

HM welcomes President of Tanzania

Views exchanged on realising aspirations of the two countries, enhancing cooperation

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik welcomed President Samia Suluhu Hassan of the United Republic of Tanzania on her arrival at the Royal Airport on Sunday.

When the jet of President Samia touched ground at the airport, His Majesty the Sultan met the guest at the foot of the ramp, welcoming and wishing her and the official delegation accompanying her a pleasant stay in Oman.

Alongside His Majesty the Sultan, the Tanzanian President was received by Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Nu'mani, Minister of Royal Office, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and Head of the Mission of Honour, Saud bin Hilal al Shidhani, Ambassador of Oman to



Tanzania, Abdallah Abasi Kilima, Ambassador of Tanzania to Oman, and members of the Mission of Honour.

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

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

Before arrival of the motorcade at Al Alam Palace, a squadron of cavalry lined the two sides of the road heading to the gate of the palace.

Upon arrival of the motorcade of His Majesty the Sultan and President Samia at the entrance of Al Alam Palace, the Royal Guard of Oman band played a

welcoming tune, to the accompaniment of trumpets, as the motorcade entered the courtyard of Al Alam Palace.

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

Then, His Majesty the Sultan shook hands with members of the official delegation accompanying the President of Tanzania, wishing them a pleasant stay. On her turn, the guest shook hands with some members of the Royal Family, chairmen of the State Council and Majlis A'Shura, ministers, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces and Royal Oman Police.

President Samia is being accompanied on her visit by an official delegation comprising January Yusuf Makamba, Minister of Energy, Pindi Chana, Minister of Natural Resources and Tourism, Khalid Salum Mohamed, Minister of Works, Transport and Communications, Mbarouk Nassoro Mbarouk, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and East African Cooperation, Fatma Rajab, Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and East African Cooperation, Abdallah Abasi Kilima, Ambassador of Tanzania to Oman, and other Tanzanian officials.

The two sides exchanged points of view about ways to realise the aspirations of the two countries and elevate joint cooperation towards broader horizons.

ONA

HM, President Samia hold official talks

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik held an official session of talks with President Samia Suluhu Hassan of the United Republic of Tanzania at Al Alam Palace on Sunday.

The talks explored the strong bilateral relations binding the two countries and ways of elevating these to realise the aspirations of the Omani and Tanzanian peoples. The two leaders also exchanged views on several matters of common interest.

The official session of talks was attended from the Omani side by Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Personal



Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid

Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Nu'mani, Minister of Royal Office,

Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, Sultan bin Salim al

Talks explore the strong bilateral ties binding the two countries and ways of elevating these

Habsi, Minister of Finance, Dr Madiha bint Ahmed al Shaibani, Minister of Education, Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and Saud bin Hilal al Shidhani, Ambassador of Oman to Tanzania.

ONA

President Samia's visit to boost economic ties

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman and Tanzania have enjoyed close relations developed over thousands of years of shared cultural history and trade exchanges.

The visit of President Samia Suluhu Hassan of the United Republic of Tanzania to the sultanate, starting Sunday, is expected to play a crucial role in bolstering relations further.

Besides establishment of the Oman-Tanzania Businessmen Council in 2021, which contributed to strengthening economic relations between

the two friendly countries, there has been a great deal of cooperation in the recent past.

Oman Investment Authority is playing a tangible role in investing in East Africa, in general, following the opening of an office in Tanzania in 2015.

That led to opening new prospects for investments in Tanzania, including investing in Mangapwani Port in Zanzibar, the procedural phase of which has been finalised.

A memorandum of understanding for the development and rehabilitation of Malindi Port and adjoining areas, has already been signed.

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MoCIIP ensures readiness for khareef season in Dhofar

04

LNG production rises to record 10.6mn tonnes in 2021



Deal inked to recruit 100 jobseekers at airports

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Airports and the Ministry of Labour (MoL) signed an agreement on Sunday to employ 100 jobseekers.

In a statement, Oman Airports said Transom Handling, which is responsible for ground handling at all airports in the sultanate, and MoL signed the

agreement to recruit jobseekers through the latter's on-the-job training programme which bears the cost of the monthly training in the first year. A Bachelor's degree graduate receives RO500 per month, a diploma graduate RO400, and General Education Diploma holder RO300. In the second year, 50 per cent of the training cost is paid by the ministry.

Committee to review private healthcare fees

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health is considering the prospect of reducing treatment fees in private health institutions.

Dr Muhanna al Maslahi, director general of Private Health Establishments, informed that a committee has been formed by the ministry, in cooperation with stakeholders, to study the possibility of reducing treatment fees in private health institutions in line with a government directive.

According to Dr Maslahi, private health institution visit numbers are very high in Oman. "Around 3mn patients visit private health institution annually; a large number of Omanis and expatriates have health insurance.



Around 3mn patients visit private health institution annually; a large number of Omanis and expatriates have health insurance

DR MUHANNA AL MASLAHI

This indicates the importance of the private health sector in the sultanate."

With this in view, Dr Maslahi said, relevant authorities will regulate a pricing mechanism acceptable to all parties, "which will contribute to the expansion of the private health sector".

The Ministry of Health, represented by several directorates, is currently working on implementing digital payments for all transactions at private health institutions. "A joint effort with all parties concerned is underway to simplify procedures that will contribute to the digital transformation process."

He added that there are close to 1,600 health institutions in the sultanate, and 11 private hospitals are under construction.

HM hosts dinner for President Samia



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik hosted an official dinner at Al Alam Palace in honour of President Samia Suluhu Hassan of Tanzania. The two also exchanged souvenirs before the dinner (ONA)



President Samia's visit to boost economic ties

Continued from Page 01

In May, Oman and Tanzania signed a memorandum of understanding in the field of fisheries and marine exploration, besides investing in a fish farm in Zanzibar with production capacity of 1,000 tonnes per year in the first phase. It will be increased to 3,000 tonnes in the second phase and 6,000 tonnes in the third.

Earlier in the month, a MoU was signed between Asyad Group and Tanzania Posts in the field of e-commerce services and logistics solutions to increase the volume of e-commerce activities between the two countries.

Data of trade between the two countries shows that Omani exports to Tanzania in 2021 was worth RO40.1mn. The most important commodities exported to Tanzania were plastic products, oil derivatives, electrical and household materials, and foodstuffs. Omani imports from Tanzania amounted to RO9.5mn, mostly in commodities, food and meat.

Oman and Tanzania have maintained good relations at the political level by holding annual talk sessions, the last of which was held in March in Tanzania.

During the talks, the two countries reiterated their support for dialogue and peaceful means for resolving issues and conflicts in order to stabilise and sustain international peace and security. They emphasised the importance of exchanging views on a number of regional and international issues of common concern.

Big scope of trade growth between Oman, Tanzania

Our Correspondent Muscat

Redha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), received in his office Paul Faraj Koyi, President of the Tanzania Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture, on Sunday.

The meeting was attended by Saud bin Hamad al Rawahi, head of the Omani side of the Oman-Tanzania Businessmen Council.

The council held a meeting at the OCCI headquarters in Muscat, reviewing areas of joint cooperation, especially investment



(Supplied photo)

prospects for both the countries. Both sides also deliberated on mechanisms to enhance oppor-

tunities for establishing commercial partnerships between Omani businessmen and their Tanzan-

ian counterparts.

OCCI is exerting efforts, Saleh said, to strengthen economic re-

lations between Oman and Tanzania by exploring new investments ventures, and holding introductory seminars and bilateral meetings between Omani and Tanzanian businessmen.

"The official visit of President Samia Suluhu Hassan reflects the keenness of the two leaderships to develop the solid historical relations between the two friendly countries further. The two countries enjoy cooperation in various spheres, especially in economic and trade fields."

Saleh added that more work needs to be done to enhance investments as the total capital invested between the two

countries was RO8.32mn in 2020, with the Tanzanian contribution to it being RO1.899mn.

Calling for more efforts for co-operation in sectors like logistics, Saleh said that Oman looks forward to benefiting from Tanzania's location, as it is one of the most important entry points to the African continent.

"There is potential for the private sector in a number of promising fields, including industry, agriculture, fisheries, mining and tourism, in addition to health, education, renewable energy and information technology, to expand the base of cooperation between the two countries."

MAFWR restores 78 aflaj in N Batinah

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has completed maintenance and restoration work of aflaj in North Batinah.

A statement issued by MAFWR said the Directorate General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in North Batinah Governorate, has completed maintenance and restoration of 78 aflaj spread over

several wilayats of the governorate. 'Work is currently underway to restore 20 more aflaj.'

Mohammed Ali al Isae, head of Dams and Aflaj Department in North Batinah, said, "The department has formed a team to survey aflaj affected by Cyclone Shaheen in the governorate. A tender for maintenance and restoration was launched in October 2021. The job contracts were signed for 98 projects, of which 78 are complete."

According to Isae, the aflaj

projects aim to support farmers and improve irrigation services. "Aflaj are a traditional water source on which Omanis have depended for irrigation for ages. The aflaj types vary according to the geological and hydrological characteristics of an area."

There are 993 aflaj in the North Batinah, including 408 in Sohar, 277 in Khabourah, 123 in Saham, 76 in Shinas, 73 in Liwa, and 36 in Suwaiq.

Oman has 4,112 aflaj spread over its governorates.

MoL launches change management programme

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) launched a national programme called 'Innovation and Change Management' on Sunday.

The launch event was presided over by H E Sheikh Nasr bin Amer al Hosani, Undersecretary for Labour in MoL, and representatives of government and private establishments.

A statement issued by MoL said, 'The first meeting of the na-



(ONA)

tional system for Innovation and Change Management aimed to bring together various government and private agencies to work on developing an action plan

aimed at strengthening Oman's position and improve its international competitive indicators.'

According to Saud bin Hamad al Hamouda, Director General of

Development and Quality Assurance in the ministry, the programme aims to make work environment in government institutions supportive of innovation and change management, and to benefit from the experiences of the private sector in developing administrative work systems.

MoL has started implementing the programme through several stages and has identified more than 82 successful practices from the private sector.

THE MOMENT

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North Sharqiyah announces projects

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Governor's Office of North Sharqiyah on Sunday announced several development and service projects in the governorate.

Sheikh Ali Ahmed al Shamsi, Governor of North Sharqiyah, stated that the governorate is planning many projects, including construction of central markets, gardens, public parks and recreational facilities, in addition to the construction of slaughterhouses and walkways.

"These projects are part of the Governorate Development Programme aimed at achieving national development goals," he added.

A central market for livestock and fodder in Sinaw, in the wilayat of Mudhaibi, will be built on an area of 193,000sqm.

A slaughterhouse is also planned in Mudhaibi, while Ibra will get a central market for vegetables and fruits through the Governorate Development Programme.

According to the Shamsi, an integrated station planned in Ibra will include a public yard to sell used cars, a motel and a restaurant. "Spread over 73,000sqm, it



These projects are part of the Governorate Development Programme aimed at achieving national development goals

SHEIKH ALI AHMED
AL SHAMSI

will support tourism and the economy of the governorate."

A recreational centre in the wilayat of Bidiyah, on an area of 212,000sqm, will host winter festivals and include a family



(Supplied image)

shopping area. It will also have children's rides, a heritage village, restaurants and cafes. "The project has been assigned to a specialised consulting firm," the governor said.

Sharqiyah Park

Spread over an area of 1mn sqm, Sharqiyah Park will be built in Masron in Ibra. The park will include shaded benches, a theatre for live performances,

play areas, bicycle and skating paths, a walkway, and special lanes for people with disabilities.

It will have restaurants, cafes and shops, with its main attrac-

tion being a dancing fountain.

Another public park will be set up in the wilayat of Dima Wa al Teian on an area of 28,000 sqm, while a 24,000sqm park - Al Khalidiya

Park - will be built in wilayat of Wadi Bani Khalid.

Shamsi informed that the parks will have play areas for children, cafes, and barbecue areas, besides prayer halls.

MoCIIP ensures readiness for khareef season in Dhofar



(Supplied photos)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has announced its readiness for khareef in Dhofar on Sunday.

The Directorate General of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in Dhofar held a meeting with several government and private sector institutions to review the ministry's efforts. This was held to ensure the continuation of facilities provided by the relevant government and private



The ministry is ensuring sufficient stock of fuel at 134 stations across Dhofar, besides the fuel stations located on the Adam-Thumrait road

SHEIKH JAMAL AL HINAI

agencies during the khareef season as well as supply of food and basic commodities in the markets in the governorate.

Sheikh Jamal bin Abdullah al Hinai, Director General of Direc-

torate General of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in Dhofar, said, "The ministry is ensuring sufficient stock of fuel at stations - 134 in all - across Dhofar. This is apart from the fuel

stations located on the Adam-Thumrait road."

He added that fuel station owners have been asked to carry out maintenance of public facilities regularly to facilitate travellers.

"The directorate has also co-ordinated with officials of banks in the governorate to carry out necessary maintenance work of ATMs and CDMs in commercial centres to ensure uninterrupted cash flow."

The khareef season officially begins on June 21 and continues till September 21.

MoE signs six MoUs for Oman Science Festival 2022



(Supplied photo)

Muscat - The Ministry of Education (MoE) has signed six memoranda of understanding (MoU) with private sector institutions to support Oman Science Festival 2022.

The signing was held under the patronage of H E Dr Madiha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, on Thursday at the ministry's headquarters.

On the occasion, H E Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambosaidi, Undersecretary for Education in MoE, said, "We are pleased to sign the MoUs with the institutions supporting Oman Science Festival. These institutions believe in the concept, significance and its benefit not only to science and education but to the economy in general and to the private sector in particular."

The festival will be held in October. It will prompt school, college and university students to

pay more attention to science, innovation and creativity. The 2022 edition of the festival targets all segments of society, especially school and university students, with the aim of encouraging a scientific bent of mind.

"Today, science and technology are the engine and developer of societies," the undersecretary said.

He signed three agreements with Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel), Petroleum Development Oman, and Khimji Ramdas Corporation (Eshraqa Corporation).

It was followed by H E Majid bin Saeed al Bahri, Undersecretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs, MoE, signing three other MoUs with Oman Liquefied Natural Gas, Bank Sohar, and Oman Shell Development Company and Shell Marketing Company.

Qarn Alam touches 49.1°C, Zamaim 48.8°C on Saturday

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Temperatures soared on Saturday in many parts of Oman with the mercury touching 49.1°C in Qarn Alam in Dakhiliyah, the highest temperature this summer.

However, overcast weather conditions in Muscat, coastal areas overlooking the Sea of Oman, and South Sharqiyah and Al Wusta governorates on Sunday brought some respite from the heat.

Zamaim (48.8°C), Fahud (48.1°C), Izki (47.8°C) and Nizwa (47.7°C) rounded up the top



five highest temperature places.

In its forecast for Monday, the Directorate General of Meteorology stated, 'Partly cloudy skies

ISM closes early for summer break due to rising heat

Muscat - Indian School Muscat (ISM) has announced early closure for the summer break due to rising heat with effect from Sunday, June 12.

According to the school calendar, June 16 was to be the last instruction day before breaking for summer.

'This is to inform you that the school closes for summer vacation for Grades KG to VIII from June 12,' a circular stated.

'This decision has been taken considering the increased heat and humidity in the past few days. We have received the guidelines in this regard from the BoD to consider early closing of the school.'

The last instruction day for the senior section - Grades IX to XII - before the summer vacation is Thursday, June 16.

ISM will reopen on Monday, August 8, after the summer break.

will prevail along the coastal areas of Dhofar governorate and adjoining mountains with chance of isolated rain.'

Clear skies are expected over the remaining governorates with chance of late night to early morning low level clouds or fog

patches over parts of coastal areas along the Sea of Oman and parts of South Sharqiyah and Al Wusta. 'Chance of cloud devel-

opment may result in isolated rain over Al Hajar Mountains.'

With clouds over Muscat, the temperature at Muscat International Airport was 34°C on Sunday afternoon, 35°C in Bausher and 36°C in Amerat.

The state of the Arabian Sea, according to Met Office, will be moderate to rough with waves of a maximum height of 2.5m and moderate along the rest of the coast with maximum wave height of 1.5m.

There are chances of dust rising due to northwesterly winds over the desert and open areas in Dhahirah and Al Wusta governorates.

Two Omani fishermen missing at sea; search on

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Two citizens who set off on a fishing trip in the Sea of Oman in Al Ashkharah, South Sharqiyah, on Thursday, have gone missing.

Search and rescue operations are on, Royal Oman Police tweeted. 'Police aviation and Coast Guard police boats, in co-operation with Royal Air Force of Oman and a group of citizens, are continuing to search for the missing fishermen off the coast of Al Ashkharah.'

MARKET WATCH

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(RO1 equals)

Indian Rs	202.98
Pakistani Rs	529.13
Bangladeshi taka	243.27
Philippines peso	137.83
Sri Lankan Rs	937.91

*Rates as on JUNE 12
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

War shrinks Ukraine economy by 15%

The war with Russia caused Ukraine's economy to contract by 15.1 per cent in the first three months of this year, the state statistics agency calculated.

The invasion by Russia on February 24 laid waste to large swathes of the Ukrainian economy, with a slew of companies forced to shut or dramatically recalibrate production.

The International Monetary Fund is forecasting a contraction in Ukraine's GDP of 35 per cent across the whole of 2022, and Ukrainian finance minister Sergiy Marchenko told AFP in mid-May that he was anticipating a decline of as much as 45-50 per cent.

Inflation in the war-stricken country accelerated to 18 per cent on a 12-month basis in May from 16.4 per cent in April, the statistics agency said, with food prices continuing to soar.

The Ukrainian central bank has warned that headline inflation could rise as high as 20 per cent by the end of 2022.

Oman's LNG production rises to record 10.6mn tonnes in 2021

Total revenues of Oman LNG surged 31% to US\$3.3bn in 2021; net income up 34%

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman LNG Company on Sunday announced that its liquefied natural gas (LNG) production reached to a record level of 10.6mn metric tonnes during the year 2021 compared with 10.2mn tonnes in the previous year, an increase of nearly four per cent. The company expects its production capacity to reach more than 11mn metric tonnes this year after the completion of strategic projects in its industrial complex in Sur.

During 2021, Oman LNG continued its progress in implementing several strategic projects that are nearing completion to boost productivity.

These projects include: the plant renewal project, the project to raise efficiency of the production of liquefaction trains, and the modern energy project that uses gas engine technology to raise efficiency.

"The early results of these projects contributed to an increase in production rates which reached record level of 10.6mn metric tonnes in 2021 compared to 10.2mn tonnes in 2020. It is expected that the production ca-



capacity will reach more than 11mn metric tonnes after the completion of the strategic projects in the industrial complex," Oman LNG said in a statement to Oman News Agency.

Revenues surge

Oman LNG's total revenues

surged by 31 per cent to US\$3.278bn in 2021 compared with the previous year, thanks to the higher prices and recovery in the global energy sector, according to the company's yearly report.

On the back of increased revenues, Oman LNG's net income for the year 2021 grew by 34 per

cent to US\$886mn compared with US\$663mn in 2020.

The company's report indicated that the LNG sector provided the sultanate's government with gas revenue of about US\$2.873bn during the past year.

Talal bin Hamid al Awfi, chair-

man of Oman LNG, said that the company demonstrated its complete readiness and high flexibility to adapt to exceptional circumstances during the past period and face all challenges and difficulties to implement its business at the highest levels.

He noted that the company

achieved high positive results in revenues and net income during 2021, which are close to the levels achieved during the pre-pandemic years.

As the company continued its positive performance, Awfi said Oman LNG intends to work with many partners to promote and develop the energy sector in Oman.

Oman LNG last year allocated around US\$37mn for its social responsibility programmes and initiatives.

Maintaining its position in the global energy markets, Oman supplied energy to more than 20 countries around the world.

A total 163 LNG shipments were delivered to the customers around the world during the last year - 119 shipments by Oman LNG and 44 shipments by Qalhat LNG.

Oman LNG directly and indirectly undertake project operations and related activities essential to liquefy, store, transport and market Oman's natural gas and to deliver LNG to customers.

The company operates three liquefaction trains at its site in Qalhat near Sur.

Ominvest holds internal audit forum for group companies

Muscat - Ominvest Group recently held its internal audit forum, as part of its participation in the 'Internal Audit Awareness Month' and to provide an opportunity for the internal audit teams in the group to better understand business risks and help develop their skillset to perform more effectively as trusted advisors of the organisation.

The forum, held during the Internal Audit Awareness Month, was attended by audit committee chairmen, CEOs and audit team members at Ominvest and its group companies including Ubhar Capital, National Life & General Insurance Company, National Finance Company, Oman Arab Bank, Alizz Islamic Bank, and Takaful Oman.

The forum's discussion focused on further enhancing the role of internal audit within organisations as agents of change. The forum provided internal auditors with the opportunity to in-

teract with key stakeholders across the group and to participate in roundtable discussions with executive management.

The engagement sessions helped senior management teams to be more acquainted with how risk assessment is conducted and enabled internal auditors to better understand business environment and decision-making approaches.

The forum also focused on Ominvest's environmental, social and governance (ESG) initiatives in relation to internal audit, and on how its core values of collaboration, excellence and integrity are instrumental in driving overall success.

In his keynote speech at the forum, AbdulAziz al Balushi, group CEO at Ominvest said, "To cope with shifting business dynamics, internal audit teams need to take more proactive action-oriented approaches towards all kinds of risks facing the



organisation. This calls for continuous vigilance, creative thinking, and acquiring new skills to remain relevant to the business. Understanding the business is a key factor for the internal audit team to contribute to the business, be an agent of change and provide meaningful challenge to management."

He added, "It is very reassuring to see the enthusiasm and commitment from our group companies to continuously develop the internal audit role to achieve effective outcomes. I would like to express my sincere appreciation of our internal auditors for carrying out their duties professionally and diligently and I hope this forum will bring the auditors and business executives together in a constructive and fruitful dialogue."

Commenting on the significance of the internal audit forum, Muneer al Mughairy, chief audit officer at Ominvest, said, "Ominvest organised this event with the aim of spreading awareness of the internal audit profession. In doing so, the forum attempted to align the internal audit role with business expectations and allowed businesses to understand and appreciate the internal audit mandate and operating environment."

MSX drops 0.21% on weak trading

Our Correspondent Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange decreased 0.21 per cent on Sunday to close at 4,125.81 points.

All the sectoral indices posted declines on Sunday led by Industrial Index which lost 0.32 per cent. Financial and Services indices closed 0.04 per cent and 0.26 per cent lower, respectively. MSX Sharia Index was down by 0.49 per cent at 459.45 points.

Trading activity continued to remain weak on the bourse as volumes decreased by nearly 42 per cent to 20.43mn shares against 35mn shares traded on Thursday. Market turnover dropped by 16.22 per cent to RO2.97mn compared with RO3.55mn recorded in the previous trading session.

The market breadth of the MSX remained negative with

five advancing stocks to 17 decliners. As many as 21 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers of the day were Oman Arab Bank (6.78 per cent), Oman REIT Fund (2.86 per cent), Bank Muscat (1.49 per cent) and National Bank of Oman (0.98 per cent).

Top losers were Takaful Oman (-6.67 per cent), Construction Materials Industry (5.68 per cent), Sohar International Bank (-4.76 per cent), Al Omaniya Financial Services (-3.61 per cent) and Oman & Emirates Investment Holding (-3.23 per cent).

TotalEnergies gains foothold in Qatar gas expansion

Doha, Qatar - Qatar on Sunday named France's TotalEnergies as its first foreign partner to develop the world's largest natural gas field and eventually help ease Europe's energy fears.

The French energy major will have a 6.25-per cent share of the giant North Field East project that will help Qatar increase its liquefied natural gas (LNG) production by more than 60 per cent by 2027, Qatar's Energy Minister Saad Sherida al-Kaabi told a news conference.

Kaabi said it was "a marriage more than an engagement" as the accord will last until 2054.

Other foreign firms will also have joint venture stakes with state-owned Qatar Energy (QE) but none will be bigger than TotalEnergies, said Kaabi, who did

not reveal names.

Industry sources say Exxon-Mobil, Shell and ConocoPhillips are all in line to take part in the giant US\$28bn expansion, that Qatar had originally wanted to finance alone.

"We have finished the selection process and we have signed the agreements," Kaabi said, adding that names would be announced in the "near future".

With European nations scrambling to find alternatives to Russian oil and gas, LNG from North Field is expected to start coming on line in 2026.

TotalEnergies chief executive Patrick Pouyanne said the company's biggest deal with Qatar would help make up for the company's withdrawal from Russia in the wake of the



Ukraine invasion.

Hard bargain

Without giving figures, Pouyanne indicated that Qatar had demanded a high price in the talks that started in 2019.

"Your team and yourself have been a very good defender of Qatar's interests in this project," he said in comments to the minister who is also the QE chief.

"Qatar Energy certainly drove a hard bargain. But for the biggest global LNG players like Shell and TotalEnergies, Qatar is too good to pass up. A stake in these LNG trains delivers scale, low-cost supply, great marketing opportunities, and a good partner," said Ben Cahill, an energy security specialist at the Center for Security and International Studies in Washington.

Qatar is already one of the world's top LNG producers, alongside the United States and Australia.

QE estimates that North Field holds about 10 per cent of the world's known natural gas reserves.

The reserves extend under the sea into Iranian territory, where Tehran's efforts to exploit

its South Pars gas field have been hindered by international sanctions.

South Korea, Japan and China have become the main markets for Qatar's LNG but since an energy crisis hit Europe last year, the Gulf state has helped Britain with extra supplies and also announced a cooperation deal with Germany. Europe has for long rejected the long-term deals that Qatar seeks for its energy but the Ukraine conflict has forced a change in attitude.

Qatar's expansion "underlines its position as a leader in this industry", said Bill Farren-Price, head of macro oil and gas research at the Enverus energy consultancy.

"With gas balances tight globally amid reduced Russian

gas exports to Europe, LNG is a key and growing component in the energy transition and Qatar is determined to leverage its world-class North Field reserves to capture additional value through this deal.

"Its partnership with TotalEnergies reinforces Doha's political partnership with Western powers while giving it even more marketing options."

The Ukraine conflict has also injected a new urgency into efforts around the world to develop new sources.

Tanzania on Saturday signed a framework agreement with British and Norwegian energy giants Shell and Equinor towards implementing a US\$30bn project to export its natural gas.

AFP

Resurging inflation puts US Fed on track for big rate hikes

Washington, US – Red-hot US inflation is showing few signs of cooling, putting the Federal Reserve on track to continue its aggressive interest rate increases to help cool high prices that are challenging Joe Biden's presidency.

The hoped-for signs of relief for American families did not materialize in May as consumer prices hit a new four-decade high, rising 8.6 per cent and topping what economists thought was the peak in March.

With Russia's war on Ukraine continuing to pressure global fuel and food prices, and amid ongoing supply chain uncertainties due to Covid-19 lockdowns in Asia, analysts now say the expected easing of inflationary pressures will take much longer to materialize.

The US central bank already had signalled plans for more big increases in the benchmark borrowing rate this week and next month, but chances are rising that the Fed might have to be even more aggressive – which increases the risk the economy might tip into a recession.

The latest inflation report – the last major data point before the Fed's policy meeting Tuesday and Wednesday – also douses hopes central bankers will be able to call a ceasefire in September ahead of key congressional elections, where Biden's Democrats are widely expected to suffer damaging losses.

Prices continued to rise last month for a range of goods, including housing, groceries, airline fares and used and new vehicles, setting new records in



In this file photo taken on Friday, a sign displays the price of fuel at a gas station in McLean, Virginia (AFP)

multiple categories, according to the Labor Department data.

Energy has soared 34.6 per cent over the past year, the fastest since September 2005, while food jumped 10.1 per cent, and the cost of fuel oil more than doubled, jumping 106.7 per cent, the largest increase in the history of CPI, which dates to 1935.

The CPI surge "raises the probability of even more aggressive Fed rate hikes to tamp down on inflationary expectations," said Mickey Levy of Berenberg Capital Markets.

If the policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee decides on a giant step – three quarters of a point rather than the expected half-point increase – it would be the first 75 basis

point rate hike since November 1994.

Diane Swonk of Grant Thornton indicated such a move is possible.

"They are behind the curve and eager to catch up," she said on Twitter. "Fed has to reduce demand to meet a supply-constrained world. Ugly in many ways."

Economists at Barclays are now calling for a 0.75-point increase, though Ryan Sweet at Moody's says chances are low, and Karl Haeling at LBBW expects three more half-point hikes.

Biden is facing growing political backlash as high prices increase the pain for American families, who are seeing daily records at the gas pump and

higher grocery bills due to the fallout from Russian leader Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

Unlike his predecessor Donald Trump, who relentlessly attacked the Fed and its chair Jerome Powell, Biden has publicly endorsed the central bank's efforts. Biden, who blames "Putin's Price Hike" for the acceleration in inflation, said Washington "must do more – and quickly – to get prices down here in the United States."

Some analysts had speculated that Powell might call for a timeout in the interest rate moves at the FOMC's September meeting, but economist Levy echoed the prevailing view that a pause in rate hikes is now "looking increasingly unlikely."

Powell has always insisted that central bankers eschew political considerations and focus on what's best for the economy.

The Fed, which has already acknowledged that slowing demand will entail some pain, is hoping to cool price pressures without choking off economic growth – but that is looking increasingly difficult.

Gita Gopinath, the number two at the International Monetary Fund, last week said US central bankers are treading an "incredibly narrow path" to achieve a soft landing and avoid a sharp increase in unemployment.

"It will be a real challenge to bring down inflation... without turbulence," she said at a Financial Times conference, adding that it could "require much steeper increases in rates."

AFP

Tanzania signs \$30bn natural gas deal with Shell, Equinor

Dar es Salaam, Tanzania – Tanzania on Saturday signed a framework agreement with British and Norwegian energy giants Shell and Equinor towards implementing a US\$30bn project to export its natural gas.

The deal foresees a final investment decision by 2025, and a start of operations by 2029-2030 at a liquefied natural gas plant to be built in the southern coastal town of Lindi.

It marks a significant step forward in Tanzania's efforts to jumpstart the export of part of the vast gas deposits off its coast, estimated at more than 57tn cubic feet.

"We have never reached this stage of natural gas development in the history of our country," Energy Minister January Makamba said during the signing ceremony in the capital Dodoma. "This project will significantly change our economy."

"Tanzania's geographical positioning makes it easy to transport the natural gas to other countries, especially Asian (ones), which are looking for new



Photograph for illustrative purpose only

sources of energy."

President Samia Suluhu Hassan, also present, welcomed the preliminary agreement.

"We have reached a good stage of discussions about the LNG project, but much work is still waiting for us to talk and make it competitive," she said.

Plans for the LNG plant had stalled for several years under her predecessor John Magufuli, and she re-launched efforts after becoming head of state last year.

Equinor country manager for Tanzania, Unni Fjaer, said the deal had been long in the making.

"We had many stops but through resolve of the government, we kept engaging, discus-

sions and we believe Tanzanian gas presents a huge opportunity," she said.

Along with US firm ExxonMobil, Equinor is exploiting a block some 100km off the coast of Lindi, where it says it has found 20tn cubic feet of natural gas.

Shell, together with Ophir Energy and the Pavilion Energy, says it has discovered 16tn cubic feet of gas in two other offshore blocks in the same area.

Tanzania's economy suffered a blow during the coronavirus pandemic, as travel restrictions battered the tourism sector, a key earner in the East African country.

AFP

Russia cuts key rate as inflation eases

Moscow, Russia – Russia's central bank has cut its key interest rate as the country's economy recovers faster than expected following sanctions imposed on Moscow over its military action in Ukraine. The Bank of Russia cut the rate to 9.5 per cent from 11 per cent, saying in a statement that "inflation is slowing faster and the decline in economic activity is of a smaller magnitude" than expected in April.

It said, however, that the "ex-

ternal environment for the Russian economy remains challenging and significantly constrains economic activity".

The next rate review meeting will take place on July 22.

The central bank had already cut its key rate by three percentage points at an emergency meeting just two weeks ago.

Russia's economy faces deep recession and consumer demand is weakening.

Days after President Vladimir

Putin sent troops to Ukraine and the West pummelled Moscow with sanctions in response, the central bank more than doubled its key interest rate to 20 per cent to prop up the plunging ruble.

Since then, the ruble has staged a spectacular rebound and strengthened by around 30 per cent against the dollar, leading the central bank to cut its key rate three times.

AFP

TENDERS ADVERTISEMENT

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) Announce the following Tenders:

Sr.No	Tender No.	Tender Name	Last Date for Obtaining Tender Documents	Closing Date	Grade	Tender Document's Fees (Including VAT) (RO)
1	33/2022	Preparation of Documentary Film for (Rabt) Project	27/06/2022	26/07/2022	Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate.	42,000
2	34/2022	Supply, Installation and Testing of 2 Nos of 110V DC Battery Chargers 200A Capacity with DCDB at Al Mabelah Grid Station.	27/06/2022	26/07/2022	Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate.	105,000
3	36/2022	Supply of UV Corona Camera and Transformer Test Set (PD Analyzer)	27/06/2022	26/07/2022	Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate.	105,000

Participation:	Interested Companies may obtain Tender Document with the necessity Apply on E-tendering
Buying the Tender:	By using E-Tendering System.
Fees:	Against non-refundable payment as mentioned above against each set of document. (Payment Through Bank Transfer)
The deadline for clarification:	Before (21) Days from closing date.
Submission:	The submission of hard copy will be only for Bid Bond & other documents by E-Tendering
Terms and conditions:	- No other writing or any reference thereto should be mentioned on the envelope. - The bid should be valid for not less than (90) days from closing date. - The Tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the bid value and should be valid for (90) days from closing date, addressed to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC). - Any bid not comply with the required guarantee, will not be accepted. - OETC is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offers.
Offer:	The bid bond should be submitted in Tender Box No. (1) at the company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission of the Tenders.
Company Address:	Muscat - Al Mawaleh Road No: 2153 - Building No. 423 O Block No: 321 – Contact Details: 92217856 - 91777378 - 93515198
Email Website:	tenders@omangrid.com www.omangrid.com / link of E-Tendering System https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx

إعلان طرح مناقصات

تعلن الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء عن طرح المناقصات التالية :

م	رقم المناقصة	عنوان المناقصة	آخر موعد للحصول على مستندات المناقصة	آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات	الدرجة	لمن الوثيقة تشمل ضريبة القيمة المضافة (أ ر غ)
١	٢٠٢٢/٣٣	إعداد فيلم وثائقي لمشروع "ربط"	٢٠٢٢/٠٦/٢٧	٢٠٢٢/٠٧/٢٦	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال والمسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول .	٤٢.٠٠٠
٢	٢٠٢٢/٣٤	توريد وتركيب واختبار عدد (2) شاحن بطارية التيار المستمر جهد 110 فولت (200) أمبير مع لوحة التوزيع (DCDB) في محطة كهرباء العبيدة	٢٠٢٢/٠٦/٢٧	٢٠٢٢/٠٧/٢٦	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال والمسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول .	١٠٥.٠٠٠
٣	٢٠٢٢/٣٦	توريد كاميرا الأشعة فوق البنفسجية وعدة فحص المحولات الكهربائية (جهاز فحص وتحليل التفريغ الجزئي)	٢٠٢٢/٠٦/٢٧	٢٠٢٢/٠٧/٢٦	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال والمسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول .	١٠٥.٠٠٠

الاشتراك	يمكن للشركات والمؤسسات المتخصصة الحصول على مستندات المناقصة بعد تقديم الطلب عن طريق نظام المناقص الإلكتروني.
طريقة الشراء	من خلال إستخدام نظام المناقص الإلكتروني
الرسوم	مقابل دفع المبلغ المحدد أعلاه للنسخة الواحدة - لا ترد (الدفع عن طريق التحويل البنكي)
آخر موعد للإستفسارات	قبل (٢١) يوم من تاريخ آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات
تقديم العروض	يتم تسليم النسخة الأصلية فقط من الضمان البنكي للعطاء في الصندوق . أما العرض فيتم تسليمه من خلال نظام المناقص الإلكتروني
الشروط و الضمانات	معدم تحديد اسم صاحب العطاء أو ما ينشهر إليه على المظروف . أن تكون العروض سارية المفعول لمدة لا تقل عن (٩٠) يوما من تاريخ تقديم العطاء . إرفاق تأميناً في صورة ضمان مصرفي من أحد البنوك العاملة في البلاد قدره (١٪) من قيمة العطاء ساري لمدة (٩٠) يوما من تاريخ تقديم العطاء . ومعدوناً بإسم الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء . كل عطاء لا يستوفي التأمين المطلوب لن ينظر فيه . الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء غير مقيدة بقبول أقل العروض أو أي عطاء آخر.
العرض المقدم	يجب وضع الضمان البنكي للعطاء فقط في صندوق المناقصات رقم (١) بمبنى الشركة قبل الساعة ١١ صباحاً من التاريخ المحدد لتقديم العطاءات
عنوان الشركة	عنوان الشركة: محافظة مسقط - الموالح رقم السكّة ٢١٥٣ - مبنى رقم ٤٢٣ تفاصيل التواصل: ٩٢٢١٧٨٥٦ - ٩٢٢١٧٨٥٦ - ٩٣٥١٥١٩٨
البريد الإلكتروني	tenders@omangrid.com
الموقع الإلكتروني	www.omangrid.com https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx



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الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء ش. م. ع. م
ص. ب : ١٣٨٩. الخوض الرمز البريدي : ١٣٢. سلطنة عمان
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الموقع الإلكتروني : www.omangrid.com



الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء شركة مساهمة
أحد شركات مجموعة أمان
Member of Nama Group

National Finance, Dar Al Atta'a inaugurate greenhouse project

Reflecting its commitment to enhance its contribution to the programmes and charities in Oman, National Finance, in collaboration with Dar Al Atta'a Charity, inaugurated a greenhouse project which aims to engage people with special needs at Al Wafa Social Centre in Ibra, Sharqiyah North.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Hon Maryam Issa al Zadjali, member of the State Council and chairperson of Dar Al Atta'a, in the presence of representatives from Al Wafa Centre in Ibra and a number of officials from the public and private sectors, on June 6, a press release said.

Resulting of partnership between the company and the associations, this project aims to build nine greenhouses in various Al Wafa Social Centres. People with special needs will have the opportunity to acquire employment and a sustainable income source.

Lina al Abdulsalaam, National Finance head of Corporate Communication and Marketing said, "We are pleased to launch the greenhouse project in cooperation with Dar Al Atta'a. We are also



delighted to help and support all segments of the society. We strongly believe that we have responsibilities not only toward our customers, employees and shareholders but also to enhance our initiatives to serve the communities in which we operate. In addition, within our CSR programme, we are keen to strengthen our partnership with various entities and sectors to

achieve added value in the country and provide opportunities for the nation's people to build a brighter future."

Expressing her appreciation to National Finance, Hon Maryam said, "We thank National Finance for its efforts to serve the community by supporting our sustainable programmes. The greenhouse project, as part of the 'Tam-

keen', initiative contributes to strengthening the role of job integration for people with special needs at Al Wafa Social Centre. This can be succeeded by enrolling them in the production and marketing of agricultural crops with the aim of achieving an effective community partnership."

National Finance's Imtidad programme has undertaken a

number of initiatives that are centered on education, community, health and the environment. Following a holistic approach to CSR, National Finance will continue to contribute to the socio-economic development of the country while leading programmes that are thoughtful, strategic and encompass the broad vision of the country.



City Centre Qurum collaborates with HCT students

City Centre Qurum, owned and operated by Majid Al Futtaim in Oman, in partnership with the entrepreneurship and innovation club from the Higher College of Technology, recently hosted 20 student SMEs to showcase their businesses in the mall.

As a leader in retail, this is all part of Majid Al Futtaim's vision

to serve the community as well as create a destination for entrepreneurs to grow their presence in one of Oman's most prominent shopping centres.

The latest partnership not only showcases the work of fantastic talent in the region but enhances the shopping and entertainment experience in Oman, a press release said.



Hawana Salalah's Laguna Gardens sold out

Muriya has sold-out Laguna Gardens, a new residential community set at the heart of Hawana Salalah, Oman's largest tourism destination. The desirable waterfront development features a selection of one, two and three-bedroom single storey villas, each enjoying uninterrupted views of the lagoon from their private gardens.

Laguna Gardens is the largest neighbourhood within the destination, boasting 240 units, each designed to celebrate the finer things in life with superb access to Hawana Salalah's 5-star resort facilities. A few units remain available to sell in the waterfront neighbourhood Azure, with delivery in two years for all nationalities, a press release said.

"Laguna Gardens is unique within Hawana Salalah in a sense that it combines inspirational waterfront designs and func-

tional spaces with the strengths of all Muriya developments. The neighbourhood has been very popular since we first introduced the concept and buyers have been drawn to its harmonious relationship with the surrounding nature," said Seif Elkhouly, chief development officer, Muriya.

"The project offers ultimate luxury and within walking distance of the resort-style amenities. Overseas buyers can also apply for lifetime family residency and enjoy their holiday home all year round," he added.

Muriya has been Oman's pioneering developer of resort-like towns where people can live, visit or enjoy leisure offerings. The newly launched project provides lucrative investment opportunities with spacious properties and unique architectural designs, varying from classic, to modern and contemporary.

Ahlibank managers discuss growth strategy

Following its positive performance in the first quarter of 2022, Ahlibank recently held a branch managers meeting to review the performances of each branch and its role in furthering the bank's customer-centric philosophy to enhance financial experiences.

The meeting, which was attended by the bank's management, included discussions on the robust retail performance for the last four months and an overview of the strategy for the next six months. Moreover, crucial among the presentations was the update on the bank's digital roadmap that enhances its commitment to being at the forefront of the fintech era and improves upon its customer service offerings that make ahlibank among the most preferred financial institutions in the country, a press release said.



Offering an insight into the meeting, Muneer al Balushi, AGM - head of Retail Distribution, Ahlibank, said, "The success of Q1 has been a remarkable achievement for Ahlibank. However, this does not permit us to become complacent. Being continuously aware of our loyal customers' loyalty bestowed upon us, we don't rest on our laurels.

"Ahlibank is committed to consistent growth and this can

only be achieved through discussions, deliberations, and continuous innovation. Our growth trajectory, among other things, is due to our customers who have been the key drivers for all our products and policies. We owe it to them to ensure that their experiences are bespoke and seamless. Our dedicated teams across Ahlibank branches continue to listen to feedback and endeavor to create better solu-

tions and services that cater to a better tomorrow for everyone."

The meeting also saw interactive discussions on various key topics such as the operational needs of the branches taking feedback into account and creating conducive environment required to improve upon process and operation management. Other topics included change management, business development, programmes to support

SMEs, sales and marketing strategies, and performances of the bank's premium banking and wealth management services.

Ever since its inception, Ahlibank is committed to enhancing customer satisfaction with a comprehensive suite of services, use of modern technology, and innovative solutions across its branches in Oman. All offerings are aimed at inculcating a culture of savings.



Oman Air wins APEX Passenger Choice Award

Oman Air, the national airline of the Sultanate of Oman, has been awarded the 2022 Passenger Choice Award for Best Seat Comfort in the Middle East by the Airline Passenger Experience Association (APEX).

The award was announced and presented to Oman Air in a ceremony held in Dublin, Ireland on June 8, a press release said.

"Everything we do as an airline revolves around providing an extraordinary passenger experience," stated Oman Air CEO Eng

Abdulaziz al Raisi. "We're ecstatic and honoured that the flying public has backed our continued efforts to provide exceptional service. This award reaffirms our dedication to on-board comfort and providing award-winning service to our passengers on every flight, and it is a testament to the high quality of care and professionalism we strive to provide at Oman Air."

APEX once again partnered with Triplt from Concur, the world's highest-rated travel-or-

ganising app, to gather anonymous passenger feedback based on neutral, third-party passenger feedback and insights for the honour. For the 2022 Awards, nearly one million flights were rated by passengers across more than 600 airlines from around the world using a five-star scale. On the same screen, passengers were given the opportunity to provide anonymous ratings in five subcategories - seat comfort, cabin service, food and beverage, entertainment, and Wi-Fi.

Mercedes-Benz Oman offers car care packages

Making sure its customers enjoy an outstanding experience long after purchasing their car, Mercedes-Benz Oman's Car Care packages combine choice, convenience and the highest quality of service.

Starting at RO370, drivers can leave their vehicles confidently in the hands of trusted Mercedes-Benz professionals, who will attend to any minor paintwork damage and dents, applying cutting-edge methods quickly and reliably. With three excellent value packages to choose from depending on individual requirements, customers



will have the peace of mind that their Mercedes-Benz car will

preserve its condition and value, with a pristine appearance all-

round, a press release said.

"Appropriate car care is important and necessary. Our valued Mercedes-Benz customers rightly expect us to provide reliable maintenance and service for their vehicle at reasonable prices. This is precisely why we created our Car Care Packages, which cover scratch repairs and paintless dent removal procedures, making the service costs transparent. That way, our customers can count on first-class care and spare themselves unpleasant surprises," said Shaun Michael, CEO, Mercedes-Benz Oman.

Ooredoo's Hala Plans offers open data

Giving its customers even more freedom and flexibility, all of Ooredoo's popular Hala prepaid plans now come with open data. Whether subscribing for an RO2 plan or an RO18 plan, users have complete freedom to use their data allowance not

only whenever, but however, they want.

With up to 30 GB, 600 local minutes and 75 international minutes up for grabs, valid for as much as four weeks, the plans are the perfect way to chat, watch and play, press release said.

With an option for every kind of user, Ooredoo's Hala SIM is absolutely free. All customers have to do is select their plan of choice and enjoy data with voice, data only, or straightforward credit. Plus, users can now 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.



Michelin opens eighth TyrePlus outlet in Oman

MHD ACERE recently announced the opening of the 8th branch of the TyrePlus service centres in Oman. Following the great success the franchise has enjoyed through its multiple shops in the sultanate, this branch in Salalah comes as an addition to serve a growing market. A one-stop-shop on vibrant Samahram street, this center is set to serve

a wide cross-section of the local community in Salalah and the surrounding region. On June 6, the branch was inaugurated by H E Dr Ahmed Mohsin al Ghassani, chairman of Dhofar Municipality and attended by MHD ACERE's CEO Mohsin Hani al Bahrani. TyrePlus Salalah, like its counterparts throughout Oman, offers a variety of services to car

owners, including general car checks, battery replacements, nitrogen tyre inflation, balancing tyres, wheel alignments, puncture repairs, car oil changes, AC gas refills, and more. The TyrePlus website allows customers to book appointments in any of TyrePlus's branches without physically visiting them. More details can be found at [https://www.tyreplus-](https://www.tyreplus-me.com/en/oman)

[me.com/en/oman](https://www.tyreplus-me.com/en/oman). Bahrani said, "We are delighted to see the expansion of the TyrePlus network in Oman. Our long partnership with Michelin has always been excellent, providing high quality services to our customers. "MHD ACERE is committed to staying on top of our game and expanding to cover all of Oman."

Bank Muscat's Floosi account improves financial inclusion

Bank Muscat's Floosi account, which was launched last year in line with the bank's commitment to improving financial inclusion across the sultanate, continues to receive excellent response from customers.

Targeted at youth in the 15-17 age group, Floosi accounts are becoming very popular with both Omanis and expatriates as it helps young people get financially aware and make savings a regular habit in their lives, a press release said.

The debit card linked to the customer's Floosi account, comes with a daily limit of RO50 and a monthly cumulative limit of RO200 for Point of Sale (PoS), e-commerce transactions and ATM withdrawals.

To apply for a Floosi account, minors must visit their nearest branch along with their parent or legal guardian, and submit their application along with copies of important documents like their National ID card (for Omani citizens) or Resident Card and Passport (for expatriates).

The father/guardian will be the authorised signatory and must sign the deal slip on behalf of the minor.

A major advantage of the Floosi account is that young customers are not penalised for not maintaining a minimum balance. At the same time, the account has a number of benefits specifically targeted at young people like social media giveaways, gaming tournaments, and exclusive offers at restaur-



ants, cafes, and entertainment venues. To add convenience to the financial inclusion process, the Floosi account can be converted into a Shababi account when the customer turns 18.

The customer can approach the nearest branch with their father/legal guardian and submit the documentation for converting the account and releasing guardianship of the account, after which the newly converted Shababi account may be operated independently by the customer.

Bank Muscat has been steadily working to improve financial inclusion and a good savings habit amongst people in Oman through a number of financial products and services.

The Floosi account was launched by the bank after extensive market research in response to customer feedback. Parents are particularly happy that this new account helps their children learn the importance of personal finance management and savings for their future.

NBO's Muzn holds first meeting of its Shari'a Supervisory Board

Muzn, National Bank of Oman's (NBO) Islamic banking window, recently held its First Shari'a Supervisory Board meeting.

Board members Sheikh Saleh al Kharusi and H H al Sayyid Dr Adham bin Turki al Said were joined by newly appointed members Sheikh Dr Muhammad Zubair Usmani and Sheikh Dr AbdulRahman Abdullah al Saadi, a press release said.

During the meeting, the Board discussed its responsibilities, which include ensuring all products, services, activities, investments, operations and transactions are compliant with the principles of Shari'a.

Salima al Marzouqi, chief Islamic Banking officer, said, "Our Shari'a Supervisory Board meetings ensure Muzn continues to be ready to meet the growing demand from customers for Islamic financial products and services which are aligned with their values. Adding to our highly qualified



Salima al Marzouqi

Shari'a Board, our new members bring extensive experience and a deep understanding from diverse Islamic banking markets.

"This will be of great benefit to Muzn as we continue to increase our market share and create new investment opportunities to benefit the bank and enrich the lives of our customers and the community."

NBO's Muzn is Oman's first Islamic Banking Window that offers innovative, competitive and quality financial services and shari'a compliant banking solutions with the values of Shari'a at the core.

Omantel and SUBCO elevate relationship

Omantel and SUBCO have recently entered into a large capacity agreement for connectivity between Oman and various key telecom hubs in Europe through Omantel's extensive subsea network.

Through this arrangement, Omantel will be providing ultra-high capacity connectivity from Muscat to SUBCO's new PoP's in London, Milan, and Marseille effectively extending the Oman Australia Cable (OAC), due to be RFS in Q3, 2022, from Australia to Oman and all the way to Europe, a press release said.

Speaking about Oman Australia Cable, Talal Said al Mamari - Omantel CEO said "We are proud to have been the landing partner for the successfully landed OAC, achieving another key addition in our vision for Oman to be the leading gateway to the region and beyond. Our motto in Omantel's Wholesale is Reach Further which is something we truly live, and today we see yet another demonstration of fulfilling this mission by enabling our partners in SUBCO to reach further through Omantel's extensive network."

"OAC is going to contribute in



changing the landscape of the wholesale industry and take our collaboration to the next level. Omantel was the wholesale partner of choice for OAC and has attracted more and more international partners like SUBCO to work and collaborate with us," Al Mamari further added.

Bevan Slattery, SUBCO's founder, commented "I am so excited to see our vision of the first truly diverse route between Asia and the Middle East and now Europe coming to fruition and our relationship with Omantel has been pivotal in helping us to reach further.

With the OAC only a few months away from RFS, having this capacity in place to extend our reach into Europe is important to further enable our capability and addressable market.

Omantel and SUBCO are in the process of completing provi-

sioning and handover of the capacity in readiness for OAC service commencement. The parties are also exploring further options to expand their collaboration and to include other upcoming systems to provide further capability and diversity for OAC.

The system also leverages on being extended into the Equinix MC1 facility in Oman, which is the first carrier-neutral data center in MENA which successfully positioned Oman as the natural hosting location for major hyperscalers and tier 1 service providers in the region. This ensures open access to the OAC system and hence further increases the potential of the project.

Future phases of OAC include a possible extension to the newly announced Equinix SN1 data center in Salalah and even beyond.



ROHM announces blood donation campaign on June 14

On June 14, the Royal Opera House Muscat will open its doors for its annual blood donation campaign to mark World Blood Donor Day.

All around the world, organisations in every country will be gathering people together to perform this generous act of giving which will, in turn, be the difference for someone whose life hangs in the balance.

The campaign will be run in collaboration with the Blood Bank Department of the Ministry of Health and will be stationed in the foyer of the House of Musical Arts. The campaign will begin at 9am and close at 5pm.

The Royal Opera House extends its sincere appreciation to everyone in our community and

around the world who volunteers to join the campaign. This single brave action, by a multitude from our communities could save someone in childbirth, a child with severe anaemia due to malaria and malnutrition, a patient with blood and bone marrow disorder, a victim of trauma from an accident or a patient undergoing advanced medical and surgical procedure. The need for blood is universal, but access to blood for all those who need it is not.

The campaign, running with the slogan 'Donating blood is an act of solidarity. Join the effort and save lives' raises awareness for the need for regular donations of blood. It urges people to take time out for a worthy cause.

MoSD honours OAB for its social responsibility initiatives

As a testament to its efforts towards supporting local communities, Oman Arab Bank (OAB) was recently honoured by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) with an award for its Corporate Social Responsibility.

Held under the patronage of H H Sayyid Kamil bin Fahd al Said and H E Laila Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, the ceremony took place in Avani Muscat Hotel.

It was attended by a number

of ministers, undersecretaries and senior officials from the public and private sectors, a press release said.

Commenting on the bank's achievement, Rashad bin Muhammad al Zubair, Chairman of OAB, said, "We are delighted to be recognised for our corporate commitment and social involvement to serve Oman and its people.

We continue to collaborate with local partners and charities

to ensure that as many people as possible in the communities in which we live and work are supported.

Our objective is to grow and mature alongside our employees, customers and the community through sustainable practices.

Receiving this award is testament to our work to support Oman's 2040 vision and socio-economic agenda."

Last year, the bank supported



Rashad al Zubair

low-income families whose homes were destroyed by the storm that hit the North Batinah Governorate.

This social initiative was carried out in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development and a number of Small to Medium Enterprises.

The initiative provided support to families in the governorate by repairing their homes in partnership with reputed local construction companies.

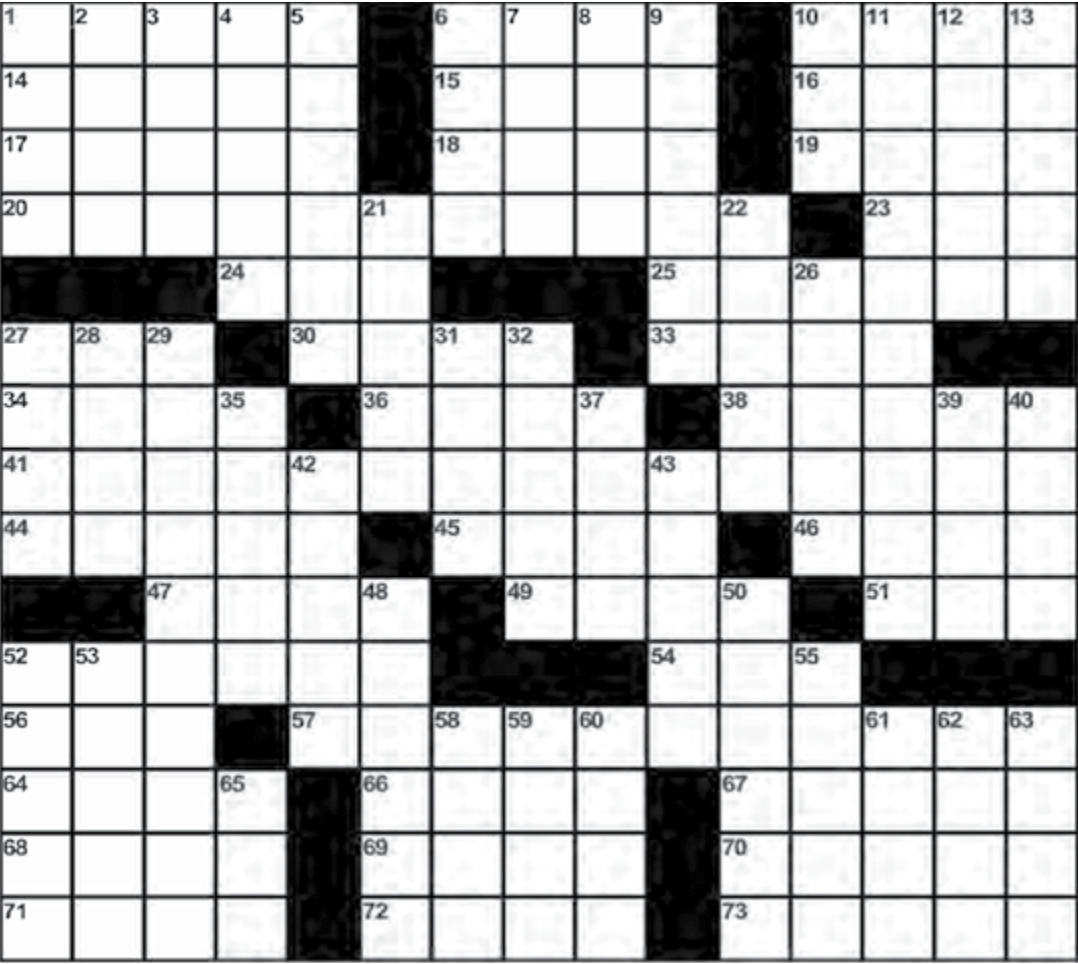
OAB's sustainability strategy was designed to strengthen the Bank's social impact within its three main strategic pillars - Community partnerships, environmental responsibility and financial inclusion.

In line with the Bank's community partnerships sustainability pillar, the bank donated RO300,000 to support those affected by 'cyclone Shaheen' that hit the sultanate last year.

Additionally, several bank employees volunteered to help in cleaning and re-building the affected homes and neighbourhoods in the Wilayats of Al Khaboura and Al Suwaiq. The Bank also launched an internal initiative to support employees affected by the cyclone.

Furthermore, the Bank launched a donation feature through its mobile banking app to create an easy and safe platform for donors to contribute.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Animal with a striped rear
6) Insect feeler
10) Sorrowful sigh
14) Pneumonia type
15) Malaria symptom
16) Passed-down knowledge
17) Lady between Hillary and Michelle
18) Better safe _ sorry
19) Sleeping?
20) Reo, for one
23) Partner of only
24) Pride or lust, say
25) James Cameron film
27) In on the latest trends
30) Little row
33) Hopeful singer's tape
34) Hearty draughts
36) Cenozoic and Big Band
38) Textile fiber
41) Secondhand store section
44) All finished, as dinner
45) Thailand's former name
46) Words with "record" or

"trap"
47) More than dislike
49) Ski lift
51) Cover with turf
52) Play friskily
54) Pen point
56) Monetary unit of Romania
57) "Stairway to Heaven," e.g.
64) Choir recess
66) To the sheltered side
67) Vietnam capital
68) They shall inherit the earth
69) Minimal amount
70) Dazzling display
71) "So what_ is new?"
72) Musical notation
73) "I like your_!"

DOWN

1) Paella cooker
2) "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" e.g.
3) Lie adjacent to
4) The City of Light
5) Natives ofUmm Qasr
6) Hors d'oeuvre selection
7) Turkish honorific (var.)
8) Oahu gala

9) Group of five
10) Beginning for "carte" or "king"
11) Surgeries that affect mental ability
12) Venue for big crowds
13) Commemorative meal
21) Remove, as a tent anchor
22) Difficult to miss
26) New Delhi nannies
27) One of the wealthy
28) Russian gold medalist Kulik
29) Places to live the high life?
31) Hawk among gods
32) Implicitly understood
35) It's better than a bargain
37) Thickish piece
39) Really enthusiastic about
40) Mild exclamation of surprise
42) Bit of nuttiness
43) Dweller on the Arabian Sea
48) Cream-filled dessert
50) Entrepreneur's dream
52) It's attractive to a moth

53) Parry
55) Flower base
58) Shaving cream ingredient
59) Mends, as bones

60) Act the usher
61) "For Your Eyes_"
62) Furnace fodder
63) Windy day toy
65)_ out Uust manage)

NOTE PAD

LASSO BOWSE HAY
ASPER UBOAT OBI
KEEPINTOUCH LIP
HADAGO ELK ADDS
LAVS DEMPSEY
AAH MENU DREW
IMAGINARY SMARM
LAVA ARBOR ETUI
SHELF EAGERNESS
ILLS NINE RET
ANNOYED SALK
VAMP VEE MANTIS
III GETTHEPOINT
SAN ARENA SWEDE
ODD RERAN ENDOW

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

A recent encounter that began somewhat playfully turned out to be highly-charged and even quite passionate. It's also tough to forget, which may or may not be a good thing. In fact, you might even have to reluctantly admit that you're obsessing. So if someone close asks you what's wrong, don't be surprised to learn that you're more in the mood to shout than speak softly. It might be best to put some distance between you for the time being

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You're ordinarily the life of the party, and your people may have gotten used to that by now. Weirdly, even though you woke up in the mood to play, by the time evening arrives you probably just want to snuggle up at home with someone close, a couple of your favorite movies, and a giant bowl of popcorn. Go for it. Just tell your fans you'll see them soon, but tonight is just for you.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

Give yourself the gift of peace and quiet today. It's not selfish to want to be by yourself. It's healthy. You are in an inward phase now, which will help you recharge your emotional batteries, center yourself, and get better prepared to be there when the people you love need you most. Be honest with your needs, and as long as you keep your people in the loop, they'll be cool with you pulling back from your social scene for a little while. Everyone needs a break now and then!

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

It could be quite a night tonight, the kind that might go on well into tomorrow. There's only one thing to do: pamper yourself while the sun is shining, and make sure you've got enough energy to keep going for as long as it lasts.
If you have preparations to make, get them done right away and then head home briskly. You need a power nap, a nice long shower, and an intense cup of coffee.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You're the very soul of accommodation today. You love making others happy, and you're likely to offer your services to achieve those ends any time you think you're needed.
That's lovely, but you might forget about your own needs in the process. Don't let that happen! You were recently introduced to someone who could make this a wonderful week for you if you let them. Let the rest of the world take care of itself.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Your family means a great deal to you, and your elders are especially dear. When you wake up in the mood to get together with family members today, especially your elders, don't hesitate to postpone your plans. You need to see them, and of course they are always delighted to see you. Of course, you can always take your sweetheart along or include your family in a friendly gathering coming up.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

It doesn't matter whether you've planned a casual evening at the movies or a formal dinner at a five-star restaurant. No matter what you've got planned, it's probably not going to happen, at least not in the way you thought it would.
The Universe has decided to throw a heaping helping of the unexpected in your face and, more importantly, into your evening. Don't be upset. Just wait and see how much fun it turns out to be.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Making peace comes easily to you and it's one of the things you do best. For some reason, you're just not in the mood to do that right now. It might be because your last attempt wasn't quite as successful or appreciated as it should have been.
Or maybe you're tired of listening to why people can't do what it takes to get along. Whatever it is, though, it's convinced you to think solely of yourself now.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You haven't been in this kind of mood for a really long time, and it's usually been because you've missed certain friends or relatives. You're not willing to settle for just a taste either.
Catching up with those loved ones is your top priority now, and you want to catch up on absolutely everything that's been happening to them. Get comfy and make some coffee, because they're certainly up for it.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You are feeling pretty good about your plans and should be able to extract a fair amount of fun out of the day if you push ahead. If something unexpected comes along that's not quite what you had in mind, once again, you can't get too upset about it. You just have to go with the flow and see what happens. Ready or not, here it comes, and you should be ready for it.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You're equal parts strategist, detective, and analyst, and you're excellent at all three of those occupations. In fact, your real occupation (the one you get paid for) probably involves a fair amount of digging on some level. Still, it's easy to see how today's energies can only help you turn up the volume on those qualities.
You'd better warn everyone not to try to keep anything from you, because it just won't work.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

The good news is you've got more time to yourself today, and you can stay up as late as you like without worrying about having no energy, a terrible headache, and seriously red eyes tomorrow.
The even better news is that there's no bad news.
You're due for a great evening, especially if you spend it with someone you've just met and find fascinating, and you won't have any trouble convincing them!

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Swahili is NOT one of the two official languages of which of these countries?

A. Ethiopia
B. Kenya
C. Tanzania
D. Uganda

02. Which of these wedding anniversaries is the earliest?

A. Cotton
B. Tin
C. Sapphire
D. Pearl

03. Leonardo di Caprio played multi-millionaire Howard Hughes in which film?

A. Money, Money, Money
B. The Firm
C. The Aviator
D. Gimme, Gimme, Gimme

Answers: 1.A 2.A 3.C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

N	C	L	S
P	S	U	S
K	E	P	A
O	G	H	A

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Russia strikes depot in west Ukraine, battle for key eastern city intensifies

Kramatorsk, Ukraine - Russian forces said on Sunday they had struck a site in western Ukraine storing large amounts of weapons supplied by the United States and European countries, as the battle intensified for the key eastern city of Severodonetsk.

The strike on the town of Chortkiv, a rare attack by Russia in the relatively calm west of Ukraine, left 22 people injured, the regional governor said.

Meanwhile the situation in Severodonetsk was 'extremely difficult', after the Russian army destroyed a second bridge into the city and was heavily bombarding the last one, regional governor Sergiy Gaiday said.

Away from the battlefield, the head of the European Commission on Saturday promised it would provide a clear signal by the end of next week on Ukraine's bid to become a candidate to join the European Union.

"Ukraine has achieved a lot in the past ten years and much still needs to be done. Our opinion will reflect this carefully," Ursula von der Leyen said after a surprise trip to the capital Kyiv.

Despite reservations among some member states, EU leaders are expected to approve the bid at a summit later this month, although with strict



A Ukrainian BM-21 Grad, a multiple rocket launcher, firing near Izyum, south of Kharkiv, amid Russian invasion of Ukraine on Saturday (AFP)

conditions attached.

"The challenge will be to come out of the (EU) council with a united position, which reflects the enormity of these historic decisions," von der Leyen said as she travelled back to Poland. Ukraine's geopolitical vulnerability has been laid bare by Russia's February 24 invasion, which has killed thousands, sent millions fleeing and reduced swathes of the country to rubble.

Ukrainian President

Volodymyr Zelensky said on Saturday that it was a 'decisive time'. "Russia wants to ruin European unity, wants to leave Europe divided and wants to leave it weak. The entirety of Europe is a target for Russia. Ukraine is only the first stage in this aggression," he said.

Extremely difficult

The United States and EU have sent weapons and cash to help Ukraine fend off the Russian advance, alongside punishing

Moscow with unprecedented economic sanctions.

Russia's defence ministry said the strike on Chortkiv destroyed a 'large depot of anti-tank missile systems, portable air defence systems and shells provided to the Kyiv regime by the US and European countries'.

Regional governor Volodymyr Trush said that four missiles fired from the Black Sea had partially destroyed a military installation in the town, about 140km from the border with Romania, on Sat-

urday evening.

Residential buildings were also damaged and 22 people were hurt, all of them - including seven women and a 12-year-old - taken to hospital, he said in a Facebook post.

It was a rare attack in western Ukraine, with the east and south of the country having borne the brunt of Russian firepower.

The cities of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk, which are separated by a river, have been targeted for weeks as the last areas

still under Ukrainian control in the region of Lugansk. "The situation in Severodonetsk is extremely difficult," said Lugansk governor Gaiday on Sunday, adding that by attacking the bridges, Russian forces wanted to cut off the city completely.

"Most likely, today or tomorrow, they will throw all reserves to capture the city and also possibly in other directions to cut and fully control the road" southwest to Bakhmut.

He said the Azot chemical plant was being shelled, with fighting around the area. About 800 civilians have taken refuge in the plant's bunkers, according to the tycoon whose company owns the facility.

The war has caused a spike in the global prices of energy - Russia is a major producer of oil and gas - and basic food stuffs.

Before the war, Russia and Ukraine produced 30 per cent of the global wheat supply, but grain is stuck in Ukraine's ports and Western sanctions have disrupted exports from Russia.

Addressing the Shangri-La Dialogue security summit in Singapore on Saturday, Zelensky warned of an acute food crisis, adding that the 'shortage of foodstuffs will inexorably lead to political chaos'.

AFP

At least five killed in attack in Mali

Bamako, Mali - An attack at a checkpoint in southeast Mali on Saturday killed at least five people, including customs officers and civilians, local and military sources said.

While a military source told AFP a 'terrorist attack' had killed seven civilians and customs officers at the Koutiala checkpoint, a local councillor put the death toll at five. Neither source provided the breakdown of the civilian and customs officers involved.

"The enemies also suffered losses," the military source said, adding the situation was currently under control. At the time of the attack, the Malian army was conducting an operation in the Koutiala area, near the border with Burkina Faso.

Since 2012, Mali has been rocked by a militant insurgency and the so-called IS group. The violence began in the north, then later spread to the centre and to neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger. Inter-communal and criminal violence is also common. The country has been run by a military junta since August 2020, when colonels angered at failures to roll back the jihadists toppled the country's elected leader, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita.

AFP



France's President Emmanuel Macron casts his vote in French parliamentary elections at a polling station in Le Touquet, northern France on Sunday (AFP)

Macron seeks majority in parliament vote as left mounts challenge

Paris, France - France voted in the first round of parliamentary elections on Sunday with President Emmanuel Macron hoping to win a majority backing his reform plans while a resurgent and newly unified left seeks to thwart his ambitions.

Elections for the 577 seats in the lower house National Assembly are a two-round process, with the shape of the new parliament becoming clear only after the second round on June 19.

The ballots provide a crucial coda to April's presidential election, when Macron won a second term and pledged a transformative new era after a first mandate dominated by protests, the coronavirus pandemic and Russia's war against Ukraine.

After a dismal performance in April, the French left has united in a coalition for what its leader Jean-Luc Melenchon dubs 'the third round' of the presidential elections.

Opinion polls show the president's centrist alliance, Ensemble (Together), and Melenchon's NUPES coalition of hard left, Socialists, Communists and Greens neck-and-neck in the popular vote - although the actual breakdown of parliamentary seats will depend on turnout in the second round.

'Gardening instead'

The abstention rate is predicted to be well over 50 per cent in the first round, in what would be a new record for elections already

marked by feeble participation in recent years.

At midday (1000 GMT) turnout was 18.43 per cent, according to an interior ministry estimate, down 0.8 points from the last election in 2017.

"I voted tactically in the presidential election, and that didn't change a thing," unemployed 59-year-old Alain Mendez told AFP at an outdoor cafe in Toulouse, southwestern France. "So today I'd rather do my gardening instead, and cook for my grandchildren." If the president's alliance retains an overall majority, Macron will be able to carry on governing as before.

Falling short could prompt messy bill-by-bill deals with right-wing parties in parliament, or an unwanted cabinet reshuffle. A win by the left-wing alliance - seen as unlikely by analysts - would spell political disaster for the president by raising the spectre of a clunky 'cohabitation' - where the prime minister and president hail from different factions. Such a set-up has paralysed French politics in the past, most recently from 1997 to 2002 when right-wing president Jacques Chirac ruled in tandem with Socialist Lionel Jospin as premier.

Melenchon, a former Marxist, has already made clear his ambition to become prime minister and stymie Macron's plan to raise the French retirement age, a key part of his reform plans.

AFP

Pope says hopes to reschedule Africa trip soon

Vatican City, Holy See - Pope Francis said on Sunday he hoped to visit the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan as soon as possible, after cancelling an upcoming visit due to a knee problem.

"Dear friends, with great regret, due to problems with my leg, I have had to postpone my visit to your countries," the 85-year-old said after delivering his weekly Angelus prayer in St Peter's Square.

"I truly feel great sorrow for having had to postpone this trip, which means so much to me. I apologise for this.

"Let us pray together that, with the help of God and medical



Pope Francis waves to faithful during the Angelus prayer from the Apostolic Palace overlooking St. Peter's Square at the Vatican, on Sunday (AFP)

attention, I will be able to be with you as soon as possible. Let us be hopeful!"

The Vatican on Friday an-

nounced that the trip planned for July 2 to 7 would be rescheduled, although no new date was set. "At the request of his doc-

tors, and in order not to jeopardise the results of the therapy that he is undergoing for his knee, the Holy Father has been forced to postpone," spokesman Matteo Bruni said.

Francis has been suffering from pain in his right knee in recent weeks and last month relied on a wheelchair for the first time at a public event.

He has cancelled numerous engagements - a scheduled trip to Lebanon in June was postponed - and has sometimes been seen struggling to walk.

The Vatican has not said officially what the problem is, although sources have told AFP he has chronic arthritis.

The pope himself has also spoken of an injured ligament in his knee.

Also on Sunday, the pope urged the world not to forget about the war in Ukraine, triggered by Russia's invasion in late February.

"The thought of the people of Ukraine, afflicted by war, remains vivid in my heart," he said.

"Let the passage of time not temper our grief and concern for that suffering population.

"Please, let us not grow accustomed to this tragic situation! Let us always keep it in our hearts. Let us pray and strive for peace."

AFP

Protesters demand action on US gun violence

Washington, US - Thousands of people took to the streets in the United States on Saturday to push for action on the devastating gun violence plaguing the country, where Republican politicians have repeatedly blocked efforts to enact stricter firearms laws.

Protesters of all ages streamed onto the National Mall in Washington, where activists placed more than 45,000 white vases holding flowers - one for each person killed by a firearm in the United States in 2020.

"Protect People Not Guns," said one sign held by a protester near the Washington Monument. "Fear Has No Place In Schools," read another.

Two horrific shootings last month - one at a Texas elementary school that killed 19 children and two teachers, and another at a New York supermarket that left 10 Black people dead - helped spur the rallies, organised by March For Our Lives.

The student-led organisation, founded by survivors of a shooting at a high school in Parkland, Florida, held a rally that drew hundreds of thousands of people to the nation's capital in March 2018. Four years later, the demonstration was marked by



Gun control advocates join the 'March for Our Lives' as they protest during a rally on the National Mall in Washington, DC, on Saturday (AFP)

frustration at the lack of progress.

"Enough is enough" rang out repeatedly from the podium, with speakers including Parkland survivor X Gonzalez and Martin Luther King Jr's granddaughter Yolanda King. "We are here to demand justice," said Garnell Whitfield, whose 86-year-old mother was killed in the racially motivated supermarket shooting in Buffalo, New York on May 14.

"We are here to stand with those who are bold enough to demand sensible gun legislation."

Widespread outrage, little change

The problem of gun violence in the United States - which has killed more than 19,300 people so far this year, according to the Gun Violence Archive - goes far beyond high-profile mass killings, with more than half of those deaths due to suicide.

Outside of Washington, hundreds of other demonstrations were planned around the country on Saturday, including in Parkland, where protesters carried signs with messages such as 'Am I Next?'

Thousands also turned out in New York City. In Brooklyn, white crosses were erected for the children killed in Uvalde and portraits of those killed in Buffalo fastened to shopping carts.

Ease of access to firearms, and mental health problems that can lead to them being used in attacks, have both been in the spotlight in the wake of the May 24 shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas.

The massacre was carried out by a gunman who bought two assault rifles shortly after turning 18. Gun control advocates are calling for tighter restrictions or an outright ban on such rifles. But opponents have sought to cast mass shootings as primarily a mental health issue, not a weapons problem.

Gerald Mendes, a physical education teacher in Texas who joined the rally in New York said he supports the US constitutional right to bear arms, but that 'as far as AR-15s and weapons of war, we regular citizens don't need those.' The majority of Americans support tighter gun laws, but opposition from many Republican lawmakers has long been a hurdle to major changes.

"The will of the American people is being subverted by a

minority," said Cynthia Martins, a 63-year-old resident of the US capital, referring to the Republican Party.

"There's a reason that we're still in this situation," she said.

Some lawmakers are trying to pass gun regulations.

The Democrat-controlled House of Representatives passed a broad package of proposals this week that included raising the purchasing age for most semi-automatic rifles from 18 to 21 - but the party does not have the requisite 60 votes to advance it in the Senate.

A cross-party group of senators has also been working on a narrow collection of controls that could develop into the first serious attempt at gun regulation reform in decades.

But it does not include an assault weapons ban or universal background checks, meaning it will fall short of the expectations of President Joe Biden.

Faith Barrett, a teacher who traveled to the rally with her daughter, also a teacher, voiced the frustration shared by many on the Mall. "We're still back in the same place," the 47-year-old said, voicing only 'tentative' hope change would come.

AFP

China vows ‘fight to the end’ to stop Taiwan independence

Singapore - China will ‘fight to the very end’ to stop Taiwanese independence, the country’s defence minister vowed on Sunday, stoking already soaring tensions with the United States over the island.

The superpowers are locked in a growing war of words over the self-ruled, democratic island, which Beijing views as part of its territory awaiting reunification.

Frequent Chinese aircraft incursions near Taiwan have raised the diplomatic temperature, and on Saturday US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin accused Beijing of ‘destabilising’ military activity, in a speech to the Shangri-La Dialogue security summit.

Defence Minister Wei Fenghe hit back in a fiery address at the same event, saying Beijing had ‘no choice’ but to fight if attempts are made to separate Taiwan from China.

“We will fight at all cost, and we will fight to the very end,” he told the summit, which brings together defence ministers from Asia and around the world.

“No one should ever underestimate the resolve and ability of the Chinese armed forces to safeguard its territorial integrity.”

“Those who pursue Tai-



Australia's Defence Minister Richard Marles (left) meeting with China's Defence Minister Wei Fenghe on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue summit in Singapore on Sunday (AFP)

wanese independence in an attempt to split China will definitely come to no good end,” he added. Wei urged Washington to ‘stop smearing and containing China... stop interfering in China’s internal affairs and stop harming China’s interests’.

But he also struck a more conciliatory tone at points, calling for a ‘stable’ China-US relationship, which he said was ‘vital for global peace’. During his address, Austin stressed the importance of ‘fully open lines of communi-

cation with China’s defence leaders’ in avoiding miscalculations.

The pair held their first face-to-face talks on the sidelines of the summit in Singapore on Friday, during which they also clashed over Taiwan.

Tensions over Taiwan have escalated in particular due to increasing Chinese military aircraft incursions into the island’s air defence identification zone (ADIZ).

President Joe Biden, during a visit to Japan last month, appeared to break decades of US

policy when, in response to a question, he said Washington would defend Taiwan militarily if it was attacked by China.

The White House has since insisted its policy of ‘strategic ambiguity’ over whether or not it would intervene had not changed. Despite the heightened tensions, analysts said the fact Austin and Wei were willing to meet in person offered a small sign of hope.

“Talking is better than not talking,” Ian Chong, associate

professor of political science at the National University of Singapore, who is attending the summit, told AFP.

“But I think at this point, we won’t be seeing any breakthroughs. Maybe it’ll lead to something in future.”

The dispute is just the latest between Washington and Beijing, who have clashed over everything from the South China Sea to human rights and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

China’s expansive claims to the sea, through which trillions of dollars in shipping trade passes annually, have stoked tensions with rival claimants Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam.

China, whose historical claims were rejected in a landmark 2016 Hague ruling, has been accused of flying its planes and sailing its boats close to the coastlines of rival claimants, and of intercepting patrol planes in international airspace in a dangerous fashion.

While the superpowers traded blows, there were more positive signs for Australia and China’s strained ties as the countries’ defence ministers met for the first time in three years.

AFP

Thousands of sheep drown as Sudan vessel sinks

Khartoum, Sudan - An over-laden ship crammed with thousands of sheep sank on Sunday in Sudan’s Red Sea port of Suakin drowning the animals on board but with all crew surviving, port officials said.

The livestock vessel was exporting the animals from Sudan to Saudi Arabia when it sank after several thousand more animals were loaded on board than it was meant to carry.

“The ship, Badr 1, sank during the early hours of Sunday morning,” a senior Sudanese port official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. “It was carrying 15,800 sheep, which was beyond its load limits.”

The official said the ship was supposed to carry only 9,000 sheep.

Another official, who said that all crew were rescued, raised concerns over the economic and environmental impact of the accident.

“The sunken ship will affect the port’s operation,” the official said.

“It will also likely have an environmental impact due to the death of the large number of animals carried by the ship.”

Last month, a massive fire broke out in the cargo area of Suakin port, lasting hours and causing heavy damages. It was not clear what caused the blaze.

An investigation has been launched to determine the cause of the fire, but has yet to release its findings.

The historic port town of Suakin is no longer Sudan’s main foreign trade hub, a role which has been taken by Port Sudan, some 60km away along the Red Sea coast.

There have been moves to redevelop the port, but a 2017 deal with Turkey to restore historic buildings and expand the docks was suspended after the ouster of longtime president Omar al-Bashir.

Sudan remains gripped by a chronic economic crisis, which has deepened following last year’s military coup led by army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan.

The military takeover triggered punitive measures, including aid cuts by Western governments, who demanded the restoration of the transitional administration installed after Bashir was toppled.

AFP

Haiti gang frees 38 hostages kidnapped

Port-au-Prince, Haiti - Nearly 40 people taken hostage in a mass kidnapping in Haiti’s capital Port-au-Prince were freed on Saturday, one day after they were abducted by a gang, a transporters’ union announced.

“The passengers who had been kidnapped were released... on 11 June,” the Haitian Owners and Drivers Association (APCH) said on Twitter, adding that the two minibuses they had been travelling in were also recovered. The Haitian association, however, did not say whether a ransom was demanded and paid to the kidnappers.

The 36 passengers and two drivers were taken hostage on Friday morning by gang members from Village de Dieu, one of the capital’s slums.

The mass kidnapping came as Haiti finds itself in the grip of

armed gangs, whom police have failed to confront. Since June 1, 2021, Haitian authorities have lost control of the only road connecting Port-au-Prince to the southern half of the country, with a section of some 2km under the sway of armed gangs.

Last weekend, three young Turkish women were released after a month in captivity. They had been kidnapped by the criminal gang that controls the entire region east of Port-au-Prince, up to the border with the Dominican Republic.

This gang, which hijacked the bus in which they were traveling from Santo Domingo, still holds five other Turkish nationals.

In the month of May alone, at least 200 kidnappings were recorded by the UN, overwhelmingly in Port-au-Prince.

AFP

UN agency urges Iran to resume stalled nuclear talks ‘now’

Washington, US - The International Atomic Energy Agency on Sunday urged Iran to resume talks ‘now’ to avoid a crisis that could make it ‘extremely more difficult’ to salvage the 2015 nuclear accord.

Iran this week disconnected some cameras allowing international inspectors to monitor its nuclear activities in response to a Western resolution passed June 8 in which the UN agency denounced Tehran’s lack of co-operation.

Twenty-seven surveillance cameras ‘have been removed’, IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi said in an interview broadcast on Sunday by CNN, calling it a ‘very serious move’.

“Recent history tells us that it is never a good thing to start saying to international inspectors, go home... things get much more problematic,” he added.

The 2015 deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, gave Iran relief from crippling economic sanctions in exchange for curbs on its nuclear activities.

But in 2018, then-US president Donald Trump unilaterally pulled out of the pact and reimposed sanctions, prompting Iran to begin rolling back on its own commitments.



Rafael Grossi informs journalists about the current situation in Iran during his special press conference in Vienna, Austria (AFP)

plunging economic sanctions in exchange for curbs on its nuclear activities.

But in 2018, then-US president Donald Trump unilaterally pulled out of the pact and reimposed sanctions, prompting Iran to begin rolling back on its own commitments.

Talks to revive the deal have stalled since March.

In the CNN interview, Grossi said he was telling his Iranian counterparts, “We have to sit down now, we have to redress the situation, we have to continue working together.”

“The only way for Iran to get

Iran this week disconnected some cameras allowing international inspectors to monitor its nuclear activities in response to a Western resolution passed on June 8

the confidence, the trust they so badly need in order to move their economy forward... is to allow the inspectors of the IAEA to be present.”

Without the surveillance cameras, Grossi said, his agency will soon be unable to declare whether the Iranian nuclear program is ‘peaceful’ - as Tehran has repeatedly insisted - or whether Iran is developing an atomic bomb.

Even if the Iranians reconnect the cameras in a few months, Grossi said, whatever work they do in the meantime will remain secret, possibly rendering useless any agreement.

Therefore, he said, the recent Iranian action makes ‘the way back to an agreement extremely more difficult’.

While Trump pulled the United States out of what he said was a badly flawed accord, his successor Joe Biden has said he is ready to again embrace the deal so long as Iran also respects its own commitments.

But negotiators have met with repeated frustration, and the possibility of failure appears closer than ever.

In a call Saturday with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on diplomats to rescue the agreement, according to a Sunday statement.

AFP

Turkey bets on modern cruise hub to boost tourism

Istanbul, Turkey - A state-of-the-art port in Istanbul with an underground terminal, a celebrity chef’s restaurant and a shopping centre, welcomes yet another 5,000-passenger cruise ship, bringing more cash to Turkey’s struggling tourism industry.

Hit hard by COVID, Turkey’s tourism sector could get a shot in the arm from the revenue generated at Galataport, which opened in 2021 - a year later than planned due to the pandemic.

The port could also provide a boost to an economy that has been weighed down by double-digit inflation and a currency in free fall, though the project has drawn criticism over the destruction of historical monuments and the potential environmental impact.

Figen Ayan, chief port officer at Galataport, said ‘ships began to arrive one after the other’ after the facility opened in October.

“Galataport has become the face of tourism,” she told AFP.

The 20-story Costa Venezia

vessel from Italy was taking passengers from an 11-day voyage to the Aegean Sea when it docked in Galataport, its gangway connecting directly to the futuristic underground customs terminal.

The port is home to a shopping centre, a hotel, cultural venues and a restaurant owned by Turkish butcher Nusret Gokce, better known as Salt Bae, the social media star who sprinkles salt on steaks in front of celebrity customers.

“Galataport Istanbul is much more than a cruise port,” Ayan said.

High-spending passengers

Around 30 cruise ships have so far anchored at Galataport and 200 more are expected by the end of the year, which amounts to 450,000 passengers.

The pandemic caused havoc in the global cruise ship industry as vessels were hit by outbreaks and vessels were banned in several countries.



Galataport, located in Istanbul’s neighbourhood of Karakoy, is set to energise cruise tourism from the Mediterranean Sea to the Black Sea (AFP)

“Now we can say that we have left the pandemic behind and that the cruise sector, which is an important segment of

tourism, has revived and is on the move,” Ayan said.

The target is 1.5mn cruise passengers and 25mn visitors annu-

ally. “If a regular tourist spends US\$62 daily, a cruise passenger spends US\$400. He spends up to eight times more in one day,”

she said.

Environmental cost

The project also opened up a 1.2km coastline that had been closed to public use for 200 years.

But critics, including some urban planners and architects, say the gentrification of the area destroyed old neighbourhoods, with the shopping centre replacing a historical post office building, and also posed a risk to the environment.

Cruises threaten marine life, discharging large quantities of sewage and other waste, said Muharrem Balci, associate professor of biology at Istanbul University.

“The environmental cost of cruises is seven times higher than the financial return they provide,” Balci told AFP.

“The consumption level of each traveller is higher than in the host cities, therefore, cruise tourism has the potential to create stress (for the environment)

for the regions they visit.”

Large ships were banned from Venice last year after years of warnings that the giant floating hotels risked causing irreparable damage to the lagoon city.

Burak Caliskan, country manager for MSC Cruises, said no such danger awaited Istanbul.

“We don’t think Istanbul will face a similar situation. We don’t have a city structure like Venice,” he told AFP.

Caliskan also said newly built ships addressed environmental concerns.

“To give a few examples, the exhaust gases from the ships are filtered. The paints used on the ships have been completely changed. Paints that will not harm the sea are used,” he said.

“We even have efforts to reduce the sound of the ships’ engine so that while our ships are navigating in the open seas, they do not cause any disturbance to the living things, especially the whales.”

AFP

Palestinian president hosts US delegation in Ramallah

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories - Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas hosted on Saturday a US delegation led by Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf, ahead of an expected visit of President Joe Biden.

Abbas reiterated his requests to remove the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) from the US list of terrorist entities during the meeting, his office said. The Palestinian president also requested that the PLO's office in Washington and the American consulate for east

Jerusalem be reopened, after both were closed under the Trump administration, the Palestinian presidency said in a statement.

Leaf, who began a three-day trip to the Palestinian territories and Israel on Saturday, met Abbas 'to discuss the US-Palestinian relationship, US assistance to Palestinians, deepening ties + how Palestinians and Israelis alike deserve equal measures of freedom, security & prosperity', the State Department said.

Biden has pledged to reopen



President Mahmud Abbas (right) meeting with Special Assistant to the US President Barbara Leaf at the presidency headquarters in the city of Ramallah in the occupied West Bank on Saturday (AFP)

The unit 'operates under the auspices of the US Embassy in Jerusalem, and reports on substantive matters directly to the' State Department, an OPA spokesperson said, noting the new structuring was 'to strengthen our diplomatic reporting and public diplomacy engagement'.

The move comes ahead of a possible visit of Biden to the region. The US president saying he was considering a trip to Saudi Arabia, Israel and the Palestinian territories in July.

AFP



Nigeria's ruling party presidential flagbearer, Bola Tinubu (left) and Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari (centre) at the special convention at the Eagle Square in Abuja, Nigeria on June 8 (AFP)

Nigerian president vows 2023 vote will be free, transparent

Abuja, Nigeria - Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari on Sunday vowed that next year's presidential election will be 'free', 'safe' and 'transparent' as he marked the anniversary of the country's return to democracy.

"I know many of us are concerned with the rise in insecurity due to terrorist activities in parts of the country. As a government, we are working hard to contain and address these challenges and ensure that the 2023 general elections are safe," Buhari said in a televised address.

"I am also promising you a free, fair and transparent electoral process," he said.

"Fellow Nigerians, your right to choose your government will be preserved and protected."

With the presidential cam-

paign officially launched, and the main parties having nominated their candidate, the head of state issued an appeal for unity.

"We must sustain this mature attitude to campaigning and ultimately, voting. We must never see it as a 'do or die' affair. We must all remember democracy is about the will of the majority. There must be winners and losers," Buhari said marking Democracy Day.

After years of military dictatorships, Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999 even though insecurity, extreme poverty and endemic corruption persist.

The country has for more than a decade endured a militant insurgency in the northeast, criminal gangs in the northwest and centre as well as separatist un-

rest in the southeast.

Africa's largest economy, weakened by the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, is now feeling the pinch from the Ukraine war, which has sent fuel and food prices soaring across the continent.

Former Lagos governor Bola Tinubu and former vice president Atiku Abubakar were nominated as candidates of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and the main opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) respectively.

Since returning to civilian rule, Nigeria has held six national elections that have often been marred by fraud, technical difficulties, violence and legal challenges.

AFP

Stalled Finnish, Swedish NATO bids may drag on: NATO chief Stoltenberg

Stoltenberg said NATO was working hard to resolve issues raised by Turkey

Naantali, Finland - Turkey's blockage of Sweden's and Finland's NATO membership bids may not be resolved in time for the alliance's summit later this month, NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said on Sunday.

He said NATO was 'working hard' to resolve 'legitimate' issues raised by Turkey.

Stoltenberg had previously insisted that the two nations would be welcomed 'with open arms', but Turkey has thrown a spanner in the works and blocked their bids.

Ankara accuses them of providing a safe haven for the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), listed as a 'terrorist' group by Turkey and its Western allies.

"I would like to see this solved as soon as possible," Stoltenberg said during a joint press conference in Finland with Finnish President Sauli Niinisto on Sunday.

However, 'the summit in Madrid was never a deadline', he said.

Earlier in June during a visit to Washington, Stoltenberg said his 'intention' was to have the issue sorted out before the meeting due to begin on June 28.

Stoltenberg said Ankara had



Finnish President Sauli Niinisto (right) and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg during the Kultaranta Talks in Naantali, Finland, on Sunday (AFP)

I would like to see this solved as soon as possible. We have to understand and remember that no other NATO ally has suffered more terrorist attacks than Turkey

JENS STOLTENBERG

raised 'legitimate concerns'.

"This is about terrorism. It's about weapons exports," he said.

"We have to understand and remember that no other NATO ally has suffered more terrorist attacks than Turkey. And also that Turkey is an important ally

unsuccessfully sought to join the alliance. Any NATO membership deal must be unanimously approved by all 30 members of the alliance.

The two Nordic countries have repeatedly expressed surprise at Turkey's objections, saying Ankara had conveyed support for their membership bids until they submitted them.

"We have been surprised by the position of Turkey", Niinisto reiterated on Sunday, stressing that Helsinki was taking the concerns 'seriously'.

AFP

Dozens still missing 2 months after S Africa's worst floods

Durban, South Africa - Nearly 90 people are still missing two months after the worst floods in living memory swept through South Africa's third largest city of Durban and surrounding areas, killing hundreds, government said on Sunday.

The death toll from the raging floods and landslides has climbed to 461, with 87 people still unaccounted for, south-eastern KwaZulu-Natal provincial government premier Sihle Zikalala told journalists.

"The floods affected 85,280 people with 461 fatalities. A total of 87 people are still reported missing," Zikalala said in media briefing marking two months after the floods raged across the province.

The April torrential down-

pours, blamed on extreme weather triggered by climate change, caught by surprise the country traditionally untouched by storms which regularly hit its neighbour like Mozambique.

More than 300 mm of rain fell within a 24-hour period in some parts of the province - nearly a third of Durban's annual rainfall - smashing a nearly three decade record.

The deluge triggered the worst mudslides seen in the country, sweeping away people, buildings bridges, roads and buildings.

"By all account the KwaZulu-Natal floods have been described correctly as the most devastating floods in our history thus far," said Zikalala.

AFP

Biden reasserts US influence in Latin America

Los Angeles, US - President Joe Biden made a forceful pitch to reassert US influence in Latin America through a weeklong summit in Los Angeles but the modesty of his promises will test his efforts at a time when China is making rapid inroads.

Some two dozen leaders came together for the Summit of the Americas where Biden and the rest of the top US brass pledged to do more with them on migration, clean energy and health infrastructure - and charmed guests with glitzy receptions befitting Tinseltown.

Biden said that the Americas should be the 'most forward-looking, most democratic, most prosperous, most peaceful, secure region in the world'. "No matter what else is happening in the world, the Americas will always be a priority for the United States of America," Biden said.

But Biden also faced a boycott



US President Joe Biden said that the Americas should be the most forward looking and secure region in the world (AFP)

by Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and open criticism from several leaders including over the decades-old pressure campaign on Cuba and on whether he would follow through on promises.

The United States next year marks two centuries since it declared Latin America its exclusive

sphere under the Monroe Doctrine and cultural ties run deep.

But China - identified by Washington as its top global competitor - has quickly become the second largest commercial partner in Latin America and the biggest for South America, which has shipped commodities including soybeans and oil to the bil-

lion-plus market across the Pacific. The fast-growing communist power has lent some US\$150bn to Latin America since 2005, about half to Venezuela, offering no political conditions but putting some nations into what critics call a debt trap.

Bitter polarisation

Biden at the summit pitched a hemisphere-wide economic 'partnership' that will discuss common standards but not directly commit funding or new market access.

The political mood in the US has soured over free trade and - despite Biden extolling the democratic model - bitter polarisation makes few ambitious initiatives realistic in Congress. "It was a mistake to convene a summit with little to offer," said Christopher Sabatini, a senior fellow at Chatham House.

AFP

India's Sonia Gandhi tests COVID positive

New Delhi, India - Sonia Gandhi, president of India's main opposition Congress party, has been admitted to hospital with 'COVID-related issues', a party spokesman said on Sunday.

Gandhi was admitted to the Ganga Ram Hospital in the capital New Delhi, Congress general secretary Randeep Surjewala said in a tweet. "She is stable and will be kept at the hospital for observation," he said.

The 75-year-old had tested positive for COVID-19 on June 2.

Gandhi is the widow of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi who was assassinated in 1991. Her health has always been a matter of secrecy with her party never divulging too many details or entertaining questions, raising questions about transparency.

AFP

WOMAN MOUNTAINEER



Norwegian climber Kristin Harila sets her sights on a 14-peak record to turn the tide in favour of women mountaineers

Kristin Harila (left) at the summit of Mt Makalu

A Norwegian climber is on track to beat the time record for summiting the globe's 14 highest peaks, part of her quest to change how the mountaineering world views women athletes.

Kristin Harila has already climbed six mountains over 8,000m high, including Mt Everest, in the last two months.

The 36-year-old hopes to match or surpass Nepali adventurer Nirmal Purja and his groundbreaking 2019 record of six months and six days, an achievement that smashed the previous record and was profiled in a popular Netflix documentary.

"In history and until now, it has been the strong macho men going out climbing mountains," Harila told AFP this week. "When I talk to people that are not in this sport, they believe that men are more capable than women... If we are going to change, we need to get attention and show that women are just as capable."

Male climbers and guides far outnumber women in the top tier of the sport, with only a handful of women mountaineers getting attention and sponsorships for their expeditions.

Out of nearly a thousand climbers who visited Nepal's famed Himalayan peaks this year, only around a fifth were women, according to Nepali government data.

Harila's first notable climb was on Tanzania's Mount Kilimanjaro in 2015, but she made headlines last year for becoming the fastest woman to travel between the summits of Mt Everest and Mt Lhotse in Nepal.

She accomplished that feat in 12 hours,



Kristin Harila (left) at Mt Everest base camp



Kristin Harila arranges her equipment

If we are going to change, we need to get attention and show that women are just as capable

KRISTIN HARILA

but broke her own record this year, knocking four hours off her time. But neither record was enough to convince major sponsors to back her current endeavour.

"There are lots of girls and women who want to climb, they want to have the sponsorship from brands," she said. "It's easier for the brands to believe in what men are

presenting."

The former cross-country skier was able to find support from Bremont Watches and some other brands, but still had to sell her apartment to fund the project, she said.

Inspire women

Only around 40 people in history have summited all 14 of the world's 8,000m plus peaks.

None have come close to Nirmal Purja's 2019 expedition. He demolished the previous record for accomplishing the feat with supplemental oxygen, set by Poland's Jerzy Kukuczka in the 1980s at seven years, 11 months and 14 days.

Harila said the Nepali climber was an 'inspiration'. "But for me, it is not a competition against him, I don't care much about that," she added.

She climbed her first six peaks in just 29 days, accompanied by her Nepali guides Pasdawa and Dawa Ongju Sherpa, breaking an earlier record set by Purja.

"She is a very strong and determined climber. The first phase has been record-breaking," Lakpa Sherpa of 8K Expeditions, Harila's expedition organiser, told AFP.

The team is now preparing to leave for Pakistan to climb their next five mountains, including K2 and the 8,126m Nanga Parbat, while she raises more funds for the expedition.

Maya Sherpa, president of the Everest Summiters Association, said Harila's project was a welcome effort to bring more women into the male-dominated climbing world. "Climbers like her are very important to set an example," Sherpa said.

AFP

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DHOW RACE

Sailors participate in the annual long-distance dhow sailing race, off Dubai waters

Around Sir Bu Nair

MARATHON DHOW RACE SEEKS TO PRESERVE ANCIENT GULF HERITAGE

Under a blazing sun, far from the skyscrapers and SUVs of modern Dubai, hundreds of enthusiasts took to Gulf waters in traditional wooden vessels, keen to preserve an ancient heritage.

Around Sir Bu Nair, a teardrop-shaped island roughly 100km from both, Dubai and Abu Dhabi (two of seven emirates that make up the UAE), 118 teams raced dhows, the sailboats that have plied the Arabian peninsula's waters for centuries.

"I started about 10 years ago, when I was 23, with my father and my brothers," one of the sailors, Abdullah al Mheiri, told AFP under the setting sun.

He had just ventured out across choppy waters with 11 crew mates to take part in the Al Gaffal dhow race, a gruelling annual tournament that stretches from early morning to early afternoon.

On one dhow, the crew, clad in white robes, toiled to unfurl a white sail,

pulling at arm's length on ropes and then scrambling for balance as the giant fabric caught the wind.

For Mheiri, taking part is his way of paying tribute to his heritage - Al Gaffal refers to the return of fishermen to Dubai's coasts after being out at sea.

Duty to preserve environment

Like much of the Gulf prior to the discovery of oil, the settlements that now make up the United Arab Emirates, including Dubai, were formed largely around maritime activities, notably pearl-diving, using the once-ubiquitous dhows.

With the establishment of the federation in 1971 and the advent of oil driven development, however, the UAE's economic activity swiftly ballooned to become the Arab world's second largest, after Saudi Arabia.

Despite sitting on relatively low oil wealth compared to its neighbours, the

emirate of Dubai saw a spectacular rise, capitalising on its strategic location to transform itself into a finance, air travel, and tourism hub.

Away from the flitting of social media influencers and luxury high-rises, however, Mheiri prefers the quiet respite that he finds on the open sea.

The race's starting point, Sir Bu Nair, is ideal, he believes, as it is also home to a nature reserve. "We have lived with the sea for hundreds of years," he said. "Preserving the environment is a duty."

According to the UN's cultural agency UNESCO, the island is 'one of the most important hawksbill nesting sites within the entire Arabian Gulf and certainly by far the most important location in the UAE'.

Preserving heritage is vital for the organisers of Al Gaffal and they have sought to set an example with the competing sailboats, which are not fitted with engines.

"One of the most important mes-



One of the most important messages we send is the transmission of this heritage from one generation to the next

MOHAMMED AL FALAHI

sages we send is the transmission of this heritage from one generation to the next," tournament director Mohammed al Falahi told AFP.

"The fact is that it also doesn't pose a risk for nature," he added. "We haven't forgotten that Sir Bu Nair is a nature reserve that shelters many species of turtles in the Gulf." The teams of sailing enthusiasts set off at dawn on Saturday, at times battling the searing heat as much as the waters. Their sails hoisted, the vessels caught the wind, like white clouds floating across the expanse of blue, towards the Dubai shoreline.

AFP



The Hasheem team celebrate after crossing the finish line



Australia coach Graham Arnold speaks during a presser at the Ahmed bin Ali Stadium in Al Rayyan, Qatar, on Sunday (AFP)

Australia, New Zealand, Peru, Costa Rica fight for last two World Cup places

Doha, Qatar - The last two places at the World Cup finals will be decided this week, with Australia, New Zealand, Peru and Costa Rica digging into their stamina reserves for do-or-die battles.

Both international playoffs are single-leg showdowns in the Ahmad bin Ali Stadium in Doha, a 40,000 capacity venue that will host matches in the World Cup finals in the autumn.

Australia take on Peru on Monday. New Zealand face Costa Rica 24-hours later.

All four nations are used to the last-chance scrap for a World Cup place.

Four years ago Peru beat New Zealand 2-0 to clinch a slot at Russia 2018 where they beat Australia in the first round group - their first World Cup win in four decades.

Graham Arnold's Australia are looking for a fifth straight appearance at the finals, but they needed playoffs for two of the past four and in 2006 that meant a penalty shootout against Uruguay.

Peru are ranked 22 in the world, 20 places above Australia, who beat United Arab Emirates 2-1 in the Doha stadium last week to reach the

final playoff.

But Arnold plays up their "underdog" status and says he has driven a never-say-die psyche into the team.

"We like people saying that we have no chance and we cannot achieve anything," he said after the UAE win se-

Fight, scratch and do whatever you have to do to win the game. However we win it, who cares?

GRAHAM ARNOLD

cured with an 84th minute Ajdin Hrustic goal.

"You know sometimes you don't play well but you can still win by fighting and running, and chasing and being aggressive and that also can be a success.

"Fight, scratch and do whatever you have got to do to win the game. However we win it, who cares? Just win it," said Arnold, who will be without injured key striker Adam Taggart.

AFP



Italy's Federico Dimarco (L) fights for the ball with England's Jarrod Bowen during their UEFA Nations League match at Molineux Stadium in Wolverhampton, England, on Saturday (AFP)

England and Italy in Nations League draw as Germany held by Hungary

Paris, France - England are bottom of their UEFA Nations League group without a win after drawing 0-0 with Italy in a repeat of the Euro 2020 final on Saturday, while Germany settled for a point in a 1-1 stalemate in Hungary.

The meeting in Wolverhampton between Gareth Southgate's side and the European champions was played before just 3,000 people, largely school-children, as a punishment for the incidents that marred the Euro 2020 final between the same nations at Wembley last year.

UEFA rules say a match ordered to be played behind closed doors can still be attended by

I said beforehand that this was the hardest game you could have after England. But we are in a development process. We've to see that we learn the lessons from this game

HANSI FLICK

children accompanied by an adult, as happened last weekend when Hungary beat England in Budapest.

England followed that reverse by drawing 1-1 in Germany and another draw at Molineux leaves them bottom of League A, Group 3 with just two points from three outings before they host Hungary at the same venue on Tuesday in their final game of a long campaign.

Mason Mount hit the bar early on for England, while Aaron Ramsdale produced a fine save to deny Sandro Tonali for an Italy side featuring just two starters who also lined up in the European Championship final.

"We had two or three really good chances we need to score, but just lacked that sharpness in front of goal," said Southgate.

Roberto Mancini's Italy are rebuilding after failing to qualify for the World Cup and are top of the group after Hungary and Germany cancelled each other out in Budapest.

Zsolt Nagy gave Hungary an early lead, smashing in after Manuel Neuer had palmed out a Rolland Salai header.

However, Germany needed just three minutes to draw level as Borussia Moenchengladbach's Jonas Hofmann latched onto a long ball forward and rounded the goalkeeper before slotting in.

"I said beforehand that this was the hardest game you could have after England," Germany coach Hansi Flick told RTL after his side's third consecutive 1-1 draw.

"But we are in a development process. We have to see that we learn the lessons from this game."

The Netherlands are top of League A, Group 4 after coming from two goals down to draw 2-2 with Poland in Rotterdam, but they could have claimed a third win in as many games had Memphis Depay not squandered a late penalty.

AFP

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Semi-automated offside could make its World Cup debut at Qatar 2022

Doha, Qatar - A semi-automated offside system could be used at this year's World Cup with the International Football Association Board, the guardian of the laws of the game, set to discuss the introduction of the technology in Doha on Monday.

The optical tracking system was trialled at the FIFA Club World Cup in Abu Dhabi earlier this year and had also been tested at the Arab Cup in Qatar last December.

The IFAB will not itself decide whether the technology should be in place at the World Cup but if it offers approval then world football's governing body could go ahead with its introduction.

"The semi-automated offside system still needs to be evaluated before a final decision is taken," FIFA told AFP, adding that it was simply "an additional tool to help the VAR".

Pierluigi Collina, chairman of FIFA's referees committee, said earlier this year that the introduction of Video Assistant Referees - first used at the World Cup in 2018 - had been "very successful" but that making offside decisions semi-automated would mean greater accuracy and greater speed.

"It's important the video officials get an accurate decision, but we are aware we need to reduce the time, particularly with offside," Collina said in February during the trials at the Club



Making offside decisions semi-automated would mean greater accuracy and greater speed

World Cup.

The data-driven, limb-tracking technology uses both dedicated and broadcast cameras around the stadium to give the exact position of players on the pitch, offering referees precise information within seconds.

The aim is for the system to generate 29 data points per player -- tracking the various parts of the body to create a skeletal, three-dimensional model.

Once a final decision is made, the artificial-intelligence driven technology turns the images into a 3D animation that can be displayed on the big screen at grounds.

The term "semi-automated" is used because FIFA insist that match officials will still make the final call, with a dedicated VAR assistant in place to monitor off-sides.

"I know that someone called it 'robot offside'; it's not. The technology is simply a tool used by human beings," said Collina.

Monday's meeting will also discuss the topic of concussion substitutes, which the IFAB approved in late 2020 on a trial basis for any league wishing to take part until August of this year.

The English Premier League was one of the leagues to begin trialling the use of concussion substitutes in response to growing concerns about the damage caused by head injuries in football.

The IFAB was founded in 1886 by the football associations of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland as the body with sole responsibility for developing and preserving the laws of the sport.

AFP

THE FUND FACTOR!

Schwartzel wins first event of the LIV Golf as PGA Tour has reasons to be concerned about the attractive rebel series

St Albans, United Kingdom - Charl Schwartzel's victory at the first event of the rebel LIV Golf series brought the curtain down on one of the most dramatic weeks in the history of a sport now in deep turmoil.

The breakaway circuit, fronted by former world number one Greg Norman and bankrolled by Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund, is now a real and present threat to golf's established tours.

The stars at the opening tournament outside London, which finished on Saturday, included six-time major winner Phil Mickelson and two-time major champion Dustin Johnson.

But there were other big names in the 48-man field too, including major winners Schwartzel, Sergio Garcia, Martin Kaymer, Graeme McDowell and Louis Oosthuizen.

During the event at the Centurion Club in St Albans, the organisers trumpeted the signings of 2020 US Open champion Bryson DeChambeau and former Masters winner Patrick Reed.

Organisers have vowed to "supercharge" golf, offering 54-hole tournaments with no cuts, simultaneous "shotgun starts" and a team element.

Play got under way on Thursday but was quickly overshadowed by a brutal statement from the US PGA Tour, banning the rebel golfers, who had not been given permission to play in the LIV tournament.

Ten of the 17 listed had already resigned their membership.

PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan said the "same fate holds true" for any players who



South Africa's Charl Schwartzel celebrates with the trophy after winning the LIV Golf Invitational Series event at The Centurion Club in St Albans, north of London, on Saturday (AFP)

compete in future LIV events, with Reed and Bryson DeChambeau due to be in the field in Oregon later this month.

There was uncertainty in the run-up to the inaugural event about who would be in the field.

Norman himself had previously said the tournament did not need the biggest names to

be an instant success, arguing it could be a showcase for future stars.

But the Australian managed to attract enough big names to make the sport's power brokers sit up and take notice and he can now count nine major winners on his books.

A number of high-profile

players had previously pledged their allegiance to the PGA Tour, including Johnson and DeChambeau, before making U-turns.

Others are staying loyal - at least for now.

Four-time major winner Rory McIlroy, currently playing in the PGA Tour's Canadian Open, said Monahan had simply en-

forced membership regulations and had "done the right thing".

Court battle?

The dispute could be heading for the courtroom if any of the players banned by the PGA Tour pursue a legal challenge.

Norman's big pitch is for a "free and open market" in golf

and he has pledged to back his players to the hilt, even saying LIV Golf would pay any fines.

Ryder Cup star Ian Poulter plans to appeal against the PGA Tour ban, saying it makes "no sense" to limit players' choice.

The DP World Tour, previously known as the European Tour, has yet to react but the LIV

players have been reassured they can play in next week's US Open.

Another unknown is the issue of world ranking points, currently unavailable at LIV tournaments.

The points are crucial because they help players qualify for the four majors, which are the sport's marquee tournaments.

Aside from the bitter power struggle, two issues have pursued players at the event in St Albans - accusations of greed

LIV Golf series organisers have vowed to "supercharge" golf, offering 54-hole tournaments with no cuts, simultaneous "shotgun starts" and a team element

and questions over Saudi Arabia's human rights record.

The money involved is undeniably mind-blowing.

There was a record \$25 million prize pot at the Centurion Club and there is a total of \$255 million on offer at this year's eight tournaments.

Mickelson did not dispel rumours he was receiving a fee of \$200 million to compete, while Johnson is reportedly getting \$150 million.

Norman said last month he had secured an extra \$2 billion to turn the initial eight-event invitational series into a 14-event league by 2024.

Mickelson faced an uncomfortable grilling by reporters on the eve of the tournament over the Saudi funding but insisted he did not "condone human rights violations", adding that golf could be a force for good.

AFP



Nick Kyrgios

Stuttgart tournament 'regrets' racial abuse of Kyrgios

Stuttgart, Germany - The Stuttgart ATP event on Sunday issued an apology to world number 78 Nick Kyrgios after an ugly racial incident during his semi-final loss to Andy Murray.

Kyrgios was insulted mid-way through what turned into a 7-6 (7/5), 6-2 loss to three-time Grand Slam winner Murray on Saturday.

Kyrgios was penalised a point and then a game for unsportsmanlike conduct early in the second set, smashing a racquet before an angry exchange with a group in the crowd.

The 27-year-old Australian, who is of Greek origin, said he

had been the victim of racism.

"When is this going to stop? Dealing with racist slurs from the crowd?" Kyrgios wrote on Instagram. "I understand that my behaviour isn't the best all the time, but 'you little black sheep' 'shut up and play' - little comments like this are not acceptable.

"When I retaliate to the crowd I get penalised. This is messed up."

Tournament bosses expressed their regrets prior to Murray's final against Wimbledon finalist Matteo Berrettini.

"We have expressed our regret to Nick Kyrgios and his team at what has happened and have

assured him that we do not accept such behavior," a statement read. "The incident is currently being investigated by those responsible."

"The ATP tournament in Stuttgart stands for creating an integrative environment for all players, coaches, visitors and employees in which discrimination of any kind - has no place," a statement read.

"This attitude is lived by those responsible and therefore has top priority for the event, as does compliance with sporting values such as fairness, tolerance and team spirit."

AFP

Alexandrova surprises Sabalenka in 's-Hertogenbosch

's-Hertogenbosch, Netherlands - World number 30 Ekaterina Alexandrova sprung a surprise on the grass of 's-Hertogenbosch by beating top seed Aryna Sabalenka 7-5, 6-0 in Sunday's final. It is only the Russian's second career title following her win in Shenzhen in 2020.

Sabalenka, sixth in the world and a Wimbledon semi-finalist last year, led 5-4 in the first set before her game completely imploded. The Belarusian conceded nine games in a row, coughing up 31 unforced errors.

Meanwhile, Tim van Rijthoven made the most of a rare main tour berth as he claimed a first title by beating Daniil Medvedev 6-4, 6-1 in the men's final.

AFP



Ekaterina Alexandrova kisses the trophy after winning the Libéma Open in Rosmalen, Netherlands, on Sunday

Federer admits 'things moving slowly' in recovery

Lausanne, Switzerland - Roger Federer admitted Saturday that "things are moving slowly" in his attempt to recover from knee surgery. The 20-time Grand Slam title winner and former world number one has not played since a quarter-final defeat at Wimbledon almost a year ago.

He then underwent a third surgery on his knee while his world ranking has slumped to 50, his lowest in 22 years.

Federer told Swiss broadcaster SRF that he "plays from time to time" with his four children, but "things are moving slowly". He still intends to return to action at the Laver Cup in London at the end of September.

AFP

Badminton number one Axelsen wins Indonesia Masters title

Jakarta, Indonesia - Danish badminton ace Viktor Axelsen clinched the men's singles title at the Indonesia Masters on Sunday, beating Taiwan's Chou Tien-chen in straight sets.

The world number one beat Chou 21-10, 21-12 in a 41-minute match held at the Istora sporting arena in Jakarta.

"I love playing here in Istora and I always dreamt of winning a tournament at Istora. It's a legendary venue, so to have done that is something that is really special to me," 28-year-old Axelsen told reporters.

Axelsen's victory came after he downed home favourite Anthony Sinisuka Ginting in the



Viktor Axelsen exults after beating Chou Tien-chen in the final on Sunday

semi-finals.

In the women's singles, China's Chen Yufei overcame Thailand's Ratchanok Intanon to win her first title since her gold

medal at the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo. She defeated Ratchanok in a 74-minute three-set match 21-16, 18-21, 21-15.

AFP