



GORBACHEV FUNERAL TO BE HELD IN MOSCOW ON SATURDAY

Moscow - The funeral of the last Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev - who died at the age of 91 on Tuesday - will take place in Moscow on Saturday, Russian news agencies reported citing Gorbachev's daughter Irina and his foundation. The ceremony will be held in the Moscow Hall of Columns. Gorbachev will be buried in the prestigious Novodevichy cemetery, according to the Interfax news agency.

See also Page 08



Chai Wala, in Darsait, serves a variety of piping hot 'chais'

Economy hotels planned in several governorates



(Image for illustrative purpose)

9 deals inked as part of drive to attract investments amounting to RO3bn in the tourism sector, in line with economic directions of Oman Vision 2040 to empower SMEs

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) signed nine usufruct contracts on Wednesday to attract investments to stimulate the economy and implement small and medium-level tourism projects on government land. The contracts were signed H E Salem bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, and investors representing the companies concerned.

The contracts include the establishment of several projects - a rest house, a two-star and a three-star hotel in Dhofar, and a one-star and three-star hotel in Jabal Akhdar, Dakhliyah. North Sharqiyah will get a three-star hotel in Wadi Bani Khalid and a resort in Bidiyah, while Dhahirah will see the construction of a tourist camp in Ibri. Elsewhere, a luxury tourist camp will be set up in Jalan Bani Bu Hassan in South Sharqiyah. The contracts are part of MHT's drive to attract investments amounting to RO3bn in

the tourism sector, in line with the economic directions of Oman Vision 2040 to empower SMEs. The ministry is focusing on ensuring the economic and social impact of new projects and their contribution to serving local communities by providing job opportunities and enhancing local content (local added value). This is in addition to increasing the number of hotel rooms and facilities in line with the objectives of the comprehensive tourism development plan,' MHT stated.

MTCIT pushes for fair access to digital services for disabled

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has notified units of the state's administrative apparatus and government and private companies to provide easy access to services and information available on ICT platforms to persons with disabilities and the elderly, and to remove barriers that prevent this. The ministry is pushing to implement the National E-accessibility Policy, which aims to provide fair and equal life opportunities to persons with disabilities and the elderly through the use of information and communications technology. MTCIT has called on government and private companies to start transforming their digital services, whether on websites or mobile phone apps, and enhance these with digital access, including 'accessibility' as a required feature in all ICT purchases. The authorities supervising private sector institutions should oblige them to design and upgrade their existing sites and platforms in line with international standards for digital access,' it stated.



Oman has made steady progress in ICT development in the last decade. The sultanate will invest RO170mn over the next few years in its Digital Transformation Programme, which aims to enhance national competencies, ONA reported recently. The programme, being implemented from 2021 to 2025, is carried out by MTCIT, and will include investments in improving processes, re-engineering government services and improving digital infrastructure. The programme includes a roadmap for utilising modern techniques to develop public sector functioning, notably by creating digital platforms for services, as well as a legal and regulatory climate that empowers digital transformation.

European Union hopeful on Iran nuke deal in 'days'

Budapest, Hungary - The European Union's foreign policy chief said on Wednesday he was hopeful the Iran nuclear deal could be revived "in the coming days" after receiving "reasonable" responses to his proposed text from Iran and the United States. "I am hoping that in the coming days we are not going to lose this momentum and we can close the deal," Josep Borrell said after an informal meeting of EU foreign ministers in Prague. "It's clear that there is a common ground, that we have an agreement that takes into account, I think, everyone's concerns." The EU put forward on August 8 what it called a final text to restore the landmark 2015 agreement that was trashed by former US president Donald Trump. President Joe Biden took office with a goal of restoring the agreement, believing it was the best way to constrain Iran's nuclear programme and that Trump's withdrawal had done nothing but lead Tehran to accelerate its nuclear work. The new proposal would see Iran get sanctions relief and be able to sell its oil again in return of severe limits on its nuclear programme. Both Iran and the US have responded with a series of proposed changes. But Iran's arch-rival Israel has stepped up pressure on Western nations to block the deal. Iran wants stronger guarantees included in a text put forward by the EU aiming to salvage Tehran's landmark 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said on Wednesday. "We are thinking about how to



I am hoping that in the coming days we are not going to lose this momentum and we can close the deal

JOSEP BORRELL

reach a strong text on the issue of the guarantee, and to obtain stronger guarantees," he told a joint news conference in Moscow with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov. "My colleagues are carefully examining the text of the American side," Amir-Abdollahian said of Washington's response to Tehran's suggestions on the EU text that was submitted on August 8. "We want to reinforce in the text the idea that the International Atomic Energy Agency concentrates on its technical task and moves away from its political role," he said. The US had been adamant that Tehran cooperate with the IAEA to clear up suspicions about earlier work at three undeclared sites. AFP

Dementia rising exponentially in MENA

Our Correspondent Muscat

Dementia prevalence in the MENA region is increasing at an alarming rate, but progress to tackle the neurodegenerative condition is far too slow, according to Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI), the global federation for 105 Alzheimer's and dementia associations across the world. The MENA region currently has almost 3mn people living with dementia, with cases set to rise 367 per cent across the region to over 13.8mn by 2050 according to the latest estimates, the highest regional increase in the world. Dr Hamad al Sinawi, chairman of Oman Alzheimer's Society and consultant and psychiatrist in Department of Behavioural Medicine at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, said, "The statistics released by ADI and WHO are worrying, and we need to start acting now. Additionally, the issues faced by MENA countries regarding dementia differ greatly to other regions, which is why national dementia plans need to be localised and tailored to these specific issues." He added that the root-cause problems, "which we need to focus our efforts and energy on



Many people think forgetfulness is a normal part of ageing and only visit a doctor when the person develops behavioural symptoms such as agitation, poor sleep and leaving the house and failing to return back

DR HAMAD AL SINAWI

are lack of proper health education and healthcare services. We are still dealing with the stigma of memory loss". Speaking on the situation in Oman, Dr Sinawi bemoaned the lack of exact figures. "The number of people attending hospitals for an assessment is still low. Many people think forgetfulness is a normal part of ageing and only come when the person develops behavioural symptoms such as agitation, poor sleep and leaving the house and failing to

return back." Some of the factors increasing risk of developing Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia are diabetes, obesity, hypertension and an unhealthy life style, including junk food. "These factors are common in the Omani population, which is why we need to have healthy eating habits and take good care of diabetes and hypertension." Furthermore, insufficient diagnostic and screening tools result in many individuals with dementia remaining undiagnosed without access to treatment and support.

"In most parts of the world, healthcare and social care are joining together, but specifically in the Middle East very few countries manage to merge these services. A national dementia plan will have to consider accessibility as a major issue. Most people will appreciate an update of healthcare services, care homes, and recruitment first," Dr Sinawi added. "Before we talk about dementia-friendly communities, we must first focus on education, awareness building and early diagnosis. I believe a more collaborative plan between countries is the way to go for the MENA region," Dr Sinawi said in conclusion.



TAXI DRIVERS PARK AS THEY LIKE

Taxi drivers stop at bus bays in Ruwi despite having dedicated parking space built by the municipality, causing inconvenience to bus drivers and commuters. Saif al Sabahi, a Mwasalat bus driver, said, "This is always the case - taxi drivers stop their taxis to pick up or drop passengers. What's worse, some taxi drivers park their taxi in the bus bay and leave." On this particular occasion, Sabahi was compelled to stop his bus on the road, causing a traffic jam near Ruwi roundabout (Photo by Syed Fasiuddin)



Drug smuggling cases rise in Aug; 18 arrested with 258kg of narcotics

Our Correspondent Muscat

Royal Oman Police (ROP) arrested 18 foreign nationals for smuggling over 258kg of drugs into Oman in August itself. According to data shared by ROP, the General Administration of Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Control arrested 18 foreigners for drug smuggling from several parts of Oman. On August 30, Oman Customs arrested an expat in possession of marijuana and seized large quantities of psychotropic tablets from him at Muscat International Airport. On the same day, ROP arrested two Asians on charges of smuggling a large quantity of drugs. On August 24, the General Administration of Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Control arrested an Asian for smuggling narcotic drugs in association with international gangs. More than 43kg of crystal meth, 25kg of hashish and a quantity of opium and psychotropic substances were seized from the accused. On August 20, North Batinah Governorate Police Command arrested an Asian on charges of smuggling 20kg of crystal meth.

Citizens are requested to report drug traffickers and dealers on the hotline 1444 or the nearest police station

On August 18, Dhofar Governorate Police Command, in cooperation with the Special Task Force of Salalah, arrested four Arabs and Asians in possession of narcotics. On August 17, an Asian resident was arrested on charges of possessing 18kg of crystal meth and 5kg of hashish. Earlier on August 15, another Asian was found in possession of more than 18kg of crystal meth, while on August 10, two infiltrators were arrested while trying to unload over 73 kg of cannabis on a beach in Muscat governorate. On August 4, ROP arrested two African nationals with 13kg of hashish. On August 3, Coast Guard arrested three Asians with a large quantity of drugs. ROP urged citizens to report drug traffickers and dealers on the hotline 1444 or the nearest police station.

Charity distributes 1,400 school bags among needy in Quriyat

Our Correspondent Muscat

To support students of social security and low-income families, Quriyat Charity Team has distributed 1,400 school bags in the wilayat. Operating under the umbrella of the Committee for Social Development in the Ministry of Social Development in Quriyat, the group comprises 11 board members and more than 112 volunteers. Started in 2011, Quriyat Charity Team has several charitable initiatives. Speaking to Muscat Daily, Ahmed Rashid al Balushi, chairman of the Finance Committee of the group, said, "We launched the campaign to distribute school bags on August 15. The group, in cooperation with the Zakat Committee in Quriyat, completed distribution of 1,400



Quriyat Charity Team members put stationery in school bags before distribution (Supplied Photo)

school bags to students of needy families registered with it and the committee on Tuesday. The bags were packed with necessary school supplies."

The group also distributed food baskets and iftar meals among needy families last Ramadan. "Additionally, we distribute clothes and gifts on Eid al Fitr

and Eid al Adha," Balushi added, thanking all the individuals and companies that have supported the group in conducting its activities.

"The group aims to achieve social solidarity among community members to help poor families. We strive to meet the urgent and permanent needs of families with limited income in Quriyat through numerous programmes that raise their standard of living." The group is currently running several charity programmes in cooperation with government organisations. "We have received support from many people and want to cooperate with other volunteers and communities in Quriyat to help needy families. We will continue to create a strong financial position for the group and arrange funds and food packages from a variety of sources to implement our initiatives," Balushi added. The group can be reached on Instagram and Twitter at @Quriyatcharity

17 TONNES OF MESQUITE TREES REMOVED IN PDO'S NIMR AREA

PDO Nimr team has removed more than 17 tonnes of mesquite trees from the Nimr area in an ongoing campaign to eradicate the harmful species, which is known to cause desertification. PDO's campaign is part of a wider national campaign that the government has undertaken in different parts of the country to eradicate the invasive species. PDO has plans to continue the campaign for a better environment (Supplied Photo)



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Falling Walls Lab extends registration till Sept 5



Muscat - The Falling Walls Lab Oman 2022 competition, organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation in collaboration with Falling Walls Foundation in Germany, has extended the registration deadline till September 5. In the competition, being organised in the sultanate for the seventh consecutive year, participants present an idea of a research project, entrepreneurial or social initiative in English that is relevant to the world of today in just three minutes. The presentation should convince a high-level competition jury, comprising experts from academic fields, research institutions and businesspersons, of the potential of the project to create a positive impact on science and society. This year, the competition will

take place on September 19. The winner from Oman will participate in the Lab Finale in Berlin, Germany, on November 8. Students, entrepreneurs, early-career researchers and academics of all disciplines can apply through https://falling-walls.com/lab/apply/oman-2/ Ideas have to be presented in the following format - Presentation title: Breaking the wall of... (40-character limit); project field as well as subfield within project field (40-character limit); state the problem addressed through the project (200-character limit); solution to the problem (200-character limit); project description in one-two sentences (200-character limit); and link to project website/video (if applicable). All character limits are including spaces.

REGIONAL WEATHER			PRAYER TIMINGS	
	Max	Min	Fajr	4.31am
Abu Dhabi	40	26	Sunrise	5.49am
Doha	39	28	Duhr	12.12pm
Kuwait City	44	31	Asr	3.40pm
Manama	40	30	Maghrib	6.30pm
Riyadh	41	26	Isha	7.43pm

RO7mn pact inked to benefit from silt deposited in dams

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has embarked on a one-of-its kind project in which it will use the silt deposited in dams in the ceramic industry and for agriculture.

With an aim to benefit from the silt accumulated in dams, the ministry and Arkan Foundation for Research, Development and Innovation signed an agreement on Wednesday. The first phase of the RO7mn project will involve collecting deposits from five dams. The project will later be expanded to more dams.

Silting of dam reservoirs is a worldwide problem. Though a natural phenomenon, it endangers dam safety. The sediments deposited amplify the overall load and often shut off dams' bottom outlets. Silting also reduces the usable capacity of the reservoir and degrades the quality of the water stored.

With this new project, the ministry seeks to add value to the silt extracted from dams and use it in different industries, chiefly to revitalise the ceramics industry.



Abdullah bin Mohammed al Shehhi, CEO of Arkan, said, "The first phase of the project - called Ardci (Your Land) - is aimed at exploiting the silt from Wadi al Jazi dam in Sohar, Wadi Ahin dam in Saham, Wadi al Hawasna dam in Khabourah, Wadi Mistal dam in Nakhal, and Wadi Dayqah dam in Quriyat."

He added that the project will

provide value addition to the tune of RO3mn from innovative projects in agriculture and industry, and from raw materials for the construction sector targeting local and international markets.

According to Shehhi, the project will provide 29 direct job opportunities for Omanis, and more than 70 indirect jobs in the first years of the initiative, while sup-

porting small and medium enterprises greatly.

"Our company conducted a study to implement targeted value-added projects in partnership with investment funds, and local and international companies. Strategic objectives of the initiative, such as cleaning accumulated mud from dam lakes, will also raise storage capacity."



Workshop focuses on integrating the disabled into labour market

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Executive Office of the Council of Labour Ministers and Council of Social Affairs Ministers in Gulf Cooperation Council launched a workshop titled 'Challenges and Job Opportunities' in Salalah on Wednesday.

The two-day workshop aims to empower persons with disabilities in the labour market in GCC countries.

The opening of the workshop was patronised by H H Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, in the presence of representatives of the Executive Office of the Council of Labour Ministers and Council of Social Affairs Ministers of the GCC.

The working sessions of the programme included four main themes, including community partnership and its role in empowering persons with disabilities in the Gulf labour market,

Persons with disabilities receive due attention in development of social policies in the GCC, taking into account the rights guaranteed to them

MOHAMMED AL KALBANI

issues and aspirations of women with disabilities at work in the GCC, the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals in empowering persons with disabilities in the Gulf labour market, and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities to integrate into the labour market.

Mohammed bin Humaid al Kalbani, director general of Directorate of Social Development in Dhofar, said, "The workshop

aims to support the issues of persons with disabilities and provide them with full rights for equality and social integration."

He added that persons with disabilities receive due attention in development of social policies in the GCC, taking into account the rights guaranteed to them by the Islamic Sharia and other international, regional and local legislations and agreements.

Salim Said al Badi, director general of Labour Welfare in the Ministry of Labour, informed that the total number of Omanis with disabilities employed in 2021 was 9,296, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Of the total, 3,391 were employed in the government sector and 5,905 in the private, while 7,757 were men compared to 1,539 women. Hearing impairment and disability constituted the highest number among those employed.

SAI participates in anti-graft agencies meet in Riyadh

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - The State Audit Institution (SAI) took part in the 25th meeting of a GCC committee of integrity protection and anti-corruption agencies, held at the headquarters of the Secretariat General of the council in Riyadh on Wednesday.

The meeting covered several

topics, including drafting an action plan to activate cooperation and coordination among GCC integrity protection and anti-corruption agencies and drafting a guide for enhancing integrity in government dealings in GCC states, among other topics.

ONA



Workshop trains SMEs to trade on Amazon

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) held a workshop on Wednesday in its efforts to encourage and expand the culture of e-commerce and support 100 SMEs to register on the Amazon e-commerce platform.

ASMED is targeting 56 entrepreneurs to join the platform in the first phase, all of who participated in the workshop.

"The initiative aims to stimulate the Omani economy, support owners of SMEs, and promote Omani products through the world-famous platform," an ASMED official said. "In the programme, experts will conduct workshops for SME owners, training them as well as providing information related to e-commerce."

The sultanate's e-commerce market - valued at US\$2.19bn in 2020 - is expected to grow to US\$6.52bn by 2026, according to an industry report released by market intelligence and advisory firm Mordor Intelligence.

The e-commerce market in Oman, which currently accounts for a very small portion of the total retail sales, has ample opportunities to grow in the future, the report titled *E-commerce Market in Oman (2021-2026)* said.

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(RO1 equals)	
Indian	206.37
Pakistan	571.75
Bangladesh	246.56
Philippines	145.98
Sri Lanka	921.16

*Rates as on August 31
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

US private firms slow hiring in August

American employers ratcheted back their hiring in August, which slowed for the second straight month, according to data Wednesday from payroll firm ADP.

Private jobs increased by 132,000 this month, less than half the pace of July, when firms hired nearly 270,000 workers, ADP said in its newly revamped survey, AFP reported. The data, coming before Friday's all-important government employment report, could be good news for the Federal Reserve which has been aggressively pushing up interest rates to tamp down red-hot inflation, amid fears the strong labour market will cause a wage spiral.

"Our data suggests a shift toward a more conservative pace of hiring, possibly as companies try to decipher the economy's conflicting signals," ADP chief economist Nela Richardson said.

Fitch places Mazoon Electricity on rating watch positive

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Fitch Ratings has placed Mazoon Electricity Company's long-term foreign- and local-currency issuer default ratings (IDRs) of 'BB-' on rating watch positive.

"The rating watch positive follows the upgrade of Oman's long-term foreign-currency IDR to 'BB' from 'BB-' on 15 August and reflects Oman Investment Authority's announced plans to restructure the electricity distribution and supply companies, including Mazoon, into one distribution and one supply company," Fitch said in a statement.

Fitch said it expects to resolve the rating watch positive with an affirmation or a one-notch upgrade after the restructuring of the companies is completed and Fitch has sufficient details to assess the post-restructuring standalone credit profile (SCP) of Mazoon.

The rating agency said it may maintain the rating watch positive beyond its six-month horizon, depending on the restructuring completion date.

"We do not yet have sufficient details to analyse the post-restructuring profile, but we deem it unlikely that the restructured network operator would be assessed significantly below Ma-



zoon's current rating and SCP (bb),' Fitch said.

Fitch expects to upgrade Mazoon's long-term issuer default rating and senior unsecured debt ratings by one notch if it views that Mazoon's post-restructuring SCP remains at least at 'bb-', assuming unchanged links with the Omani sovereign.

A significantly weaker post-restructuring SCP (b+ or b) would lead to an affirmation of Mazoon's issuer default rating at 'BB-', assuming unchanged links with Oman's sovereign, the rating agency added.

As per Fitch's estimates, Mazoon had available cash at end-

2021 of RO7.9mn, and RO39mn available under its revolving facilities. 'This compares with forecast negative free cash flow of RO0.7mn in 2022 and debt maturities of RO136.5mn (after extending two loans maturing in 2022 totalling RO120.4mn for an additional year).'

Fitch said that Mazoon may have to postpone its long-term funding plans following the January 2022 restructuring announcement. The rating agency views that a prolonged restructuring process could have an impact on the liquidity position given its forecast capital expenditure of RO292mn between

2022 and 2025.

"Mazoon will depend on bank debt and support from the shareholder to fund its requirements. The company also has the flexibility to delay part of its non-committed capital expenditure," Fitch said.

Mazoon, as noted by Fitch, is primarily undertaking regulated business of distribution and supply of electricity in the South Batinah, Dakhliyah South Sharqiya and North Sharqiya governorates of Oman. The company derives its revenue through the provision of distribution system services, and the supply of electricity to its customers.



Asas Drilling to set up RO6mn project in Nizwa Industrial City

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Nizwa Industrial City, which falls under the umbrella of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), has signed an investment agreement with Asas Drilling Solutions Company to establish a RO6mn worth of project in the city.

Asas Drilling Solutions will set up the new project for manufacturing, repair and maintenance services for machinery and equipment used in the oil and gas industry, according to a statement issued by Madayn.

The project will be established on an area exceeding 14,000 sqm with an investment value touching RO6mn.

The agreement was signed by Ahmed al Hajri, director general of Nizwa Industrial City, and Khalid al Busaidi, the project owner.

Commenting on the project, Hajri said that this value-adding project will serve the oil and gas industries, promote their growth, and provide them with a wide range of advanced tools and equipment that are used in drilling wells.

He added that Madayn is currently developing the infrastructure as part of the expansion project in phases 3 and 4 in Nizwa Industrial City on an area of one million sqm. Most of the road connection works, electrical connections, and remaining excavation works are currently being completed.

Abu Dhabi's ADNOC awards \$1.8bn contracts for drilling services

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) on Wednesday announced the award of five framework agreements valued at US\$1.83bn (AED6.72bn).

The contracts are for directional drilling and logging while drilling to support ADNOC's efforts to expand production capacity of its low carbon oil and gas resources to help meet the world's growing demand for energy.

The framework agreements are the largest of such awards in the oil and gas industry and were awarded to Al Ghaith Oil-field Supplies and Services Company, Al Mansoori Directional Drilling Services, Schlumberger, Haliburton and Weatherford following a competitive tender process.

The awards cover ADNOC's onshore and offshore fields and will run for five years with an option for a further two years. Over 75 per cent of the award value could flow back into the UAE economy under ADNOC's In-Country Value program over



the duration of the agreements.

Yaser Saeed Almazrouei, ADNOC's upstream executive director, said, "As ADNOC responds to rising global energy demand, we are responsibly ramping up drilling activities to further unlock Abu Dhabi's oil and gas resources which have some of the lowest carbon intensity in the world.

These awards build on our ongoing investments in drilling services and they will deliver substantial in-country value for the nation to support economic growth and diversification, in line with the UAE Leadership's wise directives."

The framework agreement

awards will support ADNOC's requirement to drill thousands of new wells to expand its production capacity to five million barrels per day by 2030, enable gas self-sufficiency for the UAE and remain a leading low-cost, low-carbon oil producer.

ADNOC is optimising its procurement approach to reflect market dynamics, focusing on long-term contracts with an optimal number of suppliers that provide stable and reliable delivery at highly competitive rates.

Since November 2021, the company has awarded drilling contracts worth over US\$11bn to top-tier contractors.

WAM

India's quarterly GDP surges 13.5% on pandemic rebound

Mumbai, India - A post-pandemic rebound saw India's economy grow 13.5 per cent in the June quarter, official figures showed Wednesday, but inflation and other headwinds signal a looming slowdown in Asia's third-largest economy.

The double-digit expansion from last year reflects a dramatic uptick in activity since mid-2021, when the peak of the country's most devastating coronavirus wave began to recede.

That outbreak saw thousands of people dying across India each day, overwhelming hospitals and crematoriums, and came after an extended lockdown that pummeled consumer spending and brought factories to a standstill.

Wednesday's figure from the national statistics office was the highest since the 20.1 per cent expansion recorded during the same period last year, at a time when business activity was recovering from government shutdown edicts.

State Bank of India chief eco-



India's GDP growth for April - June quarter is lower than the 16.2 per cent forecast by Reserve Bank of India

nomc advisor Soumya Kanti Ghosh said in a note that India was navigating well through global uncertainty "with leading indicators continuing to show acceleration".

A rebound in capital inflows in August after months of investor flight from Indian debt and equities also pointed to improved sentiment, Ghosh said.

But Wednesday's result is lower than the 16.2 per cent forecast by India's central bank, and

concern.

Elevated crude oil prices and a seven per cent fall in the rupee this year have hit living costs and left India struggling with a deteriorating trade balance.

India's merchandise trade deficit widened to a record US\$31bn in July, compared to US\$10.6bn in the same month last year, provisional data showed.

Import costs, led by petroleum products and coal, were more than twice as high as export revenues.

India imports more than 80 per cent of its crude oil needs and shocks to the market since Russia's invasion of Ukraine have left its 1.4bn people struggling with higher fuel charges.

Consumer inflation has consistently overshoot the central bank's two-to-six percent target range this year, hitting an eight-year high of 7.79 per cent in April before cooling to 6.71 per cent in July.

AFP

Eurozone inflation jumps to new record 9.1% in August

Brussels, Belgium - The eurozone inflation rate hit a new record in August, official data showed on Wednesday, increasing pressure on the European Central Bank to hike rates to tame Ukraine war-fuelled prices.

Driven by soaring energy prices caused by Russia's invasion in Ukraine, the yearly inflation rate in the 19-country single currency area reached 9.1 per cent, its highest since records began, according to Eurostat.

Consumer prices had accelerated to 8.9 per cent in July.

The president of Germany's powerful federal central bank, Joachim Nagel, immediately declared that the ECB should plan for a "strong rise in interest rates

for September".

"Otherwise, inflation expectations could become permanently entrenched above our target of two per cent," he warned.

The headline rate has been rising since November 2021, amid global supply chain stresses. War erupted in Ukraine in February and the European summer was marked by a drought that helped force up food prices.

The ECB is expected to raise interest rates at its next meeting on September 8, after first increasing them in July for the first time in a decade. Rates had been kept low as Europe emerged from its coronavirus slump.

France, which has moved to



cap energy prices saw the lowest rate within the eurozone, with 6.5 per cent in August, according to Eurostat.

But powerhouse Germany was high on 8.8 per cent, Italy saw nine per cent and Spain 10.3

per cent.

Russia's neighbours on the Baltic, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia suffered the most, at 25.2 per cent, 21.1 and 20.8, respectively.

Economist Jack Allen-

Reynolds of Capital Economics warned that the eurozone inflation rate could hit 10 per cent by the end of the year, even if the bank hikes rates.

"The balance of probabilities is shifting towards a 75 basis points hike next week," he said. The ECB raised rates by 50 basis points in July, from a zero interest rate to 0.5 per cent.

For Bert Colijn, a senior economist at the bank ING, the increase in the price of goods contained within the broader inflation rate should worry observers as much as the hikes in energy.

"The increase from 4.5 per cent to 5 per cent was much larger than expected and fuels

worries about second-round effects from the input cost shock lasting longer," he said.

But he noted that wage growth data for the second quarter of the year - salaries rose only 2.1 per cent - suggested that Europe was tightening its belt already.

"As the economy is slowing rapidly - and perhaps already contracting at this point - the question is how much the ECB needs to slam the brakes," he said.

"Another hike of at least 50 basis points in September seems to be a done deal, with the hawks pushing for 75 basis points," he said.

"The big question is how the

ECB will respond after this, if indeed signs of economic distress become more apparent, and inflation remains highly driven by supply-side factors."

Among the items in the eurozone inflation basket, energy prices once again experienced the highest annual increase in August, although they slowed slightly to 38.3 per cent compared to 39.6 per cent in July.

Food prices including alcohol and tobacco increased by 10.6 per cent, from 9.8 per cent in July. Industrial goods and services increased by five per cent and 3.8 per cent respectively, also accelerating compared to the previous months.

AFP

Russia halts pipeline gas flow in new jitters for Europe

Lubmin, Germany - Russian energy giant Gazprom suspended gas deliveries to Germany on a major pipeline on Wednesday, the latest in a series of supply halts that have fuelled an energy crisis in Europe.

Gazprom said supplies via Nord Stream 1 were "completely stopped" for "preventative work" at a compressor unit, shortly after European gas network operator ENTSOG announced that deliveries had ceased.

Gazprom has also said it would suspend gas supplies to France's main provider Engie from Thursday after it failed to pay for all deliveries made in July.

The latest stop comes as European countries have faced soaring energy prices since Russia invaded Ukraine in late February and subsequently curbed its gas deliveries to the region.

Germany, which is heavily dependent on Russian gas, has accused Moscow of using energy as a "weapon".

But Gazprom has said the three-day maintenance work was "necessary" and had to be carried out after "every 1,000 hours of operation".

Germany's Federal Network Agency chief Klaus Mueller has called it a "technically incomprehensible" decision, warning that it was likely just a pretext by Moscow to wield energy supplies as a threat.

Experience shows that Moscow "makes a political decision after every so-called maintenance", he said, adding that



Workers walk past facilities on the grounds of gas transport and pipeline network operator Gascade in Lubmin, northeastern Germany, on Tuesday (AFP)

"we'll only know at the beginning of September if Russia does that again".

With winter around the corner, European consumers are bracing for huge power bills. Some countries like France have warned that rationing is a possibility.

The European Union is preparing to take emergency action to reform the electricity market in order to bring galloping prices under control, with energy ministers scheduled to hold extraordinary talks next week.

Asked if gas supplies would resume after the three-day works were completed on Saturday, Russian government spokesman Dmitry Peskov said "there is a guarantee that, apart from technical problems caused by sanctions, nothing interferes

with supplies".

Western capitals "have imposed sanctions against Russia, which do not allow for normal maintenance, repair work", he added, in what appeared to hint at a replay of an earlier round of start-stop rigmarole.

Gazprom had already carried out 10 days of long-scheduled maintenance works in July. While it restored gas flows following the works, it drastically dwindled supplies just days later, claiming a technical issue on a turbine.

The Russian company insists that a key turbine could not be sent to Russia because of sanctions on Moscow. But Germany, where the turbine was located, has said Moscow was itself blocking the component's delivery to Russia.

An official at Gascade, which operates the distribution network within Germany, also viewed Gazprom's latest actions sceptically.

"In July, it was regular maintenance planned for a long time by Nord Stream 1, this time it was not planned and we don't know what is behind this operation," the official said on condition of anonymity.

A day ahead of the new shutdown, Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Germany was now "in a much better position" in terms of energy security, having achieved its gas storage targets far sooner than expected.

Germany's gas storage tanks were now almost at 85 per cent of capacity, said Mueller, assessing that "Germany is better prepared for the new 'maintenance'

by Nord Stream".

Europe as a whole was also getting a march on filling its gas storage tanks. On Sunday, storage levels were already at 79.9 per cent of capacity in the EU.

'Gas emergency'

At the same time, fears over throttled supplies have also driven companies to slash their energy usage.

Germany's industry consumed 21.3 per cent less gas in July than the average for the month from 2018 to 2021, said the Federal Network Agency.

Mueller has said such pre-emptive action "could save Germany from a gas emergency this winter".

And Europe's biggest economy was already racing to turn its back on Russian gas.

At the German coastal city of Lubmin, where Nord Stream 1 comes onshore, plans are already well underway for the switch to liquefied natural gas (LNG).

The LNG, transported in by ships, will arrive at Lubmin's industrial port and be converted back into gas and pumped into Gascade's distribution network, which has so far been used to funnel Russian gas around the country.

"We expect to be able to inject gas into the distribution network on December 1," said Stephan Knabe of Deutsche ReGas -- the company managing the LNG project.

AFP



Policemen stand guard as demonstrators protest against the Sri Lankan government in Colombo on Wednesday (AFP)

Crisis-hit Sri Lanka's inflation hits record 64%

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Crisis-hit Sri Lanka's inflation hit an eleventh consecutive monthly record in August, official data showed on Wednesday, rising to 64.3 per cent as the International Monetary Fund extended bailout talks by one more day.

The benchmark year-on-year Colombo Consumer Price Index (CCPI) in August was more than eight times higher than the 7.6 per cent recorded in October 2021. Since then it has set a new record high every month.

According to the department of census and statistics, food inflation in August was even higher, hitting 93.7 per cent.

Inflation in August was impacted by a more than threefold increase in electricity tariffs and kerosene oil prices that hit in the middle of the month.

The CCPI figures were released hours after the IMF said it had extended by a day official-level talks with the Sri Lankan government on a possible bailout.

"The IMF Mission in Colombo has been extended by one day because discussions are still ongoing with the authorities," the IMF said in a brief statement.

The IMF had asked Sri Lanka to contain spiralling inflation and address corruption as part of efforts to salvage the troubled economy, which has been ravaged by a foreign exchange crisis.

The Sri Lankan rupee has lost more than 45 per cent of its value against the US dollar this year.

An unprecedented economic crisis - which saw the country default on its US\$51bn debt in April - forced Gotabaya Rajapaksa to step down as president last month, after prolonged protests against acute shortages of food, fuel and medicines.

The country's 22mn people have also been enduring lengthy electricity blackouts due to the government's inability to import enough fuel to run generators.

AFP

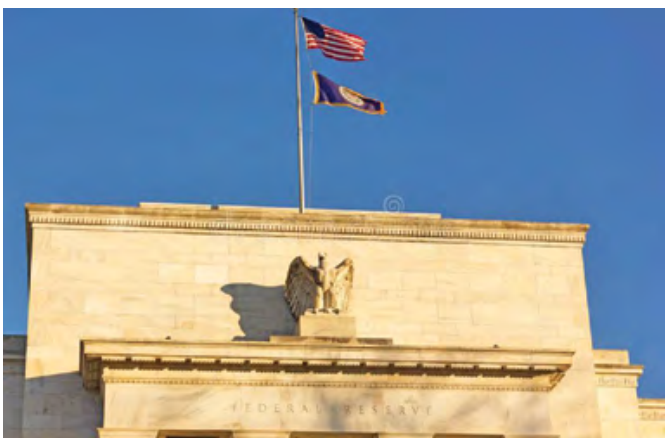
Will take 'few years' to get US inflation back to 2%: Fed official

Washington, US - The US Federal Reserve is committed to bringing soaring US inflation back down to two per cent, but that will take "a few years," a top central banker said.

The Fed this year has moved aggressively to raise interest rates to try to rein in price surges that have hit American families, and central bankers, notably Fed chief Jerome Powell, have doused any hopes they would alter course anytime soon.

New York Federal Reserve Bank President John Williams echoed Powell's tough comments, saying the benchmark lending rate will have to remain high for some time to bring demand back into line with supply.

US annual inflation ebbed slightly in July to a still-painfully high 8.5 per cent, and Williams said the Fed is "absolutely committed" to achieving the two-percent goal.



"The situation is very challenging. Inflation is very high. The economy has a lot of crosscurrents. I do think it will take a few years, but we're going to get that done," Williams said in a discussion with The Wall Street Journal. The Fed has increased the key lending rate four times this year, including two supersized 0.75 percentage point hikes in June and July, and Powell said

Friday another similar increase is possible next month as well.

Inflation was already high at the start of the year and spiked globally following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but gas prices at the pump have been moving down in recent weeks, taking some of the pressure off American consumers.

That in turn led to a jump in consumer confidence in August,

according to The Conference Board's monthly survey released Tuesday.

But the US labour market remains very strong, which the Fed fears will add fuel to the inflation fires as wages rise.

New data from the Labor Department Tuesday showed that after dipping in June, job openings rebounded slightly in July, which means there are about two positions available for every unemployed person in the country. The Fed on Friday will get a look at one more employment report before its September 20-21 policy meeting, and will look for a slowdown after the surprise surge in July.

Williams said the September policy decision will depend on the data, but added "it's clear that we need to get interest rates significantly higher by the end of the year."

AFP

Toyota to spend \$5.3bn expanding Japan, US battery output

Tokyo, Japan - Toyota said Wednesday it will ramp up the production of batteries for electric vehicles in Japan and the United States through an investment of up to 730bn yen (US\$5.3bn).

Part of the cash is included in a huge two-trillion budget for the development and production of auto batteries that was announced by the Japanese giant in December, a spokesman told AFP.

Automakers are speeding up the transition to electric as pressure grows from governments to move away from cars with combustion engines, and also thanks to the success of Elon Musk's Tesla. Toyota is the world's top-selling carmaker, and has championed hybrid motors and pioneered hydrogen as a fuel of the future.

But until recently it has been slow to embrace battery-powered electric vehicles, seen as a



key to reducing carbon emissions.

"With this investment, Toyota intends to increase its combined battery production capacity in Japan and the United States by up to 40 GWh (Gigawatt Hours)," the company said in a statement.

Toyota said it aims to begin producing cells for battery-powered vehicles in the two countries between 2024 and 2026.

Around 400bn yen will be spent in Japan and around 325bn yen in the United States, said the

company, which expects a new battery-making plant in North Carolina to come online in 2025.

The announcement comes after Honda unveiled a joint venture on Monday with South Korea's LG Energy Solution to invest US\$4.4bn in a new US electric car battery plant. And last month, Japanese electronics giant and Tesla supplier Panasonic announced its own US\$4bn investment to build a new battery factory in the United States for electric vehicles.

AFP

Turkish economy grows 7.6% in Q2

Ankara, Turkey - Turkey's economy grew 7.6 per cent year-on-year in the second quarter of 2022, according to the country's statistical authority on Wednesday.

The country's gross domestic product (GDP) at current prices surged 114.6 per cent to 3.4tn Turkish liras (US\$219.3bn) in the April-June period, the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) said. During this period, while the annual sectoral growth was 7.8 per cent in industry and 18.1 per cent in services, construction decreased by 10.9 per cent and agriculture by 2.9 per cent. The economy thus recorded one of the highest growth rates in the G20.

With this growth, Turkey became the second-fastest growing economy in the G20 after Saudi Arabia.

Final consumption expenditure of resident households increased by 22.5 per cent, while the government's final consumption rose by 2.3 per cent in the second quarter compared with the same period last year.

Commenting on the figures, the country's Finance Minister Nureddin Nebati said the economy had maintained balanced growth for five quarters.

Noting that the strong annual increase in machinery and equipment investments over the last two-and-a-half years continued with 17.8 per cent in the second

quarter, Nebati underlined that this was a positive development in terms of increasing production capacity.

"In this period, an additional 900,000 people were employed compared to the end of last year, and the unemployment rate fell to 10.3 per cent," he said, adding that these gains had been achieved thanks to the Turkish Economy Model, which prioritizes growth and employment and supports production and exports, which will continue in the rest of the year.

The hallmark of the Turkish economy is balanced, sustainable, and employment-oriented growth, he said.

Anadolu Agency

European stocks drop on record inflation

London, UK - European stock markets slid Wednesday as record-high eurozone inflation fanned fears that more interest rate hikes could herald recession.

Frankfurt, London and Paris stocks dropped as data showed eurozone inflation hit 9.1 per cent in August on surging fuel prices, raising pressure on the European Central Bank to tighten its monetary policy.

Wall Street opened down 0.1 per cent, while most Asian markets closed lower on concerns the US Federal Reserve's rate-hiking policy would send the world's biggest economy into recession, with oil prices diving on demand jitters.



"Traders aren't just ready to back riskier assets and losing their appetite for them because there are concerns about the Fed's hawkish monetary policy," said Naeem Aslam, chief market

analyst for Markets.com.

"The data from the EU has confirmed that inflation is moving in one direction only, and the ECB has a long way to go before it can put a leash on inflation," he

said. The ECB is set to lift borrowing costs next week, having increased them in July for the first time in a decade to help tackle rampant inflation.

"The reality is that a more aggressive (ECB) tightening is going to be needed, and when the economy is already as fragile as it is, the situation quickly starts to look quite problematic," OANDA analyst Craig Erlam told AFP.

"That's not good for stocks as it's extremely difficult for companies to prosper if the bloc is in a deep recession made worse by higher interest rates, which is now a real risk."

AFP

Alizz Islamic Bank offers home finance at only 4.75 per cent

Alizz Islamic Bank has launched flexible finance choices for those looking to purchase or build their new home at a profit rate of 4.75 per cent only.

Home Finance, approved by the banks Sharia Supervisory Board (SSB), offers easy, quick and flexible financing. This comes in line with the bank's vision to provide fast, safe and innovative digital solutions to carry out financial transactions for its customers. Home Finance is available for locals and residents working in the public sector with a minimum monthly salary of RO300, or the private sector with a minimum monthly salary of RO350 including business owners, with flexible payment options for up to 20 years and financing up to 80 per cent of the value of the property.

Alizz Islamic Bank is proud of its role in helping customers to secure their dream homes, the bank said in a statement.

Audi announces entry to premier motorsport circuit

Audi has announced its entry to the premier class of motorsport, with the premium brand set to compete in the FIA Formula 1 World Championship from 2026 with a specially developed power unit, taking place in four of the main races across the Middle East and beyond.

The project will be based at Audi Sport's facility in Neuburg near Ingolstadt. This is the first time in more than a decade that a Formula 1 power train will be built in Germany.

Audi announced its entry at a press conference at the Formula 1 Belgian Grand Prix at Spa-Francorchamps. At the event, Markus Duesmann, Chairman of the Board of Management of AUDI AG, and Oliver Hoffmann, Member of the Board of Management for Technical Development, answered questions in the company of Formula 1 President and CEO Stefano Domenicali and Mohammed ben Sulayem, President of the International Automobile Federation (FIA).

T-Roc - a sharpened form of confidence arriving in ME

Volkswagen Middle East's charismatic crossover, the T-Roc, receives a facelift and will launch in the region in September at a starting price of US\$23,663 (excluding VAT).

The T-Roc has sold over 1mn units globally, and first launched in the Middle East last year as the first compact SUV to enter the market by the German brand, said a press statement.

Majoring in style, progressive design, and versatility, the T-Roc has quickly become a firm favourite in the Middle East. The new T-Roc will launch with a fresh design, innovative assistance systems and upgraded digital services, showcasing Volkswagen's focus on software-oriented mobility and continuing the model's success story. The new T-Roc will come in three trim lines - Life, the entry-level package, Style, for those looking for an upgraded design and technological experience, and R-Line, for those seeking additional performance. All trim lines of the new T-Roc come with a 1.4-litre turbocharged stratified injection technology (TSI) engine that generates 110kW/150HP and boasts a torque of 250Nm.

Ooredoo declares latest charity number auction

Ooredoo is back once again with its popular vanity number charity auction and the only way to win it is to be in it! 100 Diamond and Gold numbers will be up for grabs, with the highest bidder taking home the eight-digit prize. With registration open from September 4 and bidding kicking off on September 7, it's not only the perfect chance to get a memorable number, but with all proceeds being donated to charity, to do a good deed too.

Those interested can browse the online list, which includes different starting prices for different numbers. A registration fee of RO20 is applicable to take part in the auction and first-time bidders are required to fill out a registration form. Meanwhile, those who have participated in previous auctions can simply activate their account.



Omantel brings top FIFA champions of Mid East to compete in e-sport event

In its quest for making e-sports popular in Oman, Omantel on Saturday hosted a prestigious e-sports event - Omantel FIFA 22 Tournament - in Salalah with top players from the Middle East unleashing their full potentials in a strongly contested event.

Demonstrating Omantel's ability to host a major regional e-sports event, the tournament attracted fans of the FIFA game, FIFA champions, and Gaming in general. In addition, the event reflected on Omantel's continuous commitment and support towards the advancement that circulates around the e-sports industry in Oman. This was an important opportunity for the FIFA e-sports champions and fans to come together.

Building up to the flying start to the launch of Omantel's e-sports platform that has been initiated with PlayHera MENA, the tournament was an opportunity for the passionate gamers to showcase their talents and meet the legends.

Omantel's Chief Commercial Officer Aladdin Baitfadhil expressed 'extreme delight' for being able 'to host such a reputable FIFA tournament with only the elites'.

"We see the event as a platform for champions across the Middle East to gather and showcase their competitive talents. It is also an occasion to thrust Oman into the limelight as a country that works towards the progress and



development of the gaming and e-sports industry.

"In addition, it is an opportunity for young fans to share the stage with talented e-sports players in the heart of Salalah. Owing to the enormous popularity of e-sports all around the world, we hope our youth would avail such opportunities to grow and compete regionally and internationally."

Following intense competition between the champions, Abdullah Mohammed al Raish, a FIFA Champion from Kuwait, succeeded in claiming the first place, as the runners-up position was achieved by Mohammed Fawzi Hothan from the Kingdom of Saudi

Arabia. Saleh al Ghassani from the Sultanate of Oman won the third place.

Abdullah Mohammed al Raish, FIFA champion from Kuwait, reflected on the professional organisation of the tournament as he stated, "I was really impressed by the detailed and well-thought-out event planning, from welcoming us to providing all the necessary tools to compete and showcase our skills to the fans. The e-sports industry is developing rapidly in the Middle East; thus, it was extremely important to participate in this tournament, especially in such welcoming conditions here in Salalah."

Fahad Abdul Rahman al Hasani, Omani FIFA Champion, illustrated the

significance of hosting such tournaments in the region as he commented, "The gaming industry is continuously evolving all around the world, as such, it is vital to be aligned with this revolution here in the Middle East, to allow young and talented gamers to showcase their skills and build careers around the industry."

"The event was a huge success for me, not only for competing with fellow talented players, but because of the unity, gathering, and interaction with e-sports fans," he added.

Omantel is the sultanate's first and leading integrated telecommunications services provider, enabling the digital society to flourish.

Oman Corrosion Conference held at Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre

The Oman edition of the Corrosion Conference, jointly organised by Al Nimr Expo, Innovative Concepts and Raya Services in partnership with AMPP Oman, got underway at the Grand Ballroom of the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre on Monday drawing leaders and influencers from across the corrosion sector.

The inauguration ceremony witnessed the presence of technical experts, industry leaders and influencers from across the corrosion sector.

The event was graced by His Excellency Eng Khamis Mohammed Abdullah al Shammakhi, Undersecretary of Transport, Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

The welcome address by



Amjad al Kharusi, AMPP Oman General Manager, kickstarted the affair, which was followed by an opening address and keynote speeches by Salim Mahrouqi, Trustee, AMPP Oman Chapter; Taher Mohammed Khalifa al Bussaidi, Acting Director General, Maritime Affairs Consultant and

Auditor for the International Maritime Organisation, Ministry of Transport, Communication & Information Technology (MoTCIT), Talal Nabhani, PDO and Nasser al Behlani, respectively. The event culminated on Wednesday with the presentation of the Nasser Behlani Youth

Excellence Awards.

In its bid to honour outstanding youth for their contributions to create a positive impact in the field of engineering, the Nasser Behlani Youth Excellence Awards are for students in their final year or post-graduate candidates for the category 'Outstanding Student in the Field of Material, Corrosion & Integrity' and a professional with a four-year experience in material, corrosion and integrity for the category 'Outstanding Young Material, Corrosion & Integrity Engineer'.

Oman Corrosion Conference & Exhibition is organised under the patronage of the Ministry of Transport, Communication & Information Technology and hosted by PDO.

'BB+/Stable' Fitch rating for OETC

Fitch Ratings announced the upgradation of Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), a member of Nama Group, Long-Term Foreign-Currency Issuer Default Rating (IDR) to 'BB+' from 'BB'.

The improvement in OETC's ratings to 'BB+' reflects the company's stability, and profitability.

The 'Fitch' credit rating agency has identified several main factors that resulted to the rating of Oman Electricity Transmission Company, including the positive financial performance and assets owned by the company.

Commenting on this achievement, Saleh al Rumhi, CEO of Oman Electricity Transmission Company, said, "This is a big milestone for OETC, and we are proud of the company for the increase of the credit rating to the same degree as the sultanate's credit rating, which came as a re-



sult of the improvement of the company's independent credit record, following a financial and organisational restructuring of the electricity sector under the umbrella of Oman Investment Authority."

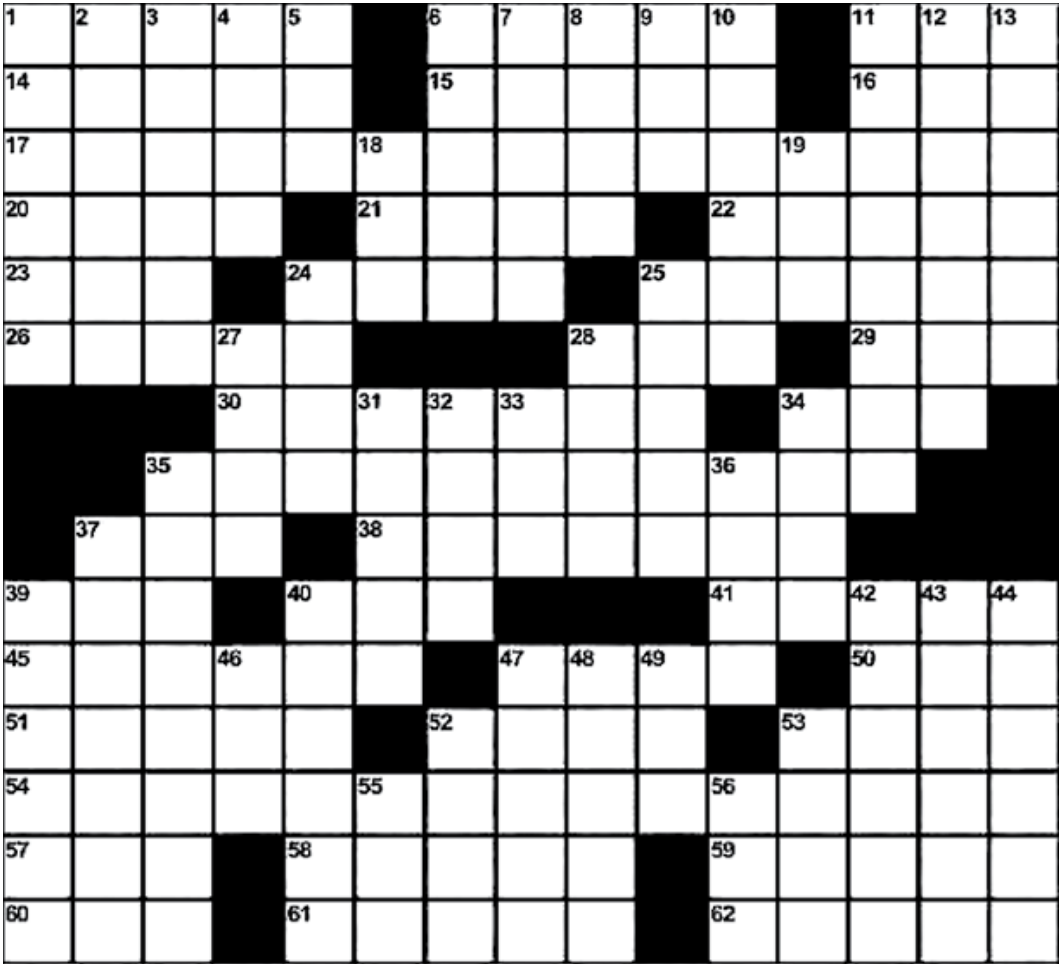
Rumhi added that raising the company's credit rating will increase its competitiveness to attract investors. He stressed that the classification would enhance the company's future strategic plans in line with the company's new vision to reach globalisation with a world class smart transmission grid by 2030, which

would contribute to improving the credit rating of Oman. This important achievement will enable the company to further contribute to achieving the goals of the 'Oman 2040 Vision' related to the energy and renewable energy sectors.

It is worth mentioning that, Oman Electricity Transmission Company is the only company responsible for the transmission and control of electricity in northern Oman's network and also in the Governorate of Dhofar, where electricity is transferred from production stations to distributed load centres in all governorates.

The transmission network operates at a voltage of 132kV and above, to cover most of the governorates. OETC also manages the interconnection lines between Oman and the GCC with a voltage of 220 kV.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Wine stoppers
6) One-pot meals
11) High-arching hit
14) Sports venue
15) White-sale item
16) "Ciao, Brutus"
17) Cable alternatives
20) Be aware of
21) "Oh, me!"
22) San Diego player
23) Bigheadedness
24) "... Flanders"
25) Easy to control
26) AT&T, for one
28) Coffee house?
29) Grand Coulee or Aswan
30) John Lennon's lady
34) Drivel
35) Semi-gloss alternative
37) Is able
38) Alphabetic characters
39) Bare-bones bed
40) "... all in your mind"
41) Playful marine mammal
45) Adjusts wheels
4 7) Advise caution

- 50) Eggs, to Nero
51) Spiral-homed antelope
52) "Art of Fugue" composer
53) "Wheel of Fortune" action
54) Time for cartoon watching
57) Donned the feedbag
58) Really dumb
59) Tiny weight
60) Cardinal, e.g.
61) Merchant's successes
62) Urged (with " on")
DOWN
1) Coffin
2) Certain citrus fruit
3) Come out with a modified version
4) Homophone of 46-Down
5) Actor Mineo
6) " It's_ Rock and Roll to Me"
7) Destroy completely, as a car
8) Some meadow creatures
9) "With this ring, I thee_"

- 10) Like some blouses or shoes
11) Pretentious
12) Partly coincide
13) Old-fashioned suit?
18) " 7 Faces of Dr..." (1964 flick)
19) Cul-de-_
24) Beside the point
25) Stingless male honey-bee
27) Blue shade
28) College course division
31) Bagpipers' gannents
32) Aces, sometimes
33) O'er and o'er
34) " Do you want to hear a secret?"
35) Filled to the gills
36) Appliance for smoothing cloth
37) Assemble in proper sequence
39) Victim of Brutus
40) Short-tailed lemurs
42) Hitting the bottle
43) Demonstrate clearly
44) Traveled far and wide
46) African antelope
4 7) Batman Bruce

- 48) Apexes
49) Greek "P"
52) Canaanite deity
53) Like a bug in a rug
55) FBI evidence, at times
56) Lobster coral

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Take care of your body, and it should do the same for you. Pay attention to cause and effect. A bad night's sleep causes you to be cranky and out of it, which affects your whole day (and your cash flow because you have to keep buying those double espressos). Eating frozen dinners all week might result in a knotty stomach. After you see the results, you can figure out what to do to get better responses.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You need to start thinking about long-term financial issues that have been in the back of your mind for a really long time. Whether you're thinking about investments, real estate, or maybe trading in certain job benefits for an improvement to your quality of life, now is certainly the time to lay the foundation for your future. Your leadership is even more heightened than usual, so once you decide, others fall in line.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Someone close insists on sorting out all the little details and then scooting them out of the way, but you know it's silly to focus on them right now because so much about the bigger picture remains unknown. Rather than just arguing over what's important, try to retreat a few steps and work on the parts each of you considers most important. Check in with each other often and things should go more smoothly for both of you.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You're a paragon of politeness right now, and your willingness to take in others' needs makes you the perfect diplomat. You can easily figure out answers to thorny problems and discover detours that make any journey more pleasant than it would have been otherwise. If something bad pops up, you are sure to make it better. If it's good, you can make it even better for everyone.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

A personal issue that was recently pretty stormy turns the page and becomes rather sweet just when you were ready to give up. It's a pleasant surprise, but it's also quite timely. You were just about ready to turn your back on fate and make a hasty choice. Everything has finally come together in a way you would never have seen coming, but you're quite happy with the results.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

As usual, you're seeking the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but. Keep in mind, though, that truth can be subjective and might depend on who's talking. Focus on digging up the facts, all the facts. Once you can see everything that you know is for real, you're able to figure out what everyone else has been right and wrong about lately.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

It can be incredibly satisfying to draw up a task list and then check off items one by one until you finally reach the end. You've got enough mental energy to power a city, so spend some, if not all, on tackling any items that have been sitting there staring you in the face for way too long. Once you're done, breathe a big sigh of relief, and then take a much deserved break.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Try to combine your altruistic impulses with your amazing ability to host people by throwing a party or dinner for charity. You're the best at organizing gatherings, no matter what constraints you have to deal with, and you're totally involved with your community. Do a little research and find a cause that could make good use of your talents, then recruit as many friends as you can find to make it happen.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Lift up the carpet in your mental living room and take a good look. It's likely that someone's been trying to sweep a lot out of sight. You've got great insight into matters that go deeper than you may have expected. Use those amazing powers of perception and get a little clarity on issues that have been bugging you or seemed unclear before, then decide on your next move.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Your way with words is golden for the time being, so it's time to indulge in communication about nearly anything that you need to get out in the open. You're already the best at spotting opportunities and making the most of them, but you still need to be cautious about choosing the perfect moment to strike. Afterward, let your eloquence carry the day. It's incredibly satisfying to persuade.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You can do almost anything right now as long as you can maintain focus. That includes financial issues and career plans, and it's time for you to get real, breaking down your big schemes into small, reasonable steps. Not only should your goals become more achievable once you compartmentalize them, but you should also be much more motivated to actually get going!



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You may normally check in with your feelings before making decisions, but now is a good time to go with your intuition rather than sitting there in a state of indecision. Feelings are mutable, and an emotion that seems permanent one minute could be a distant memory the next. Instead of focusing on what could be, try to figure out what really is and then make your move with haste.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Why was NBA player Kyrie Irving, a player with the Brooklyn Nets and 7-time NBA All-Star, excluded from practising and playing with his team in October 2021?

- A. Funding for sports fell sharply in mid 2021
B. He had not had a vaccine against COVID-19
C. He was late in paying his membership fee for his sports federation
D. He had made a racist tweet

02. Where are bascules found?

- A. In embroidery
B. In trouser design
C. In typefaces
D. In bridges with a span which can be swung upwards

03. Which of these is a breed of dog?

- A. Boxer
B. Wrestler
C. Ice skater
D. Swimmer

Answers: 1.B 2.D 3.A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

L	H	I	R
L	O	T	F
L	H	R	L
G	E	I	I

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

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

Tributes from West as Gorbachev dies at 91

Moscow, Russia - The death of Mikhail Gorbachev triggered an outpouring of tributes from Western leaders on Wednesday but reaction was muted in Russia, where many blamed the last Soviet leader for the loss of the country's status as a global superpower.

Gorbachev, who changed the course of history by triggering the demise of the Soviet Union and was one of the great figures of the 20th century, died on Tuesday aged 91.

Russian news agency reports said he had died in a central Moscow hospital 'after a serious and long illness'.

Gorbachev, in power between 1985 and 1991, helped bring US-Soviet relations out of a deep freeze and was the last surviving Cold War leader.

His life was one of the most influential of his times, and his reforms as Soviet leader transformed his country and allowed Eastern Europe to free itself from Soviet rule.

The changes he set in motion saw him lionised in the West - he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990 - but also earned him the scorn of many Russians after the country was plunged into economic chaos and saw its international influence decline.

President Vladimir Putin, who called the Soviet collapse the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century, has spent much of his more than 20-year rule reversing parts of Gorbachev's legacy.

By cracking down on independent media and political opposition, critics say, Putin has worked to undo Gorbachev's efforts to bring 'glasnost', or openness, to the Soviet system.

And with the launch earlier this year of a military campaign in Ukraine, he has sought to reassert Russian influence in one of the countries that won its independence when the Soviet Union fell apart.

'One-of-a-kind'

In a letter of condolences published by the Kremlin, Putin said Gorbachev 'was a politician and statesman who had a huge impact on the course of world history' but said little of his political accomplishments.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Russian news agencies it was not yet clear if a state funeral would be held and that a decision would be made later based on the family's wishes.

On the streets of Moscow many Russians refused to comment on his death, with one muttering that he was 'a traitor' and a young Russian asking who he was. But in the West, where Gorbachev was regarded fondly and affectionately referred to as Gorbby, he was hailed as an iconic figure.

US President Joe Biden credited Gorbachev with having 'the imagination to see that a different future was possible and the courage to risk his entire career to achieve it'.

"The result was a safer world



This file photo shows Mikhail Gorbachev with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat (AFP)

He despised war. He despised realpolitik. He was convinced that the time to resolve issues of the world order by force had passed

DMITRY MURATOV

and greater freedom for millions of people," he said.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Gorbachev's 'tireless commitment to opening up Soviet society remains an example to us all', while UN chief Antonio Guterres called him 'a one-of-a-kind statesman' who 'did more than any other individual to bring about the peaceful end of the Cold War'.

French President Emmanuel Macron praised Gorbachev as a 'man of peace whose choices opened up a path of liberty for Russians', and former German chancellor Angela Merkel said he

demonstrated how 'one single statesman can change the world for the better'.

Gorbachev was best known for defusing US-Soviet nuclear tensions in the 1980s as well as bringing Eastern Europe out from behind the Iron Curtain.

He won the Nobel Peace Prize for negotiating a historic nuclear arms pact with US leader Ronald Reagan, and his decision to withhold the Soviet army when the Berlin Wall fell a year earlier was seen as key to preserving Cold War peace.

He was also championed in the West for spearheading re-

forms to achieve transparency and greater public discussion that hastened the breakup of the Soviet empire.

He spent much of the past two decades on the political periphery, intermittently calling for the Kremlin and the White House to mend ties as tensions soared to Cold War levels after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 and launched the offensive in Ukraine earlier this year.

Backed Crimea annexation

Gorbachev had supported the Crimea annexation, saying that most people in the peninsula 'wanted to be reunited with Russia'. He made no public statements on Russia's military action in Ukraine, though his foundation called for 'an early cessation (to) hostilities and immediate start of peace negotiations'.

He spent the twilight years of

his life in and out of hospital with increasingly fragile health and observed self-quarantine during the pandemic.

He remained a controversial figure and had a difficult relationship with Putin.

Many Russians still look back fondly on the Soviet period, and Putin leans on its achievements to buttress Russia's claim to greatness and his own prestige.

As the USSR collapsed, Gorbachev was superseded by the younger Boris Yeltsin, who became post-Soviet Russia's first president.

From then on, Gorbachev was relegated to the sidelines, devoting himself to educational and humanitarian projects.

Supporter of free press

He made a disastrous attempt to return to politics and ran for president in 1996 but received

just 0.5 per cent of the vote.

An early supporter of Russia's leading independent newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, founded in 1993, he donated part of his Nobel winnings to help it buy its first computers. But the newspaper, like *Russian* independent media across the board, came under increasing pressure under Putin.

Novaya Gazeta, whose chief editor Dmitry Muratov last year won the Nobel Peace Prize, suspended publication in late March after the military intervention in Ukraine.

In a tribute, Muratov hailed him as a man who 'put human rights above the state, and valued a peaceful sky more than personal power'.

"He despised war. He despised realpolitik. He was convinced that the time to resolve issues of the world order by force had passed," Muratov said.

AFP



Mikhail Gorbachev's life in dates

MARCH 2, 1931:

He is born into a peasant family in the village of Privolnoye in the southern Stavropol region.

1946

Starts working as an operator of a combine harvester on a collective farm.

1952

Joins the ruling Communist Party of the Soviet Union, made up of several socialist republics.

1953

Marries Raisa Titarenko whom he met at university while studying law. They will have a daughter, Irina, in 1957. Raisa dies in 1999 from leukaemia.

1985-1991

He leads the Soviet Union as general secretary of the Communist Party and as president when the post is introduced in 1990.

OCTOBER 1985

Presents a modernising economic reform plan known as perestroika.

1987

He and the US president, Ronald Reagan, sign the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty on slashing their nuclear arsenals, ending a superpower build-up of warheads.

1988-1989

Soviet troops withdraw from Afghanistan, defeated after a 10-year campaign.

1990

Gorbachev is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for reforms leading to the end of the Cold War between Eastern and Western blocs.

AUGUST 1991

Hardline communists carry out a failed coup while Gorbachev is on holiday in Crimea. A series of Soviet republics begin declaring independence.

DECEMBER 1991

After the leaders of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine conclude that the Soviet Union no longer exists and sign accords for its dissolution, Gorbachev resigns.

1996

He stands as an independent in presidential polls but takes only 0.5 percent, Boris Yeltsin winning the election.

AFP

Iran's Khomeini invited Gorbachev to embrace Islam in 1989 letter

Tehran, Iran - Two years before the fall of the Soviet Union, its leader Mikhail Gorbachev received an unusual letter from the Islamic republic of Iran's founder, inviting him to embrace Islam.

In January 1989, as Europe's communist regimes were taking

their last breath, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini sent a delegation to Moscow to deliver a letter to Gorbachev.

'Mr Gorbachev, it is clear to everyone that communism belongs in the world's political history museums, because Marxism does not meet any of

humanity's true needs,' Khomeini wrote.

Iran's Supreme Leader chose to send the letter because, according to him, Gorbachev had 'entered, since assuming office, a revisionist phase of the Soviet system'.

'Mr Gorbachev, you must

face the truth: The principal problem of your country is not the question of property, economy and liberty, but the lack of true belief in God. The same problem has led or will lead the West to decadence and deadlock,' Khomeini wrote in his letter.

The ayatollah said communism had no future 'because it's a materialist school, incapable of saving man from the crisis of disbelief in spirituality, the most fundamental suffering of human society in the West and the East'.

The solution, according to

the supreme leader, who himself died five months after the missive, was Islam.

'I call on you to seriously study Islam. The high and universal values of Islam can be the source of comfort and salvation for all nations and resolve the fundamental

problems of humanity,' the letter said.

By December 1991, Gorbachev announced his resignation in a televised address, after communist states in eastern Europe collapsed one after the other.

Iraq’s political crisis persists after a day of deadly clashes

Baghdad, Iraq - A months-long political crisis in Iraq showed little sign of abating on Wednesday despite a fresh push for negotiations after nearly 24 hours of deadly violence between rival Shiite factions ended.

Baghdad’s highly-secured Green Zone returned to normality after 30 people were killed and 570 wounded in the clashes pitting supporters of powerful Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr against pro-Iran factions.

Since elections in October 2021, political deadlock has left Iraq without a new government, prime minister or president, due to disagreement over the formation of a coalition. The tensions escalated sharply on Monday when Sadr loyalists stormed the government palace inside the Green Zone following their leader’s announcement that he was quitting politics.

But Sadr’s supporters trickled out of the Green Zone in a steady stream on Tuesday afternoon when he appealed for them to withdraw within the hour.

A nationwide curfew was lifted, before shops reopened and infamous traffic jams returned to Baghdad’s streets on Wednesday as the government announced the resumption of school exams postponed by the unrest. But the hurdles obstructing a solution to Iraq’s political crisis remained firmly in place, with rival powers refusing to budge on their demands.

Early elections, less than a year after the last polls, and the



Iraq’s Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi delivering a speech in Baghdad on Wednesday (AFP)

A nationwide curfew was lifted, before shops reopened and infamous traffic jams returned to Baghdad’s streets as the government announced resumption of school exams postponed by the unrest

dissolution of parliament have been a key demand of Sadr.

Iraqi President Barham Saleh said late on Tuesday that snap elections could provide ‘an exit from the stifling crisis’.

Snap polls

Under the constitution, parliament can only be dissolved by a majority vote, which can take

place at the request of a third of lawmakers, or by the prime minister in agreement with the president. Sadr’s rivals in the pro-Iran Coordination Framework want a new head of government to be appointed before any new elections are held.

On Tuesday, they called for the swift formation of a new government, ‘to prevent a recur-

rence of the strife’ that paralysed Baghdad this week.

The Framework urged parliament and other state institutions to ‘return to exercising their constitutional functions and carry out their duties towards citizens’.

The statement drew the ire of a senior aid of Sadr, Saleh Mohammad al-Iraqi, who said it overlooked the rightful demands of protesters killed in the Green Zone who want parliament dissolved. “Iran should reign in its Iraqi camels, or else there will be little room left for regret,” he said on Wednesday, referring to the Coordination Framework.

Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi, meanwhile, threatened to resign unless the paralysis ends. “If they want to continue to stir up chaos, conflict, discord and rivalry... I will take the moral and patriotic step and vacate my post,” he said. Iraqi political analyst Sajad Jiyad said a return to violence was possible in the absence of a longer term solution.

“The biggest loser is the state, standing idly by while two powerful armed parties continue to struggle for control,” he said.

“Unless a proper solution is reached, more protests and violence are possible.”

Falah Al-Barzanji, a 63-year-old activist, said he believed the calm would be short-lived.

“Today life has returned to normal, but the fire is still burning under the ashes,” he told AFP.

“The Iraqi parliament must be dissolved and a reformist government must be installed.”

Pope Francis, who visited Iraq last year, said he was ‘following with concern the violent events that have taken place in Baghdad’. “Dialogue and fraternity are the best way to face the current difficulties.”

Sadr - a longtime player in the war-torn country’s political scene, though he himself has never directly been in government - announced he was quitting politics two days after he said ‘all parties’ including his own should give up government positions to help overcome the deadlock. AFP



IAEA Chief Rafael Grossi (right) talks with officials in Kyiv on Wednesday, before departure of his team to Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (AFP)

IAEA team reaches Zaporizhzhia to inspect nuke plant held by Russia

Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine - IAEA inspectors arrived in the southern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia on Wednesday ahead of a visit to a Russian-held nuclear power plant, after fresh shelling near Europe’s largest atomic facility.

A convoy brought in the 14-strong team, led by the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which had left Kyiv in the morning.

The fate of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant which is located on the frontline between Russian and Ukrainian forces has stoked global concern.

The area has been shelled repeatedly in recent days, with Ukraine on Wednesday accusing Russian forces of hitting Energodar, a town with a pre-war population of some 50,000 people which is next to the plant.

Both sides have repeatedly traded blame over attacks in the area. “The Russian army is shelling Energodar,” said Evhen Yevtushenko, head of Nikopol district military administration

which is located on the northern bank of the Dnipro River opposite the town and its plant.

“These provocations are dangerous,” he wrote on Telegram.

One of the shells hit Energodar’s city council, Mayor Dmytro Orlov wrote on Telegram, posting pictures of the damaged building with a hole punched into the side and debris littering the ground. News of the strike came after the IAEA team left Kyiv for the southern city of Zaporizhzhia.

Although the city is normally about a two-hour drive from the plant, it was far from clear how or when the IAEA team would reach the site given the complexities of crossing into Russian-held areas.

“We are now finally moving,” IAEA chief Rafael Grossi told reporters before heading off with his 13-strong team.

He said they planned to spend ‘a few days’ at the plant and would report back afterwards. AFP

Australia cuts mandatory COVID isolation times, eases mask rules

Sydney, Australia - Australia on Wednesday announced mandatory COVID-19 isolation would be cut to five days and mask requirements lifted on domestic flights - the most significant easing of restrictions in months.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the country’s still-stringent COVID rules would be relaxed slightly from September 9, when isolation periods would be reduced from seven days, giving some relief to businesses struggling with chronic labour shortages.

“This was a proportionate response at this point in the pandemic,” Albanese said.

Australia previously rolled out some of the world’s most stringent COVID restrictions, sealing off its international borders for two years and locking down most major cities for months on end.

The strategy worked for much of the pandemic but since January there has been an enormous leap in detected cases - which have now surpassed 10mn.

Deaths have also risen, but

high vaccination rates have limited fatalities to 14,000 since the virus first emerged, comparatively low in a country of almost 26mn people.

With workers frequently forced to isolate and fewer people moving to Australia, staff shortages are common.

The country’s unemployment rate has fallen to 3.4 per cent, after workers snapped up jobs.

Albanese said the relaxed rules would only apply to people without COVID symptoms. AFP

Artemis 1: New launch attempt on Saturday

Florida, US - NASA will make a second attempt to launch its powerful new Moon rocket on Saturday, after scrubbing a test flight earlier in the week, an official said on Tuesday.

The highly anticipated uncrewed mission - dubbed Artemis 1 - will bring the United States a step closer to returning astronauts to the Moon five decades after humans last walked on the lunar surface.

Mission manager Mike Sarafin, said the NASA team ‘agreed to move our launch date to Saturday, September the third’. Blastoff had been planned for Monday morning but was canceled because a test to get one of the rocket’s four RS-25 engines to



The Artemis rocket sits at Launch Pad 39B at NASA’s Kennedy Space Center in Florida as the Sun rises on Wednesday (AFP)

the proper temperature range for launch was not successful.

Sarafin announced the date for the new launch attempt during a media briefing on Tuesday, and

NASA later tweeted that the two-hour launch window on Saturday would begin at 2:17pm (1817 GMT). Launch weather officer Mark Burger said there is a

60 per cent chance of rain or thunderstorms on the day of the launch, but added there is still a ‘good opportunity weather-wise to launch on Saturday’.

The goal of Artemis 1, named after the twin sister of Apollo, is to test the 322-foot (98-metre) Space Launch System rocket and Orion crew capsule that sits on top. Mannequins equipped with sensors are standing in for astronauts on the mission and will record acceleration, vibration and radiation levels.

Tens of thousands of people had gathered to watch the launch, 50 years after Apollo 17 astronauts last set foot on the Moon. AFP

Taliban mark anniversary of foreign troop exit with chants, parade

Kabul, Afghanistan - The Taliban celebrated the first anniversary of the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan on Wednesday with victory chants and a military parade showcasing equipment left behind by US-led forces.

Afghanistan’s new rulers - not formally recognised by any other nation - have reimposed their harsh version of Islamic law on the impoverished country, with women squeezed out of public life. Despite the restrictions, and a deepening humanitarian crisis, many Afghans say they are glad the foreign forces that prompted the Taliban insurgency left after a brutal 20-year war.

“We are happy that Allah got rid of the infidels from our country, and the Islamic Emirate has been established,” said Zalmay, a resident of Kabul.

In a statement, the government said the day marked ‘the country’s freedom from American occupation’. “So many mu-



Armed Taliban fighters parade atop humvee vehicles as they celebrate the first anniversary of the withdrawal of US-led troops from Afghanistan, near the former US embassy in Kabul on Wednesday (AFP)

jahideen were wounded, so many children orphaned, and so many women became widows.”

The authorities held an official celebration that included a military parade at Bagram Airbase, the nerve centre of US operations during the war.

Groups of Taliban fighters - dressed in traditional shalwar kameez and carrying rocket-propelled grenades - marched as helicopters flew by, video footage aired by state television showed.

Minutes later, dozens of mili-

tary vehicles including humvees and artillery tanks, seized in the war or left behind by US forces during their chaotic withdrawal, were paraded.

Foreign media outlets were not given access to the event.

Celebrations were also held in

several provinces, with locals reading poems and verses from Qu’ran.

Victory chants

Banners celebrating victories against three empires - the former Soviet Union and Britain also lost wars in Afghanistan - flew in Kabul.

Hundreds of white Taliban flags bearing the Islamic proclamation of faith flew from lamp posts and government buildings, while squares in the capital were decorated with lights.

Kabul residents chose to stay indoors after the authorities declared a national holiday, but hundreds of Taliban fighters gathered at Massoud Square, next to the now shut US embassy. “Death to America! Death to occupation! Long live freedom!” chanted the fighters.

“The flag of Islam is flying high. We are happy to live under the banner of Islam,” Taliban fighter Shah Ahmad Omari told

AFP. On Tuesday night, the skies above Kabul were lit up with fireworks and celebratory gunfire from crowds of Taliban fighters.

The plane carrying the last US troops took off from Kabul just a minute before midnight on August 31 last year.

That departure ended America’s longest war, which began in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States.

More than 66,000 Afghan troops and 48,000 civilians were killed in the conflict, but it was the deaths of US service members - 2,461 in total - that became too much for the American public to bear.

“The burden of the war in Afghanistan, however, went beyond Americans,” the US military said on Tuesday.

More than 3,500 troops from other NATO countries were also killed. Thousands of civilians were also killed in horrific bomb and gun attacks by the Taliban

during the war.

Trolling super power

Two weeks before the end of last year’s withdrawal, the Taliban seized power following a lightning offensive against government forces. Taliban social media accounts posted videos and pictures of newly trained troops - many flaunting equipment the US military left behind.

“This is how you troll a superpower after humiliating them and forcing them to withdraw from your country,” read a tweet with a photo of a giant Taliban flag now painted on the wall of the former US embassy.

Despite the Taliban’s pride in taking over, Afghanistan’s 38mn people face a desperate humanitarian crisis - aggravated after billions of dollars in assets were frozen and foreign aid dried up.

Hardships for ordinary Afghans, especially women, have increased.

AFP

Taiwan to ‘counter-attack’ breaches by China

Tensions in the Taiwan Strait have soared to their highest level in decades after Beijing’s military drills

Taipei, Taiwan - Taiwan said on Wednesday it would exercise its right to self-defence and ‘counter-attack’ if Chinese fighters and warships were to enter its territorial space, in the wake of Beijing’s huge military drills around the island.

The self-ruled, democratic island lives under constant threat of an invasion by China, which claims it as part of its territory to be seized one day - by force if necessary.

Tensions in the Taiwan Strait have soared to their highest level in decades after China staged an unprecedented show of force in retaliation for US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taipei earlier this month. For a week after Pelosi’s visit, China sent warships, missiles and fighter jets into the waters and skies around Taiwan, which condemned the drills and missile tests as preparation for an invasion.

Asked how Taiwan would respond if Chinese warplanes and naval ships entered its territorial air space and waters, a defence official said ‘the closer the incursions are to Taiwan, the stronger our countermeasures will be’.



Taiwanese pilots walk past an Indigenous Defense Fighter (IDF) at an air force base on Penghu islands on Tuesday (AFP)

“We will use naval and air

forces and coastal fire to repel PLA (Chinese People’s Liberation Army) forces that enter our

24-nautical-mile or 12-nautical-mile zones,” said Major General Lin Wen-huang, director of op-

erations and planning division. “When the PLA aircraft and ships are in our 12-nautical-mile

territorial sea and air space, we will act in accordance with operational orders to exercise the right of self-defence to counter-attack,” he said at an online news briefing.

Lin also said Taiwan would ‘counter-attack’ when asked to comment on a recent string of drone sorties from mainland China to Taiwan’s offshore Kin-

men lies just a few kilometres off China’s coast, meaning a civilian could feasibly fly a commercial drone that distance.

However, China has also stepped up so-called greyzone tactics against Taiwan in recent years, including the drone incursions. ‘Greyzone’ is a term used by military analysts to describe aggressive actions by a state that stop short of open warfare and can use civilians.

China has also ramped up incursions by warplanes into Taiwan’s air defence identification zone. Taiwan’s ADIZ is much larger than its airspace. It overlaps with part of China’s ADIZ and even includes some of the mainland.

AFP

We will use naval and air forces and coastal fire to repel PLA forces entering our 24-nautical mile or 12-nautical mile zones

LIN WEN-HUANG

G20 chair calls for more action on climate change



Indonesian Environment Minister Siti Nurbaya Bakar greets delegates from Saudi Arabia during the G20 meeting in Bali on Wednesday (AFP)

Bali, Indonesia - Group of 20 chair Indonesia warned environment officials from the world’s leading economies on Wednesday they must act together to combat a warming planet or risk plunging it into ‘uncharted territory’.

The call came at a one-day meeting on the resort island of Bali, at the end of a month in which more than 1,000 people died in Pakistan from flooding blamed on climate change and a crippling drought exacerbated by a record heat wave spread across half of China.

In opening remarks, Indonesian Minister of Environment and Forestry Siti Nurbaya Bakar told delegates ‘global environmental problems require global solutions’, otherwise the planet could end up in a situation ‘where no future will be sustainable’.

“We cannot hide from the fact that the world is facing increasingly compounding challenges,” she said, referencing energy price spikes and global food shortages.

“We know that climate change could become an amplifier and multiplier of the crises. We cannot solve those global environmental problems on our own.”

She added that climate change ‘would not only wipe out all development progress that has been achieved over past decades, particularly in emerging economies, but it would also propel us over an environmental tipping point into uncharted territory where no future will be sustainable’.

Some of the world’s top economies and emerging nations are being increasingly hit by

record heat, flash floods and droughts - phenomena that scientists say will only become more frequent and intense due to climate change.

In attendance at the meeting were US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry, Britain’s Climate Minister Alok Sharma and officials from India, Australia, Italy, Brazil, Japan, South Korea and the European Union among others.

A joint communique was expected to be agreed at the talks.

China - the world’s biggest emitter of greenhouse gases - only sent a vice minister of ecology and environment to the meeting, according to a list seen by AFP, with high-level officials staying home because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The meeting is a prelude to a November leaders’ summit where Indonesian President Joko Widodo has said Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin would attend despite Moscow’s increasing isolation after invading Ukraine.

Britain blamed Russia’s military assault on its neighbour for exacerbating energy problems.

Sharma said the energy crisis sparked by the war showed ‘the vulnerability of countries relying on fossil fuels controlled by hostile actors’ and that ‘climate security has become synonymous’ with energy security.

Russia only sent a deputy minister for economic development in person to the talks, according to the list of attendees.

The United Nations’ next climate change talks will take place in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt in November.

AFP

Japan to ease border controls for tourists from next week

Tokyo, Japan - Tourists will be able to visit Japan from next week on package tours without a guide, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said on Wednesday, as the country moves to ease strict COVID-19 controls.

From September 7, Japan will also raise its daily cap on the number of people allowed to enter the country to 50,000, Kishida told reporters.

Japan has kept strict border restrictions in place longer than many other major economies, and only in June began allowing tourists to visit on the condition they came in tour groups accompanied by guides.

“As international exchange becomes more active worldwide, Japan will join this movement - also from the viewpoint of taking advantage of a cheap yen,” said Kishida, who has himself just recovered from COVID-19.

From the same date, ‘we’ll also make it possible for tourists from all countries to enter the country on package tours without tour guides, and we will proceed with making entry procedures smoother at airports’, he added.

But the measures fall short of a full reopening and visitors are still required to book their trips through agents and obtain visas.

Public broadcaster NHK and other local media have reported that tourists will be asked to follow isolation guidelines if they test positive for COVID-19 in Japan. Kishida said he hoped to ease border restrictions further, with industry officials keen to see the return of a waiver programme that allowed tourists from much of the world to visit without a visa.



Japan's PM Fumio Kishida (AFP)

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The nation welcomed a record 31.9mn foreign visitors in 2019, and had been on track to achieve its goal of 40mn in 2020 before the pandemic struck.

AFP

Japan hopes to eventually ‘enable smooth entry’ in line with other Group of Seven countries, he added. The country has never imposed a strict lockdown, and it has recorded total deaths from the disease of around 39,000 - far lower than many other countries. Around 64 per cent of the population and more than 90 per cent of people aged 65 and over have received three vaccine shots.

But the country has maintained strict border rules throughout the pandemic, barring foreign residents from re-entry for several months at the height of the first waves of infection. Group tours have been allowed since June, but only around 144,500 foreign tourists are estimated to have entered the country in July, according to the Japan National Tourism Organization.

The nation welcomed a record 31.9mn foreign visitors in 2019, and had been on track to achieve its goal of 40mn in 2020 before the pandemic struck.

AFP

Vietnam to free 2,500 prisoners in I-Day amnesty

Hanoi, Vietnam - Vietnam announced on Wednesday it would free almost 2,500 prisoners ahead of the country’s independence anniversary, but the amnesty will be smaller than recent years and exclude activists.

Those sentenced for ‘propaganda’ against the state or attempting to overthrow the communist regime will not be released, according to the official amnesty announcement.

The mass pardon is one of the smallest in recent years due to ‘tighter regulations’ on amnesties, Pham Thanh Ha, deputy chairperson of the president’s office, said.

In 2015, more than 18,000 were freed while last year the figure was 3,000. The country typically never releases activists.

Sixteen foreign nationals - from Australia, France, Nigeria, Laos, China, Canada, Cambodia, the US

and Malaysia - are among those who will be freed from Thursday. Independence Day is on Friday.

Around 750 foreigners are serving jail terms in Vietnam, according to the public security ministry.

Human Rights Watch says more than 150 political prisoners are behind bars in communist Vietnam, as of March this year, and the country has a reputation for levelling harsh punishments against government critics and dissidents.

In recent years the administration has tried to stamp out dissent and arrest critics, especially those posting on social media platforms.

The Southeast Asian country bans all independent media outlets, and is ranked 174th out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders 2022 press freedom index.

AFP

Misery mounts for millions trapped in Pakistan floods

Mingora, Pakistan - Army helicopters flew sorties over cut-off areas in Pakistan’s mountainous north on Wednesday and rescue parties fanned out across waterlogged plains in the south as misery mounted for millions trapped by the worst floods in the country’s history.

Monsoon rains have submerged a third of Pakistan, claiming at least 1,160 lives since June and unleashing powerful floods that have washed away swathes of vital crops and damaged or destroyed more than a million homes. United Nations chief Antonio Guterres called it ‘a monsoon on steroids’ as he launched an international appeal late on Tuesday for US\$160mn in emergency funding.

Officials say more than 33mn people are affected - one in every seven Pakistanis - and it will cost more than US\$10bn to rebuild.

The focus for now, however, is reaching tens of thousands still stranded on hills and in valleys in the north, as well as remote villages in the south and west.

“We appeal to the govern-



Flood affected people carry belongings out of their flooded home in Shikarpur, Sindh province, on Wednesday (AFP)

ment to help end our miseries at the soonest,” said Mohammad Safar, 38, outside his submerged home on Wednesday in Shikarpur in the southeastern province of Sindh.

“The water must be drained out from here immediately so we can go back to our homes.”

There is so much water however that there is nowhere for it to drain. Climate Change Minis-

ter Sherry Rehman described the country as ‘like a fully soaked sponge’, incapable of absorbing any more rain.

At a worse time

Pakistan has received twice its usual monsoon rainfall, weather authorities say, but Balochistan and Sindh provinces have seen more than four times the average of the last three decades.

Padidan, a small town in Sindh, has been drenched with an astonishing 1.75 metres since June.

Pakistan receives heavy - often destructive - rains during its annual monsoon season, which are crucial for agriculture and water supplies, but such intense downpours have not been seen for three decades.

Officials have blamed climate

change, which is increasing the frequency and intensity of extreme weather around the world.

Earlier this year much of the nation was in the grip of a drought and heatwave, with temperatures hitting 51 degrees Celsius in Sindh province. The latest disaster could not have come at a worse time for Pakistan, where the economy is in free fall. Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif promised aid donors that any funding would be responsibly spent.

“I want to give my solemn pledge and solemn commitment... every penny will be spent in a very transparent fashion. Every penny will reach the needy,” he said.

Pakistan was already desperate for international support and the floods have compounded the challenge.

Prices of basic goods - particularly onions, tomatoes and chickpeas - are soaring as vendors bemoan a lack of supplies from the flooded breadbasket provinces of Sindh and Punjab.

AFP

INDIA

India to roll out its first vaccine against cervical cancer today



This file photo shows MoS Health Bharati Pravin Pawar visiting Serum Institute of India as Institute's CEO and owner Adar Poonawalla looks on, in Pune on October 19, last year (ANI)

New Delhi, India - The Serum Institute of India (SII), which shot to global fame distributing the COVID-19 vaccine across the world, is once again set to break another record by launching India's first vaccine against cervical cancer on Thursday.

The Serum Institute and the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) are ready to launch India's first indigenously developed Quadrivalent Human Papillomavirus vaccine (qHPV) against Cervical Cancer on September 1, official sources said.

The most awaited vaccine will be launched by the country's junior minister (science & technology) Jitendra Singh on Thursday.

According to Dr N K Arora, Chairperson of the COVID-19 working group, National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI) said it is an exciting experience to launch a made-in-India vaccine.

"It is very exciting and I must say it makes us very happy that our daughters and granddaughters will now be able to get this much-awaited vaccine."

"In fact, this is one of the last major vaccines to be introduced. In fact, this is one of the last vaccines that will be launched in the programme.

Now, Indian vaccines will be available and we hope that it will be launched in the National Immunisation programme for 9-14-year-old girls," he added.

"It is very effective and prevents cervical cancer because, 85 per cent to 90 per cent cases, cervical cancer is because of this particular virus and this vaccine is against those viruses. So, if we give it to our young children and daughters, they are protected from the infection and consequently probably 30 years later, cancer does not occur," Dr Arora further explained.

"There was a shortage in the global market. Now Indian vaccine has come.

"So, we will be able to take care of our requirements within our made-in-India vaccine," he said.

ANI

Suspended BJP leader held for torturing domestic help

Ranchi, India - Indian police on Wednesday arrested a political leader in the eastern state of Jharkhand for torturing her domestic help continuously over a period of time.

Seema Patra, who was suspended by the country's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) after a bone-chilling revelations by her domestic help, who accused Patra of physically torturing her, besides keeping her without food and water for days.

"These are false allegations, politically motivated allegations. I have been implicated," Patra, whose husband is a retired civil servant, said soon after arrest.

Ranchi police arrested the suspended BJP leader after a case was registered against her at the Argora police station, police said.

On Tuesday, police confirmed that a police team rescued a 29-year-old woman on



Suspended BJP worker Seema Patra is being taken for a medical checkup by Argora Police at Ranchi Sadar Hospital on Wednesday (ANI)

August 22, after she was allegedly physically tortured by her employer.

Ironically, Patra had been a member of the National Working Committee of the BJP's women's wing and was reportedly heading the state's 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' campaign of Prime Minister Narendra

Modi that calls for saving and educating every girl child.

The maid alleged that Patra beat her with rods and an iron pan. She was also forced to lick urine off the floor, the help alleged. "I have throat issues. What you heard is exactly what happened to me. Madam used to beat me up when I used to

make a mistake while working," she said.

The house help is currently undergoing medical treatment at the Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS) in New Delhi. The BJP suspended Patra on Tuesday after a video of the victim went viral alleging that Patra tortured her.

Jharkhand minister Champai Soren also confirmed the incident and said the government would hear the matter through fast-track courts.

"Ranchi Police arrested BJP leader Seema Patra today morning for torturing Sunita Khakha. The victim is currently undergoing treatment and after that, she will be provided with all possible help from the government. We will deliver justice to the victim through speedy trial," the minister tweeted on Wednesday.

Former Jharkhand Chief Minister and current Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the Jharkhand Assembly, Babul Marandi also visited the victim at RIMS today. He called the incident extremely painful and demanded a fast-track inquiry into the case.

"I visited the victim, it is so painful to see her like that. I can't even imagine that someone can be this demonic. There is absolutely no space for such inhuman behaviour. If you are not satisfied with your house help, then let her go, but beating her like this just makes no sense. It's good that the BJP has suspended her, there are many people in our party but if someone does anything like this, it doesn't mean we will tolerate that. In this case,

"I would also like to congratulate CM Hemant Soren for airlifting her to RIMS on time. I wish he keeps on doing such things," the BJP leader said.

ANI



Accused in the Sonali Phogat murder case, being taken to Goa medical college, ahead of his 10-day custody, on Saturday (ANI)

Minister assures 'fair probe' into political leader's death in Goa

Faridabad, India - Federal Minister Krishan Pal Gurjar on Wednesday said that a fair investigation is underway in the alleged murder of politician Sonali Phogat and that 'the guilty will not be spared'.

Speaking to ANI, the minister said, "The kind of news coming and the primary investigation report of the police in the Sonali Phogat case, it seems to be a case of murder. But nothing can be certain till the final investigation report comes. But the guilty will not be spared. Everything will come out." Gurjar said a fair investigation is underway and the law will take its own course.

"This is a very sad incident. Our full condolences to the family of Sonali. The Haryana government wrote to the Goa government for a CBI investigation. It is to be seen what decision the Goa government takes," he added.

Sonali Phogat (42) was declared dead at the St Anthony Hospital at Anjuna in North Goa on August 23. A post-mortem report revealed blunt force injury on her body, following which the Goa Police registered a murder case.

Earlier, Goa Police had said that Sonali Phogat was forcibly drugged by her two associates who were arrested after being named as accused in the case.

The two accused - Sudhir Sangwan and Sukhwinder Singh - have been arrested and further investigations are on, the Goa Police said.

Further, the Goa Police arrested two more persons - Edwin Nunes and suspected drug peddler Dattaprasad Gaonkar - in connection with the case. The Police said that the investigation revealed that the drugs were supplied by Dattaprasad Gaonkar who was working as a room boy in Hotel Grand Leoney Resort in Anjuna where the accused and the de-



Sonali Phogat (ANI)

Nothing can be certain till the final investigation report comes. But the guilty will not be spared

KRISHAN PAL GURJAR

ceased were staying.

Meanwhile, Goa Police reached Haryana earlier on Wednesday for further investigation into the case.

Notably, Haryana Police detained a man after the family accused him of taking a laptop and mobile from the farmhouse of the deceased BJP leader. Haryana Police has recovered the items following which the questioning is underway. "A man named Shivam has been detained. He was in UP's Meerut-Ghaziabad area. We are questioning him further," said Mandeep Chahal, SHO. The official said that the police of both states will visit Sonali Phogat's farmhouse.

"Goa police has come. We are questioning a man named Shivam, he was in UP's Meerut-Ghaziabad area. He used to switch off his phone often. We have got a laptop and phone while further questioning is underway. Goa Police and Haryana Police will go to her (Sonali Phogat) farmhouse, then to her residence in Sant Nagar in Hissar."

ANI

Tributes paid to princess Diana, 25 years after her death

London, UK - Flowers and other tributes were laid on Wednesday at princess Diana's former London home and above the Paris road tunnel where she lost her life, to mark the 25th anniversary of her death.

The former Lady Diana Spencer, whose fairytale marriage to Prince Charles captivated the world until it publicly unravelled with infidelity and divorce, died in a car crash in the French capital on August 31, 1997. A trickle of well-wishers left flowers, flags and photographs for the self-styled 'queen of people's hearts' at the gates of Kensington Palace, and at the Place Diana, above the Pont de l'Alma tunnel.

At the Spencer family home, Althorp House, where Diana is

buried in a lead-lined coffin on a secluded island on the estate, her brother Charles Spencer lowered the Union Jack to half mast.

"She was a global celebrity," retired camera operator Claude Gautier, 79, who came to pay his respects at the makeshift memorial in Paris, told AFP.

"She was classy, sporty, elegant. Everyone's sad today. My flowers for her are on the inside," he said, touching the badge of his England football shirt.

"The flowers here will wilt but mine will never die."

"It makes the hairs on my skin stand on end to think that she died underneath us," added German tourist Ulrike Plank, 64, from Munich. "We're really missing someone like her today. If you look around the world,



A woman leaves a note as people gather to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the death of Lady Diana Spencer at the 'Flamme de la Liberte' monument in Paris on Wednesday (AFP)

there's no one like her."

Legacy

Diana, who was just 36 when she died, remains widely revered as a fashion icon and for having cut through stuffy royal convention, particularly after her very public divorce. She was also praised for charity work highlighting the scourge of landmines and encouraging a change in attitudes to people with HIV/AIDS.

In a sign of the enduring fascination with the royal, last weekend a sporty Ford Escort she once owned was sold for £737,000 (US\$864,000) at auction.

Her marital troubles will also feature in the latest series of the hit Netflix drama The Crown later this year.

Joe Little, managing editor at Majesty Magazine, said Diana had influenced her sons, princes William and Harry, to be less formal than traditional royals.

"They are much more 'touchy feely' than they ever would have been," he said, pointing to William's hugs for England's women footballers after their Euro 2022 victory this month.

"William can see there is no need for much of the formality in royal life that existed when his father was of a similar age."

Last week, Harry, who has admitted to mental health struggles because of his mother's death, said he would 'share the spirit of my mum with my family, with my children, who I wished could have met her'.

AFP

ASIA CUP

SKY HIGH IN DUBAI

Suryakumar Yadav’s stunning knock helps India beat Hong Kong and make Super Fours

Dubai, United Arab Emirates - Suryakumar Yadav’s stunning knock and Virat Kohli’s half-century helped India move into the Asia Cup Super Four stage with a 40-run win over Hong Kong on Wednesday.

Kohli made 59 while Suryakumar smashed 68 off 26 balls as the pair put on an unbeaten stand of 98 to steer India to 192-2 after being put in to bat first in the Twenty20 tournament in Dubai.

Hong Kong were limited to 152-5 in reply as India registered their second successive victory to join Afghanistan in the next round of the six-nation tournament, which acts as a tune-up to the T20 World Cup in October-November.

But it was Suryakumar’s batting blitz that stood out as the number four blasted his way to a 22-ball fifty and finished the innings with four sixes in the final over.

Hong Kong, who made the main draw after winning all three of their matches in the qualifiers in Oman, had largely kept India in check before losing their way once Suryakumar started teeing off.

The 33-year-old Kohli, who is

going through an extended batting slump and made 35 in his team’s opening win over Pakistan, also got going to complete his 31st half-century in his 101st T20 international.

Skipper Rohit Sharma started cautiously before clubbing Hong Kong medium-pace bowler Haroon Arshad for two sixes and a four in a 22-run third over.

Spinner Ehsan Khan slowed the scoring and seamer Ayush Shukla reaped the benefits in the next over as he took down Rohit with a slow off-cutter. He made 21.

Kohli walked in to loud cheers from a sparse Indian crowd but struggled to play freely against a disciplined bowling attack which kept the runs down.

Kohli finally opened up to get a boundary with a straight drive off leg-spinner Mohammad Ghazanfar and soon found some rhythm as he hit three sixes in his 44-ball knock.

KL Rahul and Kohli kept the score ticking with singles and twos with occasional boundaries to put on 56 runs before Ghazanfar broke through with the wicket of Rahul (36).

AFP



India’s Suryakumar Yadav plays a shot during his knock of 68 off 26 balls against Hong Kong at the Asia Cup in Dubai on Wednesday (AFP)

LIV can be the IPL of golf, says India’s top player

New Delhi, India - The break-away LIV series can do for golf what the IPL did for cricket, India’s top player Anirban Lahiri has said after joining the lucrative Saudi-backed tour.

The new circuit has sparked a bitter split that threatens to tear golf apart and sparked accusations of “sportswashing” of Saudi Arabia’s human rights record.

Despite that and the vast financial rewards being offered to lure players away from the more established US PGA and European tours, the defecting Lahiri said that LIV would benefit others along the way too.

Lahiri, runner-up at the Players Championship in March, was one of six new recruits announced on Tuesday for the LIV Golf Invitational Boston this week.

“I look at the Indian Premier League and T20. When it started, I remember the almost vehement opposition it received,” Lahiri said.

AFP

‘Quality’ Afghanistan ready to take on Asia Cup heavyweights, says captain Nabi

Sharjah, United Arab Emirates - Skipper Mohammad Nabi said Afghanistan is ready for the big guns after they became the first team to qualify for the Super Four stage of the Asia Cup following victories over Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

“As a team in this Asia Cup we are showing that Afghanistan have quality batsmen, quality bowlers and quality fielders,” said all-rounder Nabi after Afghanistan thrashed Bangladesh by seven wickets on Tuesday.

“In these two games we showed we can chase totals. Earlier opposition used to say that Afghanistan cannot chase.

“But we were quite good (in the two chases), were not under pressure and had proper balance and hopefully we do well in the next round against big teams,” added the 37-year-old.

Afghanistan’s victory over Bangladesh in Sharjah put them into the next round of the six-nation Twenty20 tournament.

Najibullah Zadran smashed six sixes in his 17-ball unbeaten 43 chasing down a target of 128 with nine balls to spare, accompanied by Ibrahim Zadran (42).



Afghanistan and their captain Mohammad Nabi had plenty to celebrate in the Asia Cup so far (AFP)

The two stood out after spinners Mujeeb Ur Rahman and Rashid Khan took three wickets each to flatten the fancied Bangladesh batting in a tournament which acts as a tune-up to the T20 World Cup in October-November in Australia.

Fast bowler Fazalhaq Farooqi starred in his team’s opening win against Sri Lanka last week with figures of 3-11 and Nabi said the team has covered all the bases going to the Super Four where they are expected to meet India

and Pakistan.

“We are not targeting anyone, we are just playing proper cricket,” said Nabi.

Since overcoming the odds to compete in the 2010 World T20 in England, the Afghan team, which was awarded Test status in 2017, has managed to qualify for all the major international tournaments.

No surprises

The one-time nomads - many of whom were born or brought up in

We are not targeting anyone, we are just playing proper cricket

MOHAMMAD NABI

exile - have changed bases from Sharjah and Dubai to cities around India and Abu Dhabi.

“From the last 15 years most of the times we have played in Dubai and Sharjah, Abu Dhabi, we know the conditions better,” said Nabi.

“Sometimes in Sharjah a low total is tough to chase, that’s why in a low chase the batsmen didn’t throw away early wickets and at the end we targeted the bowlers and won the game.”

Players including Rashid, Nabi and Mujeeb have sharpened their skills while playing cricket around the world including in the Indian Premier League (IPL).

Nabi was all praise for the 21-year-old Mujeeb, a spinner who rattled Bangladesh with an opening spell of 3-9 in his first three overs, for his bowling in the powerplay.

AFP



Australia’s Mitchell Starc tore through Zimbabwe’s top order to take 3-24 in their second ODI in Townsville on Wednesday (AFP)

Ruthless Australia crush Zimbabwe to seal one-day series

Townsville, Australia - Ruthless Australia wrapped up the one-day international series against Zimbabwe with a crushing eight-wicket victory on Wednesday in Townsville.

After Mitchell Starc played a central role in routing the tourists for just 96, Australia overcame an early stutter in their chase to reach the lowly target in the 15th over and take an unassailable 2-0 series lead.

Quick Richard Ngarava briefly revived Zimbabwe’s slim hopes of a miraculous victory with the wickets of openers David Warner and Aaron Finch in the third over to leave Australia wobbling at 16-2.

But an aggressive Steve Smith (47 not out) and Alex Carey (26 not out) counterattacked as Australia cruised to a series triumph, having notched a comfortable five-wicket vic-

tory in the first ODI in Townsville on Sunday.

Zimbabwe have struggled to be competitive in the first series between the teams in Australia since 2004 and were left to rue an inept batting performance lasting just 27.5 overs.

“We didn’t get any real starts and it was unfortunate that none of (the batters) could get going,” said captain Regis Chakabva.

“We always wanted to play the best. There are lots of things to take from today to make sure we keep learning.”

Paceman Starc relished the seaming conditions at Riverway Stadium to take 3-24, while spinner Adam Zampa cleaned up the tail to also finish with three wickets.

Starc is now on the brink of becoming the fastest bowler to reach 200 ODI wickets.

AFP

New Zealand’s De Grandhomme retires from internationals

Wellington, New Zealand - Colin de Grandhomme on Wednesday became the second New Zealand cricketer after Trent Boult to get a release from his central contract and join Australia’s Big Bash League.

New Zealand Cricket bosses lamented the retirement from the Black Caps of the 36-year-old all-rounder after he was drafted to play for the Adelaide Strikers.

Zimbabwe-born De Grandhomme scored 1,432 runs in 29 Tests, also playing 45 one-day games and 41 Twenty20 internationals.



Colin de Grandhomme

De Grandhomme follows key quick bowler Boult, who also

Melbourne Stars in the BBL, one of the lucrative T20 tournaments worldwide that has sprung up.

Between them they have played over 100 Test matches and were two of the 20 centrally contracted players for the forthcoming season, including October’s T20 World Cup in Australia.

The 33-year-old Boult kept his spot in New Zealand’s squad for September’s one-day internationals against Australia but New Zealand Cricket has said contracted players get priority in future selection.

Being under contract to New

Zealand Cricket meant De Grandhomme and Boult had been ineligible to play in the BBL, which starts in December.

Bryan Stronach, head of high performance at New Zealand Cricket, said De Grandhomme was a loss.

“He’s a dynamic player, he has his power-hitting, but he is an all-rounder and his accuracy with the ball is quite phenomenal,” he said.

Stronach is confident that other Black Caps will not follow the example of Boult and De Grandhomme.

AFP

GOING SOUTH

Chelsea in turmoil as Southampton inflict fresh misery on Thomas Tuchel’s side with 2-1 win

London, United Kingdom - Thomas Tuchel urged “soft” Chelsea to toughen up after a shock 2-1 defeat against Southampton plunged his spluttering team into Premier League turmoil on Tuesday.

Tuchel’s side blew the lead at St Mary’s after Raheem Sterling put them ahead midway through the first half.

England forward Sterling bagged his third goal in two games with a close-range strike in the 23rd minute.

But Chelsea had squandered a host of chances before Sterling’s opener and, not for the first time in Tuchel’s reign, their profligate finishing came back to haunt them.

Romeo Lavia equalised in the 28th minute with his first goal for Southampton, curling home from the edge of the area after Chelsea failed to clear a corner.

Adam Armstrong put Southampton ahead on the stroke of half-time as he took Romain Perraud’s pass and drilled a deflected shot past Chelsea keeper Edouard Mendy.

Chelsea, beaten 3-0 at Leeds in their previous away fixture, were unable to muster a response as they slipped to a second defeat from their last three games.

“Soft, soft, soft defending. There is no need to give shots away. Just toughen up as a team and show a different mentality,” Tuchel said.



Southampton’s Adam Armstrong scores against Chelsea in their English Premier League match at St Mary’s Stadium in Southampton on Tuesday (AFP)

With just two wins from their first five matches, the Blues are already five points behind leaders Arsenal.

Everton frustrated

Everton’s wait for a first win this season goes on after Luis Sinis-

terra’s first league goal for Leeds earned a 1-1 draw at Elland Road.

Frank Lampard’s team went ahead when Alex Iwobi’s incisive pass was flicked through the legs of Diego Llorente by Anthony Gordon, whose clinical finish capped a superb move in the 17th

minute.

But Colombia winger Sinisterra marked his first start for Jesse Marsch’s men in memorable fashion with a composed finish from Brenden Aaronson’s pass in the 55th minute.

Fulham ended Brighton’s un-

beaten start to the season with a 2-1 win at Craven Cottage that lifted them to sixth place.

Fourth-placed Brighton had won three of their first four games, but Marco Silva’s promoted side broke the deadlock in the 48th minute through Alek-

sandar Mitrovic’s fifth goal this season.

Neeskens Kebano provided the pass and Serbia striker Mitrovic tapped in at the far post for his 100th league goal for the Cottagers.

AFP



Wesley Fofana

Chelsea sign Fofana from Leicester

London, United Kingdom - Chelsea have completed the signing of France Under-21 international central defender Wesley Fofana from Leicester City, the two clubs announced on Wednesday.

Fofana, 21, has signed a seven-year deal at Stamford Bridge, the London outfit said. The transfer fee is undisclosed but reports in the UK said Chelsea would pay their Premier League rivals £70 million (\$81.3m) plus bonuses.

“Wesley is a hugely promising defender who has already proven his quality in the Premier League at a young age,” said Chelsea chairman Todd Boehly.

“We are delighted we were able to bring one of Europe’s most exciting talents to Chelsea and further strengthen that area of our squad, both for this season and many more to come.”

Fofana is the latest player signed to bolster Chelsea’s defence, following the arrivals of Kalidou Koulibaly from Napoli and Marc Cucurella from Brighton.

AFP

Dybala double against Monza fires Roma to top as Inter Milan see off Cremonese

Milan, Italy - Paulo Dybala shot Roma top of Serie A on Tuesday with a brace which sank Monza 3-0 while Inter Milan are one point behind Jose Mourinho’s side after their 3-1 home win over Cremonese.

Argentina forward Dybala brought up his goal century in the Italian top flight after netting twice in the first 32 minutes at the Stadio Olimpico to put unbeaten Roma on 10 points from their first four games.

Roma, who also scored just after the hour through Roger Ibanez’s header from a Lorenzo Pellegrini corner, are two points ahead of third-placed AC Milan after the champions were held to a drab goalless draw at Sassuolo.

“I really wanted to get a goal, and thankfully it happened here in front of our fans so I’m really happy,” Dybala told DAZN, who added that it was “too early to talk” of a title challenge.

When asked which was his favourite of his 100 goals in Italy’s top flight, Dybala broke out into a wide grin and said: “The next one.”

Napoli and Lazio both have the chance to draw level with Roma in Wednesday’s respective fixtures against Lecce and Sampdoria, while Atalanta and Torino - also both on seven points - face off on Thursday.



AS Roma’s Paulo Dybala (C) scores against Monza in their Italian Serie A match in Rome on Tuesday (AFP)

Inter on Roma’s heels

Dybala’s goals came thanks to good work from Tammy Abraham, who sent the 28-year-old on his way to opening his Roma account in the 18th minute with a looping flick onto which his strike partner charged before rifling home.

The pair linked up again for Roma’s second, this time Abraham forcing a good save from Michele Di Gregorio before Dybala showed a more aggressive side to his game by beating the Monza defenders to the ball and bundling it home.

Inter are hot on Roma’s heels after bouncing back from their

weekend defeat at Lazio despite having to do without star striker Romelu Lukaku.

Belgium’s Lukaku will miss Saturday’s Milan derby and most likely Inter’s Champions League opener against Bayern Munich next week.

But Joaquin Correa tapped the hosts ahead in the 12th minute and Nicolò Barella doubled their lead with a stunning volley seven minutes before half-time.

Substitute Lautaro Martinez drilled home his third of the season with 14 minutes remaining to make sure Cremonese, who scored late through David Okereke, stayed second-bottom

and stuck on zero points.

Maignan saves Milan

Milan had Mike Maignan to thank for their unbeaten record staying intact, the France goalkeeper diving brilliantly to his right to keep out Domenico Berardi’s penalty midway through the first half.

“We lacked a bit of lucidity and cutting edge in certain situations and that is what we need to work on tomorrow,” Milan defender Simon Kjær told DAZN in the aftermath of his first appearance after nine months out with a serious knee injury.

AFP



Fabian Ruiz

PSG sign Spain midfielder Fabian Ruiz from Napoli

Paris, France - Spain midfielder Fabian Ruiz has joined French champions Paris Saint-Germain on a five-year deal from Napoli, the Ligue 1 club announced Tuesday.

Fabian is the fifth signing of the summer by PSG and will further strengthen their midfield following the arrival of Portugal duo Vitinha and Renato Sanches.

“I am delighted to join Paris Saint-Germain. It is great for me to start this new stage of my career in this country,” Fabian told the club website.

“I am proud to be joining one of the best clubs in Europe with the best players in the world. It’s a really exciting challenge.”

The 26-year-old spent four seasons with Napoli and won the Italian Cup in 2020.

AFP

Werner hat-trick helps Leipzig to big win in German Cup

Berlin, Germany - Timo Werner scored a first-half hat-trick as German Cup holders RB Leipzig annihilated fourth-division side Teutonia Ottensen 8-0 in the first round on Tuesday.

Werner, who is his club’s all-time top goalscorer, scored twice in the space of 60 seconds to put Leipzig two goals ahead after 20 minutes. Werner completed his hat-trick in the 43rd minute when he hammered in a pass from Swedish midfielder Emil Forsberg.

“It was fun. Those are some of the most unpleasant games, because you have to win and still don’t get any compliments for it,” Werner told ZDF.

Leipzig manager Domenico Tedesco said Werner, who returned from Chelsea earlier this month, was “on a very good path to achieving very, very good form”.

Portuguese striker Andre Silva added two more in the 40th and 53rd minutes.

Forsberg, who confirmed after the game that he would be staying in Leipzig beyond the end of the transfer window, added a goal in the 56th minute.

Leipzig took their foot off the pedal as the second half wore on.

Tedesco substituted Werner for French forward Christopher Nkunku in the 57th minute.

Nkunku, who sits atop the Bundesliga goalscoring charts with four goals after four matches, added Leipzig’s seventh in the 77th minute, before Dani Olmo made it 8-0 in the final minute of the game.

Teutonia Ottensen, from the suburbs of Hamburg, were unable to host the game as they play on artificial grass.

They were also unable to play on their replacement ground - the Paul Greifzu Stadium in Dessau - due to a contaminated playing surface, meaning the game needed to be played in Leipzig.

AFP



RB Leipzig’s Timo Werner celebrates with teammates after scoring against Teutonia Ottensen in the German Cup on Tuesday

US investment fund RedBird completes Milan takeover

Milan, Italy - AC Milan said Wednesday that investment fund RedBird had completed the acquisition of the Italian champions from rival US group Elliott Management for 1.2 billion euros (\$1.3 billion).

Serie A giants Milan said in their statement Major League

Baseball giants the New York Yankees will also have a “minority equity stake” in Milan, who won their first Serie A title in 11 years last season, through their owners Yankee Global Enterprises.

“We will support our talented players, coaches and staff to de-

liver success on the pitch,” said RedBird’s founder Gerry Cardinale in the statement.

“We will look to leverage our global sports and media network, our analytics expertise, our track record in sports stadium developments and hospitality to deliver one goal -- maintaining

Milan’s place at the summit of European and world football.”

RedBird’s purchase of Milan comes after they bought a minority stake last year in Fenway Sports Group, the owners of Liverpool and MLB team Boston Red Sox and a majority stake in French Ligue 1 club Toulouse in

2020.

Elliott acquired Milan in 2018 when Chinese businessman Li Yonghong was unable to repay a loan he had taken out when he bought the club from former Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi’s Fininvest in 2017.

AFP



Rafael Nadal of Spain celebrates after defeating Rinky Hijikata of Australia in their first-round match at the US Open on Tuesday (AFP)

Nadal overcomes opening jitters to reach US Open second round

New York, United States - Four-time champion Rafael Nadal overcame dropping the first set to defeat Australian wildcard Rinky Hijikata at the US Open first round on Tuesday.

Nadal triumphed 4-6, 6-2, 6-3, 6-3 over his 198th-ranked opponent to register his 65th career win in New York. The 36-year-old Spaniard, who is chasing a 23rd Grand Slam title and third of 2022, next faces Fabio Fognini.

Nadal holds a 13-4 career lead over the Italian but Fognini famously defeated him from two sets down in the third round of the US Open in 2015.

"I'm very happy to be back. It's a long time that I played here. I thought that maybe I'd never be back," said Nadal whose last appearance in New York saw him win the 2019 title.

World number three Nadal came into this year's tournament under an injury cloud after an abdominal strain had forced him to

forfeit his Wimbledon semi-final against Nick Kyrgios.

Before Tuesday, he had played just once, a first-up loss to Borna Coric in Cincinnati and he looked rusty at the start on Tuesday.

Hijikata, making his Grand Slam debut, surprisingly broke for a 4-3 edge and claimed the opener in the 10th game on the back of 11 fearless winners.

However, Nadal was quickly back in business with breaks in the second and eighth games of the second set bringing him level in the contest. A break in the fourth game of the third for a 3-1 lead was enough to secure a two sets to one lead.

He wrapped up the tie on a fifth match point, sealing the victory with searing forehand pass to progress in a tournament missing his longtime rival Novak Djokovic who was banned from the US over his refusal to be vaccinated.

AFP

GRAVEYARD OF CHAMPIONS

Reigning champion Emma Raducanu, two-time winner Naomi Osaka, and Wimbledon title-holder Elena Rybakina crash out in the US Open first round

New York, United States - Emma Raducanu became only the third defending champion to exit the US Open in the first round on Tuesday while two-time winner Naomi Osaka was also knocked out.

Raducanu, 19, slumped to a 6-3, 6-3 defeat to veteran French player Alize Cornet who is competing in a record 63rd consecutive Grand Slam.

Raducanu has struggled in the spotlight of being a Grand Slam winner, failing to get beyond the second round of any of the previous three majors in 2022.

"In a way I'm happy because it's a clean slate. I'm going to drop down the rankings, climb my way back up," said the teenager.

"The target will be off my back slightly. Yeah, I just have another chance to claw my way back up there," she said.

Former world number one Osaka was knocked out in the opening round for the first time in seven visits, losing 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 to Australian Open runner-up Danielle Collins.

Four-time major winner Osaka has won just twice on tour since April.

Thursday's action is likely to be dominated by the clash between former world number one Azarenka and Kostyuk, a vocal critic of the presence of Russian and Belarusian players on tour.

Only last week, Azarenka was axed from an exhibition on the



Emma Raducanu of Great Britain was all at sea against Alize Cornet of France in their US Open first-round match on Tuesday (AFP)

In a way I'm happy because it's a clean slate. I'm going to drop down the rankings, climb my way back up. The target will be off my back slightly

EMMA RADUCANU

eve of the US Open aimed at raising money for Ukraine.

Kostyuk, 20, said she turned down the chance to play in protest at the presence of Azarenka and the 33-year-old

Belarusian was swiftly dumped from the event.

Belarus is a close ally of Russia and has allowed Moscow to use its territory to launch attacks into Ukraine during the ongoing war.

World number one and French Open champion Iga Swiatek eased past Italy's Jasmine Paolini 6-3, 6-0 in just 67 minutes.

Victory was a relief for the 21-year-old Pole who had suffered early losses at warm-up events in Toronto and Cincinnati.

Swiatek next faces 2017 champion Sloane Stephens.

Carlos Alcaraz, the 19-year-old world number four, was made to sweat by Sebastian Baez, winning the first two sets 7-5, 7-5 before the Argentine retired injured 0-2 down in the third.

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Venus not looking past doubles with Serena after US Open exit

New York, United States - Venus Williams brushed off questions about her future on Tuesday after tumbling out of the US Open in the first round.

The 42-year-old, who has barely played in the past year and whose last victory in a singles match came at Wimbledon in 2021, was beaten 6-1, 7-6 (7/5) by Belgium's Alison van Uytvanck.

It was yet another indication that Williams is fast-approaching the end of her glittering 28-year professional career.

But she said she was not thinking about following in the footsteps of younger sister Serena, who has signalled that this year's Open will be her last tournament.

The Williams sisters are re-uniting for the doubles at Flushing Meadows - their first tournament together since 2018 - and Venus says she is looking no further than that.

"Right now I'm just focused on the doubles," she replied when



Venus Williams hits a return to Belgium's Alison van Uytvanck during their US Open first-round match on Tuesday (AFP)

asked about her future following Tuesday's defeat.

Despite losing all four of the singles matches she has now played in 2022, the seven-time Grand Slam champion insisted she was still motivated to compete.

Asked what was driving her to compete at the highest level, she told reporters: "Three letters: W-I-N. That's it. Very simple."

Williams also maintained she had taken satisfaction from her performances in recent weeks.

AFP



The Lusail Stadium, which will host the final on December 18

UAE woos World Cup fans with multi-entry visas

Dubai, United Arab Emirates - The United Arab Emirates will offer multiple-entry visas to football fans at this year's Qatar World Cup, officials announced, as it looks to reap an economic windfall from the tournament.

The UAE, whose jewel is the tourism-to-finance hub of Dubai, follows neighbouring Saudi Arabia in opening its doors to supporters arriving for the first football World Cup in the Middle East.

Fans with the Hayya Card issued to ticket-holders will be eligible for the 90-day renewable visas available for an initial fee of 100 dirhams (\$27).

"The program comes within the UAE's initiatives aiming to support the State of Qatar, in hosting the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022," the official WAM news agency said. "Through the multiple-entry tourist visa options, the UAE will be hosting the World Cup fans, allowing them to enter UAE multiple times over a period of 90 days."

Qatar hosting the biggest event in its history, is expecting 1.2 million visitors for the November 20-December 18 World Cup.

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CHAI WALA



SIP OF BLISS

By Anirban Ray

You might walk in with distress, be preoccupied with a nagging concern, or be exhausted with your daily grind... but it all disappears in an instant as you take a sip of this piping hot magical potion that has been customised with just one key element in mind - You!

The recently celebrated word 'chai', which has found favour among diners worldwide, as well as been a secret ingredient of many celebrity chefs internationally, is now well known among the populace of most countries. That it originates from India/Pakistan and stems from the humble brew prepared at home as well as at street corners, isn't quite a deterrent for this new fad which is simply a hallowed version of the English tea - brewed with aromatic tea leaves, milk, spices, and ginger and served in clay pots (*kulhads*).

At Chai Wala, in Darsait, however, you come face to face with this stimulating beverage that is a level higher than the 'karak' tea outlets in town that have been popularising 'chai' in a big way over the past decade. Prepared with whole milk, the chai at this cafe is available in many interesting flavours not found elsewhere in the capital. You have to sip it to realise how it has the capacity to revive and rejuvenate your mood in an instant.

Both, Chai Wala and Tropical (a juice/icecream chain) are run by Salim al Mazrooei and Saadat Shakil - a duo working with Saad al Balushi, managing director of Golden Spoon group - the main franchisor of the two brands.

Chai Wala opened its door in April 2021. This is the third branch after

those in Al Khoud and Amerat, the last one being at CCC Qurm. With a staff of 12, the cafe also provides quick vegetarian/non-vegetarian bites of popular Indian/Pakistani fast foods besides over 20 varieties of chai that includes flavours like ginger, saffron, cardamon, cinnamon, besides many other combinations and blends.

The magic...

"It's not just about boiling water, milk and tea together... there are certain steps involved in preparation of our chai," said a steward explaining that

standardised procedures are followed to make every cup of this brew special.

"The process to make one single cup of chai takes 10 minutes - it includes boiling fresh milk, pounding spices as required for each choice of flavour of customers, and brewing tea leaves to get a smooth texture of the final brew.

The chefs also use a 'secret mixture' of various spices that adds not only colour and taste but also create a totally different experience. The tea leaves are imported from Pakistan. One of the most popular chais at the cafe is Kashmiri chai - a pink brew made with seven

spices, including saffron, and garnished with crushed dry fruits and nuts.

Saadat Shakil, the franchise partner of Chai Wala Darsait, said, "The idea started a few years back when I was with Salim and decided to have a cafe that caters to all. We spoke with Saad and our dream materialised soon after. The location literally fell into our laps, and good fortune smiled upon us."

The location is quite ideal with many schools, Muscat Municipality, business houses, the church and temple complex, all in the vicinity. Many people stop by every morning and evening as they

head to or return from work, for a refreshing cup of chai on their way to work/home everyday.

Cuppa and conversation

"There are so many senior citizens who frequently drop in for chai and conversation with their friends and folks. Chai is a bonding factor that makes them nostalgic - it also surpasses every barrier of nationality, culture, and religion," he said.

"Our signature *Doodh Patti* is made from 100% fresh milk and our secret tea mix. Each cup is customised as per your taste - be it sweet or strong/light - we have the right tea for you. Our Zafarani chai is a secret blend of herbs and dry fruit mix, cooked in 100% fresh milk on high heat which makes all those ingredients blend to generate a unique hue and texture - each cupful is special."

The seating space is limited but comfortable giving an impression of a wayside '*dhaba*', quite common in India/Pakistan. Bright coloured murals and designs are painted on the walls, including meaningful Punjabi quotes like '*Na Chedh Malanganu*' (Don't instigate the holy one) and '*Naseeb Aapna*' (It's your fate).

People come in to socialise over chai, discuss deals/projects, or simply unwind with light conversation. "Many new friendships are struck here, many lucrative deals have materialised here, many debates have remained inconclusive here," the steward says with a wink, "...the common bond, however, has been our chai!"



There are so many senior citizens who frequently drop in for chai and conversation with their friends and folks. Chai is a bonding factor that makes them nostalgic - it also surpasses every barrier of nationality, culture, and religion

SAADAT SHAKIL



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HOLLYWOOD/BOLLYWOOD



KHLOE KARDASHIAN CELEBRATES BEING A MOM

Khloe Kardashian, 38, is a world-renown reality star and a millionaire entrepreneur, but her favourite title is that of 'Mom'. In an interview this week, she said she loves every single thing about being a mother of two and that it is the greatest privilege. "I know it's cliched, but I love everything, even the hard parts [about being a mom of two]. I [my kids] challenge me as a person, and being able to shape little people into really incredible big people is an honour and a gift," she told *Elle*.

BEN KINGSLEY TO REPRISE MCU ROLE IN 'WONDER MAN'



Ben Kingsley is returning to the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The Oscar winner will reprise his role as actor Trevor Slattery in Marvel's *Wonder Man* project at Disney+. The Hollywood Reporter has confirmed. The potential series focuses on one of Marvel's oldest characters - Simon Williams. *Wonder Man* will mark Kingsley's fourth appearance in the MCU, following scene-stealing turns in 2013's *Iron Man 3*, a follow-up short film and last year's *Shang-Chi* and the *Legend of the Ten Rings*.



LEONARDO DICAPRIO AND CAMILA MORRONE SPLIT AFTER 4 YEARS OF DATING

Leonardo DiCaprio and his model girlfriend Camila Morrone have reportedly called it quits after nearly four years of dating. As reported by *People*, a source informed the outlet that the duo has parted ways. DiCaprio and Morrone first made their relationship official after the duo was spotted sitting together at the Oscars 2020 ceremony in February. The *Don't Look Up* star and his model girlfriend first sparked romance rumours in January 2018 although they managed to keep most part of their relationship extremely private.

PRIYANKA CHOPRA JOINS JONAS BROTHERS' TOUR



Priyanka Chopra joined Nick Jonas in Mexico as Jonas Brothers' *Remember This* tour kicked off in Mexico City. Taking to Instagram, the couple posed for a cool snap together that was posted by Nick. The photo posted by Nick was clicked by his brother Kevin Jonas. Priyanka in one of her Instagram stories also gave a glimpse of her backstage entry card at the Jonas Brothers' concert.

JOHNNY DEPP'S FIRST LOOK AS KING LOUIS XV RELEASED



Johnny Depp's first look as controversial King Louis XV has been released by a French production house from director Maiwenn's historical love story *Jeanne du Barry*. This is Depp's first film role since his highly publicised defamation trial against ex-wife Amber Heard. The shooting for *Jeanne du Barry* started in the month of July in Paris, according to *Variety*. The title role is being played by Maiwenn herself.

'THE FLASH' STAR EZRA MILLER SEEKS TREATMENT FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Ezra Miller, the troubled star of Warner Bros' major upcoming superhero movie *The Flash*, is seeking treatment for mental health issues after a string of high-profile controversies, the actor said. The 29-year-old, who has already appeared as the key DC Comics character in several blockbuster films including *Justice League*, was charged this month with felony burglary in Vermont, and earlier this year with disorderly conduct following two arrests in Hawaii.

ALIA BHATT ENJOYS WORK WITH HEART OF STONE CO-STAR

Alia Bhatt, who is all set for her big Hollywood debut with Netflix's *Heart Of Stone*, shared her experience of working with co-star Gal Gadot during the promotions of *Darlings*. "I was nervous because it was all new. It was also my first action film, but they took great care of me and made me feel at home. About her experience of filming with the *Wonder Woman* star, Alia said, "Gal Gadot is such an icon, an inspiration. We had a lot to talk about. She was possibly the most beautiful energy that I've ever come across."



ASHTON KUTCHER 'LUCKY TO BE ALIVE'



Actor Ashton Kutcher recently opened up about his battle with vasculitis, an autoimmune disease that affected his hearing, sight and ability to walk for more than a year. The 44-year-old actor opened up about his condition on the show *Running Wild with Bear Grylls: The Challenge*. In a video clip from the episode shared by *Access Hollywood*, Kutcher says, "Like two years ago, I had this weird, super rare form of vasculitis, that like knocked out my vision, it knocked out my hearing, it knocked out like all my equilibrium." The actor added that he is "lucky to be alive" and that, "You don't really appreciate it until it's gone."

HOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW: **ORPHAN: FIRST KILL**
GENRE: HORROR
STARRING: ISABELLE FUHRMAN, JULIA STILES, ROSSIF SUTHERLAND

Surefire suspense

In this supposedly thrilling prequel to the original horror saga - *Orphan*, Esther's terrifying plight continues. After orchestrating a brilliant escape from an Estonian psychiatric facility, Esther travels to America by impersonating the missing daughter of a wealthy family. Yet, an unexpected twist arises that pits her against a mother who will protect her family from the 'murderous child' at any cost.

Directed by William Brent Bell, who shone with *The Devil Inside*, *Brahms: The Boy II*, and most recently, *Separation*, this film was written by David Coggeshall, based on a story by David Leslie Johnson-McGoldrick and Alex Mace. While the early birds have given a thumbs down for this movie, those who went with little expectations were not particularly disappointed. Although, the prequel could've really had a greater impact if care was taken to keep it as close as possible in treatment to the original.

Fans remember that Esther escaped an Estonian mental hospital before finding her way to a new family, and *First Kill* basically documents a little

trouble she got into along the way. With the mystery of Esther's murderous background in the rearview mirror, *First Kill* centers her as more of a traditional slasher villain in early scenes, willing to do anything to get her freedom.

After she escapes, she comes up with a plan to find safety in a wealthy family in the States, choosing to impersonate the missing child of the Albrights. Mother Tricia (Julia Stiles), father Allen (Rossif Sutherland), and brother Gunnar (Matthew Finlan) are shocked to see their little girl return to the Albright family estate, even if a few things about her story don't seem to add up. And, when it turns out that the Albrights have a secret that rivals Esther's, a showdown is inevitable.

The movie is not really as scary as you would want it to be, but even the suspense doesn't quite impress. Apparently, because the first film has already made the audience believe that an innocent child is capable of violent acts of murder. Watch it, anyway, knowing that it doesn't quite deserve any more than 3 stars out of five.



BOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW: **LIGER**
Genre: Action, Drama, Romance Starring: Vijay Deverakonda, Ananya Panday, Ramya Krishna, Ronit Roy, Makarand Deshpande and Mike Tyson



Knocked out success

If you are one of those smitten by Vijay Deverakonda's boyish charm and waiting with bated breath for *Liger* after seeing his exhaustive promotional initiatives, the movie might descend into your world without quite a bang, rather with a thud.

If the southern (Indian) star himself wasn't quite happy with his performance after attending a premiere and subsequently disappointed with the film's underwhelming performance at the box office, you know what to expect on the big screen when the popcorn in your lap suddenly seems quite delicious. Needless to say, Vijay's Bollywood

debut with this pan-India film has crash landed, not just in the Hindi bastions but also in the star's home turf where the Telugu version is being screened.

An action-packed film about a kickboxer (Vijay), in which the lead star undertook special martial arts training in Thailand for the role, the film also marks former American boxer Mike Tyson's debut in Bollywood. However, the performance of all key characters have been mediocre, turning a tell-tale finger towards (of course!) the director - Puri Jagannadh.

Liger (Vijay Deverakonda), whom his mother Balamani (Ramya

Krishnan) describes as a crossbreed between a lion and tiger, is good at mixed martial arts (MMA). Hailing from Karimnagar and raising him on her own (running a tea stall), she moves to Mumbai to see him as an MMA champion. They seek the help of a coach (Ronit Roy), though they cannot afford the fee. But Balamani's sob story ultimately gets the coach around.

Liger has a handicap - a stutter. And, he can land several punches in the time he takes to utter a sentence, and you are not quite amused in most of the predictable scenes wherein he needs to 'prove' himself to other students of MMA.

In case you're wondering where the 'heroine' Tanya (Ananya Panday) fits in, well, she's the wealthy brat seeking social media attention (and brickbats from the audience) as she tries to woo him, much to the displeasure of Liger's mother.

You can write the rest of the script yourself...we bet!

All in all, the movie might be a disaster but surely a treat for giddy-headed teenaged girls who may possibly drool over his good looks and physique. And, if anyone needs to sit up, it might be Tiger Shroff, as Liger (Vijay) can now do what he does best. Watch at your own peril.