

H M ISSUES TWO ROYAL DECREES

NEWS BRIEF

SAYYID ASAAD TO HEAD TO KSA TODAY

Muscat - Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, will leave for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) on Tuesday to head the Sultanate of Oman's delegation at the 18th consultative meeting of leaders of GCC countries and the GCC-Central Asia Summit.

The meeting and the summit will be held on Wednesday.

Sayyid Asaad will be accompanied by an official delegation comprising ministers, Oman's ambassador to Saudi Arabia and the two advisors in his office.



Jindal Group's acquisition of Sohar Steel complete

Royal Decree enacts Social Protection Fund bylaw

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued two Royal Decrees on Monday reading as follows: **Royal Decree No 50/2023** promulgates the Social Protection Fund bylaw.

Article 1 states the provisions of the system/bylaw attached to this decree will be applied to the Social Protection Fund.

Article 2 transfers the following to the Social Protection Fund: The duties, origins, specialisations, assets, rights, obligations, financial receivables and their related data of the Pension Fund of the Ministry of Defence, the Pension Fund of the Royal Office, the Pension Fund of the Royal Oman Police, the Pension Fund of the Internal Security Service, the Pension Fund of the Royal Guard of Oman, the Pension Fund of the Sultan's Special Force, the Pension Fund of the Diwan of Royal Court and the Civil Service Employees' Pension Fund.

This is in exclusion of the premises of the Defence Ministry's Pension Fund and assets that will be agreed upon by the Chairman of Board of Directors of the Social Protection Fund and the Chairman of Board of Directors of the Pension Fund of the Military and Security Apparatuses. These will be transferred to the Pension Fund of the Military and Security Apparatuses.



HM exchanges New Hijri Year greetings

Muscat - On the occasion of the New Hijri Year 1445 AH and the anniversary of the Prophet Mohammed's (PBUH) Hijra, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has exchanged greetings with leaders of Arab and Muslim countries.

In his cables, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health, happiness and long life to them, praying to Allah the Almighty for the return of this

blessed occasion on them and to make the New Year, a year of blessings for all peoples and further welfare and prosperity for the Islamic nation.

In their cables to His Majesty the Sultan, the leaders of the Arab and Muslim countries expressed their sincere greetings and best wishes of good health, happiness and a long life to His Majesty.

ONA

The Social Protection Fund will have the following transferred to it: Duties, specialisations, origins, rights, obligations, receivables and data related to the Public Authority for Social Insurance - along with settlement of differ-

ences between ratios of financing of the funds mentioned in the previous clause, ratios of financing of the Public Authority for Social Insurance and the registration of the settlement sum in the financial lists of the

Social Protection Fund as a deserved asset - provided an agreement is signed to secure all details of the abovementioned settlement with the Public Authority for Social Insurance.

Continued on Page 02

GCC bodies ink pact to boost economic integration in Gulf

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Secretariat General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Federation of GCC Chambers signed a collaboration work programme on Monday which aims to advance Gulf co-operation in all domains, with particular focus on economic and commercial activities.

Jasem Mohamed al Budaiwi, Secretary General of GCC, and Hassan bin Mujib al Huwaizi, President of Federation of GCC Chambers, signed the agreement. Its aim is to increase cooperation, expand trade volume among member states and with other global economies, and execute the directives of the Supreme Council of GCC.

The programme's scope encompasses multiple areas of cooperation. It focuses on improving integration among GCC economies, primarily in the private sector. This includes organising training sessions, seminars, scientific conferences and advisory studies. The programme will also facilitate sharing studies and research conducted by the federation, expanding the reach of these.

Furthermore, the agreement addresses the development and integration of GCC economies. It emphasises the exchange of information that aligns with the

two bodies' objectives, explores private sector concerns and implements the Supreme Council's economic decisions related to the Gulf's private sector.

In addition, it aims to enhance the role of the private sector in integrated development and encourages joint projects between institutions and companies within GCC countries.

This agreement builds on a long-standing cooperation relationship that began in 1992

HASSAN AL HUWAIZI

Huwaizi stressed the federation's commitment to implementing the programme to foster joint Gulf action. "This agreement builds on a long-standing cooperation relationship that began in 1992."

Joint technical committees have been active since 2014 between the GCC Secretariat General and the Federation of GCC Chambers. These include the Gulf Common Market Committee, the Customs Union Committee and the Gulf Tourism Committee. These committees focus on the aspirations and challenges of the Gulf's private sector, shaping their collective vision.

OMAN ARAB BANK APPOINTED AS LEAD ARRANGER IN USD 1.2B SYNDICATED LOAN FOR OQ GAS NETWORKS



Muscat, July 17th 2023 – Oman Arab Bank has been appointed as one of the lead arrangers for a USD 1.2B syndicated loan for OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), exclusive operator of Oman's gas transportation system. As the only Omani bank among the lead arrangers, along with a few select International and Regional

banks, Oman Arab Bank demonstrated its expertise, strong relationships, and unwavering commitment to its clients and proved its ability to undertake such complex and large corporate deals.

Sulaiman Al Harthi, CEO of Oman Arab Bank said, "We are honored to have been appointed as a strategic financial

partner for OQGN, as they pursue their ambitions and robust growth strategy. Combining their vision with our financial expertise, we aim to facilitate their journey towards becoming a crucial infrastructure player in the country. We will continue to leverage our extensive resources, industry knowledge, and financial solu-

tions to provide the necessary support to OQGN."

He added, "The oversubscription of the syndicated loan facility underscores our strong reputation and expertise in structuring such financing arrangements. The syndicated loan not only reflects the confidence of the financial community in OQGN's

potential but also serves as a testament to OAB's capabilities in providing tailored financing solutions and leading large-scale transactions."

Sulaiman Al Hinai, Head of Wholesale Banking at Oman Arab Bank added: "Oman Arab Bank continues to be the partner of choice for numerous key socio-economic projects,

enabling the growth and progress of the nation in developmental, economic and urban fields, all the while contributing to the evolving financial system."

To date, Oman Arab Bank, as a Group, along with its strategic partner Arab Bank PLC and its sharia compliant 100% subsidiary Alizz Islamic

Bank, has spearheaded the financing of several notable mega-scale projects, helping Oman attract more FDI into the country. Through meticulous planning, strategic partnerships, and a dedicated team who have the expertise, knowledge and skill sets, the bank has consistently set new benchmarks in the industry.



(Supplied photo)

Law does not hinder weather hobbyists: CAA

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Civil Aviation Law does not stop weather enthusiasts from practising their hobby, rather it aims to regulate the activity in the interest of all stakeholders, a senior Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has said.

The clarification came during the inaugural forum for weather enthusiasts hosted by CAA on Monday.

Part of the Friends of Meteorology initiative, the forum aimed to enhance engagement and discover talents across various meteorological fields under the leadership of Nayef bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of CAA.

Around 250 weather enthusiasts from across Oman participated in the forum, contributing to a dialogue aimed at fostering community partnership. It provided an opportunity to present ideas and initiatives while discussing ways to enhance collaboration with meteorological hobbyists.

Abri emphasised the authority's commitment to embracing

ECONOMIC LOSSES TO OMAN

RO2bn
Cyclone Gonu in 2007

RO330mn
Cyclone Phet in 2010

RO200mn
Cyclone Mekunu in 2018

weather enthusiasts. He highlighted the forum as an avenue for gaining insights into their experiences and understanding their resource contributions for providing accurate weather information. He further commended how these enthusiasts have honed their skills while adhering to the official framework and professional meteorological practices.

Abdullah al Khadouri, Director General of Meteorology, stressed the need to form a productive partnership with weather amateurs. He underscored the importance of regulating the dissemination of weather observations and forecasts to counter

the spread of misinformation, especially regarding tropical weather phenomena.

Khadouri clarified that the Civil Aviation Law does not come in the way of weather enthusiasts from practising their hobby, rather it aims to regulate the activity in the interest of all stakeholders.

Khalifa al Sudairy, head of CAA's Numerical Forecasts Department, gave a talk on meteorology, highlighting the National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre's pivotal role in issuing early weather forecasts to ensure community safety.

Sudairy also discussed the economic losses Oman faced due to various cyclones over the years. The losses included approximately RO2bn following Cyclone Gonu in 2007, around RO330mn from Cyclone Phet in 2010, and over RO200mn after Cyclone Mekunu in 2018.

Forum participants, including several weather enthusiasts, showcased their projects in areas such as aerial map design, atmospheric analysis and severe weather documentation.

AI: An ally, not adversary, in the future workplace

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Despite fears of job loss due to artificial intelligence (AI), the technology is emerging as an ally not a threat in the modern workplace. This was the consensus at the AI Marketing Summit Oman, a one-day event held by Dentsu M21 at Crowne Plaza Hotel on Monday.

AI must be seen as a smart and proactive partner, according to experts at the event. The summit touched upon the influence of AI in marketing, and discussed opportunities, challenges and benefits for businesses.

In his presentation, keynote speaker Sorav Jain, founder of Digital Scholar, said, "This summit aims to equip marketers, entrepreneurs and business owners with tools to leverage AI, outperform competitors and adapt to the digital age. AI is not a threat



Automating routine tasks will allow employees to engage in more complex, creative and mentally stimulating tasks

SORAV JAIN

but a proactive and intelligent companion, which is reshaping employment."

He informed that AI is facilitating a job transition where tasks are efficiently divided between humans and machines.

Sorav believes automating

routine tasks will allow employees to engage in more complex, creative and mentally stimulating tasks "requiring uniquely human skills".

The summit also highlighted key tools for marketing, particularly generative AI.

"Generative tools demonstrate how AI enhances our capabilities rather than diminish our value. Individuals can ready the-m-selves for this new landscape by harnessing AI's potential to unlock a world of opportunities, from text to image and text to video, benefiting small businesses in particular," said Rishi Jain, co-founder of Digital Scholar, another speaker at the summit.

The key for jobseekers and employees to thrive in this AI-driven era, Rishi added, is to understand AI's transformative nature and actively engage in professional development.

Royal Decree enacts Social Protection Fund bylaw

Continued from Page 01

The Social Protection Fund will have the following transferred to it: Obligations calculated in accordance with the provisions of the Social Protection Law within the pension programme of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and the pension programme of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), along with related data.

Also to be transferred to the Social Protection Law are assets equivalent to these obligations from the PDO and the CBO, provided two agreements to this effect are signed to cover all details of such transfer.

The Social Protection Fund will also have the following transferred to it: The rights and obligations related to the project on restructuring funds and systems of retirement and social protection that are secured under the National Fiscal Balance Programme and the National Programme for Fiscal Sustainability and Financial Sector Development.

Article 3 states that the Social Protection Fund will be a general and integrated legal successor of the funds, the Public Authority for Social Insurance and the programmes stated in Article 2 of this decree, within the context of all contracts, agreements, investments, partnerships and alliances forged or entered into by those parties within the Sultanate of Oman and abroad.

This legal succession stated in Article 2 of this decree will not entail changing the end-beneficiaries of the abovementioned origins, assets, obligations and programmes.

Article 4 stipulates that the employees stated below will be transferred to the Social Protec-

tion Fund, along with their financial grades and allocations: Employees of the Diwan of Royal Court's Pension Fund, the Civil Service Employees' Fund and the Public Authority for Social Insurance.

Following a decision by the Board of Directors of the Social Protection Fund, as per its needs and after coordination with heads of units, it is permissible to transfer to the Social Protection Fund any employees from the aforementioned funds or any specialised staff from the Social Development Ministry's Directorate General of Social Welfare.

Article 5 instructs the Board of Directors of the Social Protection Fund to issue the regulations and decisions necessary for the enforcement of provisions of the bylaw/system attached to this decree. Till such time, the existing regulations and decisions will continue to be enforced without prejudice to the attached bylaw's provisions.

Article 6 states that the phrase 'Social Protection Fund' will replace the following 'phrases' wherever these might occur in the abovementioned laws and Royal decrees: 'Pension Fund of the Ministry of Defence', 'Pension Fund of the Royal Office', 'Pension Fund of the Royal Oman Police', 'Pension Fund of the Internal Security Service', 'Pension Fund of the Royal Guard of Oman', 'Pension Fund of the Sultan's Special Force', 'Pension Fund of the Diwan of Royal Court' and the 'Civil Service Employees' Pension Fund'.

Article 7 dissolves the boards of directors of pension funds, the board of directors of the Public Authority for Social Insurance and pension programmes stated in Article 2 of this decree.

Article 8 cancels all pension

funds and the Public Authority for Social Insurance that emanate vide Royal Decrees No 45/80, 26/86, 72/91, 3/93, 6/93, 87/93, 7/94, 101/94 and 86/96, as well as pension programme of Petroleum Development Oman, the pension programme of the Central Bank of Oman - after the transfer of ownership of all their origins/assets to the Social Protection Fund.

This article also states that a decision will be issued by the Board of Directors of the Social Protection Fund to state the completion of transfer of such ownerships, which will be published in the Official Gazette.

Article 9 cancels all that contradicts this decree or the attached bylaw/system or contravenes their provisions.

Article 10 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the day following its date of publication.

Royal Decree No 51/2023 promulgates the bylaw of the Pension Fund of Military and Security Apparatuses.

Article 1 states the provisions of the attached bylaw/system will be applied to the Pension Fund of Military and Security Apparatuses.

Article 2 transfers to the Pension Fund of Military and Security Apparatuses the employees of the following departments, along with their ranks, grades and financial allocations: Pension Fund of the Ministry of Defence, the Pension Fund of the Royal Office, the Pension Fund of the Royal Oman Police, the Pension Fund of the Internal Security Service, the Pension Fund of the Royal Guard of Oman and the Pension Fund of the Sultan's

Special Force.

The enforcement of provisions of this article will be in accordance with the mechanism and regulations that will be endorsed by the Board of Directors of the Pension Fund of Military and Security Apparatuses, after liaising with heads and commanders of units in the military and security apparatuses.

Article 3 instructs the Chairman of Board of Directors of the Pension Fund of the Military and Security Apparatuses to issue the regulations and decisions necessary for the implementation of provisions of the attached bylaw/system. Till such time, the existing regulations and decisions will continue to be enforced without prejudice to the bylaw's provisions.

Article 4 states that the phrases 'Pension Fund of the Ministry of Defence', 'Pension Fund of the Royal Office', 'Pension Fund of the Royal Oman Police', 'Pension Fund of the Internal Security Service', 'Pension Fund of the Royal Guard of Oman' and 'Pension Fund of the Sultan's Special Force' will be replaced by the phrase 'Pension Fund of the Military and Security Apparatuses', wherever those phrases might occur in the enforced laws and Royal Decrees, and within the purview of enforcement of the Pension Fund of the Military and Security Apparatuses' powers stated in the attached bylaw.

Article 5 cancels all that contradicts this decree or the attached bylaw/system or contravenes their provisions.

Article 6 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the day following its date of publishing.

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CELEBRATION OF HERITAGE AND ADVENTURE

Jabal Akhdar gears up for annual tourism festival

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dakhliyah governorate has announced the much-anticipated second iteration of the tourism festival in the wilayat of Jabal Akhdar is set to take place from August 3 to 19.

A popular tourist destination, Jabal Akhdar boasts of a moderate summer climate and cold winter, making it an ideal hub for ecotourism and adventure seekers. It offers visitors an immersive experience with nature walks in the wadis, mountaineering and cave exploration, thus providing a unique opportunity to engage with local culture.

Known as Jabal Akhdar Tourism Festival, the event is organised by Office of Governor of Dakhliyah and Office of Wali of Jabal Akhdar. It aims to put a spotlight on the distinctive tourist potential of Jabal Akhdar, foster domestic tourism and attract various visitor demographics.

An official from the Office of



The festival will also provide a platform for entrepreneurs and owners of small and medium enterprises to participate

DAKHLIYAH GOVERNOR'S OFFICE PERSONNEL

Governor of Dakhliyah informed that the festival will showcase a variety of activities and events, highlighting the importance of the local pomegranate season to the community. It will also feature a range of cultural, heritage, entertainment and adventure activities and programmes.

"The festival will involve many entities across government, private and civil sectors. It will also provide a platform for entrepreneurs and owners of small and medium enterprises to participate," the official added.

Aligned with the objectives of

Oman Vision 2040, the festival focuses on promoting social welfare and balanced economic development across the governorate. It is intended to boost national income, increase hotel occupancy and support productive families in Jabal Akhdar.

Further, the official mentioned that Jabal Akhdar is home to numerous historical sites that appeal to international tourists.

In July 2022, the Ministry of Defence, represented by the Royal Army of Oman, and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, signed an agreement to train individuals in the field of adventure tourism. This collaborative effort aims to transform the Royal Army of Oman's Adventure Training Centre into a facility for training in adventure tourism security and safety systems.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information, Jabal Akhdar welcomed 208,423 visitors in 2022, further emphasising its popularity as a tourist destination.

MoHERI, PDO launch Phase 4 of Eidaad to bridge academia-industry gap



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) in collaboration with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) kicked off the fourth phase of Eidaad on Monday.

The national education-linked training initiative is designed for penultimate year students attending public and private higher education establishments.

Eidaad's objective is to create a closer connection between industry and academia. It achieves this by facilitating internship programmes that last an entire academic year. This structure allows students to immerse themselves in a longer duration of practical learning that aligns with industry's future demands. The initiative also serves as a facilitator and promoter of partnerships and

Eidaad's objective is to create a closer connection between industry and academia by facilitating internship programmes that last an entire academic year

dialogue between academia and industry.

The launch event saw the signing of several collaboration agreements between the industrial and academic sectors. These agreements support the preliminary plans to integrate the industrial and academic sectors, enhance skills of private higher education students and expand their capabilities. The programme now encompasses 25 academic institutions and more than 40 incubators from the industrial and private sectors.

The upcoming programme will witness a competition among

500 male and female students vying for a place. Graduates from the programme's third batch also presented their finished projects, providing insights into their training experiences.

The ceremony was held under the patronage of H E Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The event was attended by Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidi, Chairman of Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, and several university officials, private college representatives and students of the programme.

Ban on food products containing E171 from July 22

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is going to ban the production, import and marketing of food products that contain titanium dioxide (E171) starting July 22, 2023.

The Food Safety and Quality Centre on Monday announced the commencement date of the ban and a fine of RO1,000 for violating it. The fine will be doubled in the event of a repeat offence.

In January, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources issued a ministerial decision (No 11/2023) amending



some provisions of the Food Safety Regulations. It was decided to add a new item in the appendix of violations and administrative fines related to food safety.

The first article of the decision stipulates that an administrative

fine of RO1,000 will be imposed for the production, import or marketing of food products to which titanium dioxide is added.

The second article states that this decision will take effect six months after the date of its publication.

E171 is used as a food colour to make food more visually appealing, to give colour to food that would otherwise be colourless or to restore the original appearance of food. E171 is also present in cosmetics, paints and medicines.

The main food categories containing E171 are soups, broths, sauces and bakery products.



Pubertal voice deficiency surgery done in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a pioneering achievement, a team from Al Nahdha Hospital's ENT Unit has successfully performed a first-of-its-kind surgery in Oman. The team treated a 22-year-old male patient suffering from pubertal voice deficiency.

Explaining the patient's condition, Dr Shaden bint Zakaria al Riyami, vocal cord and ENT surgeon who led the team, said pubertal voice deficiency is characterised by a teenager's voice persisting post-puberty and not stabilising at a particular level. "This unusual condition affects roughly one in every 900,000 individuals."

The surgery aimed to modify

the structure of the patient's larynx, lowering the pitch of his voice and helping him achieve a more masculine tone.

The operation, which lasted approximately two and a half hours, was performed under local anaesthesia. This allowed the medical team to assess the patient's voice during the procedure, ensuring the desired outcome was achieved.

Dr Shaden is a trailblazer in her field. Following training in vocal cord surgery in the United Kingdom, she returned to Oman to be the sultanate's first surgeon specialising in this unique area of medicine. This milestone procedure reinforces her standing as a leading figure in Oman's medical community.

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Apex Trading opens new factory in Samail Industrial City



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Apex Business Trading, represented by the Corrugated Boxes Factory, on Monday opened its new branch at the Facility Building in Samail Industrial City and launched four brand new and innovative products.

The inaugural ceremony was held under the patronage of Halima bint Rashid al Zaria, Chairperson of the SMEs Development Authority, and in the presence of Eng Dawood bin Salim al Hadabi, CEO of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates 'Madayn'.

Apex Business Trading general manager Ibrahim bin Murad al Balushi highlighted the significance of the Corrugated Boxes Factory in Samail Industrial City as one of the key manufacturing projects.

"Established in 2021 with support and funding from the SMEs Development Authority, this factory plays a key role in meeting the market's demand for packaging materials, cardboard cartons and innovative products," Balushi pointed out, informing that "the factory has gained increasing popularity in both local and international markets due to its ability to produce a wide range of sizes based on demand, making it a pivotal player in manufacturing high-value and competitive products".

He was delighted to put on record that Apex Business Trading "is privileged to be the first Omani company to manufacture and innovate com-

petitive new products using the highest quality of corrugated cardboards".

These products include exhibition booths and kiosks in various shapes and sizes, various types of furnishings, materials for professional product display and promotion, and billboards. The products stand out for their cost-effectiveness and eco-friendliness, with their full recyclability reflecting the company's strong commitment to the environment.

Ahmed bin Suleiman al Hashmi, Investor Services Head at Samail Industrial City, explained that Madayn has divided Samail Industrial City into several sectors, among which is a 39,000sqm area designated for the SMEs, with the current occupancy rate of this sector touching 34%.

He added that the total number of the localised projects in Samail Industrial City has reached 156 covering an area of 2.2mn square metres.

Of these projects, 94 are in the production phase, 43 are under construction, and 19 are in the mapping preparation phase. The total investment volume of these projects amounts to RO150mn, and the projects have provided employment for approximately 2,600 workers.

Several key investment opportunities in Samail Industrial City have undergone preliminary feasibility studies, and Hashmi informed that these include diverse sectors such as dairy and juice production, date products manufacturing and packaging, beside others.



Jindal Group acquires Sohar Steel after three years of hiatus

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Jindal Group and Vulcan Investments, an industrial conglomerate based in Oman, successfully completed the acquisition of Sohar Steel after an extensive and notable three-year hiatus.

This achievement serves as a pivotal juncture in the steel industry, highlighting Jindal Group's persistence to fostering social sustainability and economic growth, supporting the nation and promoting economic diversification.

"The successful acquisition of Sohar Steel represents an extraordinary stride forward for Jindal Group, cementing our position as a prominent leader in the steel industry," said Harsha Shetty, a senior official from the Jindal Group Oman, expressing "deepest gratitude" to H E Qais Mohammed al Youssef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; and the members of the Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Centre (CPMPC) for "their invaluable support and co-operation in approving the acquisition of Sohar Steel".

"Their dedication and commitment to ensuring fair practices have played a pivotal role in making this landmark deal a reality," Shetty acknowledged.

Strategically located in Oman adjacent to the seaport of Sohar, Sohar Steel, will play a vital role in propelling industrial development and fortifying the sultanate's infrastructure.

Boasting state-of-the-art facilities, including the Bendotti Walking Beam Reheating Furnace and Automatic Tension Control, the plant possesses a production capacity of 700,000 tonnes per annum, specialising in high-quality steel products ranging from 8mm to 32mm rebars, billets and the proposed new products wire rods ranging between 5.5mm to 16mm.

"This strategic move aligns harmoniously with our steadfast dedication towards Oman's socio-economic growth, reflecting our firm resolve to progress Oman's industrial landscape," Shetty noted.

"By amalgamating cutting-edge innovations and leveraging our extensive expertise, we stand poised to drive ground-breaking initiatives, create promising employment prospects and contribute to the realisation of the country's vision for a thriving and sustainable future. Together, we shall forge ahead, transforming challenges into opportunities and shaping a vibrant and resilient economy for generations to come," he further added.

The highly fruitful revival of

the plant serves as a testament to Jindal Group's proactive approach and unyielding dedication. Through its involvement, the group has breathed new life into the facility, revitalising its prosperous operations and fostering an atmosphere of optimism within the local community.

This strategic acquisition stretches far beyond the re-employment of more than 150 local talents; it aligns with the sultanate's aspirations for a prosperous and diversified economy.

With state-of-the-art facilities, the plant has a production capacity of 700,000 tonnes per annum, specialising in high-quality steel products ranging from 8mm to 32mm rebars

Furthermore, this acquisition underscores Jindal Group's profound commitment to nurturing local talent and providing ample opportunities for growth. By enabling the re-employed individuals to develop their skills, advance professionally and experience social mobility, Jindal Group bolsters the sultanate's human capital, empowering its

citizens to contribute significantly to the nation's progress.

"We deeply empathise with the challenges faced by the individuals affected by their dismissal and their subsequent joy upon learning about Vulcan International's acquisition of Sohar Steel," said Hamed al Farsi, head of Sohar Steel, after the acquisition.

"In response, we have taken the necessary steps to nurture and develop these individuals by providing them with on-the-job training and assigning them to various departments within the company. To further enhance their capabilities, we have implemented a series of training courses and workshops, aiming to continuously empower and refine their skills," he went on explaining, while assuring that "we remain dedicated to evolving our company's strategy and focused on bolstering our production capabilities".

Ammar al Ghufaili, Federal Union Member and an employee at Sohar Steel, shared his thoughts saying, "This has been a ray of hope for those who have faced a bleak after Sohar Steel closure. The employees were overjoyed by this development as it provided them with the much-needed job security."

"On behalf of myself and my colleagues at Sohar Steel, who

have been with the company since 2008, we are incredibly happy about this agreement because it brought us the job stability we had been hoping for," said Thabet al Hadrami, another employee at Sohar Steel.

"My suspension from work had a negative impact on my personal and professional life, due to my inability to meet my financial and social obligations. However, by the grace of Almighty and the active efforts of Vulcan Steel and their effective acquisition, I and my colleagues now have job stability. My goal is to contribute to the company's success by using my skills and knowledge to achieve profitability and ensure its sustainability. I also look forward to benefit from the available training and development opportunities for my career growth," said Sultan al Jahwary from Sohar Steel.

'With an exceptional track record in steel manufacturing and firmly grounded in community-centric values, social sustainability, environment stewardship and low carbon footprint initiatives, Jindal Group continues to propel Oman's progress and competitiveness on the global stage. The company remains resolute in its mission to champion the country's advancement and spearhead the realisation of its immense potential'.

US stocks little changed as market awaits big earnings from Tesla, others

New York, US - Wall Street stocks were stable early on Monday, holding on to recent gains to open a week that includes earnings from Tesla, Goldman Sachs and other large US companies.

Last week's benign inflation data boosted stocks, adding to the market's advance in the first half of 2023.

"Stocks have been on a tear," Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare said in a note, pointing to optimism that the US economy can avoid a recession.

But that dynamic has resulted in 'stretched valuations', O'Hare added, posing challenges as earnings season builds.

About 15 minutes into trading, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was down 0.1% at 34,472.79.

The broad-based S&P 500 was flat at 4,506.20, while the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index added 0.3% to 14,159.70.

This week's calendar includes



earnings reports from more banks following Friday's results, as well as releases from other leading companies such as IBM and Netflix.

The week's economic data releases also include US retail sales and housing starts for June.

Among individual companies, Ford dropped 5.0% as it announced steep price cuts on its F-150 Lightning electric trucks. The automaker said an upgrade

of its Michigan factory will enable it to triple output of the pickup trucks beginning this fall.

Europe markets slide
Europe's stock markets slid in opening deals on Monday, with sentiment hit by renewed concern over the health of China's economy.

London's benchmark FTSE 100 index shed 0.3% to 7,410.14 points compared with the closing

level on Friday.

In the eurozone, Frankfurt's DAX also dropped 0.3% to 16,049.76 points and the Paris CAC 40 lost 0.8% to 7,316.54.

Asian markets struggled on Monday to build on last week's rally, with new data showing China's economy grew less than expected in the second quarter as its post-COVID recovery runs out of steam.

AFP

OQ to carry out emergency drill at Block 8 in Musandam tomorrow

Our Correspondent
Muscat

OQ, the global integrated energy group, will carry out an emergency offshore drill at Block 8 in Musandam on Wednesday, the group stated.

The exercise planned from 7am to 2pm will be conducted by OQ Exploration and Production (E&P) in participation of OQ Crisis Management Team and Musandam government authorities. The exercise comes as part of the efforts exerted by OQ to maintain a high level of readiness for emergencies, is an integral part of the group's commitment to ensure the safety and security of the employees, the surrounding communities, and the group assets, OQ stated.

During the exercise, a scenario will be simulated to test the group's response and procedures, as well as the communication protocols.

It is worth noting that the ex-



ercise is not an actual emergency but rather conducted for the purpose of training only. Therefore, it should not cause any caution or general concerns.

OQ is a global integrated energy company with roots in

Oman. With operations across 17 countries, it covers the entire value chain from exploration and production to marketing and distribution of end-user products. OQ fuels and chemicals are sold in over 60 countries worldwide.



Global debt dominates G20 finance talks in India

Gandhinagar, India - G20 finance ministers and central bank chiefs opened talks on Monday on debt restructuring deals, multilateral bank reform and finance to tackle climate change, as they aim to bolster a sagging global economy.

Indian Finance Minister Nirmla Sitharaman, chair and host of the summit in Gandhinagar, began by telling finance leaders of "the responsibility we have... to steer the global economy towards strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth".

Key on the two-day agenda will be "facilitating consensus to intractable issues associated with rising indebtedness", Sitharaman said, speaking to reporters alongside US Treasury

Secretary Janet Yellen.

Talks will also focus on "critical global issues such as strengthening the multilateral development banks and taking coordinated climate action", Sitharaman added.

Yellen said, "The world is looking to the G20 to make progress on key challenges like climate change and pandemics as part of our work to strengthen the global economy."

She also cited work to tackle debt distress among the world's poorest countries, noting debt restructuring progress in Zambia, which she had discussed when visiting Beijing this month.

Italian Finance Minister Giancarlo Giorgetti said targeted interventions must "protect the

most vulnerable sections of the population and promote investments to increase the potential of our economies against the risk of recession".

China, a major lender to several stressed, low-income countries in Asia and Africa, has so far resisted a common multilateral understanding on the issue, officials said.

Yellen on Sunday said the Zambia deal had taken 'too long to negotiate', and added she hoped debt treatments for Ghana and Sri Lanka could be 'finalised quickly'. "We should apply the common principles we agreed to in Zambia's case in other cases, rather than starting at zero every time," Yellen said.

AFP

Russia ends Ukraine grain deal; EU chief calls 'cynical'

Kyiv, Ukraine - The Kremlin on Monday said it was exiting a major agreement allowing Ukraine grain exports hours after drones struck Russia's only bridge connecting its mainland to the annexed Crimea peninsula.

Moscow said the Kerch bridge attack had nothing to do with its withdrawal and for months has complained about the implementation of the pact, which was designed to ease fears of food shortages in vulnerable countries.

"The grain deal has ceased. As soon as the Russian part (of the agreements) are fulfilled, the Russian side will immediately return to the grain deal," said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, adding the move was not linked to the strike.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen condemned Russia's exit branding the move 'cynical'.

"I strongly condemn Russia's cynical move to terminate the Black Sea Grain Initiative," she tweeted.

Over the course of the last year, the Black Sea Grain Initiative has enabled the export in cargo of more than 32mn tonnes of Ukrainian grain. But those



transports have come to a halt because of Russia's refusal so far to renew the deal.

'The applications have not been approved by all parties,' said a statement from the Joint Coordination Centre (JCC) that oversees the agreement. 'No new ships have been approved to participate since June 27.'

Putin just last week signalled Russia's intention to terminate the agreement saying Moscow's interests were being ignored under the deal brokered by the UN and Turkey.

Moscow also notified Turkey, Ukraine and the UN that it was

against extending the deal, Russian news agencies reported, citing the Foreign Ministry.

Germany reacted to the news by urging Moscow to extend the deal saying the "conflict should not be carried out on the backs of the poorest on this planet", who rely on Ukrainian grain supplies.

Despite the Kremlin's statements, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan appeared optimistic about the prospects of the grain deal being maintained.

"I think that despite today's statement, my friend Putin wants to continue the agreement" that allows the export of Ukrainian

grain to the Black Sea, which is due to expire at 2100 GMT.

But Putin has repeatedly threatened to pull out of the agreement, arguing that elements of the deal allowing the export of Russian food and fertilisers have not been honoured.

According to data from the JCC, China and Turkey are the main beneficiaries of the grain shipments, as well as developed economies. The deal has helped the World Food Programme bring relief to countries facing critical food shortages such as Afghanistan, Sudan and Yemen.

AFP

Russia seizes shares of Danone and Carlsberg subsidiaries: Decree

Moscow, Russia - Russia took control of shares belonging to French agribusiness Danone and Danish brewer Carlsberg, according to a decree published on Sunday.

The decree signed by President Vladimir Putin says the Russian state would 'temporarily' manage shares belonging to Danone Russia and to Baltika, which is owned by Carlsberg.

Danone said it was investigating the situation and "preparing to take all necessary measures to protect its rights as shareholder of Danone Russia, and the continuity of the operations of the business in the interest of all stakeholders, in particular its employees".

Baltika is a leading brewing company in Russia, with approximately 30% of the market



share.

Carlsberg announced in March that it would sell the entirety of its activities in Russia, where it employed 8,400 people.

Last month the multinational brewer said it had found an unnamed buyer for the business,

more than a year after announcing its exit from the market due to the conflict in Ukraine.

'Following the presidential decree, the prospects for this sales process are now highly uncertain,' Carlsberg said in a statement.

'The Carlsberg Group has not

received any official information from the Russian Authorities regarding the presidential decree or the consequences for Baltika Breweries.'

One of few multinationals to have remained in Russia since the Ukraine offensive began, Danone said in October that it planned to withdraw from most of its business.

Danone then said it would give up the dairy and plant-based business in Russia, retaining only its infant nutrition branch.

The move could result in a write-off of up to €1bn (US\$1.1bn approx), it said.

A large number of major Western companies have pulled out of Russia since Moscow launched its Ukraine offensive on February 24 last year.

AFP

شركة التغليف المحدودة (ش.م.ع.) Packaging Co Ltd. (SAOG)			
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT	Statement Of Financial Position. Current/Non Current Statement Of Financials Position Consolidated And Separate		
On behalf of the Board of Directors, we present the Chairman's Report of Packaging Co Ltd (SAOG) for the half year ended on, 30th June 2023.	Acutals Omani Riyal Un audited	Audited	
	Consolidated 01.01.2023 - 30.06.2023	Consolidated 01.01.2022 - 30.06.2022	Consolidated 31.12.2022
The Six month ended with revenue of RO. 5,416,824/- and net profit of RO. 180,142/- as against revenue of RO. 5,263,434/- and net profit of RO. 53,393/- in the same period of previous year. The profit before depreciation for the period under review was RO. 483,597/- compared to profit of RO.346,223/- before depreciation in the same period of previous year.	ASSETS		
	NON-CURRENT ASSETS		
Property, plant and equipment	5,185,771	5,840,371	5,478,729
Total non-current assets	5,185,771	5,840,371	5,478,729
CURRENT ASSETS			
Current inventories	3,035,180	3,168,133	3,022,364
Trade and other current receivables	4,358,108	3,826,869	3,813,348
Cash and bank balances	3,260	3,329	14,519
Total current assets other than non current assets or disposal group classified as held for sale or as held for distribution to owners	7,396,548	6,998,331	6,850,231
Total current assets	7,396,548	6,998,331	6,850,231
Total assets	12,582,319	12,838,702	12,328,960
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES			
EQUITY			
Issued capital	3,000,000	3,000,000	3,000,000
Share premium	90,811	90,811	90,811
Statutory reserve	539,548	539,548	539,548
Other reserves	634,986	702,623	634,986
Retained earnings (accumulated profit) (losses)	604,085	645,848	423,943
Total equity attributable to owners of parent	4,869,430	4,978,830	4,689,288
Total Equity	4,869,430	4,978,830	4,689,288
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Non - current Provisions for employees benefits	31,612	14,777	20,591
Total non current provisions	31,612	14,777	20,591
Borrowings non-current	609,012	766,892	687,952
Deferred tax liabilities	264,216	305,458	243,560
Total Non current liabilities	904,840	1,087,127	952,103
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
CURRENT PROVISIONS			
Trade and other current payables	3,195,620	3,479,074	2,585,021
Borrowing current	3,601,295	3,293,671	4,102,548
Income Tax Payable	11,134	0	0
Total Current Liabilities other than liabilities included in disposal groups classified as held for sale	6,808,049	6,772,745	6,687,569
Total Liabilities	7,712,889	7,859,872	7,639,672
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	12,582,319	12,838,702	12,328,960
Number of outstanding shares	3,000,000	3,000,000	3,000,000
Net Assets per share	1.623	1.660	1.563
INTERIM CONDENSED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS, 30.06.2023			
	Acutals Omani Riyal Un audited	Consolidated	
	Consolidated 01.01.2023 - 30.06.2023	Consolidated 01.01.2022 - 30.06.2022	
REVENUE	5,416,824	5,263,434	
Cost of sales	4,665,736	4,799,572	
GROSS PROFIT	751,088	463,862	
Other income	102,222	172,803	
Other expenses	1,195	-	
General and administration expenses	309,435	307,570	
Selling and distribution expenses	212,146	183,090	
PROFIT FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES	330,534	146,005	
Finance costs	118,602	92,612	
Profit(loss)before income tax, continuing operations	211,932	53,393	
Income tax expense, continuing operations	31,790	-	
Net profit/(Loss) for the period	180,142	53,393	
PROFIT (LOSS), ATTRIBUTABLE TO			
Profit (loss), attributable to owners of parent	180,142	53,393	
Basic earnings (loss) per share from continuing operations	0.060	0.018	
Total basic earnings (loss) per share	0.060	0.018	
Chairman of the Board of Directors			
Note: The Complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who request them either in Arabic or English within 7 days of the receipt of the request at the company's address at PO Box No 2818, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman.			

China's economy shows further weakness in second quarter

Beijing, China - China's economy showed further signs of weakness in the second quarter as data on Monday revealed growth missed expectations and consumers remained cautious, adding pressure on leaders to unveil further stimulus.

The disappointing figures follow a string of below-par readings in recent months indicating the post-COVID recovery was already going off the rails and highlighting the tough work authorities face reviving momentum.

The National Statistics Bureau said the world's number two economy grew 6.3% on-year in April-June, faster than the previous three months but much weaker than the 7.1% predicted in an AFP survey of analysts.

That came despite having a very low base of comparison with last year when the country was hit by a series of COVID lockdowns in major cities.

In quarter-on-quarter terms



- considered a more realistic basis for comparison - growth came in at 0.8%, well down from the 2.2% seen in January-March, the first full period after the removal of zero-COVID restrictions.

NBS spokesman Fu Linghui said in a statement that the economy "showed a good momentum of recovery".

"Market demand gradually recovered, production supply continued to increase, employment and price were generally

stable, and residents income grew steadily," he added.

But Fu admitted at a Monday news conference the Chinese economy faces "a complex and difficult international situation, and arduous tasks for reform, development and ensuring stability".

Additional data reinforced the view that the post-pandemic recovery was petering out. Retail sales, a key gauge of consumption, edged up 3.1% in June from a year earlier, ac-

cording to the NBS, slowing from the 12.7% rise in May.

It was in line with expectations of analysts polled by Bloomberg, but signalled shaky consumer confidence.

"Consumption remains a driving force for the economic recovery," Erin Xin, Greater China Economist at HSBC, said. "In some areas, particularly in services, the revival has been particularly strong," she said, adding that consumption levels had not recovered to pre-pandemic levels.

Unemployment among Chinese youth also jumped to a record 21.3% in June, up from 20.8% in May, the NBS said. The general unemployment figure stayed at 5.2%, but only takes into account the big cities.

The People's Bank of China last month cut interest rates and authorities pledged to help the troubled property sector, there has been very little concrete action out of Beijing.

AFP



Zubair organises Human Resources Forum

The Zubair Corporation recently organised the fourth edition of its Human Resources (HR) Forum.

The bi-annual event - an initiative of the Human Capital Centre of Excellence (HCCoE) - plays a vital role within the corporation's strategy to enhance human capital and provide an enriching work environment within the corporation and its subsidiaries.

The forum served as a platform for knowledge-sharing, discussions on new and existing policies as well as the corporation's competency framework.

The forum is also considered the cornerstone of promoting the strategic partnership concept among HR departments to fulfil human capital needs in an efficient manner that suits its work nature.

Bringing this concept to fruition, the main topic of discussion during the Forum was the launch and introduction of the Tadweer (Training & Development) Programme, a job rotation initiative, led by the Human Capital Center of Excellence - The Zubair Corporation's HR function.

The purpose of the corporation's Tadweer Programme is to establish a framework for a job rotation practice within the Corporation and its subsidiaries while providing employees with the opportunity to enrich their knowledge, skills with a broader understanding of the Corporation's business operations.

In 2023, the focus of the Programme will be the Finance function where selected employees will be rotated to different roles, such as financial analysis, accounting, treasury, and internal controls.

The rotations will typically last for three months to a year, depending on the specific role and the individual's development needs.

Speaking on the occasion, Sharifa al Balushi, Group Head - Human Capital Centre of Excellence said, "Creating a compelling journey from candidate to employee is just as crucial as numerous consumer-facing processes and interactions that have been retooled and simplified to provide a more satisfying customer experience.

She said that her department shifted its approaches as well with idea to move from a process-driven mindset to one that always begins with the experience for the HR customer, who could be a candidate, employee, contingent worker, or even alumni.

"The forum is a great platform to enhance the pivotal role that human resources functions should play in achieving the strategic and future goals of all Group companies," she stressed.

"To continue meeting the challenges that HR brings requires a balancing act between change, risk and innovation. Whilst conventional perceptions of HR might be limited to hiring and firing, the role is more complex now than ever before; considerations of diversity and training and development are all at the forefront of the Corporation's HR plan."

Based on this concept, she noted that the Tadeer programme has been designed to help employees develop a sense of motivation and loyalty as well as creating well-rounded professionals across the corporation which will lead to strengthening our talent pool.

"We continue to enhance human capital through projects and programmes that fulfil our strategic objective of creating well-rounded professionals across the group," she added.

For over five decades, The Zubair Corporation (TZC) has been bringing innovation and expertise from around the world into the Sultanate of Oman and beyond. It has participated in the creation, promotion and growth of the country's national infrastructure, culture, tourism and industry at large.

TZC comprises a diverse range of hallmark companies, strategic business units and joint ventures that operate within Oman, the Middle East, India, the Far East, Europe and the US.

Bank Nizwa's sharia'a board holds meeting on transactions

Bank Nizwa, Oman's leading Islamic bank, held a pivotal meeting of its esteemed sharia'a board. Headed by Sheikh Majid al Kindi, Chairman of the Sharia'a Supervisory Board (SSB), the participants discussed and evaluated diverse aspects of sharia'a compliance within the banking industry.

The meeting saw the participation of the board members, who engaged in thought-provoking discussions to ensure the bank's adherence to Islamic principles.

The board, composed of distinguished personnel with extensive expertise in finance and sharia'a, plays a crucial role in guiding Bank Nizwa's operations and ensuring the bank's adherence to Islamic banking principles.

The board conducts regular meetings to deliberate on matters related to Islamic finance, investments and sharia'a-compliant products and services.

During the meeting, Sheikh Majid highlighted the significance of Bank Nizwa's role in providing innovative financing solutions that adhere to Islamic principles.

"Bank Nizwa's SSB meeting reinforces our collective dedication to delivering sharia'a-compliant banking services to our valued customers. We strive to ensure complete transparency, fairness and ethical practices as well as embracing innovation which is driving us forward in perfect harmony with the rich tapestry of Islamic values that guide and inspire our every endeavour. Bank Nizwa is committed to shaping a brighter future by raising the bar of excellence in Islamic banking, fostering financial prosperity and promoting social progress in complete harmony with the wisdom enshrined in sharia'a principles," he said.

The discussions held during the meeting covered a wide range of topics, including Islamic financing, risk management, corporate governance and social responsibility.

The board members provided valuable insights and guidance on these matters, enhancing Bank Nizwa's capabilities to serve its customers whilst ensuring compliance with Islamic principles.



Muscat Municipality takes part in U20 Mayoral Summit in India

Muscat Municipality participated in the U20 Mayoral Summit held in the western Indian city of Ahmedabad on July 7 and 8 to discuss issues related to the global economy, climate and development.

Eng At'Tayib al Harthy, manager of Muscat Municipality in Qurayyat, represented Muscat Municipality in this summit.

The summit of Mayors is an initiative that deals mainly with the urban problems of cities, and includes cities from the member countries of the group of twenty, other cities are also hosted outside the cluster system to expand public benefit, localise communication for the urban community.

The Muscat Municipality's participation reflects its interest to benefit from international experiences and knowledge in order to enhance national efforts and endeavours aimed at achieving sustainable development according to national pillars.

WHO training-of-trainers regional workshop begins

A training-of-trainers regional workshop to strengthen the capacity for morphological identification of primary malaria and dengue vectors for high-risk countries commenced on Sunday at Grand Hayat Muscat.

The workshop is being carried out by the World Health Organization (WHO) in collaboration with the Ministry of Health represented by the Directorate General of Diseases Surveillance & Control. Infection control specialists from Eastern Mediterranean Region and some African neighbouring countries took part in the workshop.

Public Health Representative at WHO-Oman Office Dr Mohammed al Abri pointed out in the opening session that Mosquito-borne diseases such as malaria, dengue, and chikungunya contribute to significant morbidity and mortality in the endemic countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR).

The spread of invasive vectors outside their geographic range in EMR, namely Anopheles stephensi, Ae. Aegypti, and aedes albopictus, are an additional challenge increasing risk to outbreaks of malaria, dengue, and other Aedes-borne diseases in high risk EMR countries.

Abri stressed that the main challenge encountered in these countries is the weak capacity and capability on entomology and conducting regular vector surveillance for rapid and appropriate vector control response, noting that building capacity is currently the main goal to enhance capacity for vector surveillance. Accurate identification of the mosquito vectors is essential to determine the presence of vectors and the composition of the mosquito fauna in an endemic area, both spatial and temporal, he added.

The Public Health Representative emphasized that identification is the first step in processing the field samples during vector surveillance to provide evidence-base implementation of timely effective vector control interventions.

The five-day training workshop aims at promoting national capacity on morphological identification and consequently planning entomological training for concerned workers across the governorates.

The event reviews geographic distribution of malaria and dengue vectors in the participating countries and introduces mosquitoes. The workshop offers both practical and theoretical approaches to train the trainers on methods of morphological identification of mosquitoes-borne diseases. Field visits will further be conducted and participants will be updated on the processing of the field collected samples.



Busafi participates in forum of chef de mission for 'Paris 2024'

Ali bin Salem al Busafi, chef de mission of Oman's delegation to the 33rd Summer Olympics 'Paris 2024', participated in the first meeting of chef de mission of sports delegations, which is underway in Paris.

The forum, which started on July 13, saw a number of plenary sessions reviewing all technical and administrative details related to the participation of countries in the Olympic Games, especially accommodation and competitions, and requirements related to the opening ceremony, in addition to holding individual sessions to answer inquiries from representatives of National Olympic Committees.

A number of competition venues were also visited, as 35 sports facilities were equipped in 14 different locations to host the competitions.

It is worth noting that the Summer Olympic Games 'Paris 2024' will be held from July 26 to August 11.

Where the athletes of 206 National Olympic Committees, in addition to the Refugee Olympic Team, will compete in 32 diverse sports and 329 competitions.



Temperature reaches new highs as heatwaves scorch the globe

Rome, Italy - Temperatures reached new highs on Monday as heatwaves scorched parts of the Northern Hemisphere, triggering health warnings and fanning wildfires in the latest stark reminder of the effects of global warming.

From North America to Europe and Asia, people gulped water and sought shelter from the sweltering heat, with the mercury expected to reach new highs in several places in the next few days.

Europe, the globe's fastest-warming continent, was bracing for its hottest-ever temperature this week on Italy's islands of Sicily and Sardinia, where a high of 48 degrees Celsius (118 degrees Fahrenheit) is predicted, according to the European Space Agency.

"We're from Texas and it's really hot there, we thought we would escape the heat but it's even hotter here," Colman Peavy, 30, said as he sipped a capuccino at an outside terrasse in central Rome with his wife Ana at the start of a two-week Italian vacation.

With June already having been the world's hottest on record, according to the EU weather monitoring service, Mother Nature seemed intent on July not falling far behind.

China reported a new high for mid-July in the northwest of the country, where temperature reached 52.2C in the Xinjiang region's village of Sanbao, breaking the previous high of 50.6C set six years ago.

In nearby Turpan city, where ground surface temperatures



A boy pours water over himself amidst soaring temperatures at the Shati camp for Palestinian refugees in Gaza City on Monday (AFP)

sizzled at 80C in some parts, authorities have told workers and students to stay home and ordered special vehicles to spray water on major thoroughfares, the meteorological body said.

In Cyprus, where temperatures are expected to remain above 40C through Thursday, a 90-year-old man died as a result of heatstroke and three other seniors were hospitalised, health officials said.

In Japan, heatstroke alerts were issued in 32 out of the country's 47 prefectures, mainly in central and southwestern regions. At least 60 people in Japan were treated for heatstroke, local media reported, including 51 who were taken to hospital in Tokyo.

The heat was enough for at least one man to dispense with social mortification in Hamamatsu city.

"It's honestly unbearable without a parasol, although I have to admit it is a bit embarrassing," he told national broadcaster NHK of the umbrella in his hand. Japan's highest-ever temperature was 41.1C first recorded in Kumagaya city in 2018.

In western and southern states in the US, which are used to high temperatures, more than 80mn people were under advisories as a 'widespread and oppressive' heatwave roasted the region.

California's Death Valley, often among the hottest places on Earth, reached a near-record 52C on Sunday afternoon.

In Arizona, the state capital Phoenix recorded its 17th straight day above 109 degrees Fahrenheit (43 degrees Celsius), as temperatures hit 113F (45C) on Sunday afternoon.

AFP



US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry (AFP)

US envoy calls for 'urgent action' on climate at talks with China

Beijing, China - US climate envoy John Kerry held four hours of talks with his Chinese counterpart in Beijing on Monday, calling for 'urgent action' as the two countries revived stalled diplomacy on reducing planet-warming emissions.

Climate talks between the two biggest greenhouse gas emitters came to a halt last year after Nancy Pelosi, then-speaker of the US House of Representatives, enraged Beijing by visiting self-ruled Taiwan, which China considers to be part of its territory. Kerry, a former secretary of state, has enjoyed comparatively cordial and consistent relations with China despite Washington and Beijing locking horns over Taiwan and other issues.

Kerry met his Chinese counterpart Xie Zhenhua in Beijing on Monday, with the two men speaking for around four hours, state broadcaster CCTV said.

Both countries 'must take urgent action on a number of fronts, especially the challenges of coal and methane pollution', Kerry wrote in a tweet after the talks.

"The climate crisis demands that the world's two largest economies work together to limit the Earth's warming," Kerry tweeted.

Beijing said after the talks that 'climate change is a common challenge faced by all mankind'.

China would 'exchange views with the United States on issues related to climate change, and work together to meet challenges and improve the wellbeing of current and future generations', foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told CNN on Sunday Kerry would press Beijing not to 'hide behind any kind of claim that they are a developing nation' in order to slow-roll efforts to cut emissions.

"Every country, including China, has a responsibility to reduce emissions," Sullivan said.

AFP

UN hands over ship for oil transfer from rusting tanker in the Red Sea

Aboard Nautica , Yemen - The United Nations on Monday handed over a vessel that will take on board oil from a decaying tanker in the Red Sea off war-torn Yemen, an operation aimed at averting an environmental catastrophe.

The handover ceremony took place aboard the Nautica, which is being renamed the Yemen, in the presence of the country's Huthi authorities who control the capital Sanaa. In the coming days, an operation is expected to begin pumping 1.14mn barrels of crude oil to the Nautica from the FSO Safer, a rusting 47-year-old ship that the UN describes as a 'ticking time bomb'.



The UN-owned Nautica vessel is seen off the coast of Hodeida (AFP)

The UN-owned ship arrived off Yemen on Sunday.

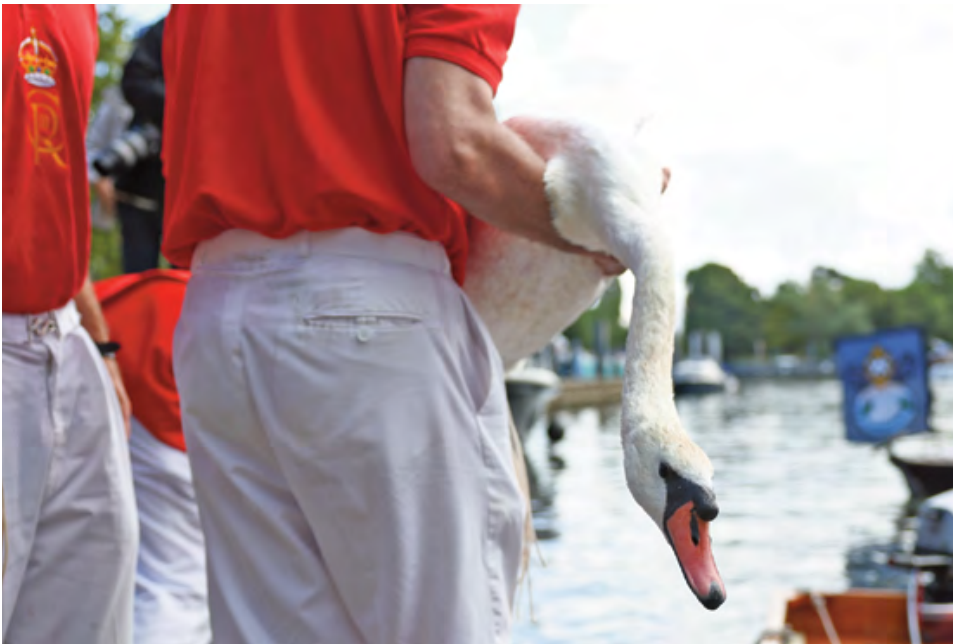
Monday's ceremony highlighted close cooperation between the UN and the Huthis,

The UN had been hoping for a low-key event, but the Huthis invited high-ranking officials from various ministries as well as more than 20 local journalists to board the new ship.

As Huthi officials looked on, David Gressly, the UN resident coordinator for Yemen, signed the handover papers along with Edrees al-Shami, the Huthi-appointed executive general manager of SEPOC, the Yemeni oil and gas company. Gressly said the ship transfer had been organised with the participation of all parties to Yemen's conflict and that it now belonged to 'the people of Yemen'.

AFP

SWAN UPPING



A swan is captured to be measured and checked during the annual Swan Upping on the River Thames in Staines, west of London, on Monday. Swan Upping is the annual census of the swan population (AFP)

Canada's Magdalen islands have 'front row' seat to climate change

Cap-Aux-Meules, Canada - In the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, on the small Magdalen islands, foot paths are caving in, cliffs are receding and the sand dunes are disappearing, leaving homes vulnerable to the lashing waves.

The archipelago, part of Quebec province in eastern Canada, is in a race against time - and the elements - to survive global warming. Residents are feeling the effects of climate change on a daily basis.

"The Magdalen islands are in the front row when it comes to the changes taking place. We are miniscule faced with the immensity of it all," says Mayka Thibodeau from CERMIM, a research center focused on sustainable development.

The changes seem to be coming fast and furious, leaving the roughly 13,000 residents reeling,



This aerial view shows coastal erosion in the Magdalen Islands of Quebec, Canada, on May 29, this year (AFP)

as they realise their island home will need to adapt quickly and radically in the decades to come if it is to survive.

The islands' picturesque shores have already been eroded, receding by an average of half a metre (1.6 feet) a year, according

to a study by the University of Quebec at Rimouski (UQAR).

It's a figure that concerns Diane Saint-Jean and her partner

- they live on the coast and worry the next big storm could sweep their home into the water. "We were rather naive, we were sure there would be a solution. But nature proved us wrong," says Saint-Jean, her voice shaky as she stares at the nearby cliffs, which are slowly disappearing.

The two women live in La Martinique, a slim band of territory that links the archipelago's two main islands.

They have spent thousands of

The archipelago, part of Quebec province in eastern Canada, is in a race against time

dollars to reinforce the cliff at the foot of their yard, but in September 2022, Hurricane Fiona struck with brute force, quickly washing away the giant rocks meant to protect their property. "We woke up one morning and realised we'd thrown away our money. But what can we do?" rues Saint-Jean, a retired nurse.

Costly emergency work

Erosion is a bit of a sensitive topic for most residents on the Magdalen islands, which were first populated in the 18th century and are located more than five hours by boat from continental Canada. Everyone here remembers spots that are now gone - especially houses that had to be moved because of the risk of flooding.

The situation is a headache

for local authorities, who must invest millions of dollars for emergency work.

In Cap-aux-Meules, in the centre of town, part of the pedestrian walkway collapsed in 2018, leaving the hospital, a retirement home and a cemetery in the direct path of dangerous waves.

Last year, local authorities built a huge gravel beach, using 143,000 tonnes of stones along an 800-metre (half-mile) stretch to raise the shoreline. It was not the first time the tactic had been used.

"Solutions exist but they are extremely expensive and these projects have to be maintained. So each time we intervene, it's a tax burden for the future," explains Jasmine Solomon, who monitors erosion for the local government.

AFP

Kenyan court acquits ‘miracle baby’ pastor in trafficking case

Nairobi, Kenya - A Kenyan court on Monday acquitted a controversial self-styled preacher who claimed he could help infertile couples conceive ‘miracle babies’ through prayer, citing insufficient evidence from prosecutors.

Gilbert Deya, a former stone-mason who moved to London from Kenya in the mid-90s, was accused of stealing five children between 1999 and 2004 to buttress his claims.

Senior Principal Magistrate

Robison Ondieki found the 86-year-old not guilty, ruling that the prosecution had not produced enough evidence to link Deya to the charges.

The preacher, whose Gilbert Deya Ministries had churches in London, Birmingham, Nottingham, Liverpool and Manchester, was extradited from Britain to Kenya in 2017 following a decade-long legal battle to remain in the UK.

Deya and his wife Mary claimed their prayers could see



Gilbert Deya celebrates outside the court with his followers after he was acquitted by the Milimani high courts in Nairobi on Monday (AFP)

infertile and post-menopausal women become pregnant in four months, and without intercourse. However prosecutors said the ‘miracle babies’ were stolen, mainly from Nairobi’s poor neighbourhoods.

“I have been acquitted of this burden, a yoke on my shoulder,” Deya told reporters outside the court, adding that it was ‘sad that I have been labelled as a child stealer’.

“It damaged my reputation.” Deya’s lawyer, John Swaka,

told AFP, ‘the charges were trumped up and could not stand in a court of law’. “He is delighted and very happy. He has no squabbles with anyone and will go back to serving the Lord.”

A 2004 case

Deya’s claims first came to light in a 2004 case, when a British coroner found that a baby called Sarah, who had died aged three weeks, was not related to either of her supposed parents. The mother had been told

she was infertile, and travelled to Nairobi where she claimed to have given birth, but DNA tests proved otherwise.

The case was the first time in eight centuries that an English coroner had to come to an official view on whether a miracle had taken place.

In 2015, Deya’s now ex-wife, Mary, abandoned her appeal against a four-year jail sentence and elected to serve the entire prison term.

AFP

Singapore speaker, MP resign over affair

Singapore - Singapore’s parliament speaker and a woman MP resigned on Monday over an ‘inappropriate’ affair, plunging the ruling party into further turmoil following a rare high-level corruption probe involving a cabinet minister.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said he accepted the resignations of speaker Tan Chuan Jin and MP Cheng Li Hui to ‘maintain the high standards of propriety and personal conduct’ of the People’s Action Party (PAP).

He said they were in an ‘inappropriate relationship’ that continued even after he had told them to stop in February.

The political drama was the latest development to rock the PAP, which has ruled Singapore uninterrupted for 64 years and has prided itself on a corruption-free government.

Last week, Transport Minister S. Iswaran was arrested by the city-state’s powerful Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau in a rare probe into high-level corruption.

He is out on bail and is helping the bureau with its investigation.

Before that, two senior cabinet ministers were probed for alleged irregularities in their rental of sprawling housing properties in the land-scarce nation, but both were subsequently cleared of any wrongdoing.

“Taken together, I would say that this is the most severe political crisis to hit the ruling party since 1986 when the minister for national development was investigated for corruption,” said political analyst Eugene Tan.

“I think public trust and confidence in the ruling party would be significantly affected. And that puts the ruling party very much on the defensive,” Tan, an associate professor of law at the Singapore Management University, added.

Elections must be called no later than November 2025, with a younger generation of leaders expected to take the lead. Lee had earlier said he would hand over leadership to his deputy Lawrence Wong, although no timing was given.

Lee told reporters that the 54-year-old speaker, who is married with two children, offered to resign earlier this year when he spoke to him about the affair.

AFP

S Korea president vows overhaul of approach to extreme weather

Seoul, South Korea - South Korea’s president vowed on Monday to ‘completely overhaul’ the country’s approach to extreme weather from climate change, after at least 40 people were killed by recent flooding and landslides during monsoon rains.

Rescue workers waded through thick mud as they drained a flooded underpass in central Cheongju, searching for more victims after vehicles were trapped in the tunnel by flash floods, the interior ministry said, with nine people still missing nationwide.

South Korea is at the peak of its summer monsoon season, and days of torrential rain have caused widespread flooding and landslides, with rivers bursting their banks, and reservoirs and dams overflowing. More rain is forecast in the coming days.

“This kind of extreme weather event will become commonplace - we must accept climate change is happening, and deal with it,” President Yoon Suk Yeol said during an emergency response meeting on Monday.

The idea that extreme weather linked to climate change ‘is an anomaly and can’t be helped needs to be completely overhauled’, he said, calling for ‘extraordinary determination’ to improve the country’s preparedness and response.

South Korea will ‘mobilise all available resources’ including the military and police to help with rescue efforts, he said.

“The rainy season is not over yet, and the forecast is now that there will be torrential rain again tomorrow,” he added.



South Korea’s President Yoon Suk Yeol (centre) visits a village, where more than a third of houses were damaged in landslides and two people remain missing, in Yecheon on Monday (AFP)

This kind of extreme weather event will become commonplace. We must accept climate change is happening, and deal with it

YOON SUK YEOL

Following the meeting, Yoon, who returned from an overseas trip early on Monday, travelled to

Yecheon in North Gyeongsang province - one of the hardest hit villages, where more than a third of houses were damaged in landslides and two people remain missing.

Dressed in a green jacket, often donned by top officials during public emergencies, Yoon was briefed by officials as he walked past piles of fallen trees and relief workers shovelling mud.

“I’ve never seen something like this in my life, hundreds of tonnes of rocks rolling down from the mountain,” Yoon told the villagers.

“I’ll do everything I can to restore the village,” he added.

The majority of the casualties - including 19 of the dead and eight of the missing - were from North Gyeongsang province, and were largely due to massive landslides in the mountainous area that engulfed houses with people inside.

Underpass disaster

On Monday, the South Korean government and police launched separate enquiries into the fatal flooding of the underpass in Cheongju, some 112km (70 miles) south of Seoul.

It flooded early on Saturday when a nearby river overflowed and an embankment collapsed, leaving more than 10 vehicles, including a bus, trapped inside.

At least 13 people were killed and rescue workers have warned the toll could rise as they search the area.

The Prime Minister’s Secretariat said there had been reports of calls to police requesting an emergency evacuation order for nearby residents as well as emergency closure of the tunnel an hour before the disaster struck.

“This investigation is to find out the cause of the failure to protect the precious life of the people,” it said in a statement.

Yoon said on Monday that the mismanagement of danger zones had led to the accident. Preemptive evacuations and road closures were the ‘basic principles of preventing the loss of lives in disaster response’, he added.

The Korea Meteorological Administration forecast more heavy rain through Wednesday and urged the public to ‘refrain from going outside’.

South Korea is regularly hit by flooding during the summer monsoon period, but the country is typically well-prepared and the death toll is usually relatively low.

Scientists say climate change has made weather events around the world more extreme and more frequent.

South Korea endured record-breaking rains and flooding last year, which left more than 11 people dead.

AFP

Poland reports bird flu in cats: WHO

Geneva, Switzerland - Poland is the first country to report ‘high numbers’ of cats infected with bird flu across a large area, the WHO said on Monday, adding that the risk of human infection remained low.

The World Health Organization said that since Polish health authorities informed it last month of unusual cat deaths across the country, 29 cats had tested positive for H5N1 bird flu.

They were among 46 cats and one captive caracal tested for the virus, it said, adding that 14 of the infected animals were reported to have been euthanised, while another 11 had died.

The last death was reported on June 30.

“The source of the exposure of cats to the virus is currently unknown and epizootic investigations are ongoing,” WHO said in a statement.

Since late 2021, Europe has had its worst-ever outbreak of bird flu, while North and South America have also experienced severe outbreaks.

This has led to the culling of tens of millions of poultry worldwide, many with the H5N1 strain of the virus, which first emerged in 1996.

There has recently been a worrying spike in infections in mammals.

The UN health agency pointed out that sporadic infection of cats with H5N1 had previously been reported.

“But this is the first report of a high numbers of infected cats over a wide geographical area within a country,” it said.

AFP

Algae poisoning of marine animals overwhelm California volunteers

Gaviota, US - Denise Christ regularly comes across injured wildlife in her work rescuing beached or stranded marine mammals along the California coast.

But she’s been shocked by the hundreds of sea lions and dolphins found on the shore in recent weeks, dead or dying from neurotoxin poisoning.

“Heartbreaking, to say the least,” said Christ, the Ventura County stranding coordinator for the Channel Islands Marine and Wildlife Institute (CIMWI).

The animals were sickened by domoic acid, a neurotoxin produced by algae that are a food source for fish, which are then eaten by sea lions and dolphins.

Algal blooms are not unusual this time of year, but this summer’s crisis follows another one less than a year ago, alarming and overwhelming the CIMWI team based about 120 miles (190km) north of Los Angeles.



A beach-goer walks past a sea lion that washed up on the sand at Santa Monica Beach in Santa Monica, California, on Sunday (AFP)

“We had a pretty intense bloom last summer but this year is way worse than we’ve ever seen in the 35 years I’ve been practicing marine mammal medicine,” said Sam Dover, the executive director and cofounder of CIMWI.

Added Ken Hughes, Christ’s colleague in neighbouring Santa Barbara County: “We had over

300 sea lions up on the beach. And over 150 dolphins that also were affected by it. It was just so sad.”

‘New reality’ of climate change

There is no official explanation for the outbreak, but experts have several theories.

Algal blooms are fed by agri-

cultural runoff, and this year California experienced heavier than normal rainfall.

“So there’s a lot more runoff from the whole state, not just from the local regions,” Dover said.

Others from the institute said warming oceans due to climate change were spurring algae growth.

“I believe it is the new reality and things are changing. The ocean’s changing,” Christ said.

When sea lions consume the toxin, they suffer neurological effects that include disorientation, foaming at the mouth, head bobbing and seizures.

“They basically don’t know they’re a sea lion. They don’t know where they’re at or what they’re doing,” Hughes explained.

The animals will head for the shore, where they wander erratically, attracting the attention of beachgoers.

AFP

HAND IN HAND



Migrants walk past concertina wire in the water along the Rio Grande border with Mexico in Eagle Pass, Texas, on Sunday (AFP)

Thousands evacuated as typhoon nears southern China, Vietnam

Beijing, China - Tens of thousands of people were being evacuated in southern China and Vietnam on Monday, and dozens of flights cancelled as a typhoon barrelled towards land.

Powerful winds, storm surges and lashing rains were forecast to hammer the southern coastline from Guangdong to Hainan provinces when typhoon Talim makes landfall on Monday night, the China Meteorological Administration said.

The forecaster has issued an orange alert, the second-highest warning in a four-tier colour-coded system, saying the storm was expected to increase in intensity to become a severe typhoon. Authorities in Vietnam said they were preparing to evacuate about 30,000 people from the areas forecast to be hardest hit in Quang Ninh and Hai Phong provinces from Monday afternoon.

The storm 'might be one of the biggest to hit the Gulf of Tonkin in recent years', Vietnam's top disaster response committee said in an online statement.

Tourists have been advised to leave outlying islands and airlines have rescheduled services to



A business street is seen closed as a precaution for the approaching Typhoon Talim in Beihai, in China's southern Guangxi province on Monday (AFP)

avoid the storm.

Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh directed disaster response teams to prepare for 'immediate rescue and relief works' late on Sunday, warning of possible floods.

At least 1,000 people were

evacuated in Yunfu city in south China's Guangdong province, the state-backed *Southern Daily* reported. Around 2pm (0600 GMT), Typhoon Talim was 280km southwest of Hong Kong, the city's weather observatory said.

Trading on Hong Kong's US\$5.2tn stock market was cancelled on Monday as the Asian financial hub came to a standstill.

The Hong Kong Observatory has warned of possible flooding in low-lying areas due to a storm surge and ferries and most bus

services in the city were suspended.

More than 1,000 travellers were affected by flight cancellations and delays, the Hong Kong Airport Authority said.

Authorities in south China's Hainan island asked ships in

nearby waters to return to port after the local marine forecasting station warned of waves of up to six metres (20 feet), state news agency Xinhua reported.

The storm might be one of the biggest to hit the Gulf of Tonkin in recent years, Vietnam's top disaster response committee said in an online statement

Ferry services between Hainan and neighbouring Guangdong province were suspended early on Sunday.

Meilan International Airport and Qionghai Boao Airport, both on Hainan island, have cancelled all flights, state media reported.

Zhuhai Jinwan Airport in Guangdong near Macau cancelled more than 80 flights, local media said.

AFP

Kenya: More bodies found in starvation cult case

Nairobi, Kenya - The death toll in an investigation linked to a Kenyan cult that practised starvation to 'meet Jesus Christ' has exceeded 400 after 12 more bodies were found on Monday, a senior official said.

"Total death Toll - 403," Coast Regional Commissioner Rhoda Onyancha told AFP in a message, following the latest round of exhumations in the Shakohla forest, where cult leader Paul Nthenge Mackenzie allegedly urged followers to starve to death.

"Exhumation continues tomorrow," Onyancha added, as investigators search for more graves in the forest, where the first victims - some dead, others alive but weakened and emaciated - were discovered on April 13.

According to government autopsies, starvation appears to have been the main cause of death, although some victims - including children - were strangled, beaten, or suffocated.

Mackenzie, a former taxi driver-turned-preacher, has been in police custody since mid-April.

On July 3, a court in Mombasa extended his detention by a month pending investigations.

AFP

Turkey's Erdogan begins Gulf tour with trip to Saudi

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan arrives on Monday in Saudi Arabia during a three-country Gulf tour as he looks to attract foreign investment in his country's ailing economy.

Erdogan is scheduled to land in the Red Sea city of Jeddah to meet King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the country's de facto ruler, before going to the United Arab Emirates and Qatar later this week.

"During our visits, our primary agenda will be joint investment and commercial activities with these countries in the upcoming period," Erdogan said before leaving Istanbul.

He said bilateral trade with Gulf countries has increased from US\$1.6bn to approximately US\$22bn over the past 20 years.

"With the business forums to be organised, we will look for ways to move this figure much further," Erdogan said.

The visit is his second to Saudi Arabia since a recent rapprochement. Ties between the two countries were strained by the



Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (AFP)

2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the kingdom's Istanbul consulate.

Turkey angered Saudi Arabia by vigorously pursuing the case at the time, opening an investigation and briefing international media on the gory details of the killing.

But with ties on the mend, Erdogan visited Saudi Arabia in April 2022, and Prince Mohammed went to Turkey in June last year.

Erdogan's new Saudi trip comes as Turkey battles a currency devaluation and soaring

inflation that has battered its economy.

The two countries will sign several accords during Erdogan's trip as Ankara looks to non-Western partners for financial support, a senior Saudi official told AFP on condition of anonymity because he is not authorised to speak to the press.

Erdogan's Gulf tour will be followed by a trip to northern Cyprus which Turkey invaded and occupied in 1974, and comes after his re-election in May for another five-year term.

AFP

Thwarted Thai PM candidate chases support for next vote

Bangkok, Thailand - The liberal reformist seeking to become Thailand's prime minister said on Monday he was marshalling support for his next tilt at the job after military-appointed senators foiled his first attempt.

Efforts to elect a government have deadlocked on parliament's refusal to endorse the candidacy of Pita Limjaroenrat, whose Move Forward Party (MFP) won the most seats in May elections.

Establishment lawmakers consider his party's pledge to reform the kingdom's strict royal defamation laws a red line and the Harvard-educated politician's nomination fell 51 votes short last week.

Pita said the eight-party coalition supporting him had agreed to renominate him for a second vote on Wednesday, adding that he was canvassing senators who did not support him in the first round.

"We still are talking to find more support," he told reporters.

"There are several who missed the vote because of other



Pita Limjaroenrat, leader of MFP and candidate for prime minister, gestures upon arrival for a presser in Bangkok on Monday (AFP)

duties," he said. "It is still possible they might vote."

Pita's Move Forward Party (MFP) won nearly 40 per cent of the vote in May's poll but his attempt at forming a government was blocked by supporters of the Thai establishment.

Junta-appointed senators oppose MFP's proposal to soften

the kingdom's royal defamation law, under which offenders can be jailed for up to 15 years.

Just 13 members of the 250-strong upper chamber voted for him last week.

Thailand's Constitutional Court could also take up a case on Wednesday on whether Pita, 42, should be disqualified from

parliament entirely for owning shares in a media company, prohibited for MPs under the Thai constitution.

Pita, who made his fortune in a family-run agrifood business, has said the shares were inherited from his father. The station has not broadcast since 2007.

He said on Monday he was not concerned by the Constitutional Court case against him the same day as he submits himself to another parliamentary vote.

"It does not affect my candidacy for prime minister," he said.

The court has also agreed to hear a case alleging that the MFP's campaign promises to amend the royal defamation laws are tantamount to a plan to 'overthrow' the constitutional monarchy.

The roadblocks thrown in front of Pita's candidacy have dismayed supporters eager at the prospect of progressive reforms after nine years of army-backed rule that followed a 2014 coup.

AFP

India: Supreme Court indicates Delhi ordinance case may be referred to Constitution bench

New Delhi, India - The Supreme Court on Monday indicated that it may refer to the Constitution bench a plea of the Delhi government challenging the constitutional validity of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Ordinance, 2023 issued by the Centre relating to control over bureaucrats.

A bench of Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud and Justices P S Narasimha and Manoj Misra posted the matter for July 20. The bench observed that the issue of whether the powers under Article 239AA(7)(a) of the Constitution could be invoked to make the law of the present nature was not considered in either of the Constitution bench judgments of 2018 and



A view of the Supreme Court of India building, the apex judicial body of the country, in New Delhi (ANI)

2023 passed in the tussle between Delhi and the Centre.

"What they have done is that

by using the power under 239AA(7), they have amended the Constitution to take services

out of Delhi government control. Is that permissible? I don't think either of the Constitution bench

judgements has covered that," the bench observed.

Article 239AA provides the framework for the exercise of legislative powers by the legislative assembly of the Union territory of Delhi and the Parliament in respect of Delhi.

Solicitor General of India Tushar Mehta, appearing for Centre, urged the bench to defer the hearing in view of the fact that the Ordinance is going to be presented as a bill before the Lok Sabha in the monsoon session starting on July 20.

"It is possible that the Ordinance may be passed in a different form after the Parliamentary process," Mehta said asking to await the legislative outcome.

ANI

Iran shuts education centre over 'inciting riots'

Tehran, Iran - Iranian authorities have shuttered an educational centre accused of 'inciting riots' during last year's mass demonstrations triggered by the death in custody of a young woman, state media reported on Monday.

Nationwide protests rocked Iran following the September death of a 22-year-old Iranian Kurd, Mahsa Amini, in police custody after her arrest over violating the Islamic republic's strict dress code.

"We prepared and issued a warrant for the closure of Gaj centre following the directive of the minister of education," state news agency IRNA quoted Ahmad Mahmoudzadeh, head of Iran's non-governmental schools, as

saying.

Mahmoudzadeh said Gaj had 'incited riots' during a Persian literature exam for students, without elaborating.

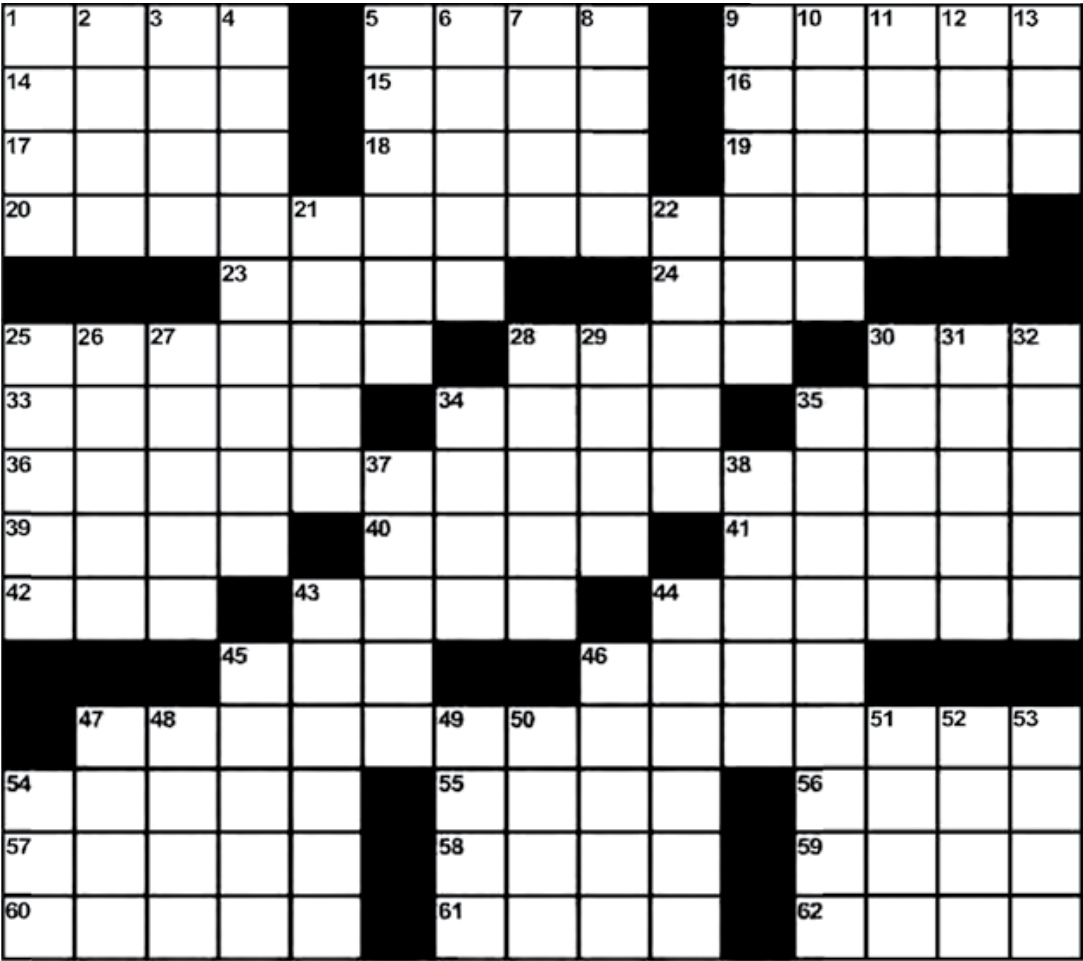
Iran's reformist newspaper *Shargh* daily reported that Gaj had cited excerpts from revolutionary poems by prominent dissident Farrokhi Yazdi.

Gaj centre, founded in 2002, has won multiple awards over the years for its publications.

Last year's protests saw hundreds of people killed, including dozens of security personnel, and thousands arrested in connection with what officials labelled as 'riots' fomented by foreign countries after Amini's death.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



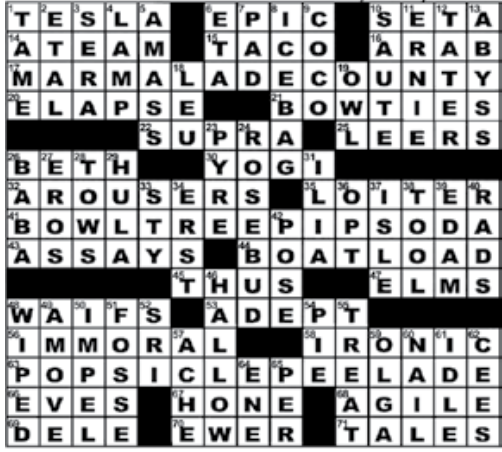
- ACROSS**
- 1) It's mounted on runners
 - 5) Corleone in "The Godfather"
 - 9) Illegal inducement
 - 14) Serve the iced tea
 - 15) _ horse (locomotive)
 - 16) Happen again
 - 17) Hairstyle that's picked?
 - 18) Like a lemon
 - 19) Love to pieces
 - 20) Is absolutely relentless
 - 23) Cabbagelike veggie
 - 24) Ballpark official, briefly
 - 25) Spars that cross a sail
 - 28) All hail them?
 - 3 0) It can be an X or an O
 - 33) It's charged
 - 34) Cornmeal dish
 - 35) Search, as for compliments
 - 36) Goes around with bad intentions
 - 39) Bugs on a hill
 - 40) Top-of-the-line
 - 41) Food for frogs
 - 42) "All right!"
 - 43) Britain, to the U.S.
 - 44) "Finally!"
 - 45) First word said after a

- birth
 - 46) Have roots in (with "from")
 - 4 7) Is as stubborn as a mule
 - 54) Winged honker
 - 55) Vigorous enthusiasm
 - 56) Do as one's told
 - 57) Nasal congestion locale
 - 58) Vending-machine offering
 - 59) Cyrano's large feature
 - 60) Plus column entry
 - 61) Capsize (with "over")
 - 62) Collectors' goals
- DOWN**
- 1) Health club features
 - 2) Hay or choir area
 - 3) Dollar relative
 - 4) Old field goal attempts
 - 5) Heart rate, blood pressure, temperature, etc.
 - 6) Good and steamed
 - 7) Utterly undecided
 - 8) Aware of, as a scam
 - 9) Lullaby composer Johannes
 - 10) Get more fondue

- 11) Desktop graphic symbol
- 12) Small town
- 13) Bard's "before"
- 21) Fills to excess
- 22) Starchy veggie
- 25) Spread apart, as fingers
- 26) Face downward
- 27) Civil disturbances
- 28) Like a Kansan's trite joke?
- 29) Poker-pot starter
- 30) Bone or flute
- 31) Tropical spots
- 32) Word with "medicine" or "cedar"
- 34) Place to swim
- 35) Monthly lunar phenomena
- 37) Not true
- 38) Quite a bit
- 43) Provide evidence for
- 44) Hardly melodious
- 45) 1/12 of a subscription, often
- 46) Lacking freshness
- 47) Clark's partner
- 48) Electrically charged particles
- 49) A real head-turner
- 50) Gin flavored

- 51) Woodwind with a pastoral sound
- 52) Bluebird's residence
- 53) Things that may twinkle
- 54) Government procurement org.

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

When you are showered with compliments today (and you will be), try to accept them all graciously. Don't go for false modesty, it simply doesn't become you. Be grateful for the fact that the people around you have the sense to see how wonderful you are, and thank them for it! You have to get used to people telling you how great you are, because it's only going to happen more and more often as the days go by. You might as well start today.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

There will be a huge spike in your creative writing skills today, and you're in the perfect frame of mind to make the most of it. It will be a breeze for you to add some rhymes and witty stuff to your emails, texts, and voicemails. You'll entertain your friends and coworkers in a way that only you can, and you might even impress a few people while you're at it. Conveying your ideas in a memorable way will separate you from the average Joe and get you more attention.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

What's the hurry? That upcoming event you're so excited about isn't going anywhere, and trying to speed up your life to get there more quickly is not only impossible, it's a total waste of energy. Besides, you could start ticking people off by having your mind so out of the moment and into the future. Embrace what's going on today and try to get enthusiastic about it. After five minutes of trying to not think about what's on the horizon, you will succeed.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You won't have a full understanding of the true amount of work you have to do today until later in the afternoon, when social time is over and you're back to spending some time by yourself. This sudden realization of the size of the pile of work in front of you could throw a lesser person into a panic, but not you! The strong warrior inside you knows that you can do this, and you can do it well! No task is too tough for you, and no deadline is too soon.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You have the wonderful gift of fresh perspective today, so take another look at the problems you've been having in your life lately. Chances are they'll look nowhere near as gigantic as they did yesterday. In fact, most of them are fairly simple to solve, and one of them you can just give to someone else to deal with. Go on. They won't mind taking something off your plate. They'll love the opportunity to help you and show you how organized they can be.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You can't let yourself take anything too seriously today. Even if you're taking a big exam, going on an important job interview, or trying to charm a first date, you have to remember to keep it loose and relaxed. If you want to start feeling good (and get someone else to feel good), you have to start smiling. Focusing on what you don't have instead of enjoying what you do have is one way to guarantee that you won't be as happy as you could be.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

There will be some more money coming into your life today, but it could create misunderstandings if you're not careful. If you and a friend are going out together, resist the urge to treat them to dinner. It's wonderful that you want to be generous, but it might come across as showing off. So hold off and be sensitive to the fact that money might be a big issue for them right now. You can show your affection in another way.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Just like you shouldn't get on a scale every day when you're on a diet, you can't constantly stare at the finish line if you want to win the race. You have to think about the here and now, not the there and later. Get confident about the fact that you're making progress, even if you're not getting any outside reinforcement of that fact. You must keep on keeping on and not make the mistake of putting your mind to anything but the task at hand.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Is someone casting a spell over you? Be careful not to let the mystical charms of someone cute fog your mind and keep you from having a realistic view of who they are as a person. Listen to your common sense, not your heart. Find out what other mutual friends think about this person. They will splash some cold water on your infatuation, but your affection probably won't diminish one bit. This means that your connection could be built on real things after all.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Today, if you get the feeling that something is being kept from you, you're right. Your usually strong intuition is stronger than ever now, and it's picking up on some seriously mysterious vibes. There is a secret being shared with everyone but you, it seems. But whatever's going on behind closed doors is only good news for you, so don't get too paranoid that things are going to change for the worse. On the contrary, things are about to get really good.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You can cut to the chase in a way that few other people can match, and that sincere desire to speak (and hear) the truth helps you out in all sorts of ways right now. A flash of insight can lead to you clearing the way for a new path. You and a few close friends might not have thought it was possible, but go ahead and lead the way anyway.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Are you expecting major transformations to happen overnight? It's time to face the fact that it's going to take longer than you thought. Whether you're looking for changes in yourself or in someone else, you have to be more patient and realistic about how quickly things can happen. What used to be simple isn't so simple any more. There are more people involved and more feelings that could get hurt. Let things unfold the way they will and the results will be better.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. The Dutch-based Stellantis N.V., formed in 2021, is a 50:50 merger between two internationally recognised manufacturing conglomerates from which countries and in what field?

A. Italy and France, automobiles
B. UK and Germany, medicine
C. Hungary and Nigeria, fashion
D. USA and Russia, energy

02. What is a medical term referring to the presence of pathogenic organisms in the bloodstream, leading to blood poisoning?

A. Tetanus
B. Septicemia
C. Hypertension
D. Bursitis

03. La Plata is the capital city of which province of Argentina?

A. La Rioja
B. Córdoba
C. Buenos Aires
D. Formosa

Answers: 1. C 2. A 3. C

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

S	L	D	A
L	I	E	S
V	V	E	E
U	A	Q	E

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz celebrates with the trophy

'BEST OF ALL THREE WORLDS'

'Spanish bull' Alcaraz is me, Federer, Nadal rolled into one: Djokovic

London, United Kingdom - Novak Djokovic believes Wimbledon champion Carlos Alcaraz possesses the "best of all three worlds", cloning the talents of himself, Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal.

World number one Alcaraz defeated Djokovic 1-6, 7-6 (8/6), 6-1, 3-6, 6-4 in the Wimbledon final on Sunday after four hours and 42 minutes of breathless action on Centre Court.

The result shattered 36-year-old Djokovic's bid to claim a record-equalling eighth title at the All England Club and 24th Grand Slam crown.

Asked what makes the 20-year-old Alcaraz such a threat, the Serb star explained that he has duplicated his weapons, as well as Federer and Nadal - the storied 'big three' of tennis who

between them have 65 Grand Slam titles.

"I think he's got basically best of all three worlds," said Djokovic. "People have been talking in the past 12 months or so about his game consisting of certain elements from Roger, Rafa, and myself. I would agree with that."

Hailing Alcaraz for his "Spanish bull mentality of competitiveness", Djokovic sees similarities in the renowned fighting spirit and "incredible defence" of Nadal.

Alcaraz's backhands are straight out of the Djokovic playbook. "That's been my personal strength for many years," he said.

"I haven't played a player like him ever, to be honest. Roger and Rafa have their own obviously strengths and weaknesses. Carlos is a very complete player.

It's a dream come true for me. It's great to win but even if I had lost I would have been really proud of myself, playing a final against a legend of our sport

CARLOS ALCARAZ

"Amazing adapting capabilities that I think are a key for longevity and for successful career on all surfaces."

In the immediate aftermath of his loss on Sunday, Djokovic was

full of praise for Alcaraz.

Just last month, Djokovic defeated the Spaniard in the French Open semi-finals, with Alcaraz's challenge undermined by body cramping brought on by the stress of facing his rival.

However, Alcaraz has now beaten Djokovic twice in their three meetings, having first got the better of him on clay at the Madrid Masters last year.

"What a quality at the end of the match when you had to serve it out," Djokovic told the champion during the Centre Court trophy ceremony.

"You can up with some big plays in the big situation and you absolutely deserve it.

"It's a tough one to swallow when you are so close."

Despite his defeat on Centre Court in 10 years, Djokovic, who

had won the previous four Wimbledon titles, insisted he still has the desire to keep on chasing silverware at the majors.

"I've been blessed with so many incredible matches throughout my career. I'm really grateful. I lost to a better player and I have to move on stronger," he said after seeing his 34-match win streak at the tournament ended. He hailed Alcaraz, who now has two Grand Slam titles following his US Open breakthrough last year, and two titles on grass in just four tournaments on the surface.

"I thought I would have trouble with you only on clay and hard court, but not on grass but now it's a different story from this year obviously," said the Serb, who briefly broke down in tears as he addressed the crowd.

If Alcaraz manages to win 25 Grand Slams, it will be fantastic for him and Spain: Nadal

London, United Kingdom - Carlos Alcaraz's triumph over Novak Djokovic at Wimbledon on Sunday marked the latest chapter in a story predicted to end with "30 Grand Slam titles".

The 20-year-old has become familiar with setting landmarks.

When he won his maiden Slam title at the US Open last year he became the youngest champion of a men's major since storied compatriot Rafael Nadal at the 2005 French Open.

He also became the youngest man to ascend to the world number one ranking.

The modest, muscular star from the small Murcian town of El Palmar in Spain's south-east hit the giant-killing jackpot at Madrid in 2022 when he became the only man to defeat both Nadal and Djokovic at the same clay-court event.

For good measure, he achieved it on back-to-back days on his way to the title.

"Carlos's intensity and speed



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz is congratulated by Serbia's Novak Djokovic

is something you rarely see," said Rafael Nadal's uncle and former coach Toni Nadal.

'Never gives up'

"His game follows the same path as Rafa; he never gives up until the last ball and has that characteristic intensity."

Nadal was also 19 when he won the first of his 22 Grand Slam titles at Roland Garros in 2005.

However, Nadal has always pleaded with fans not to put pressure on Alcaraz by making bold comparisons.

"I forgot what I was like at 19," said Nadal. "The only thing we can do is enjoy the career of an extraordinary player like Carlos."

"If he manages to win 25 Grand Slams, it will be fantastic for him and for our country. But let him enjoy his career."

Despite Nadal's reluctance, making comparisons is unavoidable. Nadal won the first of his 92 titles at Sopot at the age of 18 in 2004. Alcaraz, who learned the

game at a tennis school run by his father, was also 18 when he captured his maiden ATP trophy at Umag in 2021.

Both men are fiercely protective of their private lives, enjoy passionate crowd support and build their games on steely defence and thrilling, flamboyant attack.

Nadal famously fought out a five-hour and 53-minute Australian Open final in 2012, only to lose to Djokovic.

Four years earlier, he won his first Wimbledon crown in a four-hour 48-minute epic against Roger Federer in a match widely hailed as the greatest Slam final of all time.

"I know that I am a very competitive kid. I compete whenever I play anything - golf, petanca," said Alcaraz. "I don't like to lose."

At his side is coach Juan Carlos Ferrero, the 2003 French Open winner who also took the number one ranking at the US Open later that year.

RAIN, RECORDS, ROYALS: WIMBLEDON IN 10 HIGHLIGHTS

London, United Kingdom - Wimbledon saw Carlos Alcaraz dethrone Novak Djokovic, Marketa Vondrousova take a surprise women's title while there was also rain, records and royals.

AFP Sport looks at 10 highlights from this year's Grand Slam tournament which wrapped up on Sunday:

01 Dry hard! Djokovic mops up

Heavy rain brought havoc to the schedule on the second day with just an hour's play possible on the outside courts, which meant 69 of the planned 77 matches were unable to be completed.

Novak Djokovic helped dry Wimbledon's Centre Court with his towel on the first day, appealing to fans to "blow" on the court during a lengthy delay.

02 'Just Stop Oil' stops play

Climate activists interrupted matches on the third day, scattering orange confetti and jigsaw pieces on Court 18.

Two men and a woman, all wearing T-shirts with "Just Stop Oil" printed on them, were arrested on suspicion of aggravated trespass and criminal damage.

One fan shouted "Get off the court" as spectators booed and jeered.

03 38-point tiebreaker

Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko reached the fourth round after triumphing in the longest-ever tiebreak in a Grand Slam women's singles match.

The deciding breaker stretched to a record 38 points as the 34-year-old defeated Ana Bogdan of Romania 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (20/18) to make the last 16.

Tsurenko took victory on a seventh match point after saving five match points herself in a three-hour 40-minute epic on Court 14.

04 Murray faces the end

Andy Murray admitted he didn't know if he will be back at Wimbledon next year after a heart-breaking second round loss to world number five Stefanos Tsitsipas.

Two-time champion Murray went down 7-6 (7/3), 6-7 (2/7), 4-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-4 after a gruelling four-hour 40-minute match-up. The defeat meant 36-year-old Murray has not made the second week of a Grand Slam since reaching the quarter-finals at Wimbledon in 2017.

"I don't know," said Murray when asked if he would be back at the All England Club next year.

05 Down and out after underarm serve

Alejandro Davidovich Fokina insisted he had no regrets after his decision to serve underarm when just two points from a place in the last 16 spectacularly backfired. The Spaniard opted for the unorthodox tactic at 8/8 in the fifth set tiebreaker against sixth seed Holger Rune before losing in five sets.

"It was just another serve. I don't regret anything," said Davidovich Fokina who also squandered two match points.

06 Azarenka and 'unfair' boos

Victoria Azarenka blasted the Wimbledon crowd as "unfair" and "drunk" after she was booed off Centre Court following her defeat to Elina Svitolina in a politically charged clash.

Ukraine's Svitolina came through in three sets and opted not shake hands with Belarusian Azarenka in protest over Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Belarus is a key military ally of Moscow.

"It wasn't fair. It is what it is. What can I do?" said Azarenka.

07 Eubanks' winning feeling in defeat

Having described grass as the "stupidest" surface, big-serving Chris Eubanks left Wimbledon as a shock quarter-finalist and record-breaker.

As well as being the only man to hit over 100 aces at the tournament, he unleashed 321 winners, beating Andre Agassi's record of 317 from 1992.

08 Djokovic hit by hindrance call

Novak Djokovic endured a double mini-setback in his straight sets win over Jannik Sinner when he was docked a point for hindrance for a loud grunt which accompanied a down-the-line winner. In the same game, the Serb was handed a code violation for taking too long between points.

"The hindrance could have changed the course of the match. I felt nervous after that call, but I managed to re-group," Djokovic said.

09 Hugs welcome, Jabeur tells Princess Kate

Ons Jabeur was so disconsolate after her shock Wimbledon final defeat to Marketa Vondrousova that she told Kate, the Princess of Wales, that "hugs are always welcome".

In a moving moment on Centre Court, the wife of the heir to the British throne, gave the tearful Tunisian a warm embrace as she handed her the runners-up trophy.

"She didn't know if she wants to give me a hug or not. I told her hugs are always welcome from me. That was a very nice moment and she's always nice to me."

10 Alcaraz and changing of the guard

Carlos Alcaraz defeated seven-time champion Novak Djokovic to claim his first Wimbledon title, shattering the Serb's dream of a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam crown.

World number one Alcaraz recovered from dropping the first set and saving a set point in the second to win 1-6, 7-6 (8/6), 6-1, 3-6, 6-4 after four hours and 42 minutes on Centre Court.

"It's great for the new generation. I think to see me beating him and making them think that they are capable to do it, as well," said Alcaraz.

'GREATEST OF ALL TIME'

Argentine superstar Lionel Messi hailed as 'America's number 10' as he greets rapturous Miami fans

Fort Lauderdale, United States - It rained on his parade, but Lionel Messi greeted his new Inter Miami fans and was hailed by the club's owner as "America's number 10" at a damp but celebratory unveiling event on Sunday.

Miami's 20,000 capacity stadium was close to full despite a huge thunder storm just before the event to celebrate the arrival of the Argentine World Cup winner was due to begin.

A massive tropical downpour forced organisers to delay the start of "The Unveil" as fans took

roars from the crowd.

Miami's majority owner Jorge Mas then whipped the crowd up with his own bilingual speech.

"Tonight is a gift and celebration to the city that opened its arms to my family," said the Cuban-American businessman.

"Tonight we are doing this in the rain. "This is holy water!" he added.

"This is our moment! Our moment to change the football landscape in this country," he added, before introducing Messi as "Your new number 10, America's



Lionel Messi waves to the fans as he is presented by Inter Miami in Florida on Sunday (AFP)

project and I have no doubt that we are going to enjoy it a lot, we are going to have a good time and very good things are going to happen," he said.

Inter Miami, the bottom club in Major League Soccer, confirmed on Saturday that the seven-times Ballon d'Or winner had signed a deal that will keep him with the club until 2025.

The former Barcelona great opted to join Miami after his contract with French club Paris Saint-Germain expired last month. His former Barcelona team-mate, Spanish midfielder Sergio Busquets, was also presented to the crowd after completing his move.

Major League Soccer commissioner Don Garber praised Mas for his determined pursuit of Messi for the club which is in only its fourth season.

"Lionel Messi was on his radar from the very beginning. I have to say, when he would say that many years ago, I didn't think that he would be able to deliver it," Garber told reporters. "But here we are today with a player that I think, without doubt, is not only a generational player, but in my opinion, the greatest of all time."

He was scheduled to hold a press conference on Monday but the club said Sunday that had been postponed. No explanation for the decision was given.

Messi could make his debut for the club on Friday against Mexico team Cruz Azul in the new Leagues Cup, which features teams from both MLS and Mexico's Liga MX.

AFP

Thank you very much to all the people for supporting me and giving me this love. I am very happy to have chosen to come to play in this city with my family

LIONEL MESSI

cover or waited out the rain in their cars.

The event started around two hours later than originally scheduled with wet but delighted fans chanting Messi's name as the lights dimmed on the venue.

The club's co-owner David Beckham opened the ceremony saying Messi's arrival was a "dream come true".

"Leo, we are so proud that you have chosen our club for the next stage in your career," said the former Manchester United player whose move to MLS's Los Angeles Galaxy in 2007 was the league's previous biggest arrival.

"Welcome to our family Leo," Beckham added in Spanish, to

number 10".

Messi, who arrived in Miami on Tuesday with his family and caused a viral sensation after being photographed shopping with them in a local supermarket, thanked the supporters.

"Thank you very much to all the people for supporting me and giving me this love. I am very happy to be here in Miami," he said.

"I really want to start training, to compete, I have the same desire that I always had to compete, to want to win, to help the club continue to grow.

"I am very happy to have chosen to come to play in this city with my family, to choose this

Gimenez the hero as Mexico down Panama 1-0 to lift 9th Gold Cup

Los Angeles, United States - Santiago Gimenez scored the game-winning minutes after entering the match Sunday as Mexico beat Panama 1-0 to win a record-extending ninth CONCACAF Gold Cup crown.

The final of the regional championship for North and Central America and the Caribbean was a fast-paced physical affair between a Mexico team eager to move on from recent disappointments and a Panama side seeking a first Gold Cup crown in their third appearance in the finals.

Gimenez started on the bench in favor of Henry Martin and, with the match deadlocked, was brought on in the 85th minute.

Three minutes later the 22-year-old Feyenoord striker became an instant hero.



Mexico players celebrate with the Concacaf 2023 Gold Cup trophy after beating Panama in the final in Inglewood, California, on Sunday (AFP)

After Ivan Anderson's cross into the Mexico penalty area was blocked, Mexico's Orbelin Pineda came away with the ball and passed to Gimenez at midfield.

Gimenez raced into the penalty area, spinning away from one defender and beating an-

other before slotting a left-footed shot past Panama goalkeeper Orlando Mosquera.

"It is indescribable," Gimenez said. "It is impressive how the group came together to move forward. I'm not saying it with words, it was seen with the title."

His fourth goal in 18 international appearances sparked frenzied celebrations among the largely pro-Mexico crowd of nearly 73,000 at SoFi Stadium, home of the NFL's Los Angeles Rams and one of the venues tabbed for the 2026 World Cup

to be hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Mexico added a ninth Gold Cup title to those it won in 1993, 1996, 1998, 2003, 2009, 2011, 2015 and 2019.

The United States own seven titles, but were stunningly elimi-

nated by Panama in a penalty shootout during the semi-finals.

"We knew that we were playing to go down in the history of national soccer and opportunities must be seized," said Mexico's interim coach Jaime Lozano, who had coached Mexico to Olympic Bronze at the Tokyo Games in 2021 and was brought in for the Gold Cup tournament after Diego Cocca was sacked last month.

Cocca was fired after a disappointing Nations League campaign, which followed Mexico's failure to advance from the group stage at the World Cup in Qatar.

"We have said it from day one. Jaime understands very well what it means to represent Mexico, he understands the player very well, he gets the best out of each player and that is reflected on the field," goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa, who won a fifth Gold Cup title, said of Lozano.

Lozano himself refused to be drawn on whether he thought he'd earned the permanent job with a North American World.

AFP



Sergio Busquets is presented with a jersey after signing with Inter Miami on Sunday

Busquets inks deal to join Messi in Miami

Miami, United States - Spanish midfielder Sergio Busquets has signed a contract with Inter Miami that will see him reunited with Argentine superstar Lionel Messi through the 2025 season, the Major League Soccer club said Sunday.

Completion of the deal comes a day after Messi, who sparked Argentina to a World Cup title last year in Qatar, signed his own contract with the club.

Inter had announced last month that they were acquiring Busquets, who will be reunited with his former Barcelona teammate Messi.

The one-time World Cup champion, nine-time La Liga winner and former Barca captain will occupy a Designated Player slot and is expected to join the team "in the coming days," Inter said.

"I am excited to welcome

Sergio Busquets to Inter Miami," managing owner Jorge Mas said in a statement.

"Since day one we have set out to bring the world's best players to Inter Miami. Sergio's repertoire speaks for itself."

Busquets, 34, said in May that he would leave Barcelona this year at the end of his contract.

He made 134 appearances for Spain before announcing his retirement from the team in December.

Busquets has been a central part of Barcelona's successes in the past 15 years, including three Champions League triumphs.

Busquets played as pivot behind Andres Iniesta and Xavi Hernandez in an iconic midfield trio, and the three of them also won the World Cup with Spain in 2010.

AFP

Kane 'totally committed' to Tottenham, Postecoglou says

Perth, Australia - New Tottenham coach Ange Postecoglou said on Monday Harry Kane was "totally committed" to his vision for the north London club as speculation mounts over the England captain's future.

Kane has entered the final 12 months of his six-year Spurs contract and has been courted aggressively by Bayern Munich.

Unfazed by the uncertainty ahead of next month's start of the English Premier League season, Postecoglou said his initial discussions with Kane had been



Ange Postecoglou speaks during a press conference in Perth on Monday

instructive. "I had a good chat with Harry... nothing earth-shattering or defining," he said before Tottenham's pre-season friendly against West Ham in Perth on Tuesday.

"Me and Harry were perfectly aligned in... we want to see a successful team this year. He's here and while he's here, he's totally committed to what we're doing."

Bayern Munich honorary president Uli Hoeness added to the tug-of-war for the 29-year-old's services by telling journalists on Saturday Kane's "mind is

made up" to switch to the Bundesliga champions.

"No one has spoken to me from Munich," Postecoglou said.

"If other clubs want to talk about our contracted players, that's more of an issue for them than us. There are a lot of people that know Harry better than me but he's not going to get fazed by anything."

Kane headlines Tottenham's 31-man squad for their pre-season tour to Perth, Bangkok and Singapore.

AFP

China wins more diving gold at worlds

Fukuoka, Japan - Chinese divers continued their dominance at the world championships in Japan on Monday, winning another two gold medals to make it seven out of seven so far.

Chang Yani and Chen Yiwen won the women's 3m synchronised springboard before compatriots Lian Junjie and Yang Hao took gold in the men's 10m synchronised event.

China won every diving gold at last year's world championships in Budapest and have so far maintained a perfect record in the southern Japanese city of Fukuoka.

Chen, who picked up a fourth world championships gold medal, said she preferred diving in pairs events because it gave her "a sense of security".

"The Chinese team is strong because we get a lot of support from our coaches," the 24-year-old said. "They have encouraged us for many years."

Chang and Chen scored 341.94 to finish ahead of Britain's Scarlett Mew Jensen and Yasmin Harper on 296.58 and Italy's Chiara Pellacani and Elena Bertocchi on 285.99.

In the men's 10m synchronised, Lian and Yang finished first with a score of 477.75. Ukraine's Oleksii Sereda and Kirill Boliukh were second on 439.32.

AFP

SHAKEEL, SALMAN TO PAKISTAN'S RESCUE



Pakistan's Agha Salman (R) and Saud Shakeel run between the wickets during the second day of the first Test against Sri Lanka in Galle on Monday (AFP)

Unbeaten century stand helps visitors reach 221 for 5 in Galle Test

Galle, Sri Lanka - An unbeaten century stand between Saud Shakeel and Agha Salman rescued Pakistan from a precarious 101-5 on the second day of the rain-hit opening Test on Monday.

In response to Sri Lanka's 312, Pakistan reached 221-5 when rain stopped play with the tourists still 91 runs behind.

Sri Lanka's left-arm spinner Prabath Jayasuriya took three wickets, including skipper Babar Azam.

Sri Lanka batsman Dhananjaya de Silva had earlier made 122 to hand the hosts a respectable total.

Pakistan faltered in their reply before Shakeel, on 69, and Salman, on 61, put on 120 runs to steady the innings and thwart the Sri Lankan spinners.

The left- and right-hand batting combination of Shakeel and Salman mixed the right dose of caution and aggression, with 12 boundaries and a six between them. The pair showed maturity in tackling the spinners by using their feet to get to the pitch of the ball, with Pakistan scoring at nearly five runs an over.

Sri Lanka had come out roaring when pace bowler Kasun Rajitha got Imam-ul-Haq out for one

and Jayasuriya sent back Abdullah Shafique for 19.

The left-handed Shan Masood hit back as he smashed 39 off 30 balls but fell lbw to Ramesh Mendis, who was denied the wicket by the on-field umpire before Sri Lanka successfully reviewed.

Azam fell when he got an inside edge onto his pads and the ball looped to short leg, taken by wicketkeeper Sadeera Samarawickrama.

De Silva earlier moved from his overnight 94 to register his 10th Test ton in his 50th match to bolster Sri Lanka's position from a shaky 54-4 on Sunday.

Pace spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi, fellow quick Naseem Shah and leg-spinner Abrar Ahmed ended on three wickets each to bowl out Sri Lanka and lunch was called.

The second day's play began early with revised timings for each of the three sessions and de Silva soon got to his hundred off Shaheen. De Silva, who smashed 12 fours and three sixes, got useful runs with the lower order before he finally fell to Naseem, who struck twice after Pakistan took the second new ball.

AFP

Australia retain Women's Ashes despite Sciver-Brunt century

London, United Kingdom - Australia retained the Women's Ashes with a thrilling three-run win over England in the second one-day international at Southampton despite an unbeaten hundred from home batter Nat Sciver-Brunt.

England, set 283 to win, finished agonisingly short on 279-7 when, with five needed for victory off the last ball, Sciver-Brunt could only manage a single against Jess Jonassen to be 111 not out.

Victory gave double white-ball world champions Australia an unassailable 8-6 points lead in the multi-format series. The most England can now hope for is to end all square at 8-8 by winning the third and final ODI in Taunton on Tuesday.

But even if the series is shared, holders Australia will still retain the Ashes.

Key to Sunday's success was



Australian players celebrate their win

the last over of their innings when Georgia Wareham smashed 26 runs off England quick Lauren Bell.

"We still haven't played our best cricket yet, which is a little bit scary at times, but we're obviously really chuffed," said Australia captain Alyssa Healy.

The wicketkeeper, leading the side after regular skipper Meg Lanning was ruled out of the tour on medical grounds, added: "We came here to win the Ashes and we've retained them."

"There's still one game to go so we're really looking forward to putting our best foot forward again."

England skipper Heather Knight said: "How Nat played to get so close was brilliant... We're disappointed. The way we've fought back, we thought we had momentum and we had belief we can win."

AFP

Ian Botham auctions off 1981 Ashes mementoes

London, United Kingdom - England cricket great Ian Botham has sold off more than 200 souvenirs from his career at a London auction, with items from his celebrated role in a 1981 Ashes triumph among the most highly-valued lots.

The ball with which he took five Australia wickets for one run as England came from behind to win the fourth Test of that series at Edgbaston sold for £20,000 (\$26,000, 23,000 euros).

And a stump marked "Headingley 81" from the previous match, taken as a souvenir by Botham after his astounding 149 not out helped England win after being made to follow-on, sold for £11,000.

His man-of-the-match medal from Headingley - Botham also took six wickets in



Ian botham

Australia's first innings and then made exactly 50 - went under the hammer at £19,000, more than double the pre-sale estimate. And yet the most expensive item in the auction, held at The Oval ground, had no connection to cricket.

A Manchester United shirt worn by Sammy McIlroy in the 1977 Charity Shield against Liverpool in Wembley, later given

to Botham by the Northern Ireland footballer, sold for £23,000 - more than seven times its original estimate of £3,000.

Botham, 67, was one of the best all-rounders in cricket history during a 15-year Test career from 1977-92.

He scored over 5,000 runs in 102 matches, including 14 hundreds, and, as a fast-medium bowler, took a then-England record 383 wickets. He also held 120 catches, many of them brilliant efforts in the slips.

He transformed the destiny of the England-Australia Test series in 1981. With his side 1-0 down after a defeat at Nottingham and a draw at Lord's, where he was out for nought in both innings, Botham resigned as England captain.

AFP

Sweden's Norrman beats Kimsey in playoff for PGA Barbasol title

Washington, United States - Sweden's Vincent Norrman won a playoff over England's Nathan Kimsey with a par on the first extra hole Sunday to capture the US PGA Tour Barbasol Championship.

The 25-year-old from Stockholm sank a clutch seven-foot bogey putt on the 18th hole in regulation just to force a playoff, then pitched from the rough to two feet in the playoff and made a par putt for the victory.

"I don't think I can process this for a while. I'm at a loss for words," Norrman said. "It's even beyond (a dream). I don't think I've dreamt this big yet honestly. It's amazing."

Norrman fired a six-under par 66 to finish alongside Kimsey on 22-under 266 after 72 holes at Keene Trace Golf Club in Nicholasville, Kentucky.

The US PGA Tour rookie claimed his first title in only is 23rd tour start, the 286th-ranked standout booking a place in next week's British Open.

Norrman, whose best prior PGA result was a share of eighth in May at the Byron Nelson, wasn't sure how the triumph would alter his goals and plans.

Norrman led Kimsey by one at the 18th tee but his first two shots found the left rough. Then Norrman blasted over the green, pitched to just outside seven feet



Vincent Norrman of Sweden celebrates winning the Barbasol Championship at Keene Trace Golf Club on Sunday

I don't think I can process this for a while. I'm at a loss for words. It's even beyond (a dream)

VINCENT NORRMAN

and saw his bogey putt catch the right edge and fall in to force a playoff. I just hit it left off the tee and I had a terrible lie," Norrman said. "It was an impossible shot, I felt like. That was a really good bogey."

The playoff began at the par-

4 18th with Norrman finding right greenside rough and Kimsey a left greenside bunker.

Kimsey blasted out to 15 feet while Norrman pitched to two feet.

Kimsey two-putted for bogey and Norrman tapped in moments later for the victory.

"Have a chance to win a PGA Tour event, I can't complain really," Kimsey said.

Kimsey, a 30-year-old Englishman who plays on the DP World Tour, missed a chance to become the first player since American Jim Benepe at the 1988 Western Open to win in his PGA Tour debut.

AFP



Tadej Pogacar, wearing the best young rider's white jersey (R) cycles ahead of Jumbo-Visma's Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard

Tour de France duel could be decided at individual time trial

Passy, France - Jonas Vingegaard and Tadej Pogacar remain neck-and-neck in the standings after two hard weeks of the Tour de France, but stage 16's individual time trial on Tuesday could be the moment that decides the title.

Defending champion Vingegaard remains 10 seconds ahead of two-time winner Pogacar in what is proving to be another gripping duel for the yellow jersey.

However, neither rider can go into Tuesday's stage with the utmost confidence of beating the other because one slip on the 22.4km race against the clock

can blow away two weeks of hard work.

Riders embark individually at two-minute intervals in reverse order of the current overall standings.

That means that Jumbo-Visma rider Vingegaard is last down the ramp at Passy, the picturesque town in view of Mont Blanc.

The Dane has spent the past two weeks insisting he never thinks about his rival. But will he be able to do that with the swashbuckling Slovenian out ahead of him on what is a truly challenging course?

Three years ago Pogacar

bamboozled Primož Roglič in a similar situation by riding flat out from start to finish, to rip the title from his grasp at the last gasp.

Vingegaard, however, seems less sensitive to provocation.

"I like short, hard time trials like (Tuesday's), there will be lots of change of pace and I like that," explained the former fish factory worker.

"I have tested the course for the time trial and I like it too," said the UAE rider.

This is likely to be bluff.

"This is a time trial for real mountain men," explained course designer Thierry Gouvenou.

The last French Tour de France winner, Bernard Hinault, won a world championships that covered the same route and told AFP that Pogacar and Vingegaard will have no other rivals to worry about on this course.

"You really need to be at the summit of your art. It's made for these two guys here and I don't know anyone who can challenge them," Hinault said.

In the Alps, Vingegaard appears to have stemmed the tide. After three days of Pogacar clawing back time, the last two stages have been even.

The big question now remains which type of bike the riders

choose to best tackle a time trial featuring both flat and hilly sections.

Third-placed Carlos Rodríguez was interviewed Monday sat in front of a mountain bike.

"It's not worth the risk swapping bikes given what can go wrong," said Rodríguez.

Hinault agreed with him.

"Best start off on a light bike and give it absolutely everything," said the five-time Tour winner.

The course passes a statue of Hinault just ahead of the fearsome Cote de Domancy, a 2.5km ascent at 9.4 per cent gradient.

AFP

CLASSIFIEDS

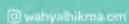
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BIRTHDAY WISHES

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MOOD – LIFTS

Sunshine Exercise

Sunlight triggers the release of serotonin – a hormone associated with boosting mood and helping one feel calm – in the brain. Use it to your advantage

If you seem to be feeling low and depressed, without any perceivable trigger, just hop outdoors and take a stroll in the sunshine... You will soon realise that the depression has vanished like morning dew and you are filled with a 'feel-good' sensation that came out of nowhere.

Medical research shows that in the absence of adequate Sun exposure, your serotonin levels can considerably lower. Low levels of serotonin are associated with a higher risk of major depression with seasonal pattern - formerly known as a 'seasonal affective disorder' or SAD.

There are several health benefits associated with catching moderate amounts of Sun rays such as more strong bones, healing skin conditions, cancer prevention and vitamin D intake. So learn to do the sunshine exercise to stay fit all year round.

The 'Sunshine Exercise' serves to test your sensory response to an imaginary Sun, as well as to practice stimulating every part of your body. Everyone has different physical and emotional reactions to the Sun. Once you learn how to recreate the Sun through your senses, you will realise it is most effective, as it is not about being struck by scorching heat, instead by a pleasant warmth.

While practising this exercise you might recall memories of times spent in the Sun, and the people who were with you at the time. Focus on how the Sun feels on each part of the body. Train your mind to stay with the exercise and not get distracted. You can



'Sunshine Exercise' serves to test your sensory response to an imaginary Sun, as well as to practice stimulating every part of your body. Once you learn how to recreate the Sun through your senses, you realise it is most effective

do this exercise indoors or outdoors. The sensation of the Sun touching your skin can be very soothing - you can use this exercise as a relaxation tool while waiting to go into an audition.

- Steps to do**
- Prepare before performing the exercise by being in the sunshine and feeling the Sun on all the different parts of your body.
 - In a class or at home, place an imaginary Sun in a spot of the space. Don't imagine

- yourself being in a place where you usually experienced the sunshine. Create a new home for the Sun in your room.
- After the relaxation exercise, close your eyes and feel the Sun in full detail on your skin, face, cheeks, nose, eyes, ears, mouth, forehead, and on every possible part of your body. Notice the intensity of your reactions and how your feelings from one side of your body to another.
 - Feel the warmth on each of your hands, fingers, feet, and toes. Feel the Sun on

- your shoulders and back and front of your torso, arms, and legs. Feel the strength of the heat through your clothing.
- Be creative. Imagine the feeling of the Sun on places where the Sun doesn't usually shine, such as the palms of your hands or the soles of your feet or your tongue. Note how the experience was on any particular part of your body where the warm Sun generated the most energetic impulses or sensations and note them in your Journal.

SUPERFOOD – YOGHURT

Nutritionally speaking, there is no standard definition, but a food which is a power house of many nutrients that keep us active, energetic, healthy and boosts our immunity, is a super food. There are many super foods and yoghurt is one among them.



NUTRITION & YOU

Today the market is flooded with foods titled as 'Super Foods'. Though many foods could be described as super, one needs to understand that no single food holds the key to good health or disease prevention. Since, we come across so many foods described as super foods, it may be worth looking at these foods more closely.

What makes a food super?
Nutritionally speaking, there is no standard definition, but a food which is a power house of many nutrients

that keep us active, energetic, healthy and boosts our immunity, is a super food. There are many super foods and yoghurt is one among them.

- Quick facts about yoghurt**
- Yoghurt is made by fermenting fresh milk with a yoghurt culture.
 - Yoghurt contain proteins, calcium, vitamins B6 and B12, riboflavin, and potassium and magnesium.
 - Protein is one of the most vital nutrient that helps in cell building, maintenance, transportation of nutrients, immunity building etc.
 - Calcium is the key nutrient for bone health and wound healing, while the other nutrients have other important functions in the body.
 - Some yoghurts contain active bacteria known as probiotics, which promote gut health. Probiotics are a type of healthy bacteria that help regulate the digestive system and decrease gas, bloating, diarrhoea and constipation.



Which type of yoghurt is best?
There are different types of yoghurt available in the market, like, Full-fat, Low fat, Reduced fat, Fruit Yogurt, Probiotic-added, Greek yoghurt etc. Plain yoghurt, be it home-made or the one available in the market, is always the best. Yoghurt with probiotics added is also a great choice. Fruit yoghurt available in the market is often loaded with sugar and various additives and chemicals.

Preparing fruit-flavoured yoghurt at home is a healthier option. Pureeing or chopping up fruits of your choice and mixing with yoghurt is an easy way of making fruit yoghurt at home.

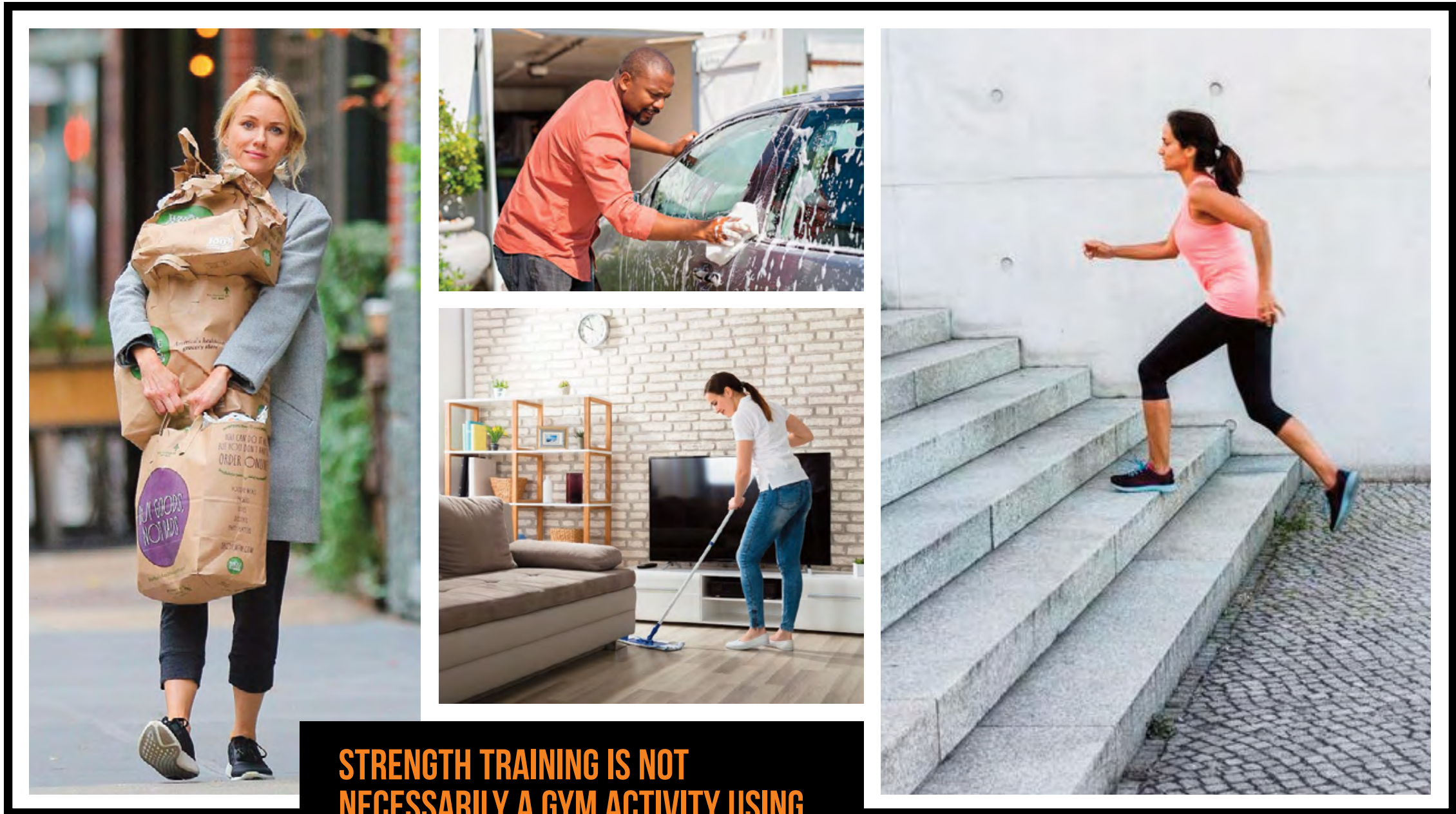
- What makes yoghurt a superfood?**
- Packed with many nutrients, it is definitely a great health food. Being a great source of calcium and protein it can offer protection for bones and teeth.

- For people on a weight-loss programme, low-fat yoghurt can be a part of daily meal plan.
- Yoghurt can satisfy sugar cravings and is also a great food when one is experiencing hunger pangs.
- Probiotics present in yoghurt, not only boost gut health, but also have an impact on brain function.
- Since gut health has a direct relation to immunity, yoghurt does help in boosting immunity.
- Some studies indicate that consuming yogurt may help protect against Type 2 diabetes.
- It is a nutritious option when people find it difficult to chew their food or having issues related to digestion, or when on soft, semi-solid diet.
- Yoghurt contains less lactose than milk because the lactose is used up in the fermentation process, hence it is also good for people having lactose intolerance or allergies.

(Vandana Chawla is an Online Nutrition Expert and a Registered Nutritionist-UKVRN)

STRENGTH TRAINING

EVERYDAY FITNESS



Don't resist the child-like temptation to run down the stairs instead of waiting for the elevator, avoid using trolleys out of the supermarkets - carry your own bags instead, don't hire hands for mopping/cleaning/gardening - do it yourself.

This way, you can save time and money on joining a gym, and at the same time, get the required strength training you seek by doing artificial exercises that imitate your daily chores at home.

If you've been hearing about the importance of strength training but haven't started a new lifting routine yet, take heart - you may already be engaging in more physical activities than you realise.

STRENGTH TRAINING IS NOT NECESSARILY A GYM ACTIVITY USING WEIGHTS AND EQUIPMENT. IF YOU DILIGENTLY PERFORM DAILY CHORES, YOU COULD BE GETTING THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF STRENGTH TRAINING WITHOUT REALISING IT

There are plenty of things you do each day that qualify as strength training, says Dr. Jay Shah, a family medicine and primary care sports medicine physician with Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center in Pomona, California. These include carrying groceries, climbing stairs, gardening, washing the car, playing with your kids, walking the dog, and doing household chores like mopping floors,

cleaning up cabinets, arranging stuff in your storeroom, moving furniture, etc.

These activities are functional strength training. In other words, by engaging in such activities, you're building strength and endurance to function over the long term - the very same results that can achieved by gym activities.

This all raises questions, though, what ex-

actly is 'strength training', and why should you be engaging in it?

WHAT IS STRENGTH TRAINING?

Also called resistance training, strength training refers to physical activity in which your muscles contract against an outside force, such as dumbbells, hand weights or weight machines.

Strength training also contributes to a variety of health benefits, including maintaining bone density, improving mobility, muscle strength and endurance, stabilising joints, supporting good cognitive function, enhancing mood and self-esteem, boosting metabolism to burn calories and maintain ideal weight, and decreasing blood pressure/supporting good heart health.

HOW TO GET STARTED?

To get into the strength-training groove, you should start small and build up your strength over time. Gradually increase frequency, intensity and duration of your exercises to build muscle growth.

Daily tasks can be altered to induce strength training. These include opting for the stairs instead of the elevator, walking or biking to work, taking a walk during break time, etc. One can also add some pushups, sit-ups, lunges or wall sits during break times.

Also, one should focus while doing daily tasks, like tightening the core while performing household chores, and using proper lifting techniques when lifting heavy items. One can also include strength training in daily life by asking family members to join in.

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Varicocelectomy for male infertility

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Male factor infertility has become an increasingly prevalent issue worldwide. Among the various causes, varicocele, an abnormal enlargement and dilation of the veins within the scrotum, has gained significant attention due to its association with impaired sperm production, motility, and morphology.

Varicocele is considered to be a leading cause of male infertility, and varicocelectomy, a surgical procedure to remove or repair the affected veins, has emerged as an effective option.

WHAT IS VARICOCELECTOMY?

Varicocelectomy, a surgical intervention, is primarily performed to correct the

underlying varicocele and restore normal blood flow within the scrotum. The procedure aims to improve semen parameters, including sperm count, concentration, motility, and morphology, thus increasing the chances of conception.

The most common surgical techniques employed include open surgery, laparoscopic varicocelectomy, and micro-surgical subinguinal varicocelectomy. Each technique has its advantages and disadvantages, and the choice is usually based on factors such as the severity of the varicocele.

EVIDENCE OF EFFICACY

Several studies have highlighted the positive impact of varicocelectomy on male fertility. A controlled trial conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) demonstrated significant improvements in

sperm parameters, pregnancy rates, and live birth rates after varicocelectomy compared to observation alone. Similarly, meta-analyses and systematic reviews have consistently shown favourable outcomes.

POTENTIAL MECHANISMS

The exact mechanisms underlying the improvement observed after varicocelectomy are not yet fully understood. However, various hypotheses have been proposed, including the reduction of testicular heat stress, correction of oxygenation imbalance, normalisation of hormonal profiles, reduction of oxidative stress, and prevention of testicular damage.

PATIENT SELECTION AND COUNSELLING

While varicocelectomy can offer promising results, proper patient selection is crucial.

Evaluation and counselling should involve a comprehensive assessment of semen parameters, medical history, and the couple's fertility status. Factors such as the degree of varicocele, duration of infertility, female partner's fertility, and other potential contributing causes should be taken into account. Accurate counselling helps set realistic expectations.

ENHANCING NATURAL FERTILITY

Varicocelectomy, as a surgical intervention for varicocele, plays a significant role in the management of male infertility. Evidence suggests that the procedure can improve semen parameters, increase pregnancy rates, and ultimately enhance natural fertility. It is generally recommended for men with clinically significant varicoceles and abnormal semen.

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