

MTCIT launches Green Mobility plan to achieve net zero by 2050

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has unveiled its Green Mobility programme aimed at reducing carbon emissions and achieving net zero by 2050.

The programme was introduced during a forum on Monday held under the patronage of Salim bin Nasser al Afi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, in the presence of Said bin Hamoud al Ma'awali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and CEOs and strategic partners.

Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamakhi, Undersecretary for Transport in MTCIT, informed that the ministry's objective is to achieve zero carbon neutrality in line with the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq. By leveraging clean technology and embracing sustainable development, the ministry aims to create a diverse mix of clean energy sources.

The Green Mobility programme focuses on three main stages. The first stage aims to promote the adoption of electric vehicles, hydrogen utilisation for heavy transport and trucks, the



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KHAMIS BIN MOHAMMED AL SHAMAKHI

use of biofuels, emission reduction through enabling technologies, installation of electric vehicle chargers along major roads, and developing trans-

portation-related big data.

In the second stage, the focus will be on increasing the number of environmentally friendly vehicles, facilitating

sustainable fuel usage for aircraft, providing smart mobility services, establishing a regional centre for supplying ships with green fuel, reducing port emis-

sions, upgrading existing fuel stations to support hydrogen fuel and electric chargers, and integrating public transport with the Metro scheme in Muscat governorate.

The final stage of the programme aims to fully embrace environmentally friendly vehicles and autonomous driving.

As part of its efforts, the ministry is collaborating with various government agencies on 18

Carbon Lab. This initiative includes the identification of special lanes for buses, planning the main and secondary public transport network in Greater Muscat, and other measures to enhance sustainability.

The ministry is actively working on developing green ports, focusing on converting port equipment to electric power, implementing smart systems, connecting ships to electric power sources, decarbonising the port sector, installing solar panels at Oman airports and ports, collaborating internationally to prevent ship pollution, and establishing solar-powered waiting stations at public transport stops.

Furthermore, MTCIT has partnered with Connect company to organise Oman Sustainability Week and present initiatives such as 'Green and Smart Mobility' and 'Green and Smart Transport Expo'.

Agreements were signed at the forum with Oman Shell for installation of electric vehicle chargers and infrastructure throughout the sultanate, and with Oman Oil Marketing Company and Synergy Investment Company to establish Ivo, a company specialising in electric vehicle charging solutions.

UN body to confront Quran burning

Geneva, Switzerland - The UN Human Rights Council will hold an urgent session to address the burning of the Quran following an incident in Stockholm that sparked global outrage, a spokesman said on Tuesday.

A Quran was burnt outside the Swedish capital's main mosque on June 28, triggering a backlash from the Muslim world.

Pakistan and other nations called for a discussion of "the alarming rise in premeditated and public acts of religious hatred as manifested by recurrent desecration of the Holy Quran in some European and other countries".

Salwan Momika, 37, who fled from Iraq to Sweden several years ago, stomped on the holy book and set several pages alight.

The Geneva-based Human Rights Council meets for three regular sessions per year. The UN's top rights body is currently in the second session, which runs until July 14. The 47-member council will change its agenda to stage an urgent debate, following a request from Pakistan.

"The urgent debate will most likely be convened this week at a date and time to be determined by the bureau of the Human Rights Council that is meeting today," council spokesman Pascal Sim told reporters.

AFP

► NEWS BRIEF

SAI PRESENTS 2022 REPORT TO HIS MAJESTY THE SULTAN

Muscat - Sheikh Ghosn Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of State Audit Institution, has presented the SAI annual report to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq. The report highlights the results of SAI activities in 2022.

SAI channelled all its resources and capabilities to perform its national duty in implementing terms of reference and achieving goals entrusted to it with a high level of efficiency and professionalism. The steps come within the framework of active partnership at the institutional and societal levels in a manner that serves the sustainable development march.

50% fee reduction for SMEs in special economic, free zones

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) announced on Tuesday that it is offering 50% reduction in fees for services offered to small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

OPAZ announced its decision at a press conference, specifying the fees for over 80 services provided in its affiliated zones. As part of the decision, SMEs will be offered a 50% reduction in fees for these services.

The move marks a crucial step towards streamlining operations, enhancing procedures and expediting business activities. 'It showcases OPAZ's unwavering commitment to bolstering the local investment and business environment, stimulating economic growth, attracting foreign investments, supporting SMEs, as well as the broader business sector. The reduction and unification of fees for services and activities within OPAZ-supervised zones demonstrate our dedication to harmonising and simplifying



ing processes, reducing challenges for investors and promoting competitiveness of the investment landscape in Oman,' OPAZ stated in a press release.

The objective of this initiative is to complement national efforts in economic diversification and maximise the role of SMEs in establishing projects that contribute significantly to the local economy.

'These projects generate employment opportunities, foster innovation, promote sustainable economic development and ensure financial stability within the

special economic zones and free zones, aligning with Oman Vision 2040. By addressing investors' concerns, encouraging greater participation from the local and foreign private sectors and improving the investment environment's competitiveness, this initiative aims to create a more favourable ecosystem.'

Furthermore, this decision focuses on streamlining procedures, licences and reducing operating costs, all while ensuring transparency and credibility in determining fees for OPAZ services.

The fee reduction applies to

various services in special economic zones and free zones, including commercial register procedures; contract registration; licences and permits for business, commercial, industrial and tourism activities; investor work permits; environmental permits, urban planning services; construction and engineering permits; certification and documentation issuance; service supplier permits; government fees related to operations and investment and more.

According to Dr Said bin Khalifa al Quraini, General Manager of OPAZ's Investment Development Department, this initiative reflects the authority's efforts to enhance the business environment, achieve sustainable economic growth and boost economic competitiveness within its zones. These measures will contribute to increased investment growth and SME integration, aligning with the needs of existing and future projects, and promoting sustainable development.

Quraini emphasised OPAZ's ongoing commitment to improve its services and review fees.

OIA ranks second in world in governance, sustainability index

Muscat - Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has secured the second position worldwide in development of governance and sustainability performance index for the period between 2022 and 2023. According to a report by the International Forum of Sovereign Wealth Funds (IFSFW), OIA exhibited a remarkable 28% improvement in its accomplishments compared to 200 other global sovereign funds.

The report highlights OIA's commitment to adhering to international norms and principles of governance and transparency practices endorsed by IFSWF. This demonstrates the authority's dedication to operational excellence and the establishment of a global identity, particularly following merger of State General Reserve Fund and Oman Investment Fund.

Furthermore, the report acknowledges OIA's efforts in sharing investment strategies, exit plans and the development of a new framework aligned with sustainable development goals. By embracing the Santiago Prin-

OIA exhibited a remarkable 28% improvement in its accomplishments

ciples set forth by IFSWF, OIA ensures adherence to unified procedures that reflect disclosure requirements, transparency, governance, accountability and risk management standards.

To consistently evaluate its commitment to these criteria, OIA collaborates with IFSWF, striving to stay up to date with the latest governance requirements and achieve superior operational and investment performance through the application of best international practices. This pursuit enables OIA to establish an integrated, flexible and practical system.

The remarkable second-place ranking of the authority in the global governance and sustainability performance index reinforces its position as a leader in implementing transparent governance practices.



Noor Shopping - Committed to serve community



Israel kills ten Palestinians in second day of major raids

Palestinians encounter major obstacles to realising right to health: WHO

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Palestinians continue to encounter major obstacles to realising the right to health, according to the World Health Organization.

WHO launched two reports, 'Right to Health 2019 to 2021' and 'Palestinian Voices 2022 to 2023' recently, outlining how fragmentation of the Palestinian people, implementation of a permit regime, physical

331,678 patient and companion permit applications denied from West Bank

750 health attacks in occupied Palestinian territory from 2019 to 2022

Attacks resulted in fatality of a health worker and 568 health worker injuries

obstacles to movement, and protection gaps cause health inequities and create substantial barriers to healthcare provision and healthcare access in the occupied West Bank, including east Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip.

"Enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is a fundamental right of every human being," said Dr Richard Peepker, WHO Representative for the occupied Palestinian territory. "The Palestinian health

system suffers the consequences of longstanding displacement, refugeehood and occupation. Public revenues, health expenditure and ultimately health services are impacted, with longstanding shortages of health workers, equipment, medicines and supplies.

"Meanwhile, movement restrictions, including Israel's implementation of a permit regime, hinder health access."

Continued on Page 03

'Trade and investment high on agenda'

Bangladesh, Oman set for stronger ties as new ambassador chalks out plan for enhanced relations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The new Ambassador of Bangladesh to Oman H E Md Nazmul Islam is geared up to strengthen relations between his country and the sultanate, uplifting community members and fostering increased investment in Bangladesh.

With a wealth of experience and determined to realise his vision, H E Islam is committed to serving the people of both nations. His tenure promises to be marked by transformative initiatives aimed at enhancing cooperation and mutual prosperity.

Muscat Daily caught up with H E Islam for an exclusive interview. Excerpts:

As the new Ambassador of Bangladesh, what are your top priorities?

Bangladesh and Oman enjoy excellent bilateral relations based on shared values, and mutual interests and respect. Our rela-



H E Md Nazmul Islam

tions date back to thousand years and the heritage and culture of Bangladesh are influenced by Omani and Arab culture. The presence of a large number of Bangladeshi expatri-

ates in Oman contributes significantly to bringing the two friendly countries closer.

As a new ambassador, my top priority will be to maintain the existing friendly political rela-

tions and to upgrade it to a higher level. I am happy to mention here that over the last few years, we have been holding political consultations between the two countries on a regular basis. The third round of political consultations between Bangladesh and Oman was held on May 28 and 29 in Muscat. I will be working to continue the political consultations regularly as well as to arrange important visits between the two friendly countries.

Another priority will be to boost business, trade and investments between the two countries, which is not up to full potential at present. We are also working on signing a few agreements and planning the launch of a joint platform/chamber for communication between the apex chambers of the two countries. Also, establishing port-to-port connectivity and exchange of visits are some of my important targets to further improve the business, trade and investment relations between the friendly countries. Direct port

connectivity to Sohar will save time as well as expenses.

I am happy to inform that currently Bangladeshi expatriates are the largest diaspora in Oman numbering around 700,000. Ensuring their wellbeing and rights in the host country and creating employment opportunities for skilled and semi-skilled Bangladeshi people is my other top priority.

How do you plan to increase cultural relations?

Bangladesh and Oman have rich culture and heritage, which is similar in many respects. Renowned Bangladeshi artists have been performing in different cities of Oman regularly in programmes organised by our expatriate community and the embassy. Every year, we invite renowned individuals, academicians and journalists to take part in a programme organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, which gives them the opportunity to see

Bangladesh and exchange views with their counterparts. We are also planning to collaborate in the field of sports. Our sports teams regularly visit Oman. Our under-19 hockey team recently took part in a junior Asian hockey tournament in Salalah. Earlier, our national men's football and cricket teams also came to play here. We look forward to increase collaboration in this area.

What events are lined up for 2023?

We held our National Day reception recently this year after a period of three years. Many Omani dignitaries, diplomats and Bangladeshi expatriates joined the celebration enthusiastically. Next year, we are planning a more grand event. Every year, we also celebrate cultural occasions like Bangla New Year and International Mother Language Day. We collaborate with the Bangladeshi diaspora living here to organise cultural and social events. Apart from these regular events, I am planning to organise

a painting exhibition where renowned Bangladeshi artists will showcase their art later this year.

How can contact between people be enhanced?

People-to-people contact between the two friendly countries is good. Currently Biman Bangladesh, Oman Air, Salam Air and US Bangla operate 33 direct flights every week between different cities of the two countries. We are encouraging our Omani friends to visit Bangladesh. The procedure to apply for a Bangladesh visa is fast and easy. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of visitors from Oman was increasingly growing. I am happy to note that the number of Omani visitors has started to increase again.

There are many places to enjoy in Bangladesh, including beaches, forests, wildlife safaris and adventure sports along with varied cuisine and multi-cultural festivals.

Call for blood donations in summers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Blood Bank in Bausher has called on donors to volunteer and help save lives.

A statement said, 'Due to a drop in the number of blood donors at the Central Blood Bank during summer, the Department



of Blood Banks Services encourages everyone to donate blood during these months.'

Those interested can donate blood from 8am to 8pm, Saturday to Thursday, and from 8am to 2pm on Friday.

Appointments can be made through WhatsApp - 94555648 - or by calling 24591255.

OCCI to host forum on tourism investment opportunities

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) is preparing to hold a two-day forum starting August 7 at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. The event will focus on highlighting the abundant investment opportunities within the tourism sector with a specific emphasis on sports tourism and real estate ventures across the sultanate.

The forum aims to serve as a platform that showcases a wide range of lucrative prospects awaiting potential investors. These opportunities encompass the development of resorts, ho-



Faisal al Rawas

tels, integrated recreational cities, waterparks and other innovative projects within the tourism industry.

In addition to exploring investment avenues, the forum will

delve into the realm of sports. The sultanate will present its vision for the establishment of sports medical cities and hosting international tournaments and sports events.

As part of the forum, the chamber will facilitate bilateral meetings between investors and companies. These sessions will shed light on Oman's foreign investment law and honour pioneers in the fields of tourism and real estate investment in the sultanate.

Running alongside the forum, an exhibition will provide individuals and enterprises a platform to showcase their ideas and explore potential investment opportunities.

The event presents an opportunity to foster economic growth and attract international investments, further consolidating Oman's position as a prime hub for tourism and development.

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TRA seizes illegal postal firms

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) took action against several firms operating without licence to provide postal and delivery services on Tuesday.

A statement issued by TRA said, 'The authority seized a number of companies that were not licensed to provide postal and delivery services, thus violating the provisions of the Postal Services Regulation Law issued by Royal Decree No 71/2012.'

TRA has warned that anyone who offers postal services



(Supplied photo)

and activities without a licence can be fined up to O100,000.

'Anyone who wishes to offer postal services and related activities must obtain the neces-

sary licence. Postal services include receiving, sorting, distributing and delivering postal items such as parcels and letters,' it stated.

It added that postal delivery services are carried out through licensed offices, applications and electronic platforms. 'The authority urges anyone who wishes to offer postal services to apply for a licence from the authority in accordance with the established procedures.'

TRA also urged all individuals and companies to deal with licensed companies only, a list of which can be found on www.tra.gov.om

State Council discusses new studies, proposals

Muscat - The State Council reviewed a number of studies and proposals submitted by the permanent and special committees of the council.

It looked into a study submitted by the Culture, Information and Tourism Committee titled 'Scope for Promoting Local Tourism in the Sultanate of Oman' and another submitted by the Social Committee titled 'Omani National Identity'. Studies submitted by the Technology and Innovation Committee and the Legal Committee were also discussed.

The meeting was headed by H E Sheikh Abdul Malik Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the council.

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ITC projects worth R04.3bn ongoing

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) has issued 19 licences for integrated tourism complexes (ITCs) and is closely monitoring the progress of these projects to ensure adherence to agreed timelines.

H E Azzan bin Qassim al-Busaidi, Undersecretary for Tourism in MHT, shared this information, highlighting the ministry's focus on expanding recreational and tourism facilities within ITC projects.

These complexes, spread across various governorates including Muscat, Dhofar, South Sharqiyah, South Batinah and Musandam, comprise a total of 81 hotel facilities, 16,576 hotel rooms, 2,552 apartments and villas, 42,617 residential units, as well as golf courses, ports, restaurants, cafes and shops.

According to ministry statistics, the ongoing ITC projects have an estimated investment volume of approximately RO4.3bn, while other licensed

A scenic view of the Cliffs of Moher in Ireland. In the foreground, a viewing platform with a white canopy and wooden railings sits on a rocky outcrop. Below it, a small beach area is visible, dotted with blue and white beach umbrellas and lounge chairs. The cliffs themselves are massive, layered rock formations that drop steeply into the ocean. The water is a vibrant turquoise color, and the sky is a soft, hazy blue. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and majestic.

nis to own property but also attract foreign capital and businessmen to reside in the sultanate, thus contributing to the local economy."

including generating employment opportunities, enriching supply chains in the tourism sector, fostering business growth and increasing local added value. "Allowing foreign ownership of property has proven to be instrumental in stimulating the local

market and attracting investors," he added.

responsive to rapid changes and adapt positively to evolving trends while ensuring a unique living experience that harmonises with the natural surroundings."

Oman's diverse terrain, featuring picturesque beaches, mountains and valleys, adds to the appeal for local and foreign investors seeking opportunities in the tourism and real estate sectors. The advantages offered by ITCs include the ability for foreign owners to obtain a visa and permanent residence for themselves and their families, as well as access to flexible mortgage options through local banks.

Moreover, these complexes present an opportunity for prospective buyers to acquire ready-made real estate through extended payment programmes. By paying a portion of the property's price upfront, typically 10-20%, buyers can take possession of the property and settle the remaining balance within an agreed timeframe, providing an alternative to traditional bank financing.

Palestinians' right to health

In the Gaza Strip from 2019 to 2021, just 55% of essential medicines were available in the Central Drugs Store of the Ministry of Health. Cancer care remains the single largest reason for referral to providers outside the Palestinian Ministry of Health, driven by gaps in public health services.

In the context of blockade and closure, 35% of permit applications by patients from the Gaza Strip were not approved in time to reach their hospital appointments from 2019 to 2021. Although rates of approval are higher for the West Bank, between 2011 and 2021 there were 331,678 patient and companion permit applications denied from the West Bank.

In 2023, the surge in violence in the West Bank has exposed Palestinian patients, health workers, ambulances and facilities to increased attacks on healthcare. WHO's reports show the longer-term trends, with 750 health attacks documented in the occupied Palestinian territory from 2019 to 2022. These attacks resulted in the fatality of a health worker and 568 health worker injuries, with 315 ambulances and 160 health facilities affected.

"In 2022, we saw the highest number of Palestinians killed by Israeli Security Forces since 2005, often following excessive use of force," said Ajith Sunghay, Head of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in the occupied Palestinian territory. "This trend has only accelerated in 2023. OHCHR and WHO documented that Israeli forces have frequently prevented access to medical care, including for first response teams to reach persons with life-threatening injuries. We are deeply concerned about failures to ensure protection against health attacks."

‘Khazaen Economic City to enhance national income’

Salim Sulaiman al Thuhli, CEO of Khazaen Economic City, has stated that the Royal Decree issued on establishment of the facility will significantly boost national income. Under the supervision of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, the city will encompass two free zones, serving as an integrated economic and free zone in Barka, South Batinah.

Spread over 52mn sqm, Khaz-

an Economic City is a global city strategically positioned on the Batinah Highway, connecting Greater Muscat with other governorates. It aims to attract investments in key sectors, including logistics, industrial, commercial, residential and strategic projects that promote service and business integration.

(Supplied image)

"It also fosters a balanced environment that integrates business, social and recreational activities, offering promising career opportunities for Omani youth and facilitating growth of small and medium-sized enterprises."

According to Thuhli, the key aspects outlined in the Royal Decree include establishment of a one-stop station for industrial needs, sale of residential and commercial land, and opening of two free zones – one for light and medium industries and logistics activities, and the second for

business and trade. The city also grants customs and tax exemptions to investors.

The decree also ratified agreements, granting Khazaen Economic City Company the authority to develop and manage the city and its free zones.

Thuhli informed that the city has achieved success in attracting local and foreign investments despite the challenges faced by global and regional markets. Over the last 30 months, it has signed 100 investment agreements valued at RO300mn.

ESO, Oman Shell to protect biodiversity, heritage of frankincense habitats

Muscat – Environment Society of Oman (ESO) and Oman Shell recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to support and promote the research and conservation of wild frankincense tree populations in Oman.

These *Boswellia sacra* trees produce the finest frankincense gum resin valued worldwide for its medicinal properties and used as a source of incense and perfumery. For thousands of years, these unique trees have played an essential role in Oman's biodiversity, cultural heritage, traditions and economy. This species witnesses human induced environmental pressures in some parts of its range in Dhofar.

modity for its cosmetic and health values."

more efficient and innovative in protecting these sacred tree populations and their habitats."

Malak al Sheibani, General Manager of Corporate Relations at Oman Shell, said, "At Shell, we are convinced that environmental awareness and education can result in environmental conservation and more sustainable practices. We believe that there is a lot we can do at the community level, so we are taking part in several national and grassroots initiatives aiming to make a real difference. We are thrilled to be part of this project with ESO and support it in protecting this tree species that is a unique part of our beautiful and biodiverse country."

Air passenger traffic rises 81%

Passenger traffic at Oman's airports in 2023 increased 81% till April to 4,209,846 compared to 2,324,007 in the same period in 2022, as indicated by the latest data from National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Muscat International Airport witnessed a significant increase in passenger numbers - 3,792,212 at the end of April this year from 1,984,428 in April 2022, accounting for a 91.1% growth.

The number of flights through Muscat International Airport increased this year to 28,939 compared to 16,262 in 2022 till the end of April, reflecting a 78% increase.

Salalah Airport also witnessed growth in passenger traffic, increasing 36.8% to 390,355, while the number of flights increased 30.9% to 2,842.

Sohar Airport welcomed 5,669 passengers on 86 flights, while Duqm Airport handled 21,610 passengers on 204 flights.

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2022
OMAN'S MOST TRUSTED BRAND AWARDS

INTERVIEW

NOOR SHOPPING
WINNER: SUPERMARKETS CATEGORY

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Noor Shopping - a neighbourhood convenience store brand created and owned by Enhance Group in Oman - won Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award 2022 in supermarkets category. In an exclusive interview with Muscat Daily, Nadil al Balushi, Business Head: Retail, at Noor Shopping, discussed in details the company's strengths and customer- and community-focused approach. He also talked about Noor Shopping's geographical presence, expansion and location strategy in Oman.

Noor Shopping was voted by public as Oman's Most Trusted Brand 2022 in supermarkets category. What are the major strengths of Noor Shopping which differentiated it from other players in the market?

Noor Shopping's distinction as Oman's Most Trusted Brand in the supermarkets category for 2022 can be attributed to its unwavering commitment to serving the community and upholding its core values. As a proud Omani brand, Noor Shopping understands the importance of catering to the needs of the local community and making a positive impact.

One of the major strengths that sets Noor Shopping apart from other players in the market is its deep-rooted connection to the community it serves. Noor Shopping genuinely cares about the well-being of its customers and strives to provide them with exceptional products and services. By consistently putting the community's needs first, Noor Shopping has earned the trust and loyalty of its customers, leading to its recognition as the most trusted brand.

Additionally, Noor Shopping's decision-making process is driven by the goal of serving the community. Every strategic decision, be it in terms of product selection, pricing, or customer service, is carefully evaluated with the community's best interests in mind. Noor Shopping recognises that its success is closely tied to the satisfaction and well-being of its customers, and as a result, it continually strives to exceed their expectations.

Overall, Noor Shopping's distinction as Oman's Most Trusted Brand in the supermarkets category stems from its strong adherence to its core values and its unwavering dedication to serving the community. By consistently prioritizing the community's needs, maintaining high-quality standards, and making decisions with the community in mind, Noor Shopping has established itself as a brand that Omani consumers can trust and rely on.

How would you ensure to maintain customer satisfaction and their trust in your brand?

Ensuring customer satisfaction and maintaining their trust in our brand is of paramount importance to us at Noor Shopping. We recognise that satisfied and loyal customers are the foundation of our success. To maintain their satisfaction and trust, we have implemented several strategies and they are:

Excellent customer service: Our dedicated customer service team is trained to provide friendly and knowledgeable assistance to our customers. We strive to create a welcoming and helpful environment in our supermarkets, where customers feel valued and their needs are met promptly and efficiently.

Product variety and innovation: We understand that customer preferences evolve over time, and their needs may vary. To cater to diverse tastes and demands, we continuously update our product range and introduce new and innovative offerings. By staying attuned to market trends and customer preferences, we ensure that our customers have access to a wide selection of high-quality products.

Competitive pricing: We believe that offering fair and competitive prices is essential to customer satisfaction. We conduct regular market research to ensure that our pricing remains competitive while maintaining the quality of our products. We aim to provide excellent value for money, allowing our customers to enjoy both affordability and quality.

Continuous improvement through community engagement: We constantly evaluate and enhance our operations and services. We value feedback from our customers and consider it a valuable source of insights for improvement. By proactively addressing any concerns or issues, we demonstrate our commitment to their satisfaction and work towards delivering an exceptional customer experience.

How many stores does Noor Shopping operate as of today in Oman and what are the future

NOOR SHOPPING

‘Committed to serve community’



By consistently prioritising community's needs, maintaining high-quality standards, and making decisions with community in mind, Noor Shopping has established itself as a brand that Omani consumers can trust and rely on

NADIL AL BALUSHI
BUSINESS HEAD, RETAIL

plans?

Noor Shopping currently operates 22 stores across Oman, strategically located in key communities to ensure convenient access for our customers. These stores serve as hubs for delivering our commitment to quality, community service, and customer satisfaction.

As for our future plans, Noor Shopping is dedicated to expanding our reach and further enhancing our services to meet the evolving needs of our valued customers. We have a robust growth strategy in place, which includes both organic expansion and exploring new opportunities.

In the coming years, we plan to open additional stores in carefully selected locations to better serve communities that may currently be underserved. Our objective is to ensure that more customers have access to our high-quality products and exceptional shopping experiences.

Furthermore, we are investing in technology and digital solutions to enhance our customers' convenience and shopping experience. We recognise the importance of digital platforms in today's fast-paced world and aim to provide innovative solutions that streamline the shopping

process and offer additional benefits to our loyal customer.

What is Noor Shopping's location strategy? How do you choose the locations for stores?

Noor Shopping's location strategy is carefully designed to ensure that our stores are conveniently accessible to the communities we serve. We prioritise strategic placement that takes into consideration several factors and they are: **Community needs:** We conduct thorough market research and analysis to identify areas where there is a demand for a supermarket that aligns with our commitment to quality and community service. We assess the demographics, population density, and shopping patterns of potential locations to determine the level of need and the potential customer base.

Accessibility: We aim to be easily accessible to our customers, considering factors such as proximity to residential areas, transportation hubs, and major thoroughfares. Our goal is to ensure that customers can reach our stores conveniently, whether they choose to visit by car, public transportation, or on foot.

Market potential: We evaluate the market potential of each location, taking into account factors such as competition, market saturation, and growth potential. We seek out areas where we can make a positive impact and where there is an opportunity for us to thrive and serve the community effectively.

Infrastructure and facilities: We assess the availability of suitable infrastructure and facilities that align with our standards. This includes factors such as the size of the property, parking facilities, and the ability to accommodate the layout and design of a modern supermarket.

Community Engagement: We also consider the engagement and feedback we receive from the community.

We actively listen to our customers and take their input into account when considering new store locations.

Once potential locations are identified, our team conducts detailed feasibility studies to evaluate the viability of each site. This includes assessing the economic factors, conducting demographic analyses, and considering any regulatory requirements or zoning restrictions.

By carefully analysing these factors, we ensure that our store locations align with our mission, allowing us to serve the community effectively and provide our customers with the best shopping experience possible. Overall, our location strategy is driven by a thorough understanding of the community's needs, accessibility, market potential, infrastructure, and customer feedback.

Noor Shopping is mostly involved in selling of food items. How do you ensure that suppliers stick to quality standards and efficiency norms?

At Noor Shopping, we take utmost care in ensuring the quality and freshness of the food items we offer to our customers. While we may not have direct control over the manufacturing process of the products we sell, we closely monitor the shelf life and temperature sensitivities to maintain the highest standards.

Our procurement team works diligently to establish strong relationships with trusted suppliers who share our commitment to quality. We source our products directly from reputable manufacturers and distributors who have demonstrated a track record of delivering high-quality goods.

To safeguard the freshness and quality of the products, we closely monitor the shelf life of each item. Our store shelves are regularly checked to ensure that items with expiration dates are removed promptly, reducing the chances of customers purchasing expired products. This meticulous process helps us maintain the integrity of our product offering.

We also pay careful attention to temperature-sensitive items, such as perishable goods. Our stores are equipped with proper refrigeration and storage facilities, ensuring that these items are stored at the appropriate temperatures to maintain their freshness and prevent spoilage. We conduct routine checks to monitor temperature controls and ensure that the products are stored within the recommended ranges.

In addition, we have trained our store staff to be vigilant in monitoring and reporting any concerns related to quality or shelf life. They are empowered to promptly remove any products that do not meet our stringent quality standards, further reinforcing our commitment to customer satisfaction and safety.

With rapid adoption of online shopping, what major challenges do you foresee in the future for supermarkets?

The rise of e-commerce and online grocery delivery services has increased competition for supermarkets. Online retailers often offer convenience, and a wide range of options, attracting customers who prefer the convenience of home delivery or click-and-collect services. Supermarkets need to adapt to this changing landscape and develop strategies to compete effectively in the online space.

Online shoppers have high expectations for convenience, personalised experiences, and seamless transactions. Supermarkets need to invest in user-friendly online platforms, intuitive interfaces, and robust customer service to provide a satisfying online shopping experience. Maintaining the same level of customer service and personal interaction that traditional supermarkets offer in a virtual environment is a challenge that requires innovative solutions.

Supermarkets need to find the right balance between their physical store presence and their online offerings.

While online shopping is growing, many customers still value the in-store experience for the ability to physically browse products, engage with knowledgeable staff, and enjoy the immediate gratification of purchasing items. Supermarkets need to create an Omni channel strategy that seamlessly integrates their online and offline presence, providing a cohesive shopping experience.

How do you see the supermarket and hypermarket format changing and evolving?

The supermarket and hypermarket segment is undergoing significant changes as consumer preferences and shopping habits evolve. Here are some key observations on how this segment is changing:

Shift towards convenience: Consumers are increasingly valuing convenience in their shopping experiences. This has led to the rise of smaller-format supermarkets that are strategically located in residential areas or urban centre's, providing easy access to everyday essentials. These compact supermarkets cater to the needs of time-pressed consumers who prefer quick and hassle-free shopping trips.

Expansion of online shopping: The growth of e-commerce and online grocery shopping has disrupted the supermarket and hypermarket segment. Consumers are embracing the convenience of ordering groceries from the comfort of their homes and having them delivered or opting for click-and-collect services. Supermarkets and hypermarkets are expanding their online presence to meet this demand and remain competitive in the evolving market landscape.

Focus on fresh and local: There is a growing emphasis on fresh and locally sourced products among consumers. Supermarkets and hypermarkets are responding to this trend by increasing their offerings of fresh produce, locally sourced goods, and organic products.

This shift reflects changing consumer preferences towards healthier and more sustainable choices.

Integration of Technology: Supermarkets and hypermarkets are integrating technology into their operations to enhance the shopping experience. This includes the use of self-checkout systems, digital shelf labels, mobile payment options, and personalised marketing through loyalty programmes and targeted promotions.

Technology is also playing a significant role in inventory management, supply chain optimization, and online order fulfillment.

Diversification of Offerings: To remain competitive and cater to evolving consumer demands, supermarkets and hypermarkets are diversifying their product offerings.

They are expanding beyond traditional grocery items to include non-food categories such as household goods, electronics, clothing, and even services like pharmacies and banking facilities. This diversification is aimed at providing customers with a one-stop shopping destination and increasing customer loyalty.

Enhanced in-store experience: Despite the growth of online shopping, the in-store experience remains important. Supermarkets and hypermarkets are investing in creating attractive, well-designed store layouts, and enhancing the ambiance to make shopping more enjoyable. They are focusing on creating engaging displays, providing expert assistance from knowledgeable staff, and offering additional services such as cooking demonstrations, tasting events, and loyalty programs to enhance customer satisfaction and encourage repeat visits.

[Anurag Kumar, Head of Retail and Commercial Operations at Enhance Group, contributed in providing content for this interview]

Moody's affirms Sohar International ratings, downgrades HSBC Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Moody's on Tuesday affirmed ratings of Sohar International positive, but downgraded the ratings of HSBC Oman.

'Sohar International Bank SAOG's (Sohar International) Ba2/NP long- and short-term deposit ratings, ba3 Baseline Credit Assessment (BCA) and Adjusted BCA, and maintained the outlook on the bank's long-term deposit ratings at positive, in line with the positive outlook assigned to the Government of Oman's Ba2 issuer rating,' Moody's Investors Service stated.

'Concurrently, the rating agency affirmed HSBC Bank Oman SAOG's (HBON) ba2 BCA, downgraded its Adjusted BCA to ba2 from ba1 and its long-term deposit ratings to Ba2 from Ba1, and affirmed its NP



short-term deposit ratings,' it added.

Moody's changed the outlook on HBON's long-term deposit ratings to positive from develop-

ing, in line with the positive outlook assigned to the Government of Oman's Ba2 issuer rating.

The latest rating action fol-

be completed by August 17.

The banks had received transaction approval from Oman's Central Bank in February this year.

Upon completion, Sohar International will be the surviving entity and acquire all HBON's liabilities and assets and Moody's will withdraw all the ratings of HBON.

Upwards pressure on the long-term deposit ratings of the banks could be triggered by a higher sovereign rating, given they are positioned at the same level of the sovereign rating.

The positive outlook on the banks' long-term deposit ratings indicates a downgrade in the near term is less likely.

However, downward pressure on the banks' ratings could develop through a deterioration in the sovereign's credit profile, or a material deterioration in the banks' solvency and liquidity.

Meta to launch Twitter-like app

Washington, US - Facebook owner Meta's new Threads app, meant to compete with Twitter, was available for pre-order on mobile app stores on iPhone and Android operating systems on Monday.

Listed as "Threads, an Instagram app", the new program should be available in the coming days, and is described on Apple's app store as "Instagram's text-based conversation app".

"Threads is where communities come together to discuss everything from the topics you care about today to what'll be trending tomorrow," says the app's description on the store.

Thread's launch comes after a period of uncertainty at Twitter since Tesla owner Elon Musk took over in October, with the billionaire restructuring the company, firing thousands and placing many features behind a subscription paywall.

Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, announced in mid-March that it was working on a new social network whose description made it a potential competitor to Twitter.

Threads will enable users to 'connect directly with your favourite creators and others who love the same things - or build a loyal following of your own to share your ideas, opinions and creativity with the world,' according to its app store description. 'We're thinking about a decentralised, independent social network for sharing written messages in real time,' the group said.

Twitter provoked ire last week when Musk announced that the platform would limit the number of tweets that could be read per day, with people not paying for subscriptions - by far the majority of users - limited to 1,000 tweets a day.

AFP

France fines Google over search, app store results

Paris, France - French authorities imposed a €2mn (US\$2.2mn) fine on Google on Tuesday over incomplete results in its search engine and app store.

The Competition, Consumer and Anti-Fraud Office said the US tech giant's search engine lacked information concerning the ranking criteria of results.

The watchdog said results for searches on tourism accommodation lacked explanations for the prices.

The Google Play Store, it added, also lacked information on the ranking criteria of results, payment information and dispute resolution procedures.

The store also did not give consumers reasons for not publishing their reviews of apps in the store.

The anti-fraud office said Google has since 'corrected part of the sanctioned short-coming'.

A Google spokesman said the company regretted that the changes had not been taken into account by the agency.

"We have always been transparent with our users about how our products work," the spokesman said, adding that it was open to working 'constructively' with French and European regulators.

AFP

Apple, 6 other firms say they meet EU 'gatekeeper' definition

Brussels, Belgium - Seven tech giants, including Amazon and Apple, have informed the European Union they meet the threshold to come under landmark new rules to curb their market dominance, Brussels said on Tuesday.

The firms - Google parent Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, TikTok owner ByteDance, Facebook umbrella Meta, Microsoft and Samsung - said they had revenue and user figures big enough to be classed as 'gatekeepers', EU internal market commissioner Thierry Breton said.

Under the EU's Digital Markets Act, the designation will subject them to tougher regulation aimed at stopping them



from seeking to "lock in users in their ecosystem", Breton said.

That involves making messenger services interoperable so users can send messages between different apps, and

preventing companies from controlling what apps are pre-installed on phones or directing users to their products.

The legislation tries to ensure smaller players will be able to enter the market without Silicon Valley behemoths stomping on them before they get off the ground. The EU will make a formal determination by September 6 on which companies will be labelled 'gatekeepers'.

Europe's push comes amid a broader international drive to rein in the power of big tech.

The 27-nation bloc has also introduced tougher rules aimed at curbing disinformation and hate content on major online platforms.

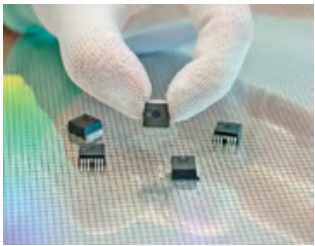
AFP

EU 'concerned' over China's curbs on rare metal exports

Brussels, Belgium - The European Commission on Tuesday said it was 'concerned' about China's decision to impose export controls on two rare metals vital for making semiconductors amid an escalating tech battle between Washington and Beijing.

China's trade ministry on Monday said exports of gallium and germanium would need a licence from August 1 in the name of "security and national interests".

But a European Commission spokeswoman, Sonya Gospodina, said the EU executive believed the new restrictions "are unrelated to the need to



protect the global peace and also stability".

"We call on China to take an approach whereby export restrictions and controls are based on clear security considerations in line with the WTO (World Trade Organization) rules," she said.

China produces 80% of the

world's supplies of gallium and germanium, according to a 2020 European Commission report.

The EU imports from China 27% of its gallium needs and 17 percent of its germanium used, the same report said.

Gallium is used in integrated circuits, LEDs and solar panels, while germanium is found in optical fibres and infrared camera lenses,

Beijing's restrictions come as international tensions rise over the production of semiconductors and a tech rivalry between China and the United States.

AFP

Ex-Audi boss appeals 'dieselgate' conviction

Frankfurt, Germany - Audi's former chief executive is appealing against his conviction over the 'dieselgate' emissions cheating scandal that rocked the car industry, a German court said on Tuesday.

Rupert Stadler, the highest-ranking former executive to be found guilty over the saga, was last week handed a suspended sentence of one year and nine months and a fine of €1.1mn (US\$1.2mn approx).

But he avoided jail time after striking a plea deal, under which he admitted fraud by negligence.

However, a spokesman for the Munich district court said in statement that the 60-year-old was now appealing the verdict, without stating the grounds for



Audi's former chief Rupert Stadler the challenge.

German car giant Volkswagen whose subsidiaries include Porsche, Audi, Skoda and Seat - plunged into crisis after admitting in September 2015 it had in-

stalled software to rig emission levels in 11mn diesel vehicles worldwide.

The so-called defeat devices made the vehicles appear less polluting in lab tests than they were on the road.

Stadler went on trial in 2020 and initially denied the charges against him, before deciding in May to strike a plea deal.

He admitted he had neglected to inform business partners that cars with defeat devices were still going on the market even after the scandal became public knowledge.

Volkswagen had always insisted that the diesel trickery was the work of a handful of lower-level employees acting without the knowledge of their superiors.

Stadler himself was not accused of instigating the scam.

Two co-defendants, former Audi and Porsche manager Wolfgang Hatz and an Audi engineer, are also appealing their convictions, the court said.

Like Stadler, they were given suspended sentences and fines last week. However, in the case of Hatz, prosecutors are also appealing the court's verdict.

They had originally sought jail time for the executive, who admitted to judges that he had helped arrange the installation of emissions-cheating software.

Before the appeals are heard, the court will produce its full written judgements, and has until April next year to do so.

AFP

Global stocks struggle in subdued deals amid US holiday

London, UK - Asian and European equities faltered on Tuesday in muted trade, with Wall Street shut for the US Independence Day holiday.

Oil rebounded from losses the previous day, when key producers Saudi Arabia and Russia unexpectedly unveiled more output cuts in a bid to stabilise the market.

The dollar rose against the euro but fell against the yen, as investors awaited Wednesday's publication of minutes from the Federal Reserve's most recent monetary policy meeting.

Friday's key US nonfarm payrolls (NFP) report will provide clues on the health of the

world's biggest economy.

'Struggling for direction'

"European stocks are struggling for direction amid a light economic calendar and on thin volumes with the US markets closed for Independence Day," City Index analyst Fiona Cincotta told AFP.

"We expect volumes to pick up again... ahead of Friday's NFP."

This week sees also minutes from the Federal Reserve's last rate-setting meet.

Investors weighed signs of a slowing US economy against hopes that the Fed's interest-



rate hiking cycle could be nearing its end.

Data showing a sharp drop in the central bank's preferred gauge of inflation for May fuelled a rally across equities in New York late last week and in Asia on Monday.

The readings followed a series of indicators suggesting the economy remained in good health, putting pressure on the Fed to keep tightening monetary policy.

Fed chairman Jerome Powell has warned more hikes are in the pipeline owing to still-elevated inflation and the strong labour market, though analysts question whether it will follow

through with that.

Wall Street limped to a positive close in a half-session on Monday, with traders winding down for the holiday.

In Asia on Tuesday, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Wellington, Taipei, Manila, Mumbai and Bangkok edged up, but Tokyo, Singapore and Seoul dipped.

Sydney got a lift from the Reserve Bank of Australia's decision to leave interest rates unchanged, though the local dollar fell against the greenback.

Oil demand concerns

Oil on Monday initially rallied after Riyadh and Moscow

curbed production levels, but finished in the red.

While the cuts will mean tighter supplies, rising interest rates and the lingering threat of recession are weighing on demand expectations.

"The oil market continues to weigh up Russia and Saudi Arabia's production cuts against a deteriorating economic backdrop," Cincotta added on Tuesday.

"After a decline in oil prices yesterday, the net impact of the surprise production cuts has been approximately zero, highlighting the market's concerns over the demand outlook."

AFP

Shifa Hospital, MedNet sign MoU to improve healthcare

Shifa Hospital Oman, a leading healthcare institution dedicated to providing exceptional medical services, proudly announces the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with MedNet (TPA), a renowned third-party administrator and managed care provider in the MENA region's health insurance industry.

This collaboration marks a significant milestone in Shifa Hospital's continuous commitment to expanding its network of esteemed partners to offer comprehensive and high quality healthcare solutions to its patients.

Dr Salim al Ghannami, Chief Executive Officer at Shifa Hospital Oman, expressed his enthusiasm regarding the newly formed alliance, stating, "At Shifa Hospital, we are dedicated to providing the highest standards of healthcare to our patients. The collaboration with MedNet (TPA) reinforces our commitment to expanding our network and enhancing access



to quality medical services. By expanding our network and resources, we reaffirm our commitment to the health and well-being of the communities we serve."

With more than 25 years of experience, MedNet has consistently taken a leading role in shaping the health insurance landscape of the region. As a highly trusted intermediary and

health insurance claims management organisation, MedNet has been instrumental in fostering seamless connections between insurance companies and healthcare providers.

Through its extensive expertise and unwavering commitment, MedNet has played a pivotal role in ensuring the provision of quality healthcare services to individuals and

communities in Oman and across the region.

Shifa Hospital Oman has consistently demonstrated its commitment to excellence by partnering with leading insurance providers, ensuring that patients receive optimal care and seamless billing processes. This strategic alliance with MedNet (TPA) further strengthens Shifa Hospital's position as a preferred healthcare provider for a wide range of insurance companies.

Shifa Hospital, a premier healthcare institution, is firmly dedicated to delivering comprehensive medical services to patients through its nine Centers of Excellence.

Guided by a commitment to excellence, Shifa Hospital combines cutting-edge technology with compassionate care to uplift the well-being of individuals and communities. With a diverse array of medical specialties and services, the hospital stands as a beacon of hope and healing for patients seeking exceptional healthcare.



OAB recognised as ACCA approved employer

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has achieved the status of Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) Approved Employer, a global benchmark for training and support.

OAB was certified at Trainee Development, Gold level, which denotes that the organization is committed to ensuring ACCA students, affiliates and members have the right skills, ethics and competences to add value and drive forward the business.

"This recognition is an impor-

tant achievement for us at the bank. It will greatly benefit our training, support, recruitment, learning and development, helping us to attract and retain the most talented employees," said Essam al Busaidi, head of the Human Resources Division at of Oman Arab Bank.

"Being an ACCA Approved Employer further enhances the bank's status as an organization where current and future employees can be sure they can progress with their training as

part of their job and become life-long learners."

'Being recognised as an ACCA Approved Employer reflects the bank's commitment and dedication to support and foster the growth of their ACCA trainees working towards the ACCA Qualification or Certified Accounting Technician (CAT) holder', the bank stated.

ACCA is a global body with 527,000 students and 219,000 qualified members across 179 countries.

ahlibank offers 10% cash reward on salary transfers

Committed to enhance customer experiences, while underscoring its intent to inculcate a savings culture, ahlibank continues its attractive 10% cash reward on salary transfers.

As part of this rewarding promotion, customers who transfer their salary to ahlibank will receive an immediate one-time cash reward of 10% of their monthly salary, with a maximum cash reward amount capped at RO500.

The offer, open to both Omanis and expatriates until end of July, is structured to infuse a note of positivity while transferring salaries for the first time to ahlibank. All customers who transfer their monthly salary to the Bank with an amount of RO1,000 or above are eligible for this reward offer.

Muneer al Balushi, AGM - Head of Retail Distribution, said that this cash reward promotion "is an extension of our gratitude to our customers who value our services and trust our products".

"We want our new salary

transfer customers to experience the sense of gratification that is embedded in our scheme; we want each one of our customers to feel inspired to save and grow their money with our bank," the bank AGM pointed out.

"We are ready and excited to welcome all new salary transfer customers with this irresistible offer," he stressed.

Balushi added that the bank intends to forge positive relations with new customers, while strengthening its ties with the existing ones.

"It is important to note here that this scheme is an example of our leadership in implementing innovative products and services that are designed to enhance our customers banking experiences," he went on to explain, adding that "we have our fingers on the pulse of our customers and are open to their feedback, which is how we devise our new campaigns and offers. We will continue to initiate more such rewarding schemes throughout this year".

Al Maha, Precision Tune Centres begin free safety checks for cars heading to Salalah

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company announced a partnership agreement with Precision Tune Auto Care Centres for free vehicle inspection for vehicles travelling to Salalah from July 1 to August 31.

Fahmi al Jabri, the manager for quality, health, safety and environment at Al Maha, stated that drivers heading to Salalah can benefit from this opportunity and obtain a free 9-points safety check for the car, at any of the following Precision Tune Auto Care Centres: Mabela, Amerat, Samail, Adam, Qurayyat, Jalan, Mudhaibi, Ibra, Wadi Kabeer, Salalah, Sahalnot, Duqm, Suwaiq, Ghubra North, Mabela Industrial City, Amerat City, New Musannah, Saham, Ghala, Mirbat, Rusayl Industrial, Buraimi, Fanja, Ghubra



Beach, Al-Hail North, Ansab, Sohar, Ghala Heights.

"The vehicle safety check increase a hassle-free journey to and from Salalah for drivers and their families. We also advise drivers to make sure to check vehicle fluids before beginning the journey," Jabri added.

Commenting on the partnership, Sandeep Ghai, CEO of Precision Tune Auto Care, stated that he is pleased to collaborate with Al Maha Company to offer free safety checks as an initiative to support vehicle safety during long journeys towards Khareef Salalah.

"Precision Tune centres are fully-equipped and have the best-trained technicians who suggest the need for car repairs and maintenance before the long drive," he added.

Unilever Food Solutions reveals top future menu trends in region

Unilever Food Solutions, the global leader in professional food service, has revealed its first Future Menus Trend Report 2023, which has been developed to provide tomorrow's menus for today's chefs showing the latest trends with insight and collaboration from more than 1,600 chefs in over 25 countries.

The report was launched locally in the Middle East at the W Dubai - Mina Seyahi, during which more than 60 leading chefs and food industry experts had the opportunity to learn more about future trends while tasting evolved menus as part of a culinary showcase.

The report identifies the top eight trends: Modernised Comfort Food, Irresistible Vegetables, Wild & Pure, Flavour Contrasts, Feel-Good Food, The New Sharing, Mindful Proteins, and Low-Waste Menus.

"Identifying the hottest global trends is critical in our quest to provide solutions for chefs, who are contending with challenges ranging from labour shortages to tackling sustainability issues like food waste," said Hanneke



Fouad Sherine, Country Head Arabia, Unilever Food Solutions

Faber, President of Nutrition Unilever.

"With the release of the Future Menus Trend Report 2023, Unilever Food Solutions is not just sharing future trends but also offering solutions-based insights and adaptable recipes to inspire chefs and help them feel prepared for the future," she added.

Unilever Food Solutions anchored the report around the eight core themes based on global data, extensive inputs

from more than 1600 chefs, global social media analytics and the expertise of hundreds of chefs who offer practical, real-world applications.

Speaking at the event, Unilever's Executive Chef for the Gulf & Indian Ocean Islands, Chef Joanne Limoanco Gendrano, addressed the growing trend of Low-Waste menus that make clever use of ingredients to help reduce food waste and cost while maintaining maximum

flavours in dishes.

She said, "There's a lot to learn from various cuisines in the world where the whole animal or the whole vegetable is used in a dish because people need to be resourceful with the food available. That means maximising every piece of an ingredient and not just keeping the 'good or premium cuts.' This positively impacts your profit, too; it's a win-win.

"Techniques that have been around for centuries, like fermenting, pickling, and curing, not only extend the life of ingredients but also create great complexity in flavours. And most importantly, efficiently planning the workflow in both back and front-of-house can significantly reduce food waste."

As part of the report, all eight trends include suggested recipes, ingredients and techniques to provide tangible solutions for chefs and food operators. Chef Joanne developed a Middle Eastern flavour with her Mezze Maze, incorporating a chickpea waffle, avocado hummus, beet pickle juice jelly, and moutabal.

"The concept is a savoury waffle combined with popular cold mezze. Often, mezze is served with a tonne of saj. In this recipe, the saj is replaced with a gluten-free option, and the avocado hummus and moutabal are piped in the crevices of the waffle. Each bite gives the diner a nice complexity of flavour and texture of the Middle East," said Chef Joanne.

Fouad Sherine, Country Head Arabia, Unilever Food Solutions, added: "Our Future Menus Trend Report 2023 has been designed to empower chefs in the UAE and broader Middle East region to keep up with industry trends and customer expectations through recipes, techniques, and training.

"As part of Unilever's Nutrition Business, we are dedicated to being a world-class agent of positive change in the food industry. From delivering top financial results to promoting healthier eating habits, reducing the environmental impact of the global food chain, and leading the sustainable food service revolution."

Shell Oman partners with MTCIT, SMEs

Committed to play key role to support and realize the potential in Mobility's energy transition pathway in the years to come, Shell Oman Marketing Company (Shell Oman) sponsored the Green Mobility Event organised by Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology (MTCIT).

This strategic partnership reflects Shell Oman's dedication to the sultanate's energy transition journey and supporting key stakeholders in their decarbonisation efforts, thereby helping us to fulfil our ambition to become a net-zero emissions energy business by 2050 or sooner, which is aligned with Shell's overarching Powering Progress strategy, the event was held under the auspices of, H E Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals.

As a sponsor of the event, Shell Oman has solidified its commitment to creating In-Country-Value (ICV) in the energy transition journey by signing Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology (MTCIT), as well as two Omani Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). These MoUs underscore Shell Oman's dedication to



supporting local SMEs as well actively contributing to the decarbonisation and net-zero emissions target in line with Oman 2040 vision whilst advancing the energy transition and expanding the electric vehicle (EV) network throughout Oman.

Dr Mohammed al Balushi, CEO of Shell Oman, said, "Shell Oman is leveraging its global expertise to play a lead role in the sultanate's progress towards a greener mobility future. Electric mobility is on the way to mass adoption, which is unlocking new

opportunities to Shell to offer commercially viable solutions to EV drivers. This requires a joint approach via strong collaboration with government and other stakeholders within a well-articulated framework and coherent structure of governance to sup-

port the long-term EV transition roadmaps across the whole EV ecosystem.

"We are glad to be partnering with MTCIT to develop a robust network development strategy for EV charging. Moreover, by capitalising on such strategic

partnerships, we continue to focus on our ICV agenda to empower Omani SMEs and nurture their growth through knowledge transfer to strongly position them competitively in the local market."

Under the first MoU, Shell

Oman joins forces with Amlaak Energy LLC, for the supply and installation of EV chargers for Shell Oman. The second MoU between Shell Oman and HTC (Hussam Technology Company) to develop a fully integrated charging point operator (CPOs) capabilities for the first time in Oman.

Through this agreement, the SME will assume responsibilities such as software and application development, customer service, technical and non-technical maintenance, payment gateways, and facilities management for the EV charging infrastructure.

Additionally, HTC will collaborate with Shell Oman provide consultancy services Engineering, Procurement, Construction, and Management (EPCM) services for various energy transition related projects by Shell Oman, including solar.

By investing in the development of EV charging infrastructure and supporting local SMEs, Shell Oman is driving the growth of renewable energy and promoting a greener mobility future for the sultanate through its Powering Progress strategy which is aligned with the country's 'orderly transition towards net zero emissions by 2050.

KIMSHEALTH signs pact with OAS to better serve autistic individuals

The Oman Autism Society (OAS) and KIMSHEALTH Hospital have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) aimed at providing healthcare services for autistic individuals and their families and OAS staff and members, signifying an important step forward towards improving the quality of life.

The MoU was signed by Dr Yahya al Farsi, Chairman at OAS and Jacob Thomas, Group Executive Director at KIMSHEALTH in the presence of Abdulaziz al Jardani, Board Member, Dr Samar Dakak Badawi, Pediatrician & Autism Specialist representing OAS and Dr Samantha De Silva, Chief Operating Officer at KIMSHEALTH Oman.

OAS is a non-profit organisation dedicated to supporting autistic individuals and is committed to raising awareness and providing assistance in creating an inclusive society where individuals with autism can thrive.



UAE sets cybersecurity benchmark with lowest attacks in Middle East

Acronis, a global leader in cyber protection, found the UAE to be the safest country in the region when it comes to cybersecurity.

The group released the findings of its Mid-Year Cyberthreats Report, From Innovation to Risk: Managing the Implications of AI-driven Cyberattacks on Tuesday.

The comprehensive study, based on data captured from more than one million global endpoints, provides insight into the evolving cybersecurity landscape and uncovers the growing utilization of generative artificial intelligence (AI) systems, such as ChatGPT, by cybercriminals to craft malicious content and execute sophisticated attacks.

According to the report, phishing is the primary method criminals use to unearth login credentials. In the first half of 2023 alone, the number of email-based phishing attacks has



Candid Wüest

surged 464% when compared to 2022. Over the same time, there has also been a 24% increase in attacks per organisation.

In the first half of 2023, Acronis-monitored endpoints observed a 15% increase in the number of files and URLs per scanned email. Cybercriminals have also tapped into the burgeoning large language model

(LLM)-based AI market, using platforms to create, automate, scale, and improve new attacks through active learning.

Regionally, the number of Malware detections in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and Kuwait as of May this year had experienced an infection rate of 11% each and a global ranking of 25 and 27 respectively. The UAE reported a 10% infection rate over the same period, ranking globally at position 31.

Regarding blocked URLs, Kuwait topped the region at 30%, ranking at second position globally while Egypt and KSA ranked 7th and 14th, having registered 15% and 14%, respectively. On its part, the UAE had the least number of blocked URLs, registering only 8% and ranking at position 30 globally.

The biannual threat report, which also covered regions of interest in the Middle East, high-

lights ransomware as the dominant risk to small and medium-sized businesses. And while the number of new ransomware variants continues to decline, ransomware attacks' severity remains significant. Equally concerning is the growing prominence of data stealers, who leverage stolen credentials to gain unauthorized access to sensitive information.

"The volume of threats in 2023 has surged relative to last year, a sign that criminals are scaling and enhancing how they compromise systems and execute attacks," said Candid Wüest, Acronis VP of Research.

"To address the dynamic threat landscape, organisations need agile, comprehensive, unified security solutions that provide the necessary visibility to understand attacks, simplify context, and provide efficient remediation of any threat."

Abu Dhabi Retail brings summer of style

Abu Dhabi Retail has begun 'an unforgettable summer of shopping' with a mega event launched on June 23.

Over 25 malls across the emirate are offering elevated shopping experiences and tempting deals as part of 2023 Abu Dhabi Summer Shopping Season from Abu Dhabi Retail, the retail arm of the Department of Culture and Tourism - Abu Dhabi.

"With more than 3,500 participating retailers across 25+ malls throughout the emirate, including renowned destinations like Yas Mall, Abu Dhabi Mall, Al Wahda Mall, and Reem Mall, you can expect fabulous deals on your favourite brands", the group stated.

Twenty-four-hour super sales, special discounts were offered during Eid al Adha (from June 29 to July 2), while back-to-school offers are on the cards from August 7 to September 10.

The Abu Dhabi Summer Shopping Season proudly unveils its visionary collaboration with Savoir Flair, a renowned magazine synonymous with cutting-



edge fashion and cultural exploration in the Middle East. This esteemed partnership aims to immerse shoppers in a captivating realm of style, providing an unrivalled source of inspiration for their shopping experience.

A collection of exclusive events will be meticulously crafted and hosted by esteemed publications Cosmo ME, Grazia, and Esquire Middle East. These

specially curated gatherings aim to take the shopping experience to new heights, delivering expert insights and unparalleled opportunities for attendees to delve into the realms of beauty, styling, grooming, and beyond.

Look out for a series of extraordinary events and masterclasses throughout the summer. From transformative beauty tutorials to innovative styling work-

shops, these curated events will leave attendees equipped with an array of practical skills and fresh perspectives.

With so much on offer throughout the Abu Dhabi Summer Shopping Season, the initiative is another reason why 'One Summer Isn't Enough' in Abu Dhabi - as shown in Experience Abu Dhabi's new destination campaign.

TOD short film festival invites entries from upcoming filmmakers in MENA

Aiming to celebrate the region's upcoming filmmaking talent, leading sports and entertainment platform TOD announces the launch of its unique campaign - 'TOD Summer Short Film Festival'.

Through the festival, TOD invites filmmakers and students affiliated to filmmaking universities and institutes from the region to submit their favourite short films. TOD will stream the winning entries on its platform for an entire two-month festival period starting from August, helping participants gain prominent exposure on TOD and via a dedicated marketing campaign.

John Paul McKerlie, VP of Marketing and Sales at TOD, said, "The competition is in line with our desire to promote regional talent and nurture its promising creative possibilities. While short films may not enjoy the longevity or widespread recognition of feature films, they offer a treasure trove of creativity and storytelling.



"Especially the ones created by budding and upcoming filmmakers from the Arab region, who despite limited budgets and resources, manage to deliver awe-inspiring works that captivate audiences with their unique stories, artistic endeavors, and profound messages.

"The TOD Summer Short Film Festival is a great opportu-

nity for MENA and Turkey-based talent to showcase their work and potential, boost their film-making credentials, gain recognition, and share their unique perspectives with a MENA-wide audience." Filmmakers aged 18 and above are eligible to submit their films, between 5 to 40 minutes long, in Arabic, English, or Turkish.

IAEA endorses Japan's plan to release treated Fukushima water

Tokyo, Japan - Japan's plan to release treated water from the Fukushima nuclear plant into the sea meets international standards and will have a 'negligible radiological impact', the UN nuclear watchdog said on Tuesday.

The assessment, delivered in a final review by the International Atomic Energy Agency, comes as its chief visits Japan before the expected water release begins this summer.

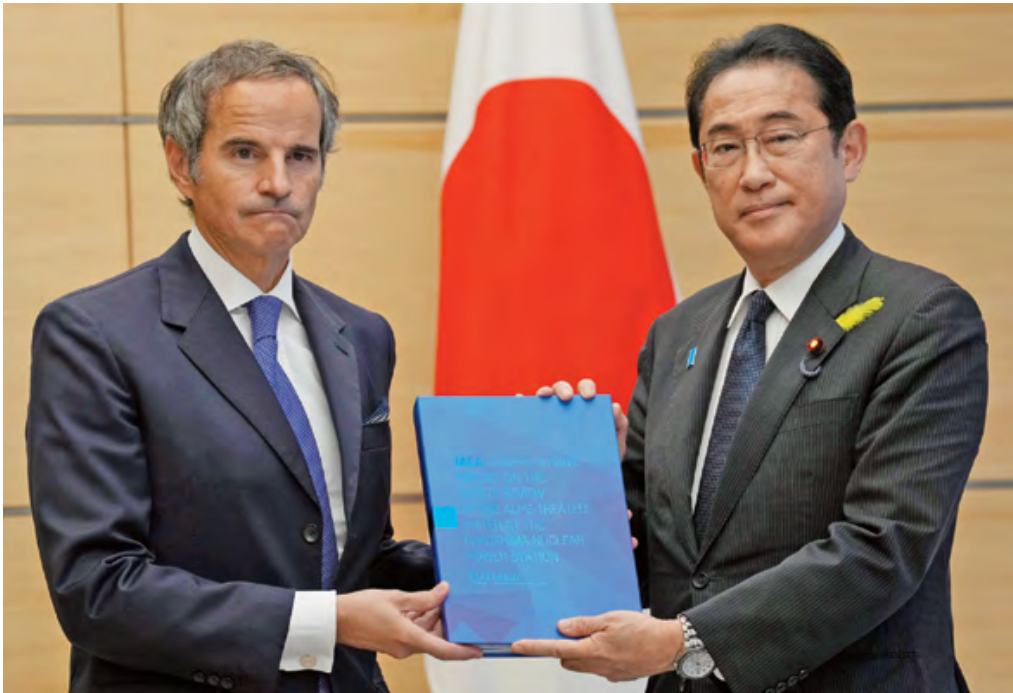
Tokyo's plan to dilute the treated water and release it into the sea over several decades is 'consistent with relevant international safety standards', the IAEA said.

"The controlled, gradual discharges of the treated water to the sea... would have a negligible radiological impact on people and the environment," it added.

Several of the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant's reactors went into meltdown after cooling systems were overwhelmed by a massive 2011 tsunami.

The resulting nuclear accident was the worst since Chernobyl, and the clean-up has lasted more than a decade, with most areas declared off-limits due to radiation now reopened.

Decommissioning the plant itself will take decades more, but the facility's operator TEPCO faces the immediate problem of more than 1.33mn cubic metres of water accumulated on the site.



IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi (left) presents IAEA's comprehensive report on Fukushima Treated Water Release to Japan's PM Fumio Kishida during their meeting at the PM's residence in Tokyo on Tuesday (AFP)

The assessment, delivered in a final review by the International Atomic Energy Agency, comes as its chief Rafael Grossi visits Japan before the expected water release begins this summer

The water is a mixture of groundwater, rain that seeps into the area, and water used for cooling. It is processed through a facility that TEPCO says removes almost all ra-

dionuclides but tritium, which commonly remains in wastewater discharged into the sea by nuclear plants globally.

The proposal had already been provisionally endorsed by

the IAEA, but the government said the release would only begin after the 'comprehensive review' that IAEA chief Rafael Grossi presented on Tuesday.

"A review by IAEA, given how authoritative it is in the management and application of nuclear safety standards, is critical to our efforts to foster international understanding," top government spokesman Hirokazu Matsuno said on Tuesday.

Still, the release remains controversial, with China vocally criticising the plans, and some in

South Korea panic-buying salt over fears of contamination after the discharge begins.

Fishing communities in Fukushima are also worried customers will shun their catches, despite strict testing protocols for food from the region.

Speaking after talks with Japan's prime minister and foreign minister, Grossi said the IAEA had spent two years reviewing the release plan, including testing water at its labs and sending samples to independent facilities.

"This process of dilution and chemical and other filtration is nothing new. It's something that exists in the industry," he added, pointing to similar releases by plants from China to France.

"We recognise that there are concerns," he said, pointing out that the IAEA will open a permanent office at the Fukushima site to continuously monitor the release process.

Japan has said the release will start this summer, without giving further details, and government spokesman Matsuno said that was still the plan.

"We will thoroughly explain and communicate, both domestically and internationally, details of the IAEA report, our effort to ensure safety and measures against reputational damage," he added.

AFP

'Savage attack' against Russian journalist in Chechnya: NGO

Moscow, Russia - An award-winning Russian investigative journalist is in hospital after being badly beaten by armed assailants during a trip to Chechnya, the Memorial human rights group said on Tuesday.

"Elena Milashina's fingers have been broken and she is sometimes losing consciousness. She has bruises all over her body," the group said on social media.

The incident happened early on Tuesday as Milashina and Alexander Nemo, a lawyer, were travelling from the airport.

"They were savagely kicked, including in the face, received death threats and were threatened with a gun to the head. Their equipment was taken away and smashed," Memorial said.

The Committee Against Torture, a human rights group, published photos of Milashina in hospital with her head shaved and covered in a green-coloured dye used on cuts and her hands bandaged.

The media rights group Reporters Without Borders said it was 'horrified by the savage attack' on Milashina.

Milashina's paper Novaya Gazeta, Russia's top independent publication, confirmed the incident. It said she and Nemo



Elena Milashina (AFP)

They were savagely kicked, including in the face, received death threats and were threatened with a gun to the head

MEMORIAL

were currently in hospital in the Chechen capital Grozny.

Novaya Gazeta said she was in Grozny to attend the sentencing of Zarema Musayeva, the mother of three exiles critical of Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov.

AFP

JULY'S SUPERMOON



The Buck moon, July's supermoon, rises through clouds behind the Liver Building in Liverpool, northwest England, late on Monday (AFP)

Unfavourable weather delays final Ariane 5 launch

Paris, France - The farewell flight of Europe's workhorse Ariane 5 rocket, scheduled for Tuesday, has been postponed for 24 hours due to bad weather, operator Arianespace said.

The 117th and final flight of an Ariane 5 rocket, after 27 years of launches, had been due to take off between 2130 and 2305 GMT from Europe's spaceport in Kourou, French Guiana.

"Due to unfavourable winds at high altitude above the Guiana Space Centre, Ariane-space decided not to start the final phase of the launch preparation operations," the French firm said.

The nearest launch window was now between 2200 and 2305 GMT on Wednesday 'if weather conditions are favourable', it added.

The final flight of an Ariane,



The assembled Ariane 5 rocket arriving on the launch pad of Europe's Spaceport, the Guiana Space Center in Kourou, French Guiana on Monday (AFP)

whose launches have punctuated life in Kourou for nearly three decades, was originally scheduled for June 16.

It was postponed the day before because of problems with pyrotechnical lines in the rocket's booster. The lines have since been replaced.

The final payload on an Ariane 5 is a French military communications satellite and a German communications satellite. The arrival in 1996 of the Ariane 5, which was able to carry a far bigger load than its predecessor Ariane 4, allowed Europe to establish itself in the communication satellite market.

It was due to be replaced by the Ariane 6 in 2020 but delays to that next-generation rocket have left Europe without a way to independently launch heavy-load missions into space.

AFP

On life support?: Britain's public health service marks 75 years

London, UK - Deeply loved but wracked by crisis, Britain's National Health Service (NHS) on Wednesday marks 75 years since it was founded as the Western world's first universal, free healthcare system.

In a secular age, the NHS is the closest thing Britain has to a national religion - devoutly cherished, with levels of public support higher than the royal family or any other British institution.

It was founded three years after World War II by a pioneering Labour government on the principle that everyone should access top-quality healthcare funded by general taxation, free at the point of care.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, whose parents were an NHS doctor and a pharmacist, paid tribute last week as he outlined a 15-year plan aimed at recruiting hundreds of thousands of new health staff. "For every minute of every day of every one of those

75 years, the NHS has been kept going by the millions of people who've worked for it. To them on behalf of a grateful nation, I want to say: thank you," he said.

"I feel a powerful sense of responsibility to make sure that their legacy endures. And to make sure the NHS is there for our children and grandchildren, just as it was there for us."

Like Sunak's parents, immigrant staff were pivotal to the NHS's early growth, helping to remake the face of Britain itself in the decades after the war.

Its centrality to national life was underscored in a memorable dance sequence featuring NHS staff and patients during the opening of the London Olympics in 2012.

Justin Bieber remixed his hit *Holy* with an NHS choir for Christmas 2020, in a year when the public, clapping on their doorsteps, paid tribute to medics battling the COVID pandemic.



This file photo shows members of the clinical staff wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) as they care for a patient at the Intensive Care unit at Royal Papworth Hospital in Cambridge, on May 5, 2020 (AFP)

Sickly state

Sunak's new workforce plan, however, is recognition that the NHS is under unprecedented

strain following the pandemic, even though the government spends nearly 12 per cent of its budget on healthcare - by far its

single biggest item.

Demoralised doctors and nurses have been striking for better pay, an ageing and unfit pop-

ulation needs ever-more complex treatment, cancers go undiagnosed for lack of scanners, and hospitals are crumbling.

Sumi Manirajan, deputy chair of the British Medical Association's junior doctors committee, accused Sunak's Conservative government of failing to value doctors. "And what that leads to is doctors leaving the country, going abroad, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and actually it's the public that loses out," she told AFP at a protest rally by striking doctors.

"The government (ministers), they may use private health care but the ordinary citizen in the UK uses the NHS, relies on the NHS." In a report for the 75th anniversary, the King's Fund charity compared the health systems of 19 similar countries and found Britain's in a sickly state.

It cited data showing the UK performed worst in fatality rates for strokes and second-worst for

heart attacks.

The UK has a 'strikingly low number of both nurses and doctors per person compared to its peers' and four times fewer hospital and intensive care beds than Germany, the report said.

But opinion polls show scant support in Britain for radical reform such as switching to a mixed model of funding, with patients paying via insurance for some of their treatment, as is the norm elsewhere.

Fully 93 per cent of more than 3,000 respondents believe the NHS should remain free at the point of care, based on general taxation, according to the annual British Social Attitudes Survey last year. But the authoritative survey also found a record 51 per cent were dissatisfied with their quality of care, especially with waiting times for appointments to see general practitioners and hospital doctors.

AFP

Israel in 2nd day of major raid that kills 10 Palestinians in West Bank

Jenin, Palestinian Territories - Israel's biggest military operation for years in the occupied West Bank continued for a second day on Tuesday, leaving at least 10 Palestinians dead and forcing thousands to flee their homes as the government said it struck 'with great strength' the assailants' stronghold.

The raid, launched under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's hard-right government, targeted the northern city of Jenin and employed armoured vehicles, army bulldozers and drone strikes.

On Tuesday morning, shops were shuttered in Jenin, with very few people on the streets littered with debris and burned roadblocks from the previous day's fighting.

Drones hummed overhead, an AFP reporter said.

In the city's refugee camp - an urban community that was home to 18,000 people - multiple streets were ripped up leaving broken electricity cables, oil, and pools of water apparently after an Israeli anti-bomb bulldozer passed.

The Israeli army said its "counter-violence activities" in Jenin had continued overnight into Tuesday, with forces acting to 'neutralise' an underground shaft used to store explosives in the refugee camp.



An Israeli armoured vehicle fires tear gas during a military operation in Jenin in occupied West Bank on Tuesday (AFP)

"Furthermore, IDF soldiers located and dismantled two operational situation rooms belonging to fighter organisations in the area," the army said in a Tuesday statement, referring to the Israel Defense Forces.

Prior to this operation Israel had already stepped up raids in the northern West Bank, which has seen a recent spate of attacks on Israelis as well as Jewish settler violence targeting Palestinians.

Israeli-Palestinian violence has worsened since last year,

and escalated further under the Netanyahu coalition government that includes extreme-right allies.

"In the last five years, this is the worst raid," Qasem Benighader, a nurse at a hospital morgue said, noting 'many' patients with bullet wounds and injuries from explosives.

Impoverished

Army spokesman Daniel Hagari told reporters that Israeli troops did 'not intend to stay in the camp', but 'we are getting ready

for the more severe situation' of prolonged fighting.

A total of 10 people were killed and 100 others wounded, 20 of them seriously, the Palestinian health ministry said.

A wounded Israeli soldier was evacuated by military helicopter.

Since the start of the operation about 3,000 people had fled their homes in the Jenin refugee camp, deputy governor of Jenin, Kamal Abu al-Roub told AFP, adding arrangements were being made to house them in schools and other shelters in Jenin city.

In the Monday night darkness, women carried their youngest children while older ones lugged belongings through the streets.

Jenin resident Badr Shagoul told AFP: "I saw them taking bulldozers into the camp, they were destroying buildings... These were people's homes."

I saw them taking bulldozers into the camp, they were destroying buildings... These were people's homes

BADR SHAGOUL

The army said soldiers and gunmen had exchanged fire at a mosque in the camp, and weapons and explosives were later found in the building.

Another camp resident, Mahmoud Hawashin, predicted that 'if there is more Palestinian blood shed, there will be more Israeli blood shed.'

The United Nations says Jenin camp has 'one of the highest rates of unemployment and poverty' among West Bank camps, and the military operation disrupted water and electric-

ity to 'large areas' of it.

Netanyahu said Israeli forces in 'the nest of attackers in Jenin' were 'destroying command centres and seizing considerable weaponry'. Israel was striking 'with great strength', Foreign Minister Eli Cohen told reporters.

The Palestinian foreign ministry called the escalation 'an open war against the people of Jenin'. The Jenin area is nominally controlled by president Mahmud Abbas's Palestinian Authority, which has partial administrative control in the West Bank.

The ruling Fatah party declared a general strike affecting private businesses and other sectors, and which saw all Palestinian Authority employees remaining home.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is 'deeply concerned' about the violence, and called for the respect of international humanitarian law, a spokesman said in a statement.

Neighbouring Jordan raised similar concerns and the United Arab Emirates urged 'the immediate halt of repeated and escalating campaigns against the Palestinian people'.

The United States said ally Israel had a right to 'defend its people' but called for protection of civilians.

AFP

IN BRIEF

France repatriates 10 women, 25 children from Syria

Paris, France - France on Tuesday repatriated 10 women and 25 children who were held in prison camps for suspected militants in northeast Syria, the fourth such operation in a year, the foreign ministry said.

The minors would be handed over to child care services while the adults would be handed over to the relevant judicial authorities, the ministry said in a statement. The French women had voluntarily gone to territories across Syria and Iraq then controlled by Islamic State militants.

They were captured when the militant group was ousted from its self-declared 'caliphate' in 2019.

Egypt, Turkey appoint ambassadors for first time in decade

Cairo, Egypt - Egypt and Turkey said on Tuesday they had appointed ambassadors to each others' countries for the first time in a decade, in the latest sign of warming ties.

Cairo and Ankara issued statements announcing 'the upgrading of diplomatic relations between them to the level of ambassadors'. The two foreign ministries said the move 'aims at the re-normalisation of relations between the two countries and reflects the mutual will to develop bilateral relations'. The appointments mark a rapprochement between Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and his Turkish veteran counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Tunisian stabbed to death in clash with migrants

Tunis, Tunisia - Three African migrants have been arrested as suspects in the stabbing death of a local man in Tunisia's coastal city of Sfax, a court spokesman said on Tuesday.

Sfax, Tunisia's second-largest city, is a departure point for many migrants hoping to reach Italy, and tensions have been rising there for months. The victim, aged in his early 40s, was fatally stabbed late on Monday during a scuffle.

AFP



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (AFP)

NATO extends tenure of chief Jens Stoltenberg for another year

Brussels, Belgium - NATO's members on Tuesday extended the tenure of alliance chief Jens Stoltenberg for one year, after struggling to find a replacement in the shadow of Russia's war in Ukraine.

The announcement comes one week ahead of a summit of NATO leaders in Lithuania that will be dominated by the Western military alliance's response to the war and Ukraine's push for membership.

"Honoured by NATO allies' decision to extend my term as secretary general until 1 October 2024," Stoltenberg, 64, tweeted. "In a more dangerous world, our alliance is more important than ever."

NATO countries made the call to extend the tenure of the former Norwegian prime minister - at the helm of the alliance since 2014 - after failing to agree an obvious replacement.

Others seen as potential candidates, including Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and British Defence Minister Ben Wallace, had recently dropped out of contention.

Frederiksen appeared to tick the requirements of some European allies as a possible first female leader and by being from the EU.

But NATO nations on the alliance's eastern flank were pushing for someone from their region to take the reins to underscore a tougher stance on Russia.

Britain's Wallace put himself forward, but numerous NATO allies wanted a former head of state or government in charge, and France insisted on someone from an EU country.

Stoltenberg - who already had his tenure extended for a year shortly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 - has the strong backing of the United States and other key allies.

Fine line

He has won plaudits for his cool-headed leadership of the alliance as the biggest armed conflict since World War II has roiled Europe and reinvigorated NATO.

That has involved maintaining stalwart support for Kyiv while also making sure the war does not spill over into a potential nuclear conflict between NATO and Russia.

The summit in Vilnius will see him treading a fine line again as he seeks to bridge gaps between Ukraine's demand to join and the reluctance of dominant power the United States to offer a clear timeline.

AFP

FARM FRESH



An Afghan labourer carries a crate of grapes at a vineyard in Zhari district in Kandahar province on Tuesday (AFP)

Turkey seeks ancient 'head' from Danish museum

Copenhagen, Denmark - A bronze head of Emperor Septimius Severus on display at a Copenhagen museum has become a bone of contention between the Danish museum and Turkey, which claims it was looted during an archaeological dig in the 1960s and wants it back.

After decades in the United States as part of a private collection that loaned it to New York's Metropolitan Museum, a statue of the Roman emperor, who lived from AD 145 to 211, was recently sent back to Turkey - minus the head. The statue was believed to have been stolen from a site in Turkey.

Turkish authorities say the missing head is in the Danish capital - where it has been on display at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen for over 50 years. But many Danish experts say they are not so sure.

"We are not convinced that the two things belong together. The documentation is at the moment not very strong, we have to



The bronze head of Roman Emperor Septimius Severus (145 AD-211 AD) displayed at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek museum in Copenhagen (AFP)

compare breaks of the torso and the head," Glyptotek's director of collections Rune Frederiksen told AFP. In 1979, a former museum curator estimated that the head - acquired in 1970 without any information about its exact origins - corresponded to a decapitated statue from a private American collection.

The two bronze parts were even reunited for an exhibition.

"The head was fitted to the torso in the sense that a pole was put into the neck of the head and fitted into the torso so that the two fragments approached each other," Frederiksen explained.

Not conclusive

But in his view, the assembly did not conclusively prove they were meant to be together. "I'm not saying that they don't belong to-

gether. I'm just saying that we are not as sure as we perhaps were 25-30 years ago, when we wrote the catalogues," he said.

The catalogues - covering Danish museum collections - state that 'nothing, in terms of composition or structure, prevented the head and body from belonging to the same statue'.

As for the origin of the bronze head, it is more categorical and places it at Bubon, a Roman site in Asia Minor, in the historic region of Lycia on what is now Turkey's Mediterranean coast.

For archaeologist Guillaume Biard, a lecturer at the Aix-Marseille University, there is no documented evidence to definitely identify the origin of the head.

But he argues it is clear 'the torso that was once exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum in New York and returned to Turkey comes from the Sebasteion - the temple of the imperial cult - at Bubon'. For Turkish authorities on the other hand, the origin of the head is not in dispute, and in particular they quote the work of the

late Turkish archaeologist, Jale Inan, who took measurements of the head and body.

"The bronze comes from Bubon in Turkey. And like all objects from Turkey, we are asking for it to be returned," said Mehmet Bulut, the Turkish charge d'affaires in Denmark.

Discussions with the Glyptotek have begun. "The procedure has been initiated. We have expressed our request, but it will take time", Bulut added.

While he is not opposed to a potential return, Frederiksen said he thinks it is necessary to thoroughly research the parts.

Reuniting lost fragments is a vital and often difficult task for historians and museums.

"It is obviously important to be able to reconstruct ancient statues. Most of those that have come down to us are heads without bodies or bodies without heads," Emmanuelle Rosso, a professor of art history and archaeology at the Paris-Sorbonne University, told AFP.

AFP

Xi urges Shanghai alliance solidarity

India’s PM Narendra Modi warned that Afghanistan was a base to ‘spread instability’

New Delhi, India - China’s Xi Jinping urged the leaders of Russia, Iran and other Shanghai alliance states on Tuesday to boost ties and resist sanctions, as Vladimir Putin thanked the bloc for support during a failed rebellion.

China and Russia have in recent years ramped up economic cooperation and diplomatic contacts, with their strategic partnership having only grown closer since Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine last year. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation - which on Tuesday welcomed Iran as its ninth member - encompasses a vast stretch of the globe from Moscow to Beijing and includes around half the world’s population when observer and ‘dialogue partner’ nations are included.

During the virtual meeting, Xi ‘called for efforts to safeguard regional peace and ensure common security’, state news agency Xinhua said, adding that he urged SCO member states to ‘enhance their solidarity’.

While China says it is a neutral party to the Ukraine conflict, it has been criticised by Western nations for refusing to condemn Moscow’s offensive.

Putin, speaking via video link at the meeting, his first summit since a short-lived mutiny last month by Wagner mercenary group chief Yevgeny Prigozhin, thanked the Beijing-headquartered SCO for its support.

“Russia is confidently resisting and will continue to resist external pressure, sanctions and provocations,” Putin said.

“I would like to thank my colleagues from the SCO countries who expressed support for the actions of the Russian leadership to protect the constitu-



Two women wait below a giant screen showing news footage of China’s President Xi Jinping speaking virtually to the SCO meeting, at a shopping mall in Beijing on Tuesday (AFP)

We must be highly vigilant against external forces fomenting a new Cold War... and resolutely oppose any country interfering in internal affairs and staging a ‘colour revolution’ for any reason

XI JINPING

tional order and the life and security of citizens,” he added.

Alongside summit host India, other full members are Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Russian ally Belarus, which

holds observer status, was also told it would become a member at the next SCO summit. Iran’s membership feeds concerns of some Western critics worried about ‘Russia, China, Pakistan and Iran coming together, so

there is a collection of countries that are inherently anti-Western in their orientation’, said Harsh V. Pant, a professor with King’s College London.

On Tuesday, China’s Xi warned against ‘colour revolutions’ and a ‘new Cold War’, according to a state media readout of his speech to the SCO summit.

“We must be highly vigilant against external forces fomenting a ‘new Cold War’ and creating confrontation in the region, and resolutely oppose any country interfering in internal affairs and staging a ‘colour revolution’

for any reason,” he said.

Afghanistan concerns

During the summit, the leaders of rivals India and Pakistan said Afghanistan remained a key concern.

India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi warned of the risk Afghanistan was a base to ‘spread instability’, while his Pakistani counterpart Shehbaz Sharif called for an ‘urgent reset’ in international engagement with Afghanistan’s Taliban rulers.

UN warns world to prepare for El Nino impact

Geneva, Switzerland - The United Nations on Tuesday warned the world to prepare for the effects of El Nino, saying the weather phenomenon which triggers higher global temperatures is set to persist throughout 2023.

El Nino is a naturally occurring climate pattern typically associated with increased heat worldwide, as well as drought in some parts of the world and heavy rains elsewhere. The phenomenon occurs on average every two to seven years, and episodes typically last nine to 12 months.

The UN’s World Meteorological Organization declared El Nino was already under way and said there was a 90 per cent chance that it would continue during the second half of 2023.

“The onset of El Nino will greatly increase the likelihood of breaking temperature records and triggering more extreme heat in many parts of the world and in the ocean,” warned WMO secretary-general Petteri Taalas. “The declaration of an El Nino by WMO is the signal to governments around the world to mobilise preparations to limit the impacts on our health, our ecosystems and our economies,” said Taalas. “Early warnings and anticipatory action of extreme weather events associated with this major climate phenomenon are vital to save lives and livelihoods.”

AFP

MAJESTIC RAIN



A Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) officer patrols at the Taj Mahal during a heavy rainfall in Agra, India, on Tuesday (AFP)

Afghan Taliban to shut women’s beauty parlours

Kabul, Afghanistan - Afghanistan’s Taliban authorities have ordered beauty parlours across the country to shut within a month, the vice ministry confirmed on Tuesday, the latest curb to squeeze women out of public life.

The order will force the closure of thousands of businesses run by women - often the only source of income for households - and outlaw one of the few remaining opportunities for them to socialise away from home.

“I think it would have been good if women did not exist at all in this society,” said the manager of a Kabul parlour who asked not to be identified.

“I am saying this now: I wish I did not exist. I wish we were not born in Afghanistan, or were not from Afghanistan.”

Since seizing power in August



Women walks past a beauty salon in Kabul on Tuesday (AFP)

2021, the Taliban government has barred girls and women from high schools and universities, banned them from parks, funfairs and gyms, and ordered them to cover up in public.

Women have also mostly been barred from working for the United Nations or NGOs, and

thousands have been sacked from government jobs or are being paid to stay at home. Mohammad Sadeq Akif Muhajir, spokesman for the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, would not say why the order had been given.

AFP

France seeks answers as President Macron declares riots ‘peak’ passed

Paris, France - French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday met with hundreds of French officials to begin exploring the ‘deeper reasons’ for the country’s plunge into riots after the killing of a teenager at a traffic stop.

The Elysee palace meeting with around 250 mayors, whose municipalities suffered damage over a week of violence, comes as the authorities reported a much calmer night across the country.

“Is it a permanent return to calm? I will be cautious, but the peak that we’ve seen in previous

days has passed,” Macron said, according to a participant.

“We all want a lasting, republican order,” he said. “That’s the absolute priority.”

The government has battled riots and looting since 17-year-old Nahel M was killed by an officer during a traffic stop on Tuesday just outside Paris, rekindling long-standing accusations of systemic racism among security forces.

Overnight violence in French cities had halved in 24 hours, the interior ministry said, with 72 people arrested overnight nationwide. That included 24 ar-

rested in and around Paris, where the riots first broke out.

The interior ministry said dozens of buildings were damaged - including attacks on four offices of police or gendarmes - but there were no injuries.

More than 150 vehicles had been set ablaze, and hundreds of fires started in rubbish bins or other public areas.

Police mobilisation had been kept at the same level as the two previous nights, at 45,000 across France.

Mayors across France had held rallies on Monday calling for an end to the violent clashes.



France’s President Emmanuel Macron addresses mayors of cities affected by the violent clashes, at Elysee Palace in Paris on Tuesday (AFP)

‘Painstaking long-term work’

Their call for a ‘return to republican order’ came after the home of the mayor of a Paris suburb was rammed with a burning car, prompting widespread outrage.

In an overnight tweet, Macron thanked police, gendarmes and firefighters for their ‘extraordinary mobilisation in these recent nights’, after meeting with police late on Monday.

At the gathering of mayors, Macron was hoping to ‘start the painstaking, long-term work needed to understand the deeper reasons that led to these

events’, an official at the president’s office said.

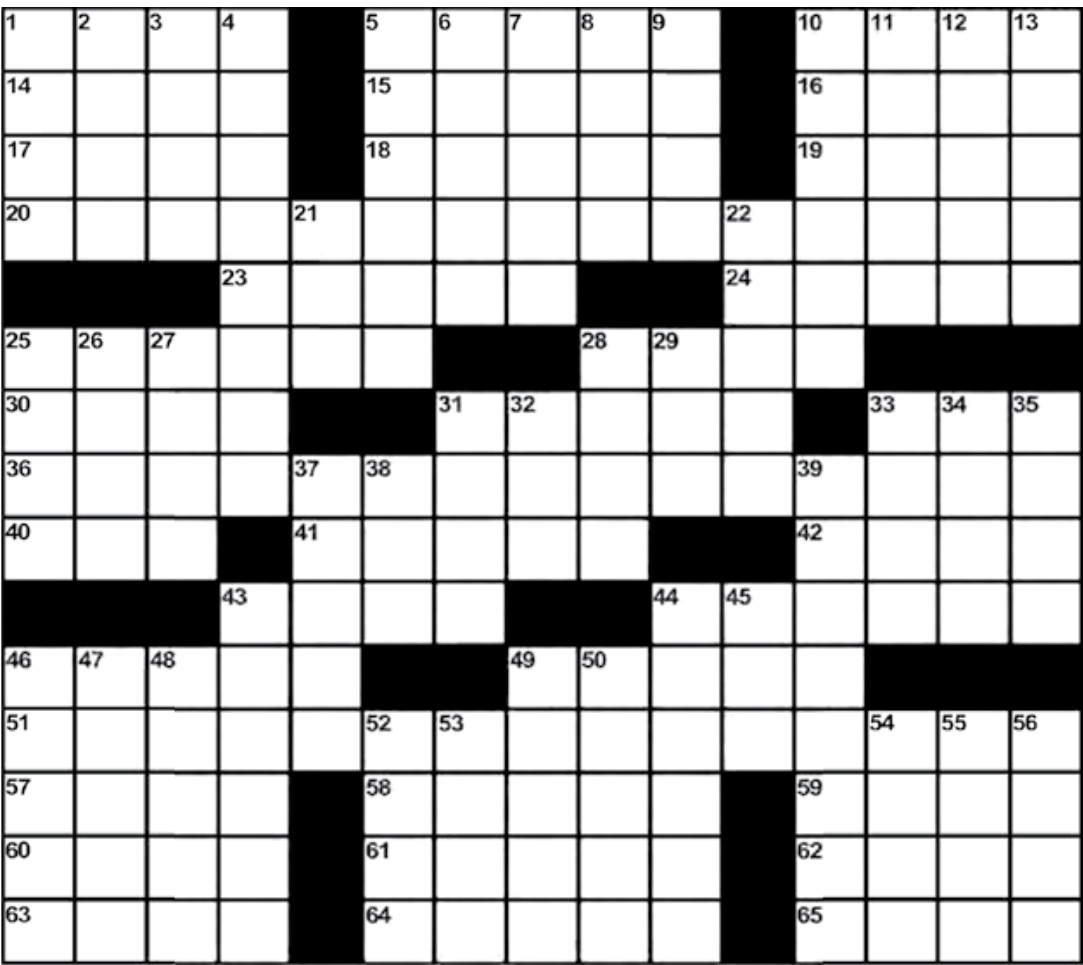
Just under 4,000 arrests have been made since Friday, including more than 1,200 minors, according to justice ministry figures.

Macron raised the idea of handing out quick-fire fines to the parents of children caught for vandalism or robberies.

“With the first crime, we need to find a way of sanctioning the families financially and easily,” he said, according to comments reported by the *Parisien* newspaper.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Trunk fastener
- 5) One Bolivian capital
- 10) Atlas contents management?
- 14) Tangerine and grapefruit hybrid
- 15) Get hitched quick
- 16) Key in the water
- 17) Man-goat creature
- 18) Buenos _
- 19) Only one assigned to a bomb?
- 20) Press releases, essentially
- 23) Applies oneself
- 24) Opposite of blessing
- 25) Rabbit's breeding place
- 28) Some deli breads
- 30) Continuous dull pain
- 31) "Goodbye," abroad
- 33) This may be over your head
- 36) Right guaranteed by the First Amendment
- 40) Jasmine, for one
- 41) In need of middle management

DOWN

- 1) Part of a fairy-tale wolfs threat
- 2) Gelatin in a petri dish
- 3) Turn sharply
- 4) Common air freshener shape
- 5) Start of a segue
- 6) With a pulse
- 7) Perspiration vents
- 8) Expert at impersonations
- 9) Tangy quality
- 10) Wife, slangily

(with "the")

- 11) Up in the morning
- 12) Architectural drawings
- 13) Twilled worsted fabric
- 21) "... you sure?"
- 22) Become frosted, as glass
- 25) Float, as an aroma
- 26) 43,560-square-foot unit
- 27) Large, three-toed bird
- 28) Abounding
- 29) "May I help you?"
- 31) Last word in churches
- 32) Two in Tijuana
- 33) Preside over
- 34) Skin condition
- 35) Yonder folks
- 37) Used HOH
- 38) _-Wan Kenobi
- 39) Literary afterthought
- 43) Precipitates, in a way
- 44) "... of fire, break glass"
- 45) Scrooge's reply
- 46) Weight-loss photo caption
- 47) TV teaser
- 48) Minor, in law
- 49) Dance with a winding line
- 50) In progress
- 52) Look up and down

rudely

- 53) Lunch or dinner, e.g.
- 54) "To Live and Die..."

(1985 film)

- 55) Isn't able to
- 56) Airline approximations

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

This is a wonderful day to get stuff started! If you've been delaying making travel plans, calling up that cutie, or getting your car fixed, it's time to stop stalling and do what you need to do. You've been thinking and pondering long enough. Now it's time to act. You can be confident that whatever is begun today will end in success. As for your concerns that you're not quite ready, well, you're never going to be completely prepared. But you can make things up as you go along!



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

There is something new going on with one of your friends or co-workers, and you should address it as early as you can today. Have you left them hanging? If they've been waiting for you to give them a final answer, follow through on a promise, or commit to a date, do it today. You two are a good combination of energies, and they're balancing you out in a way you don't understand just yet. They're pushing you in the right direction, and you should trust them.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

If it feels like people have big expectations of you, then your instincts are right. You have shown them that you're capable of great things, so now great things are all they want to see from you. If you need a little break from the pressure you're under today, take one. Follow your own wishes and do your own thing for the next day or so. There comes a time when you have to start saying no, and your time is coming soon.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

If you have any health concerns at all right now, you should address them as soon as possible. Anything from headaches to sore knees could signify something more serious, and you need to nip it in the bud before things get too far. Surfing online and reading medical websites isn't going to help you. All that information is only going to make you even more worried and confused. Call an expert, get an appointment, and take control of your health.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

In one of your oldest relationships, you're finally just coming to a place where you can get a sense of the true value you bring to this other person's life. It's wonderful to feel like you're a good influence on someone, and the two of you are getting closer in a whole new way. It's time the two of you got away for a while and reminded yourself how well you fit together. Take a trip together soon. Go visit a place neither of you has ever been to before.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Today, two's company and three's a party! You're feeling the urge to connect with other people, and you should make an extra effort to get back in the loop with a long-distance friend. The main idea for you to follow today is that the more people there are, the merrier you'll be! If you want to feel a part of the world around you, today is the day to rub elbows with people from all walks of life. Put yourself in the middle of any crowd and you'll start making friends in no time.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Romance is something that needs input from both parties. So if the object of your affection hasn't been putting forth the same amount of effort that you've been giving to your relationship, then the two of you need to talk. If you're not currently in a relationship and want to start one, speaking your mind will help invite more attention from people who agree with you. Don't make the mistake of holding your tongue in a tricky situation.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You have a lot of energy today, which will make it easy for you get a lot of stuff done and have fun while doing it. If you've been putting off your cleaning your living space, today is a great day to tackle some of it. You'll make great progress. Keep in mind that all this energy could prevent you from being a good listener right now, however. You'll be distracted and impatient for people to get to the point.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Despite several warnings not to overextend yourself, it seems like you still have a few too many things on your plate right now. You're to be congratulated for your ambition, but you need to be smart about how you prioritize things. Sort through all your tasks and see if you can ask other people to take some of the load off you. It's time to take advantage of the enduring partnerships you've built. Don't let your ego keep you from reaching out.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Recently, you've been sacrificing too much of your own free time for the sake of other people. Whenever someone has asked you to come to anything you've said yes, and that has to stop. Are you too uncomfortable having blank space in your social calendar? Those holes are a great gift to give yourself. They're time to relax and do whatever you feel like doing. By being so social, you're losing some of your independence. Make sure you get some alone time soon.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

It's going to be an easy day, full of fun conversations and simple, straightforward tasks. After a recent bout with doubt, you've moved into a very solid phase of life, and each day you're getting more and more comfortable with who you are. Keep on doing what you're doing, and try not to push things to go a certain way. Your agenda doesn't matter right now. What matters is that you keep feeling positive about where you are and where you're headed.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

There could be a lot of people vying for your attention right now, and it's going to be tough to be totally equitable. Finding a balance isn't beyond your grasp, though. Don't write anyone off just because you don't think you have enough time. You do. Just be calm and cool about things. Don't keep looking at your watch while you're talking to someone. There's no need to be in a rush, especially when it comes to connecting with your people.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. A hunter claimed to have seen what bird in 1688, thought to be the last recorded sighting?

- A. Gryphon
- B. Roc
- C. Phoenix
- D. Dodo

02. When was the first award ceremony for the US's Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences held?

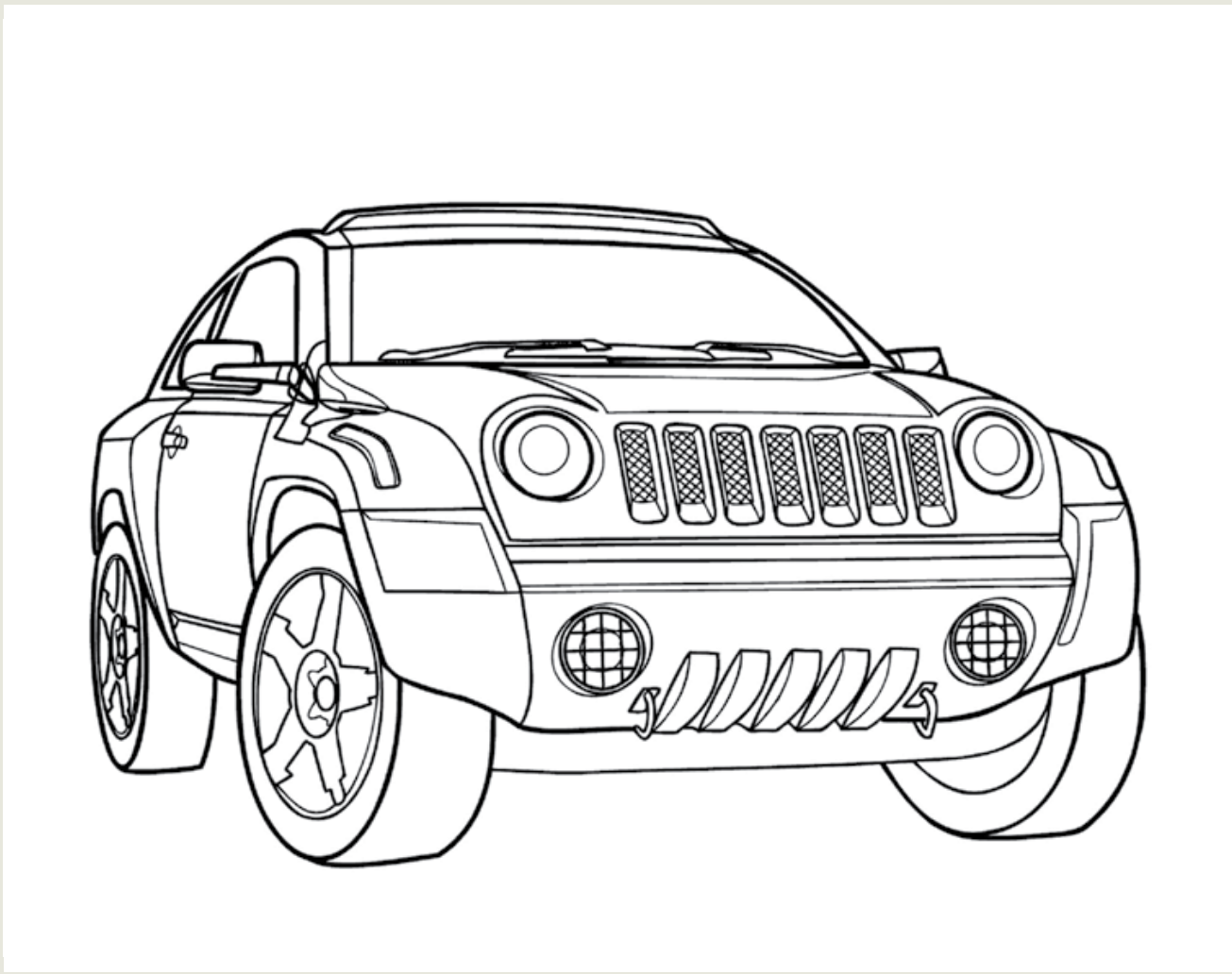
- A. 1951
- B. 1919
- C. 1941
- D. 1929

03. Which of these was a former name of Northern Rhodesia?

- A. Zanzibar
- B. Zimbabwe
- C. Zaire
- D. Zambia

Answers: 1. D 2. D 3. D

KIDS COLOURING



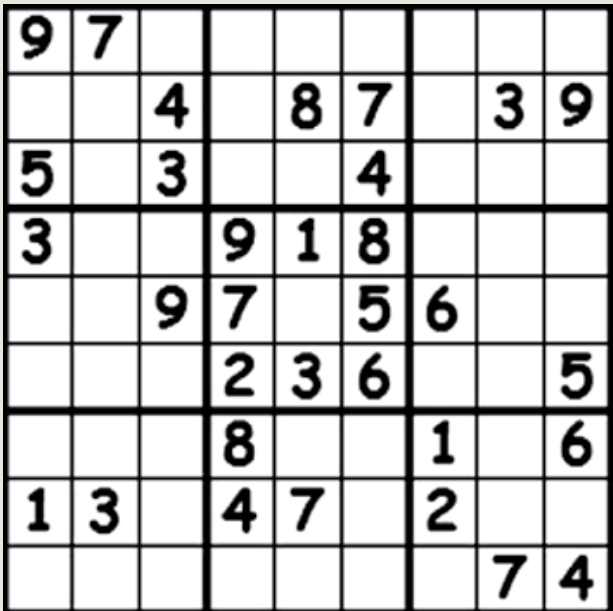
BOGGLER



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



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



'I WAS KILLING IT, THEN I GOT KILLED BY GRASS'

Five-time champion Venus loses in first round

London, United Kingdom - Venus Williams said she was "killed by the grass" after the five-time champion suffered a nasty tumble during her 6-4, 6-3 defeat to Elina Svitolina in the Wimbledon first round on Monday.

The American started strongly against her Ukrainian opponent, who reached the semi-finals in 2019, winning the first two games.

But the 43-year-old slipped on the Centre Court grass and fell to the ground in agony, clutching her strapped right knee as Svitolina pulled the score back to 2-1.

She limped back to her chair and the trainer was called but she was able to continue.

Williams came out aggressively, seeking to fire off winners, but was broken again in the fifth game and fellow wild card Svitolina went on to take the opening set 6-4.

The American had a mountain to climb after she was broken in the first game of the second set and former world number three Svitolina repeated the feat for a 4-1 lead.

The 28-year-old, who gave



Venus Williams of the US returns the ball to Ukraine's Elina Svitolina during their first-round match at Wimbledon on Monday (AFP)

It's not fun right now. I felt like I was in great form coming into this tournament, and great form in the match. It's all very shocking at the moment. This is sports

VENUS WILLIAMS



birth to a girl in October and is currently ranked 76th, served for the match in the eighth game but Williams, battling hard, broke back to make the score 5-3.

However, she failed to build

on her momentum as Svitolina broke again, wrapping up the set 6-3, with the match decided on a video referral.

Williams was given a standing ovation as she walked off Centre

Court, turning and waving to the crowd.

The American, who said she did not know the extent of her injury, was sanguine after her defeat.

"Grass is inherently going to be slippery," she said. "You're going to fall at some point. It was

just bad luck for me.

"I started the match perfectly. I was literally killing it, then I got killed by the grass.

"It's not fun right now. I felt like I was in great form coming into this tournament, and great form in the match. It's all very shocking at the moment. This is

sports." The American, who made her Wimbledon debut in 1997, was playing at the All England Club for the 24th time -- the most appearances for any player in the Open era.

At the time of that first appearance, 53 of the players in the 2023 draw were not yet born.

Svitolina was just two years old.

The Ukrainian said she was happy that Williams could continue after her fall, admitting she was "shaken up" by the incident.

"She tried, and the champion she is, she fought, she gave her everything," she said.

AFP



Serbia's Novak Djokovic returns the ball to Argentina's Pedro Cachin on Monday (AFP)

Djokovic rides slippery conditions to ease into second round

London, United Kingdom - Novak Djokovic launched his bid for an eighth Wimbledon title on Monday with a 40th successive win on Centre Court while American stars Coco Gauff and Venus Williams were knocked out.

The 36-year-old Djokovic, who has won the past four titles at the All England Club, defeated 68th-ranked Pedro Cachin of Argentina, 6-3, 6-3, 7-6 (7/4) on the tournament's showpiece court, where he has not lost since

2013.

Djokovic even found time to help ground staff dry out the world's most famous lawn after the surface became too slippery following a downpour.

The roof was closed but play did not resume for about 90 minutes, much to the frustration of the fans.

"When I come out, I usually come out with racquets, not towels," said Djokovic, who described the court as "the holy

grail, the temple of tennis".

The Serbian, bidding to match Roger Federer's men's record of eight Wimbledon titles, goes on to face Australia's Jordan Thompson for a place in the third round. World number two Djokovic has already pocketed the Australian Open and French Open this year.

Winning a men's-record 23rd major in Paris put him just one behind Margaret Court's all-time singles mark of 24.

Love match at Wimbledon for new power couple Tsitsipas and Badosa

London, United Kingdom - Move over Posh and Becks, forget "Brangelina" or "Kimye", there's a new power couple in town in the shape of Wimbledon lovebirds Stefanos Tsitsipas and Paula Badosa.

Only romantically involved since May, Greek world number five Tsitsipas and Spain's New York-born Badosa, who has been as high as number two in the rankings, are very much a modern couple.

They already have a joint Instagram account blending their names into one - "Tsitsidosas".

"Best friends and soulmates. Nothing less; nothing more," purrs its tagline.

Boasting almost 57,000 followers, the platform has showcased the couple in Dubai, splashing about in a swimming pool, training and taking selfies on Centre Court.

"O Grand Slams in one photo, but hey, love conquers all," they captioned one picture.

Tsitsipas recently told Greek media outlet SDNA that the rela-



Stefanos Tsitsipas and Paula Badosa

tionship only started after he messaged Badosa to congratulate her on defeating Ons Jabeur in Rome. "It was meant to happen," the 24-year-old said. "I feel like I'm falling in love for the first time in my life. I never expected this to happen and it gives me a new perspective on life."

All England Club spectators, shivering in the damp and cold on Tuesday, will get the chance to warm to the couple on Tuesday when they start their Wimbledon campaigns. Tsitsipas was facing former US Open Dominic Thiem while Badosa is up against Alison Riske-Amritraj.

Golden couple

They were not the only golden couple looking to make the second round on Tuesday.

Britain's Katie Boulter and Alex de Minaur of Australia, who have been dating for two years, open their campaigns on the same Court 18.

Boulter was first up against Daria Saville before De Minaur, the world number 17, faces Kimmer Coppejans of Belgium.

Boulter and De Minaur are renting a nearby house during the championships. "I feel like we continually both push each other," said 26-year-old Boulter, the British number one.

"There's a lot I've learned from him as a person and as a player. I'm very lucky to have an insider who knows the emotions that I go through on and off the court.

"He's an incredible player and, as you can see from his ranking, he does it week in, week out. I've got a lot to learn from him. I do my best to watch what he does and emulate it."

AFP

Jasper Philipsen avoids disaster in sprint for third stage victory in Tour de France

Bayonne, France - Belgian sprint ace Jasper Philipsen demonstrated his speed skills by winning the third stage of the Tour de France on Monday.

Philipsen had attracted ridicule last year for celebrating what he believed to be a stage win when in fact Wout van Aert had already crossed the line on a solo escape.

A Netflix series about the 2022 Tour then nicknamed him 'Jasper the disaster'.

On Monday, the 25-year-old

outmuscled the other fast men to take the high-speed bunch finish as the Tour arrived in France after two days in the Spanish Basque Country. The only time the Alpecin-Deceuninck rider trembled was when race Commissioners reviewed the images to check if he had not deviated from his route when he cut off compatriot Van Aert.

There followed a few anxious minutes where Philipsen scrutinised a small screen in the protocol area before his victory ahead

of German Phil Bauhaus and Australian Caleb Ewan was approved. "It was tense," said Philipsen after his seventh win of the season. "Everyone wanted to put everything into this sprint.

"I knew the right side was the most direct. When you're in the lead, you try to take the shortest path. I'm delighted with how my team and above all how Mathieu (van der Poel) led me out for it."

Van Aert finished fifth after the 193.5km ride from Amorebieta-Etxano to Bayonne in south-

west France.

"It's hard to say if his sprint was fair, unfortunately I couldn't finish my sprint," said Jumbo-Visma rider van Aert.

"Luckily I survived. That's the most important thing. Tomorrow there will probably be another chance in a mass sprint."

Mark Cavendish finished sixth to miss a first chance to beat the record for Tour stage victories of 34 which he jointly holds with the Belgian legend Eddy Merckx.

AFP



Jasper Philipsen celebrates his win in the third stage of Tour de France on Monday (AFP)

Al Harthy determined to continue excellent momentum at Monza



Oman's Ahmad al Harthy will be hoping for a repeat of his Le Mans 24 Hours performance in Monza

Muscat – History-making Omani motor racing star Ahmad al Harthy is carrying rightful confidence into round five of the FIA World Endurance Championship, which takes place at Monza in Italy on Sunday, after a monumental performance on his debut in last month's Le Mans 24 Hours.

Finishing second in GTE Am after a sensational showing from Oman Racing with TF Sport squad at the world's biggest and most prestigious endurance race, Al Harthy and team-mates

Michael Dinan and Charlie Eastwood are determined to continue their podium momentum.

As a result of their heroics at the Circuit de la Sarthe in France, the Oman Racing trio head to ultra-fast Monza second in both the driver and team GTE Am standings. In their maiden season in the globe's biggest endurance championship.

With just three races remaining in the FIA WEC season, every point scored will be crucial as the No.25 Aston Martin Vantage squad strives to achieve the

highest position in the championship it possibly can.

Monza, of course, is a track like so many in Europe which holds great memories for Al Harthy having been the scene of his maiden Pro-Am class victory in the Blancpain Endurance Series – now the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup – back in 2017 as well as further podium success.

As always, consistency and reliability will be paramount at Monza, as will sufficient top speed at the 3.6-mile (5.8-kilo-

metre) track which is famous for its flat-out straights. Just as notable, infamous in fact, is the first chicane – the Variante del Rettifilo – which will almost certainly play a significant role as the huge FIA WEC grid barrels into the right-left turn at the first time of asking on raceday.

Al Harthy, who is supported by a prestigious portfolio of partners including the Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS, has been in outstanding form throughout his debut sea-

son in the World Endurance Championship to date.

"We're still pinching ourselves to be honest after the podium at Le Mans, it was an amazing week and what we achieved in qualifying and the race meant so much to everyone in Oman – all of our incredible partners and supporters," said Al Harthy.

"It was the best event of my career and proudest moment, the biggest endurance race in the world, so the aim is to take all of that momentum forward to Monza."

Gerrard joins Saudi influx

Former England and Liverpool captain to take charge of Al Ettifaq in Saudi Pro League

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Former Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard is the latest star name to make the move to Saudi Arabia after signing a deal to become head coach of Al Ettifaq.

The 43-year-old has been out of the game since being sacked by Aston Villa in October.

Gerrard had previously said he had turned down an offer to head to the Gulf state, but has now been lured by the riches on offer.

"Where legends are found. We're thrilled to announce Steven Gerrard is our new head coach," the club said in a post on Twitter.

Al Ettifaq finished seventh out of 16 clubs in the Saudi Pro League last season.

Backed by the nation's sovereign wealth fund, the Saudi Pro League is luring big names from the major European leagues with the promise of huge salaries.

Croatian World Cup player Marcelo Brozovic has also switched to Saudi Arabia, his new club Al Nassr announced on Monday.

The 30-year-old midfielder captained Inter Milan as they lost the Champions League final to



Al Ettifaq's new manager Steven Gerrard (R) with the club's president Khaled al Debel after signing with them in London (AFP)

Manchester City in June. He has played 87 times for Croatia.

Cristiano Ronaldo's move to Al Nassr in January started the trend.

His former Real Madrid teammate Karim Benzema and French World Cup winner N'Golo Kante of Chelsea have recently joined

Gerrard had previously said he had turned down an offer to head to the Gulf state, but has now been lured by the riches on offer

Al Ittihad.

Former Tottenham manager Nuno Espirito Santo and ex-Benfica Jorge Jesus are among the coaches to head to Saudi.

Since retiring from a glittering playing career, Gerrard did have success during his spell in charge of Scottish giants Rangers, where he won the club's only league title in the past 12 years in 2020/21.

Al Mouj Golf gets six nominations at World Golf Awards

Muscat - Al Mouj Golf has been nominated for six awards in the 2023 World Golf Awards and the twice-ranked World top 100 club is inviting golfers and non-golfers to get behind the oceanfront course by casting votes to help them win.

The awards are the most prestigious in the golfing world with votes made by leading names from the world of golf tourism and management, including past and current professionals, as well as being open to the media and the public.

The Greg Norman-designed course has been shortlisted across a range of categories including Best Golf Course in the Middle East and separately, Best Golf Destination, Best Golf Course in Oman, World's Best Club House, World's Best 9 Hole Course and the World's Most Eco-friendly Golf Facility.

Voting is open until September 1

Neymar fined \$3.3 million for building lake at mansion

Rio De Janeiro, Brazil - A prosecutor in Brazil fined soccer star Neymar 16 million reais (\$3.3 million) for building a lake at his mansion on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro without an environmental license, authorities said Monday.

The town council in Mangaratiba issued four fines for "environmental violations in the construction of an artificial lake at the player's mansion," the council secretariat said in a statement.

"The sanctions add up to more than 16 million reais," the statement said, a sum set out by the prosecutor's office in Mangaratiba, a tourist area around 130 kilometers (80 miles) from Rio where the Paris Saint-Germain star has his mansion.

Among "dozens of infractions" detected, the authorities listed "carrying out work subject to environmental control without authorization," capture and diversion of river water without authorization, and "removal of land and suppression of vegetation without authorization."

Neymar has 20 days to appeal the penalty, the amount of which had initially been set at five million reais, close to one million dollars.

On June 22, after complaints based on social media posts, authorities found several environmental violations at the luxury property, where workers were



Authorities cordoned off the site and ordered all activity to cease, but Brazilian media reported that Neymar threw a party there and bathed in the lake

building an artificial lake and beach.

Authorities cordoned off the site and ordered all activity to cease, but Brazilian media reported that Neymar threw a party there and bathed in the lake.

Neymar's press office in Brazil did not respond to an AFP request for comment.

Neymar, 31, is currently recovering from surgery on his right



Milan Borjan

Canada's Borjan to miss rest of Gold Cup

Montreal, Canada - Canada's men's national team captain Milan Borjan will miss the remainder of the CONCACAF Gold Cup with an unspecified injury, Canada Soccer announced on Monday.

Goalkeeper Borjan has returned to Europe to continue his recovery ahead of the 2023-24 club campaign, the national governing body said.

He is set to play for Slovan Bratislava on loan from Red Star Belgrade.

The 35-year-old has Canadian records of 35 clean sheets in 77 appearances and was in goal for Canada's 2-2 draw with Guadeloupe and 0-0 draw with Guatemala in Gold Cup matches over the past week.

Canada will play Cuba on Tuesday at Houston needing a victory to have any chance of advancing to the Gold Cup quarter-finals from Group D.

AFP



Tiger woods

Tiger says he never saw LIV-PGA talking points from lawsuit

Miami, United States - Tiger Woods says he never saw purported prepared comments for him to deliver last year at a players meeting, documents involved in a federal lawsuit.

Golf Digest and Golf Channel reported on Monday that the comments aimed at Woods were part of 357 pages of emails and documents in a lawsuit filed in the 15th Judicial District in Palm Beach County, Florida.

Among the exhibits were scripted Woods supposedly from the PGA Tour meant for the 15-time major winner to repeat at a players meeting at the 2022 Travelers Championship, only weeks after LIV Golf's debut event in London.

"In response to the talking

points memo released this weekend, I have never seen this document until today, and I did not attend the players meeting for which it was prepared at the 2022 Travelers," Woods tweeted late on Sunday.

Remarks purportedly prepared for Woods to say at the players meeting included saying PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan was "the right guy for this war, he's a fighter" and players needed to "join the fight" and "do what I did" in rejecting overtures from the Saudi backers of LIV Golf.

The meeting came at a time when the PGA Tour was concerned about the number of players jumping to LIV for record \$25 million purses, guaranteed deals and 54-hole events. Woods with-

drew from the Masters after aggravating a foot injury and in April underwent fusion surgery on his right leg. He has given no timetable for a return.

Woods' rejection of the remarks came a month after Monahan's shock announcement the PGA Tour had made a merger deal with the Saudi Public Investment Fund (PIF) to end the battle between the PGA and the upstarts, wiping out lawsuits that would have revealed business details about both groups.

According to Golf Digest, the court filings also included details of a dire financial situation for the DP World Tour that pushed the PGA to make a deal with LIV that included the DP World Tour.

AFP

Scots stun Zimbabwe to set up decider with Dutch

Harare, Zimbabwe - Michael Leask helped Scotland to a stunning 31-run victory over Zimbabwe on Tuesday to set up a winner-takes-all clash with the Netherlands for a place at the World Cup.

Sri Lanka became the first of the top two teams in the Super Six table to have qualified for the October-November World Cup in India when they beat Zimbabwe on Sunday.

The hosts could have clinched the second spot with victory over Scotland in Bulawayo, but it was not to be after Scottish quick Chris Sole (3-33) ripped through their top order, eventually

bowled out for 203 chasing down 234. "Our boys have been fantastic. Credit to the way the lads played today," said Scotland captain Richie Berrington.

"The way we came out and showed faith in the second innings and get those early wickets was fantastic," Berrington added: "It's a quick turnaround to the game against the Netherlands. We'll take a lot of confidence but it's going to be a tough game."

"It's a very difficult pill to swallow," Berrington's Zimbabwe counterpart Craig Ervine acknowledged.

"I thought we did well to restrict them to 230. Unfortunately



Scotland players celebrate their victory

that first initial spell from Sole really put us on the back foot and just made it hard for us to recover from that position."

Leask top scored with a 34-ball 48 as Scotland racked up 234 runs for eight wickets off their allotted 50 overs. Coming in at number eight, he combined with Mark Watt (21 not out) for an invaluable eighth-wicket partnership of 46 after the Scots had been left reeling at 170-7.

Three other batsmen - Matthew Cross (38), Brandon McMullen (34) and George Munsey (31) -- all got into the 30s, but failed to build on their time at the crease.

Sean Williams grabbed 3-41 off his 10 overs, but failed to shine with the bat as Zimbabwe were quickly reduced to 37/4 in the run chase, under intense pressure from Sole.

Wessly Madhevere hit 40 and the dangerous Sikandar Raza 34 as Zimbabwe fought back.

Ryan Burl gave the host nation most hope, however, hitting 83 off 84 balls. But Burl crucially fell to the offbreak of Leask

The Scotsman ended with 2-33 off six overs and his team left the field knowing that a victory over the Dutch on Thursday would see them headed for India in the Autumn.

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French actress Adele Exarchopoulos (L) and French model Tina Kunakey (C) arrive by row-boat

LAKESIDE CATWALK

Le Chouchou

JACQUEMUS TURNS VERSAILLES LAKE INTO FASHION FRONT ROW WITH MOSTLY ALL-WHITE ATTIRE



Fashion editor Julia Hobbs



British actress Claire Foy

One of the canniest rising stars of fashion, the French house Jacquemus put on perhaps the most luxurious show of the season in Paris, a week ago, putting stars such as Victoria and David Beckham on boats on the lake of the Palace of Versailles to watch the catwalk along the water's edge.

French designer Simon Porte Jacquemus' new collection, inspired by Lady Diana and Marie Antoinette, was revealed on a long red podium installed on the grass at the royal site southwest of the capital.

Jacquemus called the show 'Le Chouchou' - French for 'darling' - but also for scrunchy hair ties in reference to some of the puffy shapes of the dresses as worn by the likes of Kendall Jenner.

The feminine looks - practically all white with some flashes of black and pink - featured openwork tights and white knee-high stockings with rose touches.

"I was always obsessed with Lady Di and started collecting 90s magazines and Vogue covers," he said.

A white dress with black polka dots as well as 80s silhouettes of suits and bomber jackets were 'winks' to his favourite modern princess, he said.

The abundance of tutus, meanwhile, evoked Marie-Antoinette's passion for ballet. "I wanted something very elegant, ballet-inspired, even for men," he said.

As with his previous shows - and many others in the recent fashion week - there was plenty of skin on show, with cutouts, mini-skirts and transparent materials.

Jacquemus said, he began planning the show before he had the green light from Versailles.

"During the first meeting I was told that it wouldn't be possible," he said.

"Now, it's crazy, I have a one-year contract," he added, promising something special to come.

Independent and daring

True to his taste for independence, Jacquemus held his all-gender show just one day after the official Paris Fashion Week menswear shows had finished.

He has forged a singular and hugely successful path in the fashion game, building 5.6 million followers on Instagram despite staying out of the official fashion week calendar since 2020.

Actresses Monica Bellucci, Eva Longoria and Adele Exarchopoulos were among the invitees who arrived at the site and were taken aboard a water-bound 'front row'.

"What a place! He's an incredible talent, an artist," said Bellucci, wearing a brown trouser suit.

Star model Gigi Hadid was among those on the catwalk, perched on heels and wearing a light, transparent lace outfit. After the show, she circled the lake driving a cart, provoking cheers from fashionistas watching from behind barriers.

Among the outfits were some patriotic touches, including red, white and blue dresses, short and transparent in the front and adorned with long trains.

"I love my country and I'm proud of it," said Jacquemus.

AFP



British former football player David Beckham (L) and British singer and fashion designer Victoria Beckham (C) arrive by row-boat at the Jacquemus Menswear Spring-Summer 2024

I WANTED SOMETHING VERY ELEGANT, BALLET-INSPIRED, EVEN FOR MEN

SIMON PORTE JACQUEMUS



Puerto Rican singer Rauw Alejandro



French model and actress Laetitia Casta



US actress and director Eva Longoria



South Korean singer Ahn Hyo-seop

PARIS COUTURE WEEK



Models present creations by Dutch fashion designer Iris Van Herpen during the Women's Haute-Couture Fall/Winter 2023/2024 Fashion Week in Paris

Surreal closet

PARIS COUTURE WEEK BRUSHES OFF RIOTS WITH ART AND OPULENCE

Greek goddesses at Christian Dior, mermaids at Iris Van Herpen, and fine art inspiration at Schiaparelli - the fashion world brushed aside concerns about riots in France as haute couture week launched on Monday.

French label Celine had cancelled its show on Sunday (held outside the official calendar) because of the unrest sparked by the police killing of a teenager last week.

With violence ebbing around Paris over the weekend, however, the fashion federation said it did not expect disruptions to couture week, whose celebration of ultra-expensive, tailor-made dresses could not be further from the issues that have roiled the country in recent days.

Before a crowd, including rapper Cardi B and Vogue editor Anna Wintour, Schiaparelli got things rolling with what it called 'a surrealist's interpretation of a woman's essential closet'.

One of the designs was created by hand-painting a woman's body in the style of artist Lucian Freud and then transferring it to a silk body stocking. Also, a cardigan and skirt made from broken mirror pieces was inspired by sculptor Jack Whitten, and there were nods to Sarah Lucas, Joan Miro and Salvador Dali.

Clean lines

Christian Dior followed with a show at the Rodin Museum inspired by classical-era statues. There were no frills or heels in the

new collection, which was full of clean, vertical lines and subtle shades of white, black, beige, gold and silver.

Designer Maria Grazia Chiuri said, "These clean lines hide remarkable complexity" and that it took a lot of work to keep Dior's iconic New Look shapes while stripping away much of the complex constructions that underpin couture dresses.

Meanwhile, Holland's star designer Iris Van Herpen presented an aquatic and fu-

turistic collection to a crowd including singer Camila Cabello and actress Maisie Williams.

The transparent outfits included an iridescent blue pleated dress reminiscent of the fins of a fish, while many of the models evoked mermaids.

Van Herpen, whose designs are a fixture of red carpets and feature in Beyonce's Renaissance tour, will have an exhibition dedicated to her in Paris in November.

Indian designer Rahul Mishra also put on an opulent display, with dresses that featured tigers, orchids and artisans in the designs, which he called an homage to the imagination and craftsmanship of embroiderers. He was one of several designers to include men among the models in his show - previously a rarity in haute couture.

Mishra said it was the first time he had done so at a Paris show. "The clothes were not made with that intent, but when we came here, we fit them onto the boys and they looked amazing."

Monday also saw the couture debuts of US designer Thom Browne and 26-year-old Charles de Vilmorin, presenting for his own brand after a short-lived tenure as artistic director of Rochas.

"I'm super happy to have lived through all this and to do my first show," the Frenchman said.

AFP

