end of a siege imposed by Houthi rebels on the third city of Ta'ez on May 25 (AFP)

The office of the United Nations special envoy for Yemen told AFP there were 77 people on board the Yemenia flight from Sanaa airport, which has been closed to commercial flights for nearly six years.

It is the seventh such flight since the truce went into effect on April 2. The six previous flights had all been to the Jordanian capital Amman.

Yemen has been gripped by conflict since the rebels overran Sanaa in 2014, triggering a Saudi-led military intervention in sup-

port of the beleaguered government the following year.

On May 16, a Yemenia plane carrying 126 passengers, including critically ill hospital patients and their relatives, became the first commercial flight to leave Sanaa since August 2016.

Air traffic into the rebel-held capital has been largely halted by a Saudi-led blockade, but there have been exemptions for aid flights that are a key lifeline for the population.

Despite accusations of violations from both the Saudi-led

coalition and the Houthi rebels, the truce has significantly reduced levels of violence.

Talks in 'trouble'

The Houthis have said they are considering renewing the ceasefire amid UN efforts to extend the truce.

But on Tuesday, the United States warned the truce talks were in 'trouble' as it pushed for an extension to help support millions of people at risk.

Talks on extending the ceasefire 'haven't ended yet but seem

to be in a bit of trouble', the US ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, said.

Aid agencies have urged Yemen's warring parties to extend the truce, saying it had 'positive humanitarian impacts'.

"As organisations working across Yemen, we have seen the positive humanitarian impacts of the truce," more than 30 aid agencies, including Save The Children, Oxfam and the Norwegian Refugee Council, said in a joint statement.

They said the reopening of Sanaa airport to commercial flights had allowed hundreds of patients in 'critical need of life-saving medical treatment outside of the country' to finally receive it.

The truce has also seen oil tankers docking in the rebel-held port of Hodeida, potentially easing fuel shortages in Sanaa and elsewhere.

But a provision for the rebels to ease their siege of Yemen's third-largest city Ta'ez has yet to be implemented, to the anger of both the government and residents, who have held repeated protests in recent weeks.

The head of Yemen's presidential leadership council, Rashad al-Alimi, discussed the implementation of the truce with UN chief Antonio Guterres by telephone on Tuesday.

He urged the UN chief to 'redouble the pressure on the Houthi militia to abide by its commitments to the truce, including opening roads to Ta'ez', the official Saba news agency reported. Ta'ez has been largely cut off from the rest of government-held territory since 2015, with all supplies coming in by a single tortuous road through the mountains.

The war in Yemen has killed more than 150,000 people and displaced millions of civilians, according to the UN.

AFP

Abu Dhabi to restrict single-use plastics

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Restrictions on single-use plastic bags took effect in the United Arab Emirates capital Abu Dhabi on Wednesday, as part of its efforts for a 'greener future'.

The 'single-use plastic bags ban starts today... to encourage sustainable living in Abu Dhabi', the emirate's media office said.

"Retailers in the emirate are encouraged to offer environmentally friendly reusable bags with a nominal fee to encourage positive behavioural change in the community, and support emirate-wide efforts for a greener future." There are exemptions for medicine bags, bag rolls for produce in supermarkets, rubbish sacks and large brand name shopping bags.

The restrictions come as the UAE prepares to host the COP28 global environmental conference in 2023, having set a target to become carbon neutral by 2050, in line with goals set by the COP26 conference in Britain last year.

Dubai, one of the seven other emirates that make up the UAE, has also announced it is ending the free provision of single-use plastic bags. The decision is scheduled to come into force at the start of July.

AFP

'Knife-wielding' Palestinian woman killed by Israel army

Jerusalem - Israeli troops shot dead a Palestinian woman after she approached a soldier with a knife in the southern West Bank, the army said on Wednesday, with Palestinian officials pronouncing her dead.

A statement from the army said the 'attempted stabbing' took place near Al Aroub camp, north of the city of Hebron.

"An assailant armed with a knife advanced toward an IDF soldier who was conducting routine security activity on Route 60. The soldiers responded with live fire," the army said. "No IDF injuries were reported."

The Palestinian health ministry said the woman died from a bullet to her torso, identifying her as Ghofran Warasnah. The Palestinians' official news agency Wafa said she was 31.

The Palestinian Prisoners Club said she was a journalist who had



Brothers mourn over the body of Ghofran Warasnah at the morgue of Al-Ahli Hospital in the West Bank city of Hebron on Wednesday (AFP)

been imprisoned by Israel in the past. Nineteen people, mostly Israeli civilians - including 18 inside Israel and a West Bank Jewish settler - have been killed in attacks by Palestinians and Israeli Arabs since late March.

Israeli security forces have responded with raids inside Israel and the West Bank, particularly

in the flashpoint northern district of Jenin. Three Israeli Arab attackers and a police commando have died. Thirty-six Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank - suspected militants but also non-combatants, including a journalist who was covering a raid in Jenin and bystanders.

AFP

Over 1mn displaced in Myanmar, says UN

Yangon, Myanmar - Post-coup violence has pushed the number of displaced people in Myanmar over one million for the first time, the UN has said, warning of 'dire' conditions as the monsoon approaches and fighting rages.

Almost 700,000 people have been forced to flee their homes since the toppling of Aung San Suu Kyi's government last year, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) said on Tuesday.

Civilian militias have formed to fight back against the coup across the country, and the junta has responded with an onslaught that rights groups say includes razing villages, mass extra-judicial killings and airstrikes on civilians. The violence has added to an estimated 346,000 people already displaced before the coup.

That includes those affected by long-running conflicts with ethnic rebel groups along the Thai and Chinese borders, and



Children attending a class in a temporary shelter in Myanmar's Kayah state on October 18, last year (AFP)

Rohingya Muslims forced from their homes during a brutal 2017 crackdown. More than 12,000 civilian properties are estimated to have been burned or destroyed since the putsch, UNOCHA said, with the approaching monsoon rains threatening more misery for those living in displacement camps.

More than 300,000 of those

displaced since the coup were from the northwestern Sagaing region, where fighters clash regularly with junta forces, it added.

It noted that authorities had cut mobile data services across much of Sagaing and neighbouring Magway - another hotspot - and that there were 'restrictions' in place affecting the transport of rice, medicine and fuel.

"Reports suggest there remains a dire need for health services, food, and relief items and shelter in these areas," it said.

More than 1,800 people have been killed and more than 13,000 arrested in the junta's crackdown on dissent since the coup, according to a local monitoring group.

AFP

Amnesty demands probe into Iran's 'hostage-taking'

London, UK - The UK government should investigate Iran's six-year detention of dual national Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe as 'an act of hostage-taking' and try to prosecute Iranian officials, Amnesty International said on Wednesday.

The rights group has compiled a detailed analysis of the case, which it says includes 'compelling evidence that Iran's detention of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe amounted to an act of hostage-taking'.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe, 43, who was first detained in Iran in 2016, returned to Britain in March along with fellow dual national Anoosheh Ashoori after the UK agreed to pay a longstanding debt to Tehran.

"The Iranian authorities deliberately and shamelessly deprived Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe of her free-

dom," Diana Eltahawy, deputy director for the Middle East and North Africa at Amnesty, said in a statement.

"They used spurious national security charges and sham judicial proceedings against her with the aim of exerting pressure on the UK government to settle its debts."

The NGO last month submitted its evidence to the UK parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, which has launched its own inquiry into state-level hostage situations.

Amnesty said there was an urgent need for the international community to step up efforts to prevent and prosecute hostage-taking amid growing evidence that Iranian authorities are holding others unjustly. It highlighted at least seven cases of dual nationals currently held in Iran.

AFP

Turkey's rose sector chases sweet smell of success

Halfeti, Turkey - To the naked eye, the delicate velvet roses in southeastern Turkey appear black and overwhelm the senses with their irresistible sweet smell.

The rosebuds are just as dark, and when fully developed, the flower takes on the colour of an intensely rich red wine.

These black roses, known as 'Karagul' in Turkish and thornier than others, can only grow in the town of Halfeti with soil that has distinctive features including a special PH level.

The unique colour cannot be preserved elsewhere, experts say. Now Halfeti's residents want to transform the rose into a brand since Turkey's rose sector is a blooming business.

The industry is currently dominated by the western province of Isparta, known as Turkey's 'rose garden'.

Today, Turkey and Bulgaria make up around 80 per cent of the world's rose oil production.



A black rose of Halfeti inside a greenhouse at Halfeti town in Sanliurfa (AFP)

But Halfeti resident Devrim Tutus, 28, has already seen business flourish.

After coming up with a business plan to promote the black roses, he now supplies Istanbul with petals for colognes, Turkish delight and ice cream.

Demand is already outgrowing supply.

That doesn't stop Tutus who already has his next plan: Karagul wine.

"There's a huge market out there in Istanbul. It's all about Isparta roses. Why not the same here?" he said.

Roses rescued

The black rose's fortunes were not always so sweet.

It once aroused only indifference among residents, said a local official in charge of preserving the roses.

"They were everywhere in the

gardens but nobody paid attention to them," said his friend who only gave his name as Bulent.

"Locals had no idea the roses were unique. We transported some to higher ground and started production in greenhouses," said the official, who did not wish to be named.

In upper Halfeti, one greenhouse operated by the town's agriculture department is home to 1,000 roses.

But the town's residents rallied to rescue the rose after a dam on the Euphrates River flooded the region in the early 2000s, threatening to bury the flower like dozens of archaeological sites from ancient Mesopotamia. The construction of the Birecik dam in 2000 was part of a series of controversial development projects in south-east Turkey.

Today, 20 variants of black roses have been identified worldwide - including sixteen in Turkey, said botanist Ali Ikinci.

"Karagul is not an endemic species in Halfeti," Ikinci, a professor at Harran University in Sanliurfa province, said.

"But the particular ecology, climate and soil cause it to bloom darker there. If you plant that rose somewhere else, it won't be as dark or black."

A French connection?

The professor insisted Halfeti's rose was 'unique'.

The colour of the rose darkens, becoming more black and the scent is stronger as one moves from Sanliurfa - where Halfeti is - towards Syria, which is 60km to the south, Ikinci said.

The Halfeti official explained the rose blossoms on higher ground because the soil close to the dam is more acidic because of the Euphrates' waters. Ikinci believes the origins of Karagul could be the 'Louis XIV' black rose, grown in France in 1859 and named after the French king.

AFP

Not competing for influence in South Pacific, says China

Port Vila, Vanuatu - China has insisted it has 'no intention to compete' for influence in the South Pacific as foreign minister Wang Yi and his Australian counterpart Penny Wong again jettied around the region on Wednesday on duelling diplomatic charm offensives.

In a statement distributed by the Chinese embassy in Canberra, Beijing said it 'does not seek exclusive rights' in the region and 'we have no intention to compete with others'.

The claim comes as Wang nears the end of a contentious 10-day visit to Pacific Island nations that has seen China pitch a radically increased role in regional security, much to the concern of the United States and Australia.

"China respects Australia's historical and traditional ties in the region and there is enough space in the vast Pacific Ocean for China, Australia and all island countries to share peace, development and prosperity," the statement said.

Although Wang failed to secure support for a regional security deal that would have seen Beijing play a much bigger role in sensitive areas including policing and cybersecurity, he has inked a series of country-



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (left) waves as he meets with Vanuatu Prime Minister Bob Loughman Weibur in the capital city Port Vila on Wednesday (AFP)

specific agreements on his trip.

In Vanuatu on Wednesday, agreements were announced on deepening economic ties and sending Chinese medical teams to the country.

In Tonga on Tuesday, Wang pledged China's support for sports stadium and wind power projects, according to Chinese state media, while signing deals on disaster prevention and mit-

igation, agriculture, fisheries and health care.

Wang's South Pacific trip concludes with a stop in Papua New Guinea on Thursday and Friday.

Australian blitz

The visit has prompted the newly elected Australian government to embark on a diplomatic blitz to shore up decades-old alliances.

Australia's new foreign minister Penny Wong said she was heading back to the Pacific Islands, travelling to Samoa and Tonga just days after the Chinese FM visited.

Since being sworn in nine days ago, Wong has already visited Japan - for a meeting of Quad countries the United States, India, Japan and Australia - and Fiji.

Australia's new centre-left government is playing catch-up after years of relations with the Pacific being hampered by the former conservative administration's foot-dragging on climate change. Rising sea levels are seen as an existential threat by many of the low-lying Pacific Island nations. Visiting Fiji, Wong said Australia would set new, more ambitious emissions targets and bid to co-host a future UN climate conference with Pacific Island countries.

There would be no more 'disrespecting' Pacific nations or 'ignoring' their calls to act on climate change, she said.

AFP



This National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration satellite image shows Hurricane Agatha over Mexico on Tuesday (AFP)

10 people dead as hurricane hits southern Mexico

Oaxaca, Mexico - The toll from Hurricane Agatha climbed to at least ten dead and around 20 missing in southern Mexico, where heavy rains triggered landslides and flooding, local officials said on Tuesday.

The storm, the first hurricane of the Pacific season, was the strongest to make landfall along Mexico's Pacific coast in May since record keeping began in 1949, the US National Hurricane Center (NHC) said.

Agatha weakened as it moved inland with its remnants producing torrential rain on Tuesday over Veracruz state.

"Right now we're at around 20 people missing, most of them are in the upper mountains," Oaxaca state governor Alejandro Murat told Radio Formula, adding that 'ten who lost their lives were unfortunately preliminarily reported by local authorities'.

"When Agatha made landfall, the day ended without any loss of human life, but heavy rains that occurred early on Tuesday morning caused rivers to burst their banks and landslides," Murat said earlier in the day.

An earlier toll had reported three dead and eight missing.

Two people aged 18 and 21 years old died when part of a hill collapsed in the community of Santa Catarina Xanaguia, the Oaxaca civil protection office said. Another woman died and her son was injured in a landslide in Llano del Chillar, it said.

Agatha made landfall on Monday near Puerto Angel in Oaxaca as a Category Two hurricane - the second lowest on a scale of five - with winds of 165km per hour. Mexico is regularly lashed by tropical storms on both its Pacific and Atlantic coasts, generally between the months of May and November.

AFP

Police probe death of star Bollywood singer KK

Kolkata, India - Indian police said on Wednesday they are investigating the death of star Bollywood singer Krishnakumar Kunnath, popularly known as KK, who died at age 53 after a concert.

The singer died shortly after performing at a college festival in Kolkata on Tuesday evening, prompting a wave of tributes.

He was rushed to hospital from his hotel at around 10:30pm, where doctors pronounced him dead.

Aroop Biswas, a government minister in the eastern state of West Bengal, said KK had died of a 'suspected cardiac arrest'.

But police said they are probing whether he died an 'unnatural death', with media reports saying there were injuries to his face and head.

An autopsy was to be performed later in the day.

"We are also talking to the hotel authorities and scrutinising CCTV footage to understand



This file photo shows Bollywood singer Krishnakumar Kunnath, popularly known as KK, performing in Mumbai on October 20, 2010 (AFP)

what had happened before he was taken to the hospital," said police official Sanjoy Mukherjee.

Versatile performer

Born in Delhi into a south Indian family, the versatile singer began his career with advertising jingles and recorded songs in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi and Bengali.

Like other playback singers in India who become stars in their own right, his songs were featured in films in which actors lip-synched along to his vocals.

His hits from the 2000s included 'Aankhon Me Teri' from the movie *Om Shanti Om* and 'Khuda Jaane' from *Bachna Ae Haseeno*.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi led the tributes to the singer.

"His songs reflected a wide range of emotions (and) struck a chord with people of all age groups," Modi said on Twitter.

"We will always remember him through his songs. Condolences to his family and fans."

"I cannot believe that such a talented artist left us this way. He had two back-to-back programmes in Kolkata," composer Anupam Roy told AFP.

Fans paid tribute on an Instagram post put up by his management with photos showing KK singing in front of a roaring crowd.

The post was accompanied by the caption 'Pulsating gig tonight at Nazrul Mancha ... Love you all'.

"Rest in peace legend, you will be always in our heart," wrote one user.

"You're gone too soon!!!!!!" commented another.

One of the Hindi songs he sang at his last concert was 'Pal', which has the lyrics 'whether we live or not, we will remember this moment'.

The Indian film industry has lost a string of luminaries in recent years, including superstar singer Lata Mangeshkar at 92 in February and veteran actor Dilip Kumar in 2021 at 98.

The year before, India lost much-loved singer S.P. Balasubrahmanyam as well as actors Irrfan Khan, Rishi Kapoor and Sushant Singh Rajput.

On Sunday, Sidhu Moose Wala, a rapper popular at home and among the Indian diaspora in Britain and Canada, was shot dead in the northern state of Punjab. Police believe the killing was related to organised crime.

AFP

Girl survives cougar attack

Washington, US - A nine-year-old American girl survived a very rare attack from a cougar during a camping trip in the western United States, wildlife officials and family members said on Tuesday.

The cat attacked the girl, Lily Kryzhanivskyy, on Saturday morning while she was camping with her family in Washington state, her uncle Alex Mantsevich wrote on GoFundMe, where he was trying to raise money to cover her medical expenses.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) said in a statement that 'Lily, along with two other children, was playing hide-and-seek in the woods a short distance from the camp buildings. Lily jumped out to surprise her friends when the

A mountain lion or cougar (AFP)

cougar suddenly attacked'.

Her uncle's photos on the website featured before and after shots of his niece, the latter a photo of her unconscious in a hospital bed with scrapes and bruises from the mauling clearly visible on her face.

"She was airlifted to the hospital with injuries," Mantsevich wrote.

AFP

Shanghai eases COVID curbs in step towards ending lockdown

Shanghai, China - Shanghai slowly whirled back to life on Wednesday as a range of COVID-19 restrictions were eased after a two-month lockdown that confined residents to their homes and battered the Chinese economy.

The commercial hub of 25mn people was closed down in sections from late March, when the Omicron virus variant fuelled China's worst outbreak in two years. After some rules were gradually relaxed over the past few weeks, authorities on Wednesday began allowing residents in areas deemed low-risk to move around the city freely.

"It feels like we've all been through a lot of trauma, a collective trauma," Grace Guan told AFP. The 35-year-old Shanghai resident said she went out at midnight when the restrictions eased and saw groups gathered in the street drinking beers, some sitting together on blankets laid



People travel on a subway in the Jing'an district of Shanghai on Wednesday, after the end of the lockdown that kept the city two months with heavy-handed restrictions (AFP)

out on the pavements.

"Now it feels like the Berlin Wall coming down."

On Wednesday morning, commuters trickled into subway stations and office buildings, scanning QR codes that certify they are virus-free.

Residents gathered in small groups to chat in a park, while masked customers thronged one of the main streets in a Shanghai shopping district. A day earlier, many of the bright yellow barriers that had hemmed in buildings and city blocks for weeks were taken down. Deputy Mayor Zong Ming told reporters on Tuesday that the easing will impact about 22mn people in the city.

Malls, convenience stores,

pharmacies and beauty salons will be allowed to operate at 75 per cent capacity, while parks and other scenic spots will gradually reopen, she added.

But cinemas and gyms remain closed, and schools - shut since mid-March - will slowly reopen on a voluntary basis.

Buses, the subway and ferry services will also resume, transport officials said.

Taxi services and private cars will be allowed in low-risk areas, permitting people to visit friends and family outside their district.

"This is a moment that we have been looking forward to for a long time," the Shanghai municipal government said in a statement on social media.

More than half a million still remained under restrictions as of Wednesday, according to the authorities.

'New normal'

The stringent curbs in Shanghai

- home to the busiest container port in the world - had hampered the economy, starving businesses and snarling supply chains in China and abroad.

Signs of resentment and anger among residents emerged throughout the lockdown.

The city government has warned that the situation is still not normal, and businesses said there were many uncertainties.

"It remains to (be seen) how this new normal will look," said Bettina Schoen-Behanzin, chair of the Shanghai chapter at the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China. "If there is a positive case in your office or site, in your compound, what happens? You will be locked down again for two weeks?"

China has persisted with a zero-COVID strategy, which involves rapid lockdowns, mass testing and long quarantines to try and eliminate infections.

But the economic costs have

mounted, and the Shanghai government said 'the task of accelerating economic and social recovery is becoming increasingly urgent'.

E-commerce professional Chen Ying said ahead of the easing that she still planned to work from home but might treat her two-year-old son to a long-awaited walk outside.

"We should have been free to begin with, so don't expect me to be deeply grateful now they've given it back to us," she told AFP.

While the easing will allow many factories and businesses to resume operations, there are concerns that the recovery will not be immediate. "I definitely have some worries, things are beyond your control... You can't tell with a pandemic," said cafe owner Chen Ribin. "No one can tell you if it will come again in July or August... We can only take one step at a time."

AFP

Ukraine braces for Severodonetsk fall

But Kyiv got boosted by US decision to send more advanced rocket systems to help with its defence

Soledar, Ukraine - Ukraine looked close to losing the key eastern city of Severodonetsk to Russian forces but was boosted on Wednesday by the US decision to send more advanced rocket systems to help with its defence.

"The Russians control 70 per cent of Severodonetsk," Lugansk region governor Sergiy Gaiday announced on Telegram, adding that Ukrainian forces were withdrawing to prepared positions.

"If in two or three days, the Russians take control of Severodonetsk, they will install artillery and mortars and will bombard more intensely Lysychansk," the city across the river, which Gaiday said remained under Kyiv's control.

One of the industrial hubs on Russia's path to taking the eastern Lugansk region, Severodonetsk has become a target of massive Russian firepower since the failed attempt to capture Kyiv.

But in a boost for the outgunned Ukrainian military, President Joe Biden confirmed that more US weaponry was on the



Smoke rises in the city of Severodonetsk during heavy fightings between Ukrainian and Russian troops at eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas on Monday (AFP)

way to allow them to 'more precisely strike key targets' in Ukraine.

The new weapon is the HIMARS multiple launch rocket system, or MLRS: a mobile unit that can simultaneously launch multiple precision-guided missiles.

They are the centrepiece of a US\$700mn package being un-

veiled on Wednesday that also includes air-surveillance radar, more Javelin short-range anti-tank rockets, artillery ammunition, helicopters, vehicles and spare parts, a US official said.

With a range of about 80km, they will allow Ukrainian forces to strike further behind Russian lines.

'Fuel to the fire'

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov accused Washington of 'adding fuel to the fire', saying 'such supplies' did not encourage Kyiv to resume peace talks.

In an article in the New York Times, Biden insisted: "We are not encouraging or enabling Ukraine to strike beyond its bor-

ders." He wrote: "We do not seek a war between NATO and Russia. "As much as I disagree with Mr. (President Vladimir) Putin, and find his actions an outrage, the United States will not try to bring about his ouster in Moscow."

While some analysts have suggested the HIMARS could be a

'game-changer', others caution they should not be expected to suddenly turn the tables, not least because Ukrainian troops need time to learn how to use them effectively.

What they may do is improve morale.

"If you know you have a heavy weapon behind you, everyone's

spirits rise," one Ukrainian fighter on the frontline told AFP before the announcement.

'Negative consequences'

On the eastern frontline in Donbas, Ukrainian towns are being subjected to near-constant shelling from Russian forces.

Moscow said on Wednesday it had no information on the death of a French journalist killed this week while covering the evacuation of civilians in the east of the country.

West of Severodonetsk, in the city of Sloviansk, AFP journalists saw buildings destroyed by a rocket attack in which three people died and six others were hurt.

And on Wednesday, at least one person died and two others were injured in Soledar, between Sloviansk and Severodonetsk, AFP saw.

The European Union has also sent weapons and cash for Ukraine, while levelling unprecedented economic sanctions on Moscow.

Germany said on Wednesday it would deliver an air defence system capable of shielding a major city from Russian air raids, although it will take months to get to the frontline.

EU leaders agreed this week to ban most Russian oil imports but played down the prospects of shutting off Russian gas on which many member states are hugely dependent.

Moscow said a 'reorientation' was under way to find alternative destinations for the oil, to 'minimise the negative consequences' of the move.

AFP



This file photo shows a man smoking an e-cigarette as he walks along the 'Promenade des anglais' in the city of Nice on February 3, this year (AFP)

Mexico bans sales of 'harmful' e-cigarettes

Mexico City, Mexico - Mexico banned sales of electronic cigarettes and other vaping devices on Tuesday because of concerns about their health effects, the government announced.

President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said it was a 'lie' to claim that e-cigarettes are a safe alternative to inhaling tobacco smoke. "The vapours are also harmful for health," added Lopez Obrador, who signed a decree introducing the ban on World No Tobacco Day.

He showed a pink vaping device to illustrate how the products are intended to appeal to young people. "Look at the color, the design," Lopez Obrador said.

Mexico City authorities meanwhile announced that smoking of any kind would be prohibited in the capital's main square, the Zocalo, and surrounding areas in the busy historic district.

City Hall said the move was aimed at raising awareness of the health risks. Smoking has been banned in closed spaces, government offices, shops, bars and restaurants for more than a decade, with exceptions for certain entertainment venues.

Mexico prohibited the import and export of vaping devices and cartridges in October, but companies have continued to sell

their inventory, Deputy Health Minister Hugo Lopez-Gatell said.

The new ban covers 'the circulation and marketing of these new products', he added.

Congress is additionally expected to discuss an initiative to expand smoking bans to beaches, stadiums and open-air entertainment venues.

Smoking 'is harmful to health and that has been proven. I think (the measure) is something good so that people don't get sick,' said Alejandra Jimenez, a 25-year-old receptionist.

But Raphael, who sells tobacco-related products, said he was against the move.

"The ban is based on bad fundamentals, mainly because vaping is meant to stop or slow increased tobacco use in our country," he said. E-cigarettes heat a liquid typically containing nicotine and other chemicals into an aerosol. The user inhales the resulting vapour, mimicking traditional cigarettes.

Proponents of vaping say it is safer than traditional tobacco.

The World Health Organization considers electronic cigarettes to be harmful to health and has called for tight regulation to stop young people in particular from using them.

AFP

Turkey's Erdogan renews threat of military offensive in northern Syria

Ankara, Turkey - Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday renewed threats of a military offensive in northern Syria, which he said would target Kurdish 'terrorists'.

"We are taking another step in establishing a 30km security zone along our southern border. We will clean up Tal Rifaat and Manbij," he said, referring to two northern Syrian cities. Erdogan said they would then proceed, 'step by step, into other regions'.

For a week now, Turkey's leader has been threatening to launch an operation against fighters of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

He is also targeting the People's Protection Units (YPG), a Syrian-Kurdish group it considers to be part of the PKK.

"We will see who supports the legitimate security operations carried out by Turkey and who



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (AFP)

tries to oppose them," said Erdogan. The YPG-linked Syrian Democratic Forces warned that an invasion by Ankara would undermine efforts to combat Islamic State group militants in Syria's northeast.

"The SDF has been expecting a possible battle for a while now," said Farhad Shami, a spokesperson for the Kurdish-led force.

"In the event of an attack, we will pause our war against the Islamic State group and start military measures against the Turkish invasion," he told AFP.

Erdogan said over the weekend that Turkey would not wait for permission from the United States before launching such an operation. Washington last week warned Turkey against launching

We are taking another step in establishing a 30km security zone along our southern border. We will clean up Tal Rifaat and Manbij.

RECEP TAYYIP ERDOGAN

a military operation into northern Syria, saying it would undermine regional stability and put US forces serving there at risk.

Erdogan on Tuesday told Russian President Vladimir Putin that a 2019 bilateral agreement allowed for the creation of a security zone along the Turkish-Syrian border.

AFP

Two quakes hit southwestern China, 4 killed

Beijing, China - At least four people are dead and 14 others injured after two earthquakes hit southwestern China on Wednesday, state media reported.

A shallow 6.1 magnitude quake hit a sparsely populated area in Sichuan province about 100km west of provincial capital Chengdu, broadcaster CCTV said. It was followed three minutes later by a second quake of magnitude 4.5 in a nearby county where the deaths and injuries occurred, according to CCTV.

Authorities in the city of Ya'an dispatched more than 4,500 people to the quake area, including emergency rescue workers, firefighters and military police, CCTV reported. It said the city was 'going all out to rescue those who have been trapped...' and reduce the number of dead to the greatest extent possible'.

AFP

UK forgets crisis to party for queen's jubilee

London, UK - Putting aside a biting inflationary crisis and doubts over the monarchy's future, Britons prepared on Wednesday for four days of festivities to mark a record-breaking 70 years on the throne for Queen Elizabeth II.

The Platinum Jubilee offers a brief respite from a surge in prices not seen since the 1970s, with accounts emerging daily of people struggling to put food on the table and pay spiralling bills.

With two public holidays from Thursday and then the weekend, pubs, restaurants and retailers are hoping for a timely sales boost, after a difficult period including the COVID pandemic.

"With the sun set to shine across the four days we're hoping to see pub gardens filled with people raising a toast to Her



Royal super-fan Margaret Tyler poses for a photograph with her collection of Royal memorabilia in her 'Jubilee room' at home in London on Monday (AFP)

Majesty the Queen and showing their support for two great British institutions," the British Beer and Pub Association said.

There are thousands fewer

pubs in Britain than when the queen ascended the throne amid gloomy post-war rationing in 1952. And support for the monarchy itself is an open ques-

tion once the 96-year-old monarch departs the scene.

With Prince Charles taking over more of his mother's duties for occasions of state, there is a

sense that the first - and possibly the last - Platinum Jubilee in British history marks a turning of the page. A poll for *The Sun* newspaper this week gave the queen a 91.7 per cent approval rating. But Charles commanded only 67.5 per cent, behind his son Prince William on 87.4 per cent.

Unlike the vocal Charles, the queen has rarely vented an opinion in public, and her sheer longevity means that she has been a fixture of the life of nearly every Briton alive.

She has overcome numerous family traumas, including Charles' very public split from Princess Diana, and personal heartache when her consort Prince Philip died aged 99 last year.

AFP

WHITE HOUSE VISIT

SEVEN STAR APPEAL

K-pop supergroup BTS say they're 'devastated' by US hate crimes and also appeal for inclusion during a White House visit



K-Pop group BTS joins White House press secretary Jean-Pierre at the daily briefing

South Korean K-pop sensations BTS didn't sing a word, but in a White House visit Tuesday to meet US President Joe Biden the supergroup's message against anti-Asian racism came loud and clear. The seven stars, dressed in matching dark suits and ties, with white shirts, joined White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre at the briefing room podium - a tiny, but powerful stage.

The singer Park Ji-min, better known as Jimin, said through a translator that the group is "devastated by the recent surge of hate crimes" in the United States. Another member, Suga, appealed for tolerance, saying, "It's not wrong to be different. I think equality begins when we open up and embrace all of our differences."

Group members did not take questions from reporters before going into a meeting with Biden and, according to the

White House, recording 'digital content'. Outside the mansion's grounds on the other side of a tall black fence, fans who dub themselves the 'Army' gathered in hopes of a glimpse.

The brief appearance before journalists itself reportedly garnered more than 300,000 viewers on the White House's YouTube channel, more than 10 times the traffic on a day when the only people watching events in the briefing room are mostly media or political professionals.

It was certainly something new for economic policy advisor Brian Deese, who had been scheduled to brief reporters on Biden's fight against US inflation right after the group left.

"I get to go home and tell my kids that BTS opened for me," he said to laughter.

'Youth ambassadors' against hate

Biden issued the invitation to "discuss the need to come together in solidarity, Asian



BTS fans waiting outside

It's not wrong to be different. I think equality begins when we open up and embrace all of our differences

SUGA

inclusion and representation, and addressing anti-Asian hate crimes and discrimination, which have become more prominent issues in recent years," the White House said.

Anti-Asian sentiment and violence in America have grown during the coronavirus pandemic in a phenomenon many blame on fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Biden's Republican predecessor Donald Trump often blamed the pandemic, which originated with an outbreak in Wuhan, China, as 'the China virus' and also mocked the deadly virus as 'kung flu'.

Just in 2021, hate crimes against Asians shot up 339 percent, according to the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism. The trend stands out within a general rise in violent crime, with the ugliest incident taking place in the Atlanta area, where a man shot dead eight people at massage spas, six of them Asian women.

The White House praised BTS's floppy haired, stylish stars as 'youth ambassadors who spread a message of hope and positivity across the world'. Band members, all in their 20s and who frequently appear wearing earrings and lipstick, have given a voice worldwide to a generation comfortable with gender fluidity.

They are credited with generating billions for the South Korean economy, and their label enjoyed a surge in profits despite holding fewer concerts during the pandemic.

Biden, who at 79 is the oldest person to become president, has often reached out to young celebrities and social media influencers to try and inject some glamour into his team's messaging on social and health issues.

These included pop singer Olivia Rodrigo and the Jonas Brothers in campaigns to persuade young Americans to get their COVID-19 vaccines.

AFP

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TEN CAUSES OF EARLY DEATH

DEFYING DEATH

THE CAUSES OF DEATH ARE MANY, KNOWN AND UNKNOWN, TIMELY AND UNTIMELY. NO ONE CAN ESCAPE DEATH BUT ONE CAN ENSURE THAT IT DOESN'T COME YOUR WAY, BEFORE IT'S TIME, WITH A LITTLE CAUTION

The past two years of the pandemic brought news about death, of known and as well as unknown persons, to many people around the world. Some seemed predictable, some seemed shocking, especially when it involved younger individuals. While the grip of the pandemic was inevitable, there are, indeed, many factors that one can tackle to keep death at bay.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), at a global level, seven of the 10 leading causes of deaths in 2019 were noncommunicable diseases. These seven causes accounted for 44% of all deaths or 80% of the top 10. However, all noncommunicable diseases together accounted for 74% of deaths globally in 2019.

It is important to know why people die to improve how people live. Measuring how many people die each year helps to assess the effectiveness of our health systems and direct resources to where they are needed most. And, one can dramatically reduce your risk of early death by making a few simple lifestyle changes.

The most common causes of illness and premature death in some countries include tobacco smoking, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, obesity, excessive alcohol consumption and physical inactivity. Hence, being a non-smoker, eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly and limiting alcohol consumption can reduce your risk of many potentially lethal diseases such as heart disease, stroke and cancer.

According to a WHO Global Health Estimates factsheet, there are ten key killer diseases that account for most deaths worldwide.

The world's biggest killer is ischaemic heart disease, responsible for 16% of the world's total deaths. Since 2000, the largest increase in deaths has been for this disease, rising by more than 2 million to 8.9 million deaths in 2019.

Stroke and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease are the 2nd and 3rd leading causes of death, responsible for approximately 11% and 6% of total deaths respectively.

Lower respiratory infections remained the world's most deadly communicable disease, ranked as the 4th leading cause of death. However, the number of deaths has gone down substantially - in 2019 it claimed 2.6 million lives, 460 000 fewer than in 2000.

Neonatal conditions are ranked 5th. However, deaths from neonatal conditions are one of the categories for which the global decrease in deaths in absolute numbers over the past two decades has been the greatest - these conditions killed two million newborns and young children in 2019, 1.2 million fewer than in 2000.

Deaths from noncommunicable diseases are on the rise. Trachea, bronchus and lung cancers deaths have risen from 1.2 million to 1.8 million and are now ranked 6th among leading causes of death.

In 2019, Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia ranked as the 7th leading cause of death. Women are disproportionately affected. Globally, 65% of deaths from Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia are women.

One of the largest declines in the number of deaths is from diarrhoeal diseases, with global deaths falling from 2.6 million in 2000 to 1.5 million in 2019.

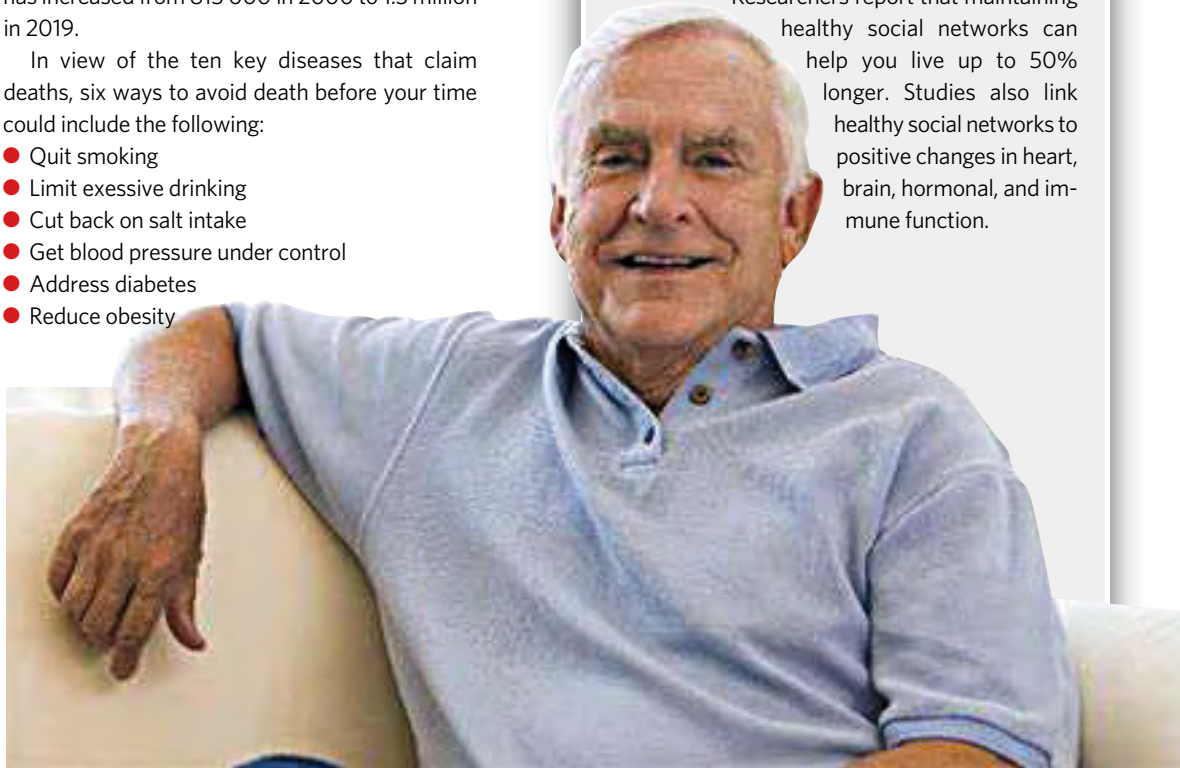
Diabetes has entered the top 10 causes of death, following a significant percentage increase of 70% since 2000. Diabetes is also responsible for the largest rise in male deaths among the top 10, with an 80% increase since 2000.

Other diseases which were among the top 10 causes of death in 2000 are no longer on the list. HIV/AIDS is one of them. Deaths from HIV/AIDS have fallen by 51% during the last 20 years, moving from the world's 8th leading cause of death in 2000 to the 19th spot in 2019.

Kidney diseases have risen from the world's 13th leading cause of death to the 10th. Mortality has increased from 813 000 in 2000 to 1.3 million in 2019.

In view of the ten key diseases that claim deaths, six ways to avoid death before your time could include the following:

- Quit smoking
- Limit excessive drinking
- Cut back on salt intake
- Get blood pressure under control
- Address diabetes
- Reduce obesity



HOW TO LIVE LONGER

Many people think that life expectancy is largely determined by genetics. However, genes play a much smaller role than originally believed. It turns out that environmental factors like diet and lifestyle are key. Here are some habits linked to a long life:

AVOID OVEREATING

Studies of human populations renowned for longevity observe links between low calorie intake, an extended lifespan, and a lower likelihood of disease.

EAT MORE NUTS

They're rich in protein, fiber, antioxidants, and beneficial plant compounds. What's more, they're a great source of several vitamins and minerals, such as copper, magnesium, potassium, folate, niacin, and vitamins B6 and E (8).

TRY TURMERIC

When it comes to anti-aging strategies, turmeric is a great option. That's because this spice contains a potent bioactive compound called curcumin which helps maintain brain, heart, and lung function, as well as protect against cancers and age-related diseases

EAT PLENTY OF HEALTHY PLANT FOODS

Consuming a wide variety of plant foods, such as fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, whole grains, and beans, may decrease disease risk and promote longevity.

STAY PHYSICALLY ACTIVE

As you age, don't confine yourself to the couch or the easy chair. It should come as no surprise that staying physically active can keep you healthy and add years to your life.

DON'T SMOKE

Smoking is strongly linked to disease and early death. Quit smoking now - its never too late.

AVOID STRESS, BE HAPPY

Anxiety and stress may significantly decrease your lifespan. Being happy and content and maintaining an optimistic outlook is a sure way to a longer life.

NURTURE A SOCIAL CIRCLE

Researchers report that maintaining healthy social networks can help you live up to 50% longer. Studies also link healthy social networks to positive changes in heart, brain, hormonal, and immune function.

DREAM BECAME A REALITY: BALE

Welshman ends his nine-year spell at Real Madrid

Madrid, Spain - Gareth Bale wrote a farewell letter to Real Madrid on Wednesday, the Welshman bringing an end to his nine-year spell at the Spanish club, where he said his "dream became a reality".

Bale will leave Real Madrid when his contract expires at the end of June, with the 32-year-old yet to confirm what he will do next.

His future is likely to depend on whether Wales qualify for the World Cup in Qatar, with retirement a possible option if they miss out.

"I write this message to say thank you to all my teammates, past and present, my managers, the backroom staff and to the fans that supported me," Bale wrote in a letter to Real Madrid, posted on social media in both English and Spanish.

"I arrived here nine years ago as a young man who wanted to realise my dream of playing for Real Madrid. To wear the pristine white kit, to wear the crest on my chest, to play at the Santiago Bernabeu, to win titles and to be part of what it's so famous for, to win the Champions League.

"I can now look back, reflect and say with honesty that this dream became a reality and much, much more.

"To be a part of this club's history and to achieve what we achieved while I was a Real Madrid player has been an incredible experience and one I will never forget.

"I also want to thank president



Real Madrid's Gareth Bale during a club training session at Ciudad Real Madrid in Valdebebas, Spain (AFP)

To be a part of this club's history and to achieve what we achieved while I was a Real Madrid player has been an incredible experience and one I will never forget

GARETH BALE

Florentino Perez, Jose Angel Sanchez and the board for giving me the opportunity to play for this club. Together we were able to create some moments that will live forever in the history of this club and football. It has been an honour."

After joining Madrid from Tottenham for 100 million euros in 2013, Bale won 16 major trophies with Real Madrid,

including five Champions Leagues, three La Ligas and one Copa del Rey.

He also won three Club World Cups, three UEFA Super Cups and a Spanish Super Cup.

Memorable moments

More than his trophies, Bale will be remembered for a handful of spectacular moments, including his two goals scored off the

bench against Liverpool in the 2018 Champions League final in Kiev, the first coming from a stunning bicycle kick.

He scored another hugely important goal in the 2014 Champions League final in Lisbon, his header at the back post giving Real Madrid the lead against Atletico Madrid in extra-time, as they went on to win the club's long-awaited 10th European Cup.

Perhaps most memorable was Bale's incredible solo goal at Mestalla to win the 2014 Copa del Rey final against Barcelona.

Bale's popularity with the Real Madrid fans, though, has plummeted in recent years as injuries and a perceived lack of commitment pushed him to the fringes of the first team.

He was barely on speaking terms with Zinedine Zidane by the end of the 2017-18 season and hopes that Cristiano Ronaldo's departure might revive his Real Madrid career were never realised.

A frosty relationship with the Spanish press harmed his reputation, with aspects of his personal life - including his passion for playing golf and a lack of fluency in Spanish - increasingly used to support the idea he had lost interest in his Real Madrid career.

The issue exploded in 2019 after Bale celebrated Wales' qualification for Euro 2020 by standing behind a flag that read: "Wales. Golf. Madrid. In that order."

AFP

French World Cup winner Pogba to leave Man Utd

Manchester, United Kingdom - French World Cup-winning midfielder Paul Pogba is to leave Manchester United at the end of June, the club said Wednesday, bringing the curtain down on a largely disappointing second spell.

The 29-year-old's departure at the end of his contract will see United recoup none of the then record £89 million (\$112 million) he cost them when they bought him from Juventus in 2016.

However, new United manager Erik ten Hag has clearly decided Pogba's chances at the club have come and gone.

A second spell at Juventus - where he won four Serie A titles - may well be on Pogba's menu as Italian media have suggested he has given a verbal agreement to return and accepted a lower salary.

French champions Paris Saint-Germain have also been mentioned as a possibility as they are due for an overhaul and built round his fellow World Cup winner Kylian Mbappe.

Ten Hag wishes to refresh a side that has seen their city rivals Manchester City become the powerhouse they once were under Alex Fergu-

son. United have rarely threatened to repeat those days since he retired in 2013.

Pogba flourished initially under Jose Mourinho - who also brought in the since departed Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Romelu Lukaku - and was part of the sides that won the League Cup and Europa League in 2017.

His subsequent performances rarely matched those he produced for France in their 2018 World Cup campaign.

He did show glimpses of his abundant talent especially in their run to the 2021 Europa League final - scoring goals against AC Milan and Roma in the knockout stages. However, he was then anonymous in the final as United lost to Villarreal on penalties.

Fitness problems limited him to 27 appearances last season in an unimpressive campaign for both player and club as United had to be content with a Europa League spot.

"The club can announce that Paul Pogba will leave Manchester United at the end of June, upon the expiry of his contract," read the club statement.

AFP



Paul Pogba

Zinchenko dreams of giving World Cup joy to Ukraine

Glasgow, United Kingdom - Ukraine's Oleksandr Zinchenko broke down in tears on Tuesday as he expressed what a place at the World Cup would mean to his war-torn homeland.

For the first time since Russia's invasion, Ukraine return to competitive action against Scotland in Wednesday's World Cup playoff semi-final at Hampden Park.

The match was postponed in March, just weeks after the war began, to allow Ukraine to fulfil the fixture.

Zinchenko thanked the Scottish side for their role in giving Ukraine the time they needed to prepare for the game.

The Manchester City defender was then overcome with emotion when asked what it would mean to bring some joy to his nation by reaching Qatar later this year.

"Every Ukrainian wants one thing - to stop this war," said Zinchenko. "I've spoken to people from all over the world. Children who don't understand what is happening, they have one dream which is to stop the war.

"The Ukrainian team also have their own dream, they want to go to the World Cup. They want to give these incredible emotions to Ukrainians because Ukrainians deserve this at this time."

Zinchenko added that he had considered leaving England to join the Ukrainian forces before being convinced he could do



Ukraine midfielder Oleksandr Zinchenko gets emotional during a press conference at Hampden Park, in Glasgow, on Tuesday (AFP)

We need to stop this aggression. Ukraine is a country of freedom, it will never give up

OLEKSANDR ZINCHENKO

against the war.

"It is impossible to describe these feelings if you are not in this position. The things which is happening now in our country is not acceptable, it is something I cannot describe.

"We need to stop this aggression all together. Ukraine is a country of freedom, it will never give up. A lot of countries don't understand today it is Ukraine but tomorrow it can be you. So we need to be united and beat this Russian aggression all together."

Players contracted to Ukrainian teams have been allowed to leave the country to prepare for the game at a training camp in Slovenia.

AFP

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AC Milan coach Stefano Pioli celebrates with players after their Serie A triumph

US investment fund RedBird to buy Milan

Rome, Italy - AC Milan said Wednesday that its current owners, investment fund Elliott Management, have agreed to sell the newly-crowned Italian champions to rival US fund RedBird for 1.2 billion euros (\$1.3 billion).

"The transition to new ownership will take place over the summer, with an expected closing no later than September 2022," the club said in a statement, adding that, under the terms of the deal, Elliott will "retain a minority financial interest in the club and seats on the board of directors."

"RedBird's priority is to work with the club's title-winning sporting and club management team to continue Milan's journey back to the summit of world football," added the statement.

AFP



Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair and his teammates, Germany's Fabian Schiller and Zimbabwe's Axcil Jeffries, will drive a Mercedes-AMG GT3 at Paul Ricard

Back in the fast lane

Oman's Al Zubair heads to Paul Ricard for Fanatec GT World Challenge Europe race

Paul Ricard, France - Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair returns to action after a two-month break to take part in the Silver category at this weekend's Paul Ricard 1000km, round two of the Fanatec GT World Challenge Europe Powered by AWS.

Al Zubair teams up with Germany's Fabian Schiller and Zimbabwe's Axcil Jeffries to drive a Mercedes-AMG GT3 running under the Al Manar Racing by HRT banner. Once again a round of the series has attracted a massive entry and the trio will face fierce competition during the six-hour, 1000km endurance race on the demanding French circuit.

They completed 94 laps of the equally demanding Italian Imola

circuit at the opening race in early April and finished fifth. Victory in the Silver category that weekend fell to Team WRT's Thomas Neubauer, Benjamin

around two months. I am really looking forward to this round. Paul Ricard is a track I feel comfortable at. It's not my favourite but I've done well here and we've

I am really looking forward to this round. Paul Ricard is a track I feel comfortable at. It's not my favourite but I've done well here and we've tested on it

AL FAISAL AL ZUBAIR

Goethe and Jean-Baptiste Simmenauer in an Audi R8 LMS.

Al Zubair said, "Round two of the GT World Challenge Endurance and it's been quite a long break from the first round,

tested on it. We are hoping to go out there and get some good results this weekend.

"We have a strong team lineup. We had some issues with the car in Imola, mostly in re-

gards to the tyres. But hopefully, the feedback we gave to the engineers and the whole team, we will be able to get back to some good results this weekend and get the momentum going for the rest of the championship."

A 90-minute free practice session for the Fanatec GT World Challenge powered by AWS gets underway at 2.20 pm on Friday. Crews will then benefit

from a pre-qualifying session, starting at 7.20 pm.

The weekend's race meeting is shared with the GT4 European Series, Lamborghini Trofeo and Formula Regional Championship by Alpine.

Fanatec GT World Challenge entrants return to the circuit for their one-hour qualifying session, starting at 11.30 am on Saturday.

The six-hour, Paul Ricard 1000km endurance race then takes centre stage from 6 pm on Saturday evening and finishes at midnight.



New Australia cricket coach Andrew McDonald

New Australia coach misses Sri Lanka tour start with COVID

Sydney, Australia - New Australia cricket coach Andrew McDonald has tested positive for COVID-19 and was not on the plane Wednesday as the country's Twenty20 squad flew out to Sri Lanka.

The 40-year-old, who replaced Justin Langer when he quit earlier this year and was interim coach on a successful tour of Pakistan, will miss at least the opening week of Australia's first visit to Sri Lanka in six years.

McDonald tested positive on Tuesday and is to remain in isolation in Melbourne for seven days, Cricket Australia said.

It means he will miss the opening T20 match in Colombo on June 7, but could be cleared to travel to the second a day later.

Assistant coach Michael Di Venuto will guide the team in McDonald's absence.

Players in the ODI and Test squads will fly to Sri Lanka later.

Australia's tour to Sri Lanka, comprising three T20 internationals, five one-day internationals and two Tests, has already been hit by concerns about security given the recent political tumult in the country.

AFP

Stokes wants England to feel 'free' as Broad and Anderson recalled

London, United Kingdom - New England captain Ben Stokes said he wanted everyone in the side to "feel free" under his leadership as James Anderson and Stuart Broad were recalled for the first Test against New Zealand at Lord's starting Thursday.

Stokes has taken over as skipper from Joe Root, with England on a woeful run of one win in 17 Tests.

But the all-rounder told reporters at Lord's on Wednesday: "There's been a lot of talk about a 'reset', which is a word I don't like. "I just see it as a completely blank canvas.

"I just want everyone to feel free under my captaincy. This is our time and we are going to dictate how things go forward. Everyone is starting fresh."

Anderson, 39 and Broad, 35, England's two most successful bowlers of all time, with a combined 1,177 wickets between them, were both controversially left out of the squad for a 1-0 series loss in the West Indies earlier this year. But they return for the



England's Ben Stokes attends a team training session at Lord's cricket ground in London on Tuesday (AFP)

first match under England's new leadership duo of Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum, the former New Zealand captain, in an XI named on Wednesday - a day ahead of schedule.

England have also given a debut to fast bowler Matthew Potts, a county colleague of Stokes at Durham.

Potts gets his chance ahead of fellow squad member Craig

Overton, after an injury crisis deprived England of several fast bowlers including Mark Wood, Chris Woakes, Ollie Robinson and Jofra Archer.

The 23-year-old has been selected on the back of a fine start to the county season, having taken 35 wickets for Durham in his opening six County Championship matches.

AFP

Dustin Johnson heads field for Saudi-backed LIV Golf opener

London, United Kingdom - Former world number one Dustin Johnson will head the field for the inaugural \$25 million LIV Golf Invitational Series event in England, the new Saudi-backed golf circuit said Wednesday.

The American two-time major champion said in February that he would stay loyal to the US PGA Tour, but in an apparent U-turn Johnson was one of two top-20 ranked players listed in the field for the 54-hole tournament starting on June 9.

Former British Open champion and world number 20 Louis Oosthuizen, former Masters champions Charl Schwartzel and Sergio Garcia, plus former US Open champions Graeme McDowell and Martin Kaymer are also in the field.

The US PGA Tour has refused to grant releases for its players in the LIV event, which clashes with next week's Canadian Open.

Six-time major champion Phil Mickelson's name was absent

despite previously expressing support for the money-spinning breakaway circuit.

"Dustin has been contemplating the opportunity off and on for the past couple of years," said Johnson's manager David Winkler in a statement quoted by US media.

"Ultimately, he decided it was in his and his family's best interest to pursue it."

The tournament at Centurion Club at St Albans, north of London, will have the largest purse in golf history at \$25 million, almost double that of any major, with \$4 million going to the winner.

Winkler went on to explain Johnson's apparent change of mind, a little over three months since he stated he was "committed" to the PGA Tour.

"Dustin has never had any issue with the PGA Tour and is grateful for all it has given him, but in the end felt this was too compelling to pass up."

AFP



Dustin Johnson (R) with his caddie

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It's yesterday once more

Rafael Nadal rolls back the years to down Novak Djokovic and reach 15th French Open semi-final



Spain's Rafael Nadal celebrates after beating Novak Djokovic in the French Open quarter-final in Paris on Wednesday (AFP)

Paris, France - Rafael Nadal edged a late-night classic against old rival Novak Djokovic in the early hours of Wednesday in four sets to reach his 15th French Open semi-final.

The 13-time Roland Garros champion won the pair's 59th career meeting 6-2, 4-6, 6-2, 7-6 (7/4) after a four-hour-and-12-minute quarter-final on a raucous Court Philippe Chatrier.

Nadal sealed his eighth victory in 10 French Open matches against last year's winner Djokovic at 1:16 am local time to set up a last-four clash with third seed Alexander Zverev on Friday.

"I'm very emotional. For me it's incredible to play here," said

Nadal. "Playing against him is always an amazing challenge... To win against Novak, there is only one way, to play your best from the first point until the last."

"But it's just a quarter-finals match? So I didn't win anything. I just give myself a chance to be back on court in two days. Playing another semi-finals here in Roland Garros means a lot to me."

The 35-year-old has lost just three of his 113 matches on the Paris clay since his 2005 title-winning debut and now only trails Djokovic 30-29 in their career head-to-head. The Spaniard, seeded fifth, remains on course for a record-extending 22nd

We make history in this sport because we did things that didn't happen before

RAFAEL NADAL

Grand Slam title after lifting this year's Australian Open, which Djokovic missed after being deported from the country over his COVID19 vaccination status.

Nadal will move two clear of Djokovic and Roger Federer on the all-time list of most men's major titles if he lifts the trophy

again on Sunday.

But he played down the importance of the battle between the 'big three'.

"From my perspective it doesn't matter that much. We achieved our dreams. We make history in this sport because we did things that didn't happen before."

Djokovic overturned a double-break deficit to take an 88-minute second set and missed two set points when serving for the fourth to force a decider.

The world number one will rue those missed chances while he waits until Wimbledon for his next opportunity to take his Slam tally to 21.

"Congratulations to Rafa, he was better in the important moments," said Djokovic.

"He showed why he was a great champion. Well done to him and his team, he deserves it."

Nadal was a slight underdog heading into the match after being taken to five sets in the previous round by Felix Auger-Aliassime and he had even hinted it could be his last appearance in Paris due to a persistent foot injury. But the 'King of clay' smashed 57 winners in a trademark performance to delight the crowd as he gained revenge for his semi-final loss to the same opponent 12 months ago.

AFP



Novak Djokovic plays a backhand return to Rafael Nadal during their quarter-final match at French Open on Wednesday (AFP)

Djokovic hails 'champion' Nadal but 'not surprised' by injury recovery

Paris, France - Novak Djokovic hailed Rafael Nadal as a "great champion" after losing an epic late-night French Open quarter-final, but added he was "not surprised" by his rival's recovery from a debilitating injury.

Nadal, the 13-time champion at Roland Garros, clinched a memorable 6-2, 4-6, 6-2, 7-6 (7/4) victory to reach his 15th semi-final at the tournament.

For world number one Djokovic, defeat was his eighth in 10 meetings with Nadal at the French Open.

"He was the better player in the important moments," said Djokovic.

"He showed why he's a great champion. Staying there mentally tough and finishing the match the way he did. Congrats

to him and his team. No doubt he deserved it."

The Spanish star had arrived in Paris unsure of his chances after a chronic foot injury, which has plagued him throughout his career, resurfaced in Rome last month.

Nadal had even hinted that defeat to Djokovic could signal the end of his Roland Garros career.

"I didn't see any problems," said Djokovic.

"It's not the first time that he is able to - a few days after he's injured and barely walking - to come out 100% physically fit."

"He's done it many times in his career, so I'm not surprised."

Defeat leaves Djokovic on 20 Grand Slams, one behind Nadal.

AFP

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Alexander Zverev (R) greets Carlos Alcaraz after winning their quarter-final match on Tuesday (AFP)

Alcaraz has 'confidence' to win Grand Slam despite Zverev defeat

Paris, France - Carlos Alcaraz said on Tuesday he "has the confidence" to win a Grand Slam tournament soon despite his French Open quarter-final defeat by Alexander Zverev.

The 19-year-old Spaniard slipped to a 6-4, 6-4, 4-6, 7-6 (9/7) loss to the German third seed as he was beaten for just the second time this season on clay.

He had been hoping to become the first teenage winner of a men's major title since Rafael Nadal in Paris in 2005.

"I have to take the lesson. I mean, I have to improve to the next Grand Slam or next matches," said Alcaraz.

"But I would say I'm not far away to reach a semi-final or be able to win a Grand Slam."

"Just take the lesson, in these

kind of matches. I would say I have the level, I have the confidence to win a Grand Slam or pass through to the semi-final next time."

Alcaraz has risen to sixth in the ATP rankings this season by winning a tour-high four titles, including two Masters 1,000 trophies.

He paid for a slow start against Zverev as he made 32 unforced errors across the first two sets, but said he was "proud" after threatening a dramatic comeback.

"I would say I finished the match playing better," added Alcaraz. "I leave the court, leave the tournament with the head very high. I fight until the last ball. I fought until the last second of the match, and I'm proud of it."

AFP



Daria Kasatkina celebrates after beating Veronika Kudermetova

World No 1 Swiatek to meet Kasatkina in semifinals

Paris, France - Iga Swiatek powered into the French Open semifinals on Wednesday as a comfortable victory over American Jessica Pegula extended the world number one's winning streak to 33 matches.

The Polish star cruised to a 6-3, 6-2 win on Court Philippe Chatrier to set up a last-four meeting with Daria Kasatkina on Thursday.

Swiatek will equal Venus Williams' record for the longest unbeaten run for a women's player in the 21st century if she wins a second Roland Garros title this week. Meanwhile, Kasatkina reached her maiden Grand Slam semi-final on Wednesday with a 6-4, 7-6 (7/5) victory over fellow Russian, Veronika Kudermetova.

AFP