

► NEWS BRIEF

OIA, INDUSTRIAL INNOVATION ACADEMY JOIN HANDS TO SUPPORT SMES

Muscat - As part of its efforts to enhance local content, promote local products and support Omani SMEs, Oman Investment Authority (OIA) signed a memorandum of cooperation (MoC) with Industrial Innovation Academy on Monday.

The MoC aims to start industrial activities in diverse economic sectors, and examine and analyse value chains, explore investment opportunities targeting SMEs, and train national talent in order to meet market needs through specialised business accelerators.



Indian Ambassador lauds Oman for G20 engagement

Budget surplus shrinks

Attributed mainly to sharp decline in Oman’s gas revenues this year

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman’s budget surplus shrank 31% to RO702mn in the first seven months of 2023, compared to RO1.019bn recorded in the corresponding period last year, mainly due to a sharp decline in the sultanate’s gas revenues this year.

Total public revenues decreased to RO7.183bn in the January-July period this year, down 10% compared to RO8.003bn registered in the same period of 2022, according to the *Fiscal Performance Bulletin* published by the Ministry of Finance on Monday.

Net oil revenue amounted to RO3.714bn, a decrease of 3% compared to RO3.827bn registered over the same period in 2022. Oman’s average oil price stood at US\$83 per barrel and average oil production was 1,058,000 barrels per day during the first seven months of 2023.

Net gas revenue also dropped - 35% to RO1.329bn in the first seven months of 2023, compared to RO2.056bn registered in the same period of 2022.

‘This decline (in net gas revenue) is due to the deduction of gas purchase and transport ex-



penses from the total revenue collected from the Integrated Gas Company,’ the Ministry of Finance bulletin noted.

The government’s current revenue, however, increased 1% to RO2.132bn during the January-July period of 2023 against RO2.107bn collected in the same period of 2022.

Spending down 7% Oman’s total public spending for

the first seven months of 2023 decreased 7% to RO6.481bn compared to actual spending over the same period in 2022.

Of the total public spending, current expenditure amounted to RO4.836bn, down 11% compared to RO5.430bn registered over the same period in 2022.

During the first seven months of 2023, development expenditure of ministries and government units totalled RO491mn,

representing 55% of the total development spending allocated for the full year 2023.

Oil product subsidies and other sectors’ subsidies amounted to RO180mn and RO11mn in the first seven months of 2023, respectively. Furthermore, an amount of RO233mn was transferred to the future debt obligations budget item, the ministry stated.

Omani citizens safe in Morocco: Embassy

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Morocco has confirmed the safety of all Omani citizens in the wake of the earthquake that struck the country on Friday.

The 6.8-magnitude quake struck the Atlas Mountains southwest of the tourist centre of Marrakesh, killing almost 2,500 people and injuring a similar number.

Ali bin Ahmed al Shanfari, Acting Chargé d’Affairs of Embassy of Oman in Rabat, said, “There is no report of any individual from the Omani community being injured; everyone - students, tourists and residents - is fine. However, the embassy continues to follow up on the wellbeing of citizens.”

He added, “Efforts are continuing to overcome the crisis and Morocco has Gulf, Arab and international solidarity to overcome it.” He expressed the embassy’s sincere condolences and sympathies to the families of the victims and prayed to Almighty Allah to heal the injured.

On Sunday, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal orders to dispatch rescue teams and relief and medical assistance to Morocco.

The Royal orders were within the framework of the brotherly relations between the two countries and in line with the sultanate’s humanitarian role to provide relief to those affected by natural calamities.

Israeli delegation makes first open visit to Saudi

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - An Israeli delegation attended a Unesco meeting in Riyadh on Monday, marking the country’s first publicly announced visit to Saudi Arabia as speculation grows about a potential normalisation of ties.

The five-member delegation arrived on Sunday, an Israeli official told AFP, for the meeting to update Unesco’s world heritage list of cultural and historic sites.

“We are happy to be here - it’s a good first step,” said the official, who did not want to be named given the sensitivities of the visit, during the meeting.

The team travelled through Dubai, the official said, as there are no direct flights between Israel and Saudi Arabia, and arrived on Sunday. They received their visas via Unesco.

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Dhakhliyah International Film Festival kicks off today

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The wilayat of Al Hamra is geared up to host the second edition of Dhakhliyah International Film Festival on Tuesday.

With participation from 21 countries, including Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the Netherlands and Portugal, the festival promises an expansive cinematic experience.

Speaking with *Muscat Daily*, Mohammed al Kindi, Director of the festival, said, "Al Hamra was selected as the festival's backdrop not only for its cultural significance but also its standing as a prominent tourist destination."

Organised by Oman Film Society, the festival has the backing of both the government and private sectors.



Mohammed al Kindi

About the festival's objectives, Kindi said, "Our aim is twofold. Firstly, give filmmakers a platform to showcase their works, and secondly, to amplify our initiative 'Make Your Film in Oman,' inviting global cinema professionals to explore the sultanate's rich cultural narrative."

Emphasising the universal appeal and economic weight of the film industry, Kindi said, "The allure of fresh, dynamic filming locations is ever-present, irrespective of a country's film production status."

For this edition, the festival attracted 155 films, of which 46 made the cut spread across various categories - 21 feature films, ten documentaries, nine animation films and six thematic films.

Alongside film screenings, attendees can look forward to diverse events hosted across Dhakhliyah's picturesque locales, including a seminar exploring Bahraini cinema's legacy, a lecture on the history of money in Oman, and a seminar on the interconnectedness on cinema and tourism.

Silver, bronze for Omani martial artists at Asian jiu-jitsu championship

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Abdullah bin Khamis al Farsi, 30, from Sur claimed a silver medal at the AJP Tour Asia Continental Jiu-Jitsu Championship 2023 held in Shabab al Ahli Club, Dubai from September 8 to 10.

The championship saw participation of over 2,000 martial artists from several countries, including China, Iran, Singapore, Kazakhstan and Japan, in addition to the GCC states. The competition included categories for children, amateurs, professionals and masters.

Besides Abdullah, participants from Oman included Ali al Nabhani, Mohammed al Farsi, Akrama al Araiimi and Fahad al Araiimi.

"Ali won the third place in the 77kg (blue belt) amateur category, while I came second in the 62kg (brown belt) professional category. Mohammed reached the semi-finals and Akrama reached the quarter-finals in their respective categories," Abdullah told *Muscat Daily*.

Reaching the finals required immense concentration and determination, he said. Preparations



Abdullah bin Khamis al Farsi

Currently there are eight academies for jiu-jitsu in Oman and many jiu-jitsu athletes

ABDULLAH AL FARSI

for the championship involved training five hours daily.

He is keen to continue representing the sultanate at international meets and raising the Omani flag in different countries.

Talking about the challenges jiu-jitsu athletes face, Abdullah said, "We need significant financial support to participate in regional and world championships. Private companies that help us financially will benefit because we will promote them in countries where we go to compete."

According to Abdullah, currently there are eight academies for jiu-jitsu in Oman and many athletes, including a few who engage in it professionally.

"We thank our families for the support and we hope to receive financial aid to continue participating in international events."

OPAL signs agreement to develop experts' database

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Energy Association (OPAL) signed an agreement with Dawam on Monday to develop and manage a platform that serves as an integrated database of experts from various fields and specialisations, including retirees and jobseekers.

The platform offers experts an opportunity to provide their services and expertise to the public and private sectors. This will contribute to enhancing co-operation between the two sectors and promote sustainable development in the sultanate.

The agreement was signed by Abdulrahman Humeid al Yahya'ee, CEO of OPAL, and Laila Said al Harthi, CEO and Co-founder of Dawam.

The signing was attended by H H Sayyida Mayan Shihab al



Said and several OPAL and Dawam officials.

Dawam is an Omani platform that serves the labour market, providing comprehensive solutions - both employment and freelance opportunities.

Through its 'Jobs Gateway', the company links skilled individuals with job openings in di-

verse industries, empowering youth to advance their careers.

'Our main goal is to bridge the gap between talent and opportunities, facilitating meaningful connections and enabling individuals and businesses to flourish in today's dynamic job market,' the company says in its mission statement.

Research recommends adopting social media in distance learning

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A research project conducted at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences Rustaq (UTAS Rustaq) has shown the positive impact of social media on higher education distance learning. It was part of a research initiative funded by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation's Block Funding Programme designed to foster a culture of research and innovation in the sultanate.

Titled 'Effectiveness of social media networks for distance education among students of UTAS Rustaq,' it was undertaken



Dr Mimi el Sayed Ahmed Ismail

by student researchers Ali al Rasbi, Omar al Zadjali and Ahmed al Muqbali, guided by Dr Mimi el Sayed Ahmed Ismail, Professor of Educational Psychology at the College of Education, UTAS Rustaq.

Aiming to gauge the effectiveness of social media in distance education at UTAS Rustaq, the study examined potential differences based on gender, area of study and academic stage. The study sample comprised 40 students from UTAS Rustaq, selected randomly.

This research holds significance as it sheds light on students' readiness to utilise social media as a learning tool. It also addresses prevalent misconceptions about these platforms and emphasises their potential in shaping the future of distance learning, especially given the challenges faced by institutions new to online education.

The findings indicate a moderate effectiveness level of social media platforms for distance learning at UTAS Rustaq. Additionally, a significant number of students showed a preference for learning via social media over traditional methods.

Consequently, the study suggests that educators receive training on harnessing social media for academic purposes. Additionally, it underscores the need for community awareness programmes to educate about the advantages of these platforms in education. It also advocates for enhanced social media infrastructure across educational entities in Oman.

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Mwasalat transports over 166,000 to Darbat during khareef

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman National Transport Company - Mwasalat - has transported over 166,000 passengers on its buses to Darbat Waterfalls during khareef season in Dhofar this year.

A statement issued by Mwasalat said it transported 166,864 visitors to this natural wonder from July 27 to August 31. 'This service has contributed to facilitating visitors' access to Darbat Waterfalls and saving time to enjoy the breathtaking natural landscapes of Dhofar,' it stated.

Mwasalat transported over 2mn passengers on its buses and ferries in the first six months of 2023.

This figure represents a substantial increase compared to the 1.43mn passengers serviced during the first half of 2022.

Indian ambassador lauds Oman

Oman has contributed greatly by giving its perspective during the G20 process at the special invitation of India

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Indian Ambassador to Oman was all praises for the sultanate when he met the press on Monday in Muscat to share India's experience while conducting the G20 Summit under its presidency.

H E Amit Narang said that the sultanate - as a special guest country in the summit - hugely contributed to the summit discussions, which spanned over several sectors including sustain-

able living, social security, fight against corruption and others.

Nine Omani ministers, besides a battery of officials from the sultanate participated in the G20 process at the special invitation of the Republic of India.

Oman has contributed greatly by giving its perspective at the global platform.

"To give you a sense of how tangible this effort was, I am happy to mention that Foreign Minister H E Sayyid Badr al Busaidi in his remarks at the Voice of Global South Summit had laid out 'social justice' and ensuring a 'just transition' as key priorities for Oman.

"Both of these priorities were well captured in the New Delhi Declaration," the Indian ambassador noted.

H E Narang said that the global leaders are concerned about the rising inequalities within a country and among different countries and the paragraph 4 of the New Delhi Declaration specifically ad-

H E Sayyid Badr at the Voice of Global South Summit had laid out 'social justice' and a 'just transition' as key priorities for Oman. These priorities were well captured in the New Delhi Declaration

H E AMIT NARANG

resses this.

"Together we have an opportunity to build a better future. Just energy transitions can improve jobs and livelihoods, and strengthen economic resilience. We affirm that no country should have to choose between fighting poverty and fighting for



our planet. We will pursue development models that implement sustainable, inclusive and just transitions globally, while leaving no one behind', reads para 4 of the G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration.

The Indian ambassador made a special reference to the India-

boost trade, deliver energy resources and improve digital connectivity.

Asked about Oman's significance in this particular project given the fact that the sultanate is part of an ambitious regional rail network, the Indian ambassador chose to allow things to unfold as the project goes into its implementation phase.

"What I can say is that it's an initiative with a lot of promise. It can be the blueprint for the collective rejuvenation of the economy of the entire region. As the project moves into the implementation phase, we'll get to know more details."

As far as the sultanate and India is concerned, the Indian ambassador said, "We're already very close economic powers and our partnership spans over several sectors, including energy, information technology etc."

He asserted that both the countries are united in their drive in infrastructure creation. "India is on a record breaking

speed for infrastructure creation within the country. In Oman as well, they have ambitious plans including for railways. These are plans in which India can be a valuable partner."

While talking about economic partnership between the two countries against the backdrop of G20's assertion on greater connectivity and trade relations, the Indian ambassador expressed pride in informing the media that the bilateral trade between the two countries more than doubled during the past two years.

"It has gone from US\$5.6bn to US\$12.4bn in the last financial year," he said, to buttress his comment that the economic engagement between India and Oman is on an upward swing.

H E Narang believes this growth is just the tip of the iceberg. "Both countries are working together to further upscale their economic engagements and explore the full potential of their partnership."

Pact to treat industrial, hazardous waste

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Oman Environmental Services Holding Company be'ah has signed an agreement with Oman SATS LLC, to treat industrial and hazardous waste.

This collaboration is in line with the government's goal to cultivate a secure, eco-friendly environment, consistent with globally recognised standards.

The pact was signed by Eng Abdul Karim bin Qasim al

Balushi, CEO of Hazardous Waste Management Operations at be'ah, and Siang Tang (ST) TAN, CEO of Oman SATS.

Balushi said, "We will work together in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way for a proper and safe disposal of industrial and hazardous waste in accordance with the national strategy for managing waste."

He highlighted the importance of a circular economy in achieving a competitive edge. TAN added to this, pinpointing

environmental conservation as a paramount sustainability pillar of the company. He underscored Oman SATS's commitment to minimising environmental impacts by adopting best local and international waste management practices.

Over the years, be'ah has signed numerous agreements with diverse entities, ensuring a commitment to environmental preservation in line with Oman's regulatory framework. It also pioneered an electronic transport

document system. It mandates companies disposing of waste to provide documented evidence of appropriate packaging and coding. This ensures the waste's safe transit to be'ah's treatment facilities. Additionally, it has established protocols for companies desiring to transport hazardous waste, requiring online registration and compliance with set standards.

Oman SATS is the cargo terminal operator at Muscat International Airport.

Use of treated water in farming to boost food security: Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Governor of Dhofar, H H Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, inaugurated a workshop on Monday focusing on the novel national initiative to use treated water in farming. This move is a crucial step to bolster the sultanate's food security sector, with several officials and stakeholders attending the workshop.

Championed by the National Employment Programme, the initiative underscores the potential of integrating treated water in innovative agricultural projects.

It aims to foster sustainable agriculture by tapping into water recovered from waste. By doing so, it would have advanced farming technologies integrated to broaden the local agricultural product supply chains so as to make those products reach consumers ef-



fortlessly.

A central objective of this initiative is to stimulate growth in the critical agricultural sector, facilitating employment opportunities and motivating small to medium enterprises to venture into the realm.

Among the workshop's highlights was the bouquet of services this initiative promises. These range from marketing and endorsing projects and products, offering technical support, imparting training, driving research and development, to providing the requisite infrastructure for an array of projects.

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BRIEFS
Japan economic growth revised down
Japanese growth in the three months to June was revised down to 1.2% on weak domestic demand and corporate investment, official data showed.
The preliminary estimate of 1.5% from August 15 had smashed estimates and been the fastest rate since the fourth quarter of 2020 in the world's third-biggest economy.
The new revised figure of 1.2% also came below the market expectation of 1.4%, as households and businesses face inflation and soaring energy costs.
Domestic demand fell 0.6%, rather than a fall of 0.3% seen earlier, the Cabinet Office said.
Capital investment by businesses dropped 1.0%, although it was earlier thought to be unchanged from the previous quarter.
AFP

Oman issues ESG reporting guidelines for listed firms

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) issued guidelines on Monday for listed companies to report their environmental, social, and governance (ESG) performance on the electronic platform of the Omani bourse.

MSX encourages all publicly listed companies to voluntarily report their ESG performance for 2024, covering their 2023 activities. Starting in 2025, reporting on the 2024 activities will be mandatory, as stated in MSX's ESG Disclosure Guideline document.

"By following these guidelines, companies can publicly disclose ESG information that communicates their commitments and activities while addressing key stakeholders, including but not limited to investors, clients, partners, suppliers, employees, and the overall community," MSX stated.

The Muscat Stock Exchange's ESG Guidelines align with the GCC ESG Disclosure Metrics for listed companies published in 2022.

According to the exchange, developing these guidelines was a natural step following MSX's participation in the UN Sustainable Stock Exchange (SSE) initiative in March 2022, which influences the growth of a sustainable and inclusive financial culture through ESG best practices.

The UN SSE collaborates with stock exchanges through technical assistance, consensus building, and research to contribute to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to stimulate investment for a sustainable future.

Exchanges worldwide partner with UN SSE to work towards a



Muscat Stock Exchange launched a platform on its website with the aim of publishing ESG disclosures (ONA)

MSX encourages all publicly listed companies to voluntarily report their ESG performance for 2024, covering their 2023 activities. Starting in 2025, reporting on the 2024 activities will be mandatory

common objective of fostering financial markets that support the growth of sustainable and responsible business practices.

The MSX ESG Guideline includes information on the business case for ESG, global trends, frameworks, and standards that aid in facilitating reporting exercises. It also provides information on 30 ESG metrics aligned with the recommendations of the UN SSE initiative and the World Federation of Exchanges (WFE).

As per the guidelines, the business case for ESG reporting includes several factors, such as meeting investor demands,

achieving operational improvements, complying with an evolving regulatory environment, enhancing financial performance, improving reputation, and effective risk management.

"We encourage companies to go beyond these guidelines and publish reports in accordance with global reporting standards that best suit their needs," MSX said.

Haitham al Salmi, CEO of Muscat Stock Exchange, in his foreword in the ESG Guidelines document, said, "Our aim is to build a sustainable and inclusive financial culture by adopting the best ESG practices, corresponding to Oman Vision 2040 for achieving a diverse and sustainable economy. These guidelines are intended to meet the current and future needs of investors while also promoting sustainable development, a crucial part of our world's future. Companies play a vital role in achieving this noble goal."

While profitability and financial success are important aspects of businesses, sustainability cannot be measured solely by financial indicators, Salmi said. "It also encompasses social responsibility, environmental protection, and strong governance. Therefore, MSX is committed to enhancing transparency in these areas as a matter of responsibility. Good governance is an essential pillar for achieving sustainable development and building a strong economy."

On a regional level, MSX is a member of the GCC Stock Exchanges ESG Committee. MSX played an active role in the development of the GCC ESG Disclosure Metrics for listed companies. The issuance of these standards for GCC-listed companies is a significant milestone in promoting ESG considerations in the region and aligning GCC markets with global best practices.

Oman, Dubai Customs to enhance collaboration to boost bilateral trade

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A delegation from the Directorate General of Customs of the Royal Oman Police recently visited Dubai Customs to strengthen cooperation and collaboration in order to boost trade between the sultanate and the UAE.

During the visit, the Omani delegation, led by Major Khalifa bin Talib al Masqari, Director of Dhofar Customs, and Captain Yusuf bin Ahmed al Balushi, discussed cooperation with Dubai Customs. They also explored the advancements made in customs operations, according to an Emirates News Agency (WAM) report.

According to the WAM report, Masqari expressed Oman's commitment to enhancing collaboration with Dubai Customs to boost trade between the UAE and Oman. He commended Dubai Customs for improving customs services and emphasised the importance of sharing



During the visit, Omani delegation received an overview of Dubai Customs' advancements, including Mirsal 2 System's role in automating customs transactions

customs-related experiences and expertise among GCC countries to support economic progress.

Corporation, welcomed the Omani delegation and highlighted Dubai's dedication to sharing practical expertise for mutual economic growth and streamlined passenger movement.

Musabih emphasised the importance of strengthening cooperation among GCC customs authorities and recognised Oman as a key regional trading partner. He also pointed out Dubai's significant economic

achievements, with a remarkable increase in non-oil foreign trade in the first half of 2023.

"This growth demands ongoing development of customs services to accommodate evolving trade needs. Dubai's economic agenda aims to double its foreign trade value by 2033, with Dubai Customs already making substantial progress."

During the visit, the Omani delegation received an overview of Dubai Customs' advancements, including the Mirsal 2 System's role in automating customs transactions. Field visits showcased key customs facilities and their roles, such as monitoring and tracking suspicious shipments and advanced training programs using modern technologies to prepare customs personnel.

The delegation also toured various customs centers, witnessing their contributions to facilitating trade, and visited Dubai International Airport to learn about streamlined customs procedures.



Asyad awards RO38mn contracts to local suppliers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's integrated logistics services provider, Asyad Group, announced that it provided approximately RO38mn worth of business opportunities for local suppliers and SMEs during the first half of 2023.

These opportunities were generated through more than 5,000 contracts awarded by Asyad Group during the first six months of this year. Among these, over 2,000 contracts (worth more than RO10mn) were awarded to

small and medium-sized enterprises holding the Riyada Card. These contracts benefited more than 600 SMEs, as reported by the Oman News Agency.

Asyad Group emphasised that these contracts offer business opportunities in various local projects across diverse economic and commercial sectors.

The group underlined its commitment to establishing robust local supply chains by forming strategic partnerships with private sector companies and SMEs to localise their procurement from the domestic market.

Oil and gas sector emission reduction pledges stalling: Report

Paris, France – Oil and gas sector emission reduction pledges have stalled and in some cases gone backwards, a recently released report said, warning that many corporate climate plans were not credible.

Fossil fuel use is set to be the main bone of contention at key UN talks aimed at curbing climate change, starting on November 30 in the oil-rich United Arab Emirates.

A report by financial think tank Carbon Tracker assessed and ranked emissions reductions commitments by 25 of the world's largest oil and gas firms, as measured by 2022 production

volumes.

According to its criteria, all but one of the companies' emissions goals are not aligned with the 2015 Paris Agreement's aspirational target of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

The weakest commitments came from US major ExxonMobil and five majority state-owned oil firms: Saudi Aramco, Brazil's Petrobras and Chinese companies Sinopec, PetroChina and CNOOC. Aramco was ranked at the bottom because it was the only company to limit emissions reductions targets to assets it wholly owns and operates.



Carbon Tracker assessed emissions reductions commitments by 25 of the world's largest oil and gas firms

It has only pledged to reduce emissions against amounts forecast under "business-as-usual" scenarios and set no baseline, Carbon Tracker said.

Some 16 firms only covered operational emissions and failed to take into account indirect emissions linked to the full life cycle and use of their products.

Others such as British-Dutch giant Shell and Norway's Equinor have 2050 net-zero goals covering full life cycle emissions, but have not set interim targets.

Some company pledges have regressed since Carbon Tracker's 2022 analysis.

BP watered down a previous

2030 production cut target and Shell has announced its "liquids" production will remain stable to the end of this decade, the report noted, referring to liquefied natural gas and liquefied natural petroleum.

Divestments and selling assets do not necessarily reduce emissions, and a reliance on third-party offsets and unproven technology undermine the credibility of climate plans, said report co-author Saidrasul Ashrafkhanov. That clashes with demands by other nations to phase out "unabated" fossil fuel use.

AFP

EU cuts eurozone 2023 growth forecast

European Commission predicted German economy would contract by 0.4% in 2023 compared to a previous forecast

Brussels, Belgium – The European Commission cut its 2023 and 2024 eurozone economic growth forecasts on Monday, with the single currency area weighed down by Germany's poor performance.

The EU's executive arm predicted the German economy would contract by 0.4% in 2023, compared to a previous forecast of 0.2% growth.

Germany faces recession in its vast industrial sector and a lacklustre performance in exports, both of which have significant impacts for the whole of the economy.

In its report, the commission pointed to manufacturing weakness and said Germany was "hit particularly hard" by energy price shocks linked to the war in Ukraine.

The European Central Bank's efforts to tame inflation via interest rate-hikes also contributed to the slowdown in the eurozone, the report added, days before the ECB meets to decide whether to raise borrowing costs again or pause its campaign.

The International Monetary

Fund had already predicted Germany would be the only major advanced economy to shrink in 2023.

Growth in the eurozone and the European Union as a whole will continue but will be lower than predicted earlier this year.

In May, the commission said the eurozone would grow by 1.1% in 2023 – but revised that on Monday to 0.8%.

"While we avoided a recession last winter, the multiple headwinds facing the EU economy this year have led to somewhat weaker growth momentum than we projected in the spring," the economy commissioner, Paolo Gentiloni, said during a press conference.

The commission in its report said there would be "slowing economic activity in the summer and months ahead, with continued weakness in industry and fading momentum in services, despite a strong tourism season in many parts of Europe".

Europe will also not be able to "count on strong support" from exports amid weak global growth and demand.



European Commissioner for Economy Paolo Gentiloni speaks at the press conference in Brussels, Belgium

'Sick man' Germany?

Gentiloni, however, sounded an optimistic note for improvement in Germany's economy.

"The situation of domestic consumption, domestic demand, household purchasing power, could be improved in the coming months and this could

bring the German economy back to a growth trajectory," he told reporters in Brussels.

But, he added, "the structural challenges on energy and other aspects are there. You don't solve this in a couple of weeks".

The gloomy German data prompted an Economist cover

story in August that asked: "Is Germany once again the sick man of Europe?"

Asked whether he would agree with the "sick man" description, Gentiloni rejected using such titles in the EU's analysis.

"I don't think we can base our

analysis on titles on the cover of newspapers," he said, adding: "Germany is a strong economy with the tools and possibility to recover."

Stubborn inflation

The commission also pointed to repeated interest rate hikes by the ECB, which meets Thursday, as having an impact on the economy.

"The sharp slowdown in the provision of bank credit to the

from an earlier prediction of around one per cent.

The single currency area made up of 20 countries will grow by 1.3% in 2024, the commission said, down from a previous forecast of 1.6%.

EU growth will be slightly better at 1.4% next year.

The eurozone inflation forecast has also been revised down, forecast to remain well over target at 5.6% in 2023 compared to 5.8% in the previ-

The growth forecast for the 27-nation European Union as a whole was also cut for 2023 to 0.8%, from an earlier prediction of around one per cent

ECB rate decision on a knife edge

Frankfurt, Germany – The European Central Bank is walking a tightrope between still-high inflation and a darkening eurozone outlook as it decides whether to lift interest rates again or finally pause its historic hiking cycle.

Whether to raise borrowing costs for a 10th straight time when they meet Thursday is shaping up to be rate-setters' trickiest decision since the tightening campaign began.

The central bank for the 20 countries that use the euro has already lifted rates by 4.25 percentage points since July last year to combat runaway consumer prices.

But the Frankfurt institution now finds itself in a "difficult spot," HSBC said in a note, as officials struggle to digest competing data.

On one hand prospects for the single currency area are looking bleaker, particularly due to a poor performance in its biggest economy, Germany, which sank into a recession over the winter and is struggling to climb out of it.

Latest data showed eurozone second-quarter growth reached just 0.1%, lower than previously estimated, while a recent survey pointed to the economy contracting at its fastest rate in three years as a manufacturing slowdown spread to services.

The weak data has fuelled calls for the ECB to pause the



ECB has already lifted rates by 4.25 percentage points since July last year to combat runaway inflation

aggressive hiking cycle for fear it could deepen a downturn, and president Christine Lagarde finally opened the door to doing so at the bank's last meeting in July.

But consumer prices, which began surging after Russia's invasion of Ukraine due to galloping energy costs, continue to rise strongly.

This would support arguments for another hike to borrowing costs, with the aim of further depressing demand and slowing inflation.

Consumer price rises came in unchanged at 5.3% in August, way above the ECB's two percent target, although closely-watched core inflation – excluding volatile energy and food prices – eased a little.

While inflation has slowed since last year as energy costs fall, officials are now worried that other factors, particularly wage increases in a tight labour market, are keeping it elevated.

The data makes for a "very complicated mixed bag," said ING economist Carsten

Brzeski.

"We expect a very heated debate with a close outcome."

Brzeski said he expected the 26-member governing council to opt for one final increase, which would take the closely-watched deposit rate to a record high.

Other analysts, however, are betting on a pause on Thursday, although they also think the ECB might then impose one final hike at a later meeting.

This would be similar to what the US Federal Reserve has done – taking a break in June before resuming lifting rates again in July.

The Fed and the Bank of England are due to hold their next meetings the week after the ECB.

ECB officials have insisted their decision will depend on incoming data, which has put the focus on updated forecasts the central bank is also due to release on Thursday.

In the run-up to the meeting, they have mostly been cagey about what will happen, a contrast to other recent meetings where the decision was usually well telegraphed in advance.

And mixed signals have emerged in recent days.

Governing council member Peter Kazimir called for another 25-basis-point hike, with the Slovak central bank chief writing in an op-ed it is "better to be safe than sorry".

AFP

US interest rates in 'good place,' for now: Fed officials

Washington, US – High US interest rates are doing their job in the fight against inflation, but more hikes may yet be needed, senior US Federal Reserve officials said.

The comments from three regional Fed presidents with a vote on setting interest rates will likely solidify expectations that the US central bank intends to hold rates steady later this month amid growing signs of weaker labor market conditions.

The Fed has raised its benchmark lending rate 11 times over the past 18 months to a level not seen for 22 years as it grapples with inflation still stubbornly above its long-run target of two percent.

After rapidly raising interest rates last year, the Fed slowed down the pace of its hikes over the summer, holding rates steady in June and then raising them by just 25 basis points in July.

Traders currently put the chances of a September pause at more than 90 percent, according to data from CME Group.

Skip 'could be appropriate'

"Another skip could be appropriate when we meet later this month," Dallas Fed President



US Federal Reserve headquarters in Washington, DC

Lorie Logan told a conference in Dallas on Thursday, according to prepared remarks.

"But skipping does not imply stopping," she continued, adding that "further evaluation of the data and outlook could confirm that we need to do more to extinguish inflation."

The Fed should keep the "water bucket" of future interest rate hikes close at hand in case inflation returns, and "must not hesitate to use it as necessary," she said.

Logan's support for a possible September pause echoes com-

ments from Fed Governor Christopher Waller earlier this week in which he suggested that data showing a weakening jobs market meant the Fed should "proceed carefully."

"There's nothing that is saying we need to do anything imminent anytime soon, so we can just sit there, wait for the data, see if things continue," he told CNBC on Tuesday.

New York Fed President John Williams was less direct than Logan in an interview with Bloomberg on Thursday.

AFP

Alibaba's ex-CEO departs

Beijing, China – Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba has announced the surprise departure of former CEO Daniel Zhang, who had been set Monday to take charge of a key subsidiary as the firm undergoes a major restructuring.

After years of turbulence in the Chinese tech sector, Alibaba in March announced the biggest restructuring in its history, dividing itself into six entities, with the goal of listing them on the stock exchange separately.

CEO Daniel Zhang was due



Daniel Zhang

to take charge of the firm's new cloud computing branch, now a separate entity, on Monday.

But two months after announcing his appointment, Al-

ibaba said its now ex-boss was no longer with the company.

"The board of our Company expresses its deepest appreciation to Mr Zhang for his contributions to Alibaba Group over the past 16 years," the company said in a statement to the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, where it is listed, late on Sunday. It gave no reason for his departure.

Plans for a spin-off cloud computing firm would go ahead, Alibaba said, "under a separate management team to be appointed".

AFP

China to curb 'disruption' in currency market

Beijing, China – China's central bank said on Monday it would crack down on speculation that distorts the value of the yuan as the country's currency sees persistent volatility.

The onshore yuan, whose trade is regulated by Beijing, last week briefly hit its lowest level against the US dollar in almost 16 years.

The unit has come under pressure as the People's Bank of China lowers interest rates in a bid to kickstart the world's number two economy, at the same time as the Federal Reserve has tightened policy to temper inflation.



The PBoC said in a statement Monday that it had convened a "special meeting" to discuss "the recent situation in the foreign exchange market and issues around

the exchange rate of the renminbi", the official name for the yuan.

"The financial management authorities have the capacity,

confidence and resources to maintain the stability of the renminbi exchange rate and take action when necessary," the central bank said.

"They are determined to correct unilateral and pro-cyclical behaviours, deal with disruption to the market order, and guard against the risk of overshooting the exchange rate," it said.

The bank added that "although the renminbi has recently somewhat depreciated against the US dollar, it remains basically stable against a basket of currencies".

AFP

Omantel celebrates graduation of 52 young future leaders

Omantel, the leading provider of integrated technology services in the Sultanate of Oman, celebrated the graduation of 52 trainees from the third batch of the 'Generation Z' training programme.

The celebration took place at Omantel's headquarter under the patronage of H E Dr Munther Hilal al Busaidi, deputy chairman of the Oman Vision 2040, and in the presence of Talal Said al Mamari, Omantel CEO, and Omantel's executive management.

This training programme, offered by Omantel to fresh graduates in Sultanate of Oman, is part of the company's ongoing efforts to support and prepare young talents. It aims to hone their skills through an intensive training programme that equips them with the necessary skills for the future.

The 'Generation Z' programme provides a stimulating training environment, allowing trainees to apply the skills acquired during the programme and gain practical experience by



engaging with employees, understanding challenges, and finding creative and effective solutions.

The programme also offers valuable and unique training opportunities for trainees to gain a close and practical understanding of the company's operations through specialised courses and real-world project management.

This equips them with the skills needed to handle their as-

The 'Generation Z' programme works to enhance the capabilities of trainees in managing projects and creative solutions before their entry into the job market

signed responsibilities over the full year. In the previous two editions of the programme, trainees worked on various projects, including process automa-

tion, enhancing consumer broadcasting services, and Omantel has executed some of these projects, now offering them as technological services

and solutions to subscribers.

The 'Generation Z' programme has attracted 123 young men and women from various backgrounds over its three editions. They were selected based on specific criteria among thousands of applicants for these training opportunities. Omantel employed trainees from the first two editions to join the company's young national workforce.

On the occasion of the graduation of the third batch of the 'Generation Z' programme, Dr Ghalib Saif al Hosni, Chief People Officer at Omantel, expressed his satisfaction with the programme's graduates.

He noted the enthusiasm displayed by the trainees throughout their training. "The 'Generation Z' programme is one of our most important initiatives aimed at supporting and

preparing young national talents to become future leaders. The programme complements the government's plans and goals to enhance the capabilities of Omani youth in various sectors," he stated to buttress why at Omantel, "we are committed to attracting recent graduates from various Omani educational institutions and Omani scholarship students to this programme, providing them with opportunities to train on the job and develop their various practical skills."

During the programme's journey, Hosni pointed out that they witnessed significant efforts and high sense of responsibility demonstrated by the trainees, reflecting the trust that the organisers placed in them.

"The programme also helped trainees understand how to perform their tasks and responsibilities in the workplace, preparing them to develop their crisis management and critical operations skills. This contributed to refining their skills and developing their knowledge.

DG-DPHE visits Badr Al Samaa Hospital, Salalah

Dr Muhana bin Nasser al Maslahi, Director General, Directorate of Private Health Establishments (DG-DPHE), Ministry of Health visited Badr Al Samaa Hospital in Salalah.

Dr Maslahi was received by Abdul Latheef Uppala, managing director, Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals.

Along with the DG-DPHE, Dr Mohammed Abdullah al Yafai, Direct General, Private Health Establishments, Dhofar Region also visited the hospital.

Both dignitaries congratulated the team of Badr Al Samaa Hospital, Salalah on the occasion of 15th year anniversary.

During the visit of Dr Maslahi, Abdul Latheef briefed him about the initiatives taken by Badr Al Samaa Hospital, Salalah for khareef like addition of more doctors, nurses, increasing the capacity and introduction of new clinics to address seasonal illnesses.

Abdul Latheef informed him that Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals is the official medical



partner of the ongoing Khareef Dhofar Festival and is running a fully-fledged clinic in the largest venue of the festival, Itten Square.

Dr Maslahi expressed satisfaction over the initiatives taken to meet the growing demand for healthcare services during khareef season. He appreciated the

facility and services rendered by Badr Al Samaa Hospital, Salalah.

Abdul Azeez Allakkatt, branch head of Badr Al Samaa Hospital, Salalah briefed him regarding their recent healthcare accreditation, The Australian Council on Healthcare Standards (ACHS) International.

Dr Maslahi laid emphasis on the importance of quality of care and patient safety and he was satisfied that the systems in places are meeting the national and international standards. The addition of latest diagnostic and therapeutic modalities like MRI, CT, Lithotripsy, Cardiac Critical

Care, etc. was well appreciated by Dr Maslahi.

The DG-DPHE laid emphasis on public private partnership in healthcare. He said like earlier, "we need to take more initiatives together in the best interest of nationals and residents of Oman."

ahli Islamic bank unveils new education finance

As part of its efforts to enhance the customer's banking experiences with substantial sharia'a-compliant financing options, ahli Islamic has unveiled its new education finance offer.

The offer has been designed to shape brighter futures and is in line with ahli Islamic's pursuits to ease the financing journey for students. This offer supports the efforts of empowering generations and in progressing to achieve Oman Vision 2040.

The offer, which started on August 1, will continue until September 30, offering many benefits to ahli Islamic's clientele. The financing amount is up to RO150,000 with a two months' grace period. The financing is up to 100% and customers can avail of the offer at any educational institution in Oman, with a tenor of up to ten years. There is also a discount of 50% on processing fees.

"At ahli Islamic, we believe

that education is the cornerstone of personal and societal growth. It's an investment that yields lifelong dividends, not just for the individual, but for the entire community," said Noora Sultan, AGM - head of Retail Banking at ahli Islamic, while commenting on the latest offer.

"We understand the significance of this investment and the financial challenges that can often come with it. That's why we've designed a comprehensive education finance solution that caters to diverse needs, ensuring that financial constraints never hinder the pursuit of knowledge and success. Whether you're a student aspiring to pursue higher education, a parent dedicated to providing the best for your children, or an individual seeking to upskill and elevate your career prospects, our tailored solutions are here to support you every step of the way," she added.

Vale in Oman builds community walkway in Liwa's Al Tayeb city

Committed to delivering long-term socio-economic impact to the communities where it operates, Vale in Oman announced the completion of a 1.2km wellbeing walkway in the heart of Liwa.

Constructed in partnership with North Batinah Governor's Office, represented by North Batinah Municipality, the project includes walking paths and cycling lanes surrounded by scenic greens and seating areas, creating spaces that promote physical fitness, enhance mental health and foster a sense of community belonging amongst its users.

Commenting on the project, Mohammed Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of North Batinah, commended the great CSR efforts made by the private sector, particularly those companies operating in the governorate, saying that the wellbeing walkway project in Al Tayeb city, constructed by the Vale in Liwa, is a great example of these socially-driven efforts.



"Cultivating partnerships between government and private sector institutions is pivotal in our shared journey of development. To elevate the quality of development services provided to society, integration and active participation are paramount."

Governor Kindi thanked Vale for its continuous contributions to the growth and development of our communities and look forward to future collaborations.

"The company's latest project is a testament to its multifaceted

societal impact, and we, in turn, are committed to leveraging our resources to create thriving investment opportunities for both large corporations and emerging, medium, and small businesses."

Nasser Azri, CEO of Vale in Oman, said, "Community wellbeing is at the heart of our social initiatives and the Liwa wellness walkway project was born from a need for a safe and inviting destination for community members of all ages to exercise and enjoy the outdoors."

Indian schools BoD organises professional development programme for teachers

The Board of Directors, Indian Schools Oman organised Professional Development Programme for its teachers on September 1 and 2, at Indian School Muscat.

Dr Sudha Acharya, CBSE master trainer from New Delhi was the resource person.

Dr Sivakumar Manickam, chairman, Board of Directors, Indian Schools inaugurated the programme.

In his inaugural address, Dr Manickam spoke on the need for continuous professional development of teachers particularly in the context of the New Education Policy and the introduction of the revised curriculum framework. "Professional Development Programmes enable teachers to keep pace with the best practices and latest trends in curriculum transaction; and it helps them in crafting personalized and practical lessons for their students," he observed.

The programme dealt with the implementation of National



Education Policy at different levels of schooling. Insights on the National Curriculum Framework and the salient features of NIPUN Bharat and Holistic Progress Card were also explicated for the teachers by the Resource Person.

NEP 2020 was presented as a forward-thinking and transformative document, aiming to align education with global agendas while ensuring quality, affordabil-

ity, and accessibility in a sustainable manner.

Dr Acharya highlighted the paramount importance of foundational literacy in a child's development, which is a primary focus of NEP. Furthermore, she elaborated on the flexibility of the framework, where there's no rigid separation between academics and co-curricular activities.

NEP 2020 places a strong emphasis on the career progression

and capacity building of teachers, emphasising the need for continuous updates in innovative classroom interaction strategies. Dr Acharya stressed on the significance of addressing not only academic excellence but also the social and emotional well-being of children. She gave insights on incorporating accountability, accessibility, equity, equality and gender-sensitive pedagogy in the education system.

Foreign rescuers join Morocco earthquake race against time

Talat Nyacoub, Morocco - Moroccan rescuers supported by newly-arrived foreign teams on Monday faced an intensifying race against time to dig out any survivors from the rubble of mountain villages, on the third day after the country's strongest-ever earthquake.

The 6.8-magnitude quake struck the Atlas mountains late on Friday southwest of the tourist centre of Marrakesh. It killed almost 2,500 people and injured a similar number, according to the latest official toll.

In the disaster-stricken community of Talat Nyacoub, 12 ambulances and several dozen 4X4s from the army and police were deployed while around 100 Moroccan rescuers were searching for signs of life amid the collapsed buildings.

Nearby, AFP saw a Spanish team of 30 firefighters, a doctor, nurse and two technicians coordinating with Moroccan authorities before starting to dig, as a helicopter flew overhead.

"The big difficulty is in zones remote and difficult to access, like here, but the injured are choppered out," Annika Coll, who heads the Spanish team, told AFP.

About 70km (40 miles) north, another Spanish team from the Military Emergencies Unit (UME) had set up camp since Sunday night on the edge of Amizmiz village.

Albert Vasquez, the unit's communications officer, said his team was awaiting a meeting



Volunteers search for survivors in the rubble in the village of Talat Nyacoub, south of Marrakech on Monday (AFP)

Help came too late. We didn't see any rescuers. We had to get our father out from the rubble ourselves. Our house has been swallowed up

HABIBA BAROUJ

with Moroccan civil defence to determine exactly where they were needed.

Time was short, and Vasquez warned that 'it's very difficult to

find people alive after three days'.

A UME unit assisted after a February earthquake struck Turkey, killing tens of thousands there and in Syria. The team still

found people after seven days despite the challenge, Vasquez added.

"Hope is still there," he said. The rescuers are assisted by four dogs and microcameras that can be fed into the rubble in an effort to detect signs of life.

For Lahcen and Habiba Barouj, the help came too late.

"We didn't see any rescuers. We had to get our father out from the rubble ourselves," said Habiba Barouj, her face drawn.

"Our house has been swallowed up."

An ambulance took their father, 81, to hospital with a broken leg.

The previous evening, they buried their mother who was killed in the quake.

Rabat on Sunday announced it had accepted offers to send search and rescue teams from Britain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, as well as Spain. "The UK is deploying a team of

search and rescue specialists, including 60 people, four search dogs and rescue equipment, as well as a medical assessment team," the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office said in a statement late on Sunday.

'The village is dead'

The earthquake wiped out entire villages in the foothills of the Atlas mountains, where civilian rescuers and members of Morocco's armed forces have searched for survivors and the bodies of the dead.

Many houses in remote mountain villages were built from mud bricks.

While the foreign teams begin to arrive, Moroccan authorities have erected emergency shelters. Bright yellow tents were visible along the road into Tikht, a village which has effectively ceased to exist.

Members of the government's civil protection service carried camp beds from a military-type truck toward the tents. Non-profit groups were also in the area to assess needs.

Previously home to at least 100 families, Tikht has been reduced to a tangle of timber, chunks of masonry as well as broken plates, shoes and the occasional intricately patterned rug. "Life is finished here," said Mohssin Aksum, 33, who had family in the settlement, where residents and their livestock were killed. "The village is dead."

AFP

150 killed in Libya floods after rainstorm: Official

Benghazi, Libya - At least 150 people were killed in freak floods in Libya as a result of storm Daniel which has swept the Mediterranean, an official said on Monday.

"At least 150 people were killed as a result of flooding and torrential rains left by storm Daniel in Derna, the Jabal al-Akhdar region and the suburbs of Al-Marj," Mohamed Masoud, a spokesman for the Benghazi-based administration in Libya, told AFP. "This is besides the massive material damage that struck public and private properties," he added.

He said the prime minister of the east-based government, Oussama Hamad, and the head of a rescue committee as well as other ministers had travelled to Derna to evaluate the extent of the damage.

Hamad's government - which rivals a UN-brokered, internationally recognised transitional administration in Tripoli - on Monday declared Derna a 'disaster area'. Experts have described storm Daniel - which also struck parts of Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria in recent days, killing at least 27 people - as 'extreme in terms of the amount of water falling in a space of 24 hours'.

AFP

Six dead as clashes rock Palestinian camp in Lebanon, says Red Crescent

Sidon, Lebanon - At least six people have been killed and dozens wounded in clashes in a Palestinian refugee camp in southern Lebanon, first responders said on Monday as fighting raged for a fifth day.

Violence broke out late Thursday in the Ain al-Helweh camp on the outskirts of the coastal city of Sidon, just weeks after similar clashes pitted members of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's Fatah movement against Islamist fighters.

The toll has risen to at least 'six dead, one of them killed on Monday, and more than 60 wounded', said Imad Hallak from the Palestinian Red Crescent's Lebanon branch.

The casualties include both fighters and civilians, he added.

An AFP correspondent in Sidon reported ongoing clashes with automatic gunfire and shelling, after fighting had subsided somewhat overnight.

Lebanon's official National News Agency (NNA) said the city's southern entrance was closed to traffic.

The NNA had reported on Saturday that three fighters and



A fighter of Palestinian Fatah movement takes cover during clashes in the Ain al-Helweh camp on Sunday (AFP)

one civilian had been killed.

Ain al-Helweh is home to more than 54,000 registered refugees and thousands of Palestinians who joined them in recent years from neighbouring Syria, fleeing the civil war there.

The camp, Lebanon's largest, was created for Palestinians who were driven out or fled during the 1948 war at the time of Israel's creation.

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, said on Sunday that 'hundreds of families have left the camp' since the clashes began.

Some 400 families were sheltering in a mosque, while others were taking refuge with relatives or in emergency shelters, it added in a report.

The Lebanese army said on Sunday that shells hit two mili-

tary sites near the camp, 'leaving five soldiers wounded, one of them in critical condition'.

By long-standing convention, the army stays out of the Palestinian camps and leaves the factions to handle security there.

In a statement on X, the army warned 'the relevant parties inside the camp' against endangering military sites.

AFP

German foreign minister makes surprise visit to Kyiv

Frankfurt, Germany - German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock made a surprise visit to Kyiv on Monday, promising unwavering support for Ukraine and praising its progress on the path towards EU membership.

"With enormous courage and determination, Ukraine is also defending the freedom of all of us," Baerbock said in a statement released by the foreign ministry upon her arrival.

And Ukraine can 'count on us' in return, Baerbock added.

'We will not let up in our efforts to support Ukraine in its defence against Russia's aggression: economically, militarily, and in the humanitarian' sphere, Baerbock said.

It was Baerbock's fourth visit to Ukraine since the start of Russia's invasion in February 2022.

Ukraine's bid for European Union membership is expected to be among the topics of discussion with Ukrainian officials during this trip.

Ukraine received EU candidacy status a year ago and is hoping to begin formal negotiations this year on what it needs



German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (AFP)

to do to firm up its membership bid. Baerbock said Ukraine had already made 'good progress' in some areas including judicial reforms, but said it still had 'some way to go' in tackling corruption.

She reaffirmed Germany's 'resolute support for Ukraine on its way into the European Union'.

"And we as the EU must now work quickly to ensure we are properly positioned for more chairs at the table," she added.

In the statement, Baerbock also voiced dismay at the forced transfer of Ukrainian children to

Russia.

Russian President Vladimir Putin 'will stop at nothing' to break the Ukrainian people, she said. "We support the organisations, Ukrainian authorities and NGOs who are working to bring the abducted children back home," Baerbock said.

'Nothing justifies waging this war on the backs of the most innocent, the children,' she said.

"The very first step towards peace is for Putin to let these children go back home."

AFP



An employee works on the maintenance of an airconditioning system outside a house in Riyadh on August 29 (AFP)

'No time to rest' for AC repairmen in sweltering Saudi

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Mohammed Sayed wipes sweat from his brow as he repairs another broken air conditioning unit at the height of the Saudi summer, his most stressful time of year.

The 28-year-old Sudanese national and his fellow technicians clock long hours as temperatures in the capital Riyadh clear 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) on a daily basis, highlighting the Gulf kingdom's dependence on

machines the government is trying to make less environmentally taxing.

"The summer season brings abnormal work pressure. It is very stressful... there is no time to rest," Sayed tells AFP as his colleagues climb ladders to replace the dust-choked filter of the latest faltering unit at a villa in eastern Riyadh.

Within minutes, the team has also inspected the fan, compressor and level of Freon refrigerant,

all under the watchful eye of Mishal Ayyad, the grateful homeowner. "The air conditioner is the beating heart of the Saudi home," Ayyad says.

From bedrooms to living rooms and even kitchens, it is not uncommon for every room in a Saudi home to have its own air conditioning unit that hums around-the-clock during the high-temperature months of April to October.

The intensive use leads to fre-

quent malfunctions, meaning Sayed and his team are called to repair dozens of units per day.

Their work continues even between the hottest hours of 12pm and 3pm, a period which the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development says is off-limits for outdoor labour from June to September.

"Unfortunately we are forced to work during this period, but I try as much as possible to have our work be inside homes and

not on outdoor units," Sayed says.

The white van that shuttles the technicians around has a weak air conditioning system, making it difficult to cool down between stops - an irony that is not lost on the group.

Saudi Arabia is no stranger to hot weather, and those who don't travel abroad to cooler locations depend on air conditioning to get through the summer months.

AFP

Support slumps for Australian Indigenous rights referendum

Sydney, Australia - Australia's historic Indigenous rights referendum is hemorrhaging support, with a barrage of damning new polls showing only a minority in favour of the October vote.

If the referendum passes, Indigenous Australians - whose ancestors have lived on the continent for around 60,000 years - will be recognised in the constitution for the first time.

They would also gain a constitutionally enshrined right to be consulted on laws that impact their communities.

But less than two weeks after Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese launched the 'Vote Yes' campaign in a blaze of publicity, polling has shown the national mood is souring on the idea.

One poll on Monday showed 57 per cent of respondents were against the referendum, known as the Voice, versus 43 per cent in favour. Another at the weekend showed an even wider split of 61 to 37.

Some surveys show support for the referendum has plummeted more than 20 percentage points in the past year.

RedBridge polling firm director Kosmos Samaras told AFP that the 'overall picture is one of continuous decline', and that it was 'hard to see' the 'yes' campaign prevailing.



An Indigenous woman and other supporters of the YES campaign set up a booth in Northern Territory capital city of Darwin on August 30 (AFP)

If the referendum passes, Indigenous Australians - whose ancestors have lived on the continent for around 60,000 years - will be recognised in the constitution for the first time

Samaras compared it to the Brexit referendum, with progressive voters in city centres splitting from older constituents in

Australia's regions. Conservative opposition leader Peter Dutton on Monday urged Albanese to drop the re-

ferendum, saying it would only damage fragile race relations.

"How can you in good conscience drive the country to a divisive referendum on October 14," said Dutton, who opposes the Voice.

"Will the prime minister withdraw his Voice referendum so we can avoid an outcome that divides the nation."

Albanese is committed to

ploughing ahead despite the troubling polls, accusing Dutton on Monday of choosing 'politics over substance'.

'Powerless people'

The polls also highlight a widening chasm between the Australian public - who view the Voice with scepticism - and the Indigenous Australian minority who are overwhelmingly in sup-

port. Campaign group Yes23 said on Monday that 'more than 80 per cent of Indigenous Australians' were behind the looming referendum.

The 'Voice' has been plagued by criticism that it will confer special privileges on Indigenous peoples, and that it is a plan cooked up by urban politicians with no experience in remote Aboriginal communities.

"The Voice isn't new, it's been decades in the making. The idea came directly from Indigenous communities, not politicians," the Yes23 group countered on Monday. Indigenous elder Noel Pearson, a high-profile backer of the Voice, has described the referendum as a rare opportunity to help the 'most powerless people in the country'.

"We're the underdog in this referendum but I still believe we can achieve victory," he told national broadcaster ABC on Sunday. "I cannot believe we still live in an Australia where that hand would just be slapped aside."

Aboriginal Australians carry the flame for one of the world's oldest continuous cultures.

But more than two centuries after the first British settlers dropped anchor in Sydney Harbour, they are still far more likely to die young, live in poverty and be imprisoned.

AFP

Four hit and killed by train in Spain

Madrid, Spain - Four people were killed and three others injured on Sunday when a commuter train hit them in Spain as they crossed the tracks outside of an authorised area, officials said.

It is the latest in a series of such incidents on the line, which regional officials in Catalonia have blamed on central government underfunding.

The accident happened when a group of seven people attempted to cross the railway line in Montmelo about 20km (12 miles) north of Barcelona, emergency services in the northeastern region of Catalonia wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter.

"Firefighters searched for other possible victims near the train. They did not find any others. They also helped evacuate the area," the regional civil protection agency said in a statement.

Spanish media said the group was leaving a techno music festival that was taking place at the Montmelo race track, which is famous for hosting F1 racing events, on the eve of a holiday in Catalonia.

According to Spain's state rail infrastructure operator Adif and state-owned railway operator Renfe 'a group of people crossed the tracks at an unauthorised point, in a curve of difficult visibility', the statement added.

Emergency services dispatched nine ambulances and a helicopter to the scene.

The roughly 170 people who were on board the commuter train did not require medical attention.

Train services along part of the line were suspended following the fatal accident.

"I am completely distraught by the multiple collision of a train at Montmelo, a tragedy that leaves us breathless," head of the regional government of Catalonia, Pere Aragonés, wrote on X.

AFP

China 'resolutely opposes' UK spying allegations

Beijing, China - China said on Monday it 'resolutely opposes' allegations that an espionage suspect arrested in the United Kingdom was gathering information for Beijing.

British police said at the weekend they had arrested a man in his twenties at his home in Edinburgh for spying, with the *Sunday Times* reporting he was a researcher in Britain's parliament.

Officers from the Metropolitan Police Service arrested him in March, along with another man in his thirties, on suspicion of offences under the Official Secrets Act and both have been jailed



Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning

until October.

"The so-called claim that China is conducting espionage activities against the UK is pure fabrication," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning told a news conference.

"China resolutely opposes this," Mao added: "We urge the UK to stop spreading disinformation and stop its anti-China political manipulation and malicious slander."

China's embassy in London earlier lashed out at the media reports, with a spokesperson branding the claim a 'political farce'.

'Strong concerns'

The arrests led British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to tell Chinese Premier Li Qiang at the G20 summit in New Delhi that he had 'very strong concerns' about Beijing's 'interference' in democracy.

"I raised a range of different concerns that we have in areas of disagreement and, in particular, my very strong concerns about any interference in our parliamentary democracy, which is obviously unacceptable," Sunak told British broadcasters of his meeting with Li.

"The right thing to do is take the opportunity to engage to

raise concerns specifically, rather than just shouting from the sidelines," he said. Li said both countries should refrain from mixing trade and economic cooperation with politics and security, according to Chinese state news agency Xinhua.

The *Sunday Times* said the suspect in his twenties had contacts with MPs from the ruling Conservative Party while working as a parliamentary researcher. They included Security Minister Tom Tugendhat and Alicia Kearns, the chair of the Commons foreign affairs committee.

AFP

Clashes, arson mar Chile march to commemorate Pinochet victims

Santiago, Chile - Chileans clashed with police on Sunday and committed acts of arson in Santiago during a march to commemorate the victims of Augusto Pinochet's military dictatorship, 50 years after the coup d'etat that brought him to power.

Civilians and police skirmished outside the presidential palace, La Moneda, where then-president Salvador Allende was overthrown on September 11, 1973, and at the cemetery that houses a memorial to the victims of Pinochet's brutal regime.

The exterior of the palace was vandalised and saw some of its windows broken, and police used tear gas and water cannon in confrontations that left at least six officers injured, the government said.

It said at least 11 people were arrested.

President Gabriel Boric, who had briefly joined the procession of some 5,000 people, according to official estimates, condemned the lawlessness after demonstrators broke through security barriers at La Moneda and dam-



Demonstrators clash with riot police during a rally-march to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the military coup led by General Augusto Pinochet against socialist President Salvador Allende, in Santiago on Sunday (AFP)

aged the building's facade.

"As President of the Republic, I categorically condemn these events without any nuance," he wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter.

"The irrationality of attacking what Allende and so many other Democrats fought for is vile," he added.

Half-a-century after the coup,

Chile remains divided among those who defend the dictatorship and those who repudiate it.

Boric on Sunday became the first president to take part in the annual commemoration since the end of the dictatorship in 1990.

There were also clashes with police at other points during the march, with some marchers

hurling Molotov cocktails and setting up burning barricades.

Inside the cemetery, some mausoleums were damaged, including the tomb of a right-wing senator killed in 1991.

"Those responsible for this violence are adversaries of the government," said Manuel Monsalve, Deputy Interior Secretary.

AFP

Cambodian PM to visit China, meet Xi this week: Beijing

Beijing, China - Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet will visit China this week and meet with President Xi Jinping, Beijing's foreign ministry announced on Monday.

"At the invitation of Premier Li Qiang... Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet will pay an official visit to China from September 14th to 16th," foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said in a statement.

Hun Manet will also meet and hold talks with Premier Li Qiang and Standing Committee Chairman Zhao Leji, she told a regular briefing.

Hun Manet took over from his father, the country's longtime leader Hun Sen, in August. Phnom Penh became one of China's strongest allies in the region under Hun Sen, who ruled with an iron fist for almost four decades, receiving huge sums of Chinese investment.

The visit will be one of Hun Manet's first abroad since becoming prime minister, after he attended the summit of ASEAN leaders in Jakarta last week.

"This will be Prime Minister



Cambodia's PM Hun Manet (AFP)

At the invitation of Premier Li Qiang... Cambodian PM Hun Manet will pay a visit to China from September 14th to 16th

MAO NING

Hun Manet's first official visit since taking office," Mao said on Monday.

"It reflects the great importance that the new Cambodian

government attaches to the development of China-Cambodia relations," she added, noting that 2023 will see the 65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Cambodia.

Beijing, Mao said, 'looks forward to using this visit to plan for the future comprehensive strategic cooperation between China and Cambodia'.

It hopes to 'achieve results as soon as possible, so as to build a high-quality, high-level and high-standard China-Cambodia community with a shared future in the new era', she added.

In August, Hun Manet met with China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi in the capital Phnom Penh, saying on his Telegram channel that the two had 'pledged to promote cooperation between the two countries'.

He also reaffirmed in a Facebook post his government's 'unchanged position' towards the issue of Taiwan - which Beijing claims as part of its territory - and promised no interference in Chinese national affairs.

AFP

India’s Modi hails Saudi ties after ‘historic’ route unveiled

New Delhi, India - India hailed its ‘strategic’ partnership with oil-rich Saudi Arabia on Monday, days after unveiling a major trade and transport route linking Europe, the Middle East and India as part of a broad alliance.

“Together, we made the historic start to establish an economic corridor,” Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi told Saudi Arabia’s de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in New Delhi.

On Saturday, the pair took part alongside other G20 leaders in the unveiling of ambitious plans to create a modern-day Spice Route, boosting trade ties with potentially wide-ranging

geopolitical implications.

“This corridor will not only connect the two countries, but economic cooperation, digital connectivity between Asia, West Asia and Europe,” Modi added, in talks following the end of the two-day Group of 20 leaders’ summit he hosted.

India and Saudi Arabia, along with the United States, the European Union, the United Arab Emirates and others launched the initiative to link railways, ports, electricity and data networks and hydrogen pipelines.

Although heavily trade-focused, the scheme could have wide-ranging implications.

US President Joe Biden called



Indian President Droupadi Murmu, PM Narendra Modi and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in New Delhi

the trade and transport scheme ‘historic’ at the launch event.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the so-called India-Middle East-Europe economic corridor was ‘much more than ‘just’ a railway or a cable’.

Signatories hope it can help integrate India’s vast market of 1.4bn people with countries to the west, offer a counterbalance to lavish Chinese infrastructure spending, boost Middle Eastern economies and help normalise relations between Israel and Gulf Arab states. For New Delhi, the most populous country, and Riyadh, the world’s biggest crude exporter, it was another step in

bringing the nations closer, with bilateral trade already reaching US\$42.8bn last year, according to Saudi’s investment ministry.

“As two of the world’s fastest growing economies, our mutual cooperation is important for the peace and stability of the entire region,” Modi added, in footage shown on state broadcasters.

“For India, Saudi Arabia is one of most important strategic partners,” he said.

Indian foreign ministry spokesman Arindam Bagchi said the leaders discussed issues included energy security, trade, investment and defence, without giving further details.

AFP

First open visit by Israeli delegation to Saudi Arabia

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - An Israeli delegation attended a Unesco meeting in Riyadh on Monday, marking the country’s first publicly announced visit to Saudi Arabia as speculation grows about a potential normalisation of ties.

The five-member delegation arrived on Sunday, an Israeli official told AFP, for the meeting to update Unesco’s world heritage list of cultural and historic sites.

“We are happy to be here - it’s a good first step,” said the official, who did not want to be named given the sensitivities of the visit, during the meeting.

“We thank Unesco and the Saudi authorities.” The team travelled through Dubai, the official said, as there are no direct flights between Israel and Saudi Arabia, and arrived on Sunday.

They received their visas via Unesco, the United Nations’ educational, scientific and cultural organisation.

The delegation, including a security official, joined the Unesco meeting on Monday, sitting behind a sign that said ‘Israel’ on the front of their desk.



The delegation from Israel attends the UNESCO Extended 45th session of the World Heritage Committee at the al-Murabba Palace in Riyadh on Monday (AFP)

It’s the result of several years of work by Audrey Azoulay to create, in the heart of UNESCO, the conditions for a dialogue between states of the region

UNESCO DIPLOMAT

The visit has been ‘very good - they treat us very well’, the official said. The ‘Israel’ sign drew stares from Saudis working at the meeting, where more than 50 sites are contenders to join the coveted world heritage list.

“That is God’s command. The

issue is bigger than us and we can’t object to it,” said a young Saudi man working among the support services, when asked about the Israeli delegation.

A Unesco diplomat said the agency’s director-general Audrey Azoulay had been instrumental in

securing Israel’s participation in Riyadh.

“It’s the result of several years of work by Audrey Azoulay to create, in the heart of Unesco, the conditions for a dialogue between all the states of the region,” said the diplomat, who did not want to

be named.

While the visit does not have any overt political significance, it comes at a time of growing rumours of moves to bring the two countries closer.

According to reports, a Palestinian delegation visited Riyadh last week to discuss the way forward if Saudi Arabia and Israel were to formalise relations.

Saudi Arabia, which contains two of Islam’s holiest sites, does not recognise Israel and did not join the 2020 US-brokered Abraham Accords where Israel established ties with Gulf countries the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. Saudi Arabia, which is trying to reshape and revitalise its oil-reliant economy, has made a number of landmark diplomatic moves in recent months including a surprise rapprochement with Iran, years after the two heavyweights severed ties.

The fact that the visit was coordinated by Unesco suggests ‘obstacles’ remain to Saudi-Israeli normalisation, said Aziz Alghashian, a Saudi analyst and expert on the bilateral relationship.

AFP

North Korea leader Kim to visit Russia, meet Putin

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea said on Monday that leader Kim Jong Un would visit Russia and meet President Vladimir Putin, with the reclusive leader’s armoured train reportedly on its way to the border.

Experts suggest that Putin is seeking artillery shells and anti-tank missiles from North Korea for Moscow’s war in Ukraine, while Kim is reportedly in search of advanced technology

for satellites and nuclear-powered submarines, as well as food aid for his impoverished nation.

Kim ‘will soon visit the Russian Federation at the invitation of ... Putin’, the North’s official Korean Central News Agency said. “The respected Comrade Kim Jong Un will meet and have a talk with Comrade Putin during the visit,” it added.

The Kremlin also confirmed on Monday that Kim would visit

Russia ‘in the coming days’.

The announcement ends days of speculation after US and other officials told *The New York Times* at the weekend that Kim, who rarely leaves North Korea, was likely to head by armoured train to Vladivostok for arms talks with Putin.

Kim has not travelled outside North Korea since the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

South Korea’s Yonhap news agency quoted an unidentified

official as saying ‘intelligence authorities believe the train presumed to be carrying Kim Jong-un is moving to Vladivostok’.

Broadcaster YTN said Seoul ‘expects that Chairman Kim will hold a meeting with President Putin of Russia around the day after tomorrow’, meaning Wednesday.

Moscow, a historical ally of Pyongyang, was a crucial backer of the isolated country for decades and their ties go

back to the founding of North Korea 75 years ago.

Kim has been steadfast in his support for Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine, including, Washington says, supplying rockets and missiles.

In July, Putin hailed Pyongyang’s ‘firm support for special military operations against Ukraine’. Vladivostok will be hosting the Eastern Economic Forum until Wednesday.

AFP

Macron in Dhaka to ‘consolidate’ Asia-Pacific push

Dhaka, Bangladesh - President Emmanuel Macron was in Bangladesh on Monday in a bid to ‘consolidate’ France’s Asia-Pacific strategy and counterbalance a ‘new imperialism’ in a region where China’s influence is increasingly being extended.

“Based on democratic principles and the rule of law, in a region facing new imperialism, we want to propose a third way - with no intention to bully our partners or to lead them to an unsustainable scheme,” Macron told Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The United States and China are competing for influence in the wider region, and Macron has pushed France as offering an alternative.

“Bangladesh is progressively retrieving its place on the world stage,” Macron said, speaking



France’s President Emmanuel Macron receives gifts from Bangladesh’s PM Sheikh Hasina at the PM’s office in Dhaka on Monday (AFP)

after he arrived in the capital Dhaka on Sunday after the G20 leaders summit in neighbouring India wrapped up.

He praised what he called ‘the tremendous success’ of the

South Asian country, a rapidly growing economy and the world’s eighth most populous nation with more than 170mn people.

Macron and Hasina on Mon-

day discussed a ‘commitment’ from the country’s Biman airline to purchase 10 A350s from European aircraft maker Airbus, a potential contract that could be worth as much as US\$3.2bn.

Biman had previously always bought aircraft from the US manufacturer Boeing, and the hope of a purchase from Airbus was ‘an important point’, Macron told reporters, alongside Hasina.

Macron held talks with Hasina on Monday and visited a memorial to her father, Bangladesh’s first president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

“We both hope that this new strategic move between Bangladesh and France will play an effective role in establishing regional and global stability and peace,” Hasina said on Monday.

Several Western governments have expressed concern over the

political climate in Bangladesh ahead of general elections due before the end of January, where the ruling party dominates the legislature and runs it virtually as a rubber stamp.

Macron’s visit follows a Pacific trip in July to the French overseas territory of New Caledonia, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea, as well as a stopover in Sri Lanka, in which he outlined his ‘Indo-Pacific strategy’ aimed at ‘recommending’ France to the region.

Macron met on Sunday with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whom he hosted in Paris in July, on the sidelines of the G20 in New Delhi.

The French presidency suggested that Macron in the past six months had ‘done more about South Asia than in the space of a decade’.

AFP

Lula backtracks on Putin’s safety at G20 summit in Rio

New Delhi, India - Brazil’s leader withdrew on Monday his personal assurance that Russia President Vladimir Putin would not be arrested if he attends next year’s G20 summit in Rio de Janeiro, saying it would be up to the judiciary to decide.

Putin missed this year’s gathering in the Indian capital New Delhi, avoiding possible political opprobrium and any risk of criminal detention under an International Criminal Court (ICC) warrant. Brazil is an ICC member but President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva raised eyebrows at the weekend when he told Indian news network Firstpost: “If I’m the president of Brazil and if he comes to Brazil, there’s no way that he will be arrested.”



Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (AFP)

He changed tack on Monday, telling reporters: “I don’t know if Brazil’s justice will detain him. It’s the judiciary that decides, it’s not the government.”

Putin has skipped recent international gatherings and sent his Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to New Delhi instead for the September 9-10 G20 meeting, even though India is not an ICC signatory. In March, the ICC announced an arrest warrant for Putin over the war crime accusation of unlawfully deporting Ukrainian children.

The Kremlin denies the accusations, insisting the warrant against Putin is ‘void’.

On Saturday, the G20 nations adopted a declaration that avoided condemning Moscow for the war in Ukraine but called on all states to refrain from using force to grab territory.

The next summit is slated for November 2024 in Rio de Janeiro and Lula said he hoped ‘that by then the war is over’.

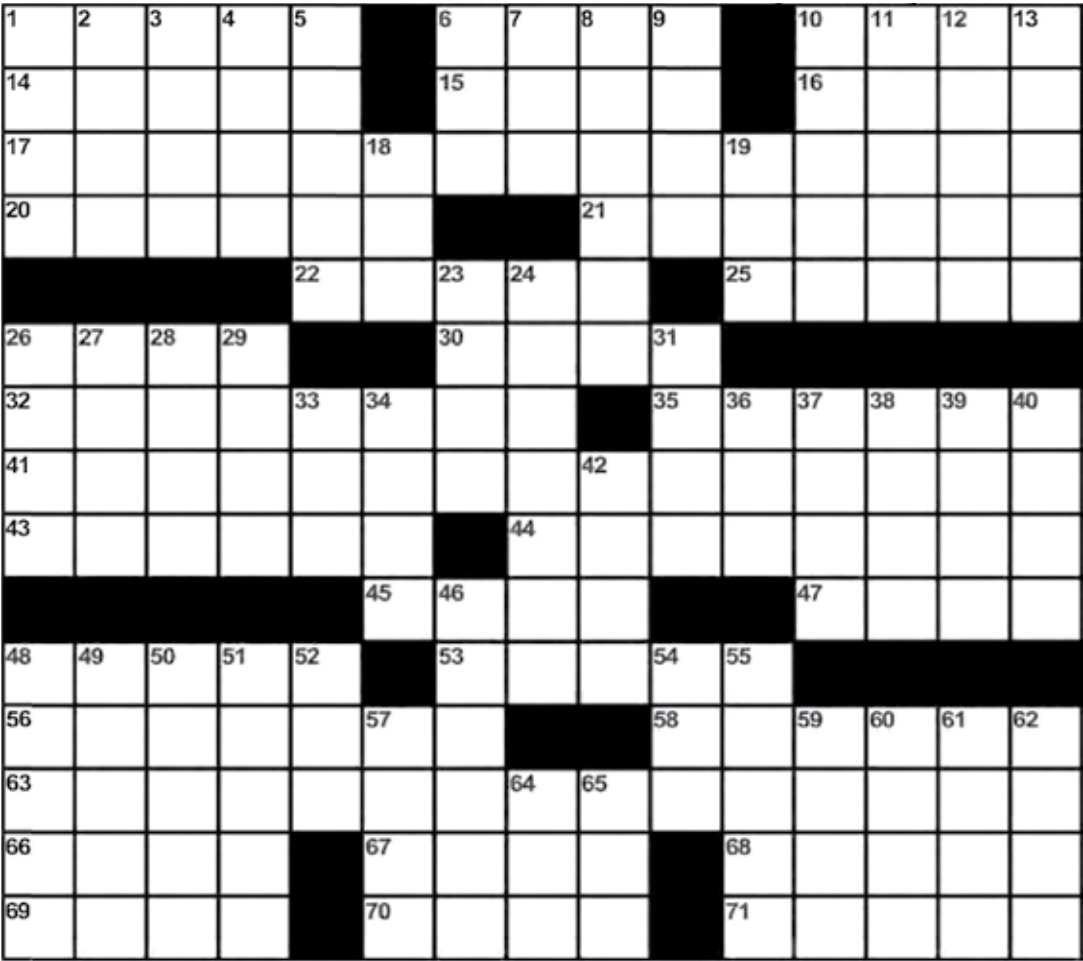
But he also questioned Brazil’s membership of the war crimes court, adding that ‘emerging countries often sign things that are detrimental to them’.

“I want to know why we are members but not the United States, not Russia, not India, not China,” Lula said.

“I’m not saying I’m going to leave the court, I just want to know why Brazil is a signatory.”

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD

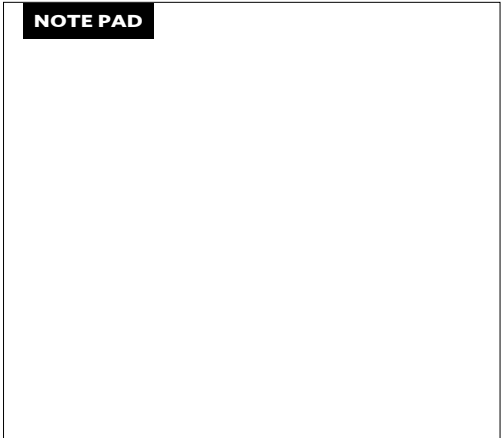


- ACROSS
- 1) Open a pill bottle
6) Peke squeaks
10) Celebratory poems
14) La_University (Philadelphia school)
15) Unglazed pot with a wide mouth
16) " _Las Vegas" (Presley film)
17) What "helps the medicine go down," in song
20) Take off the books
21) Obscuring, in a way
22) "Filthy" dough
25) Uptight
26) Cannabis product
30) Oregon, e.g.
32) Walled off
35) _-Lorraine (region of France)
41) Shortened weapon
43) Waterfall phenomenon
44) Received a varsity award
45) Surgery aftermath
47)Typeofmedia
48) One in deep thought
53) Government operative

- 56) Remove,asabracelet
58) Win, at an auction
63) Nondrinking period
66) A little over 2 pounds
67) Unstable subatomic particle
68) Ball charmer
69) No longer hidden
70) "Can I get you anything?"
71) Hurdles for graduate students
- DOWN
- 1) Superpower no more
2) Neck section
3) Horse hooves sound
4) Moisturizingredient
5) Colony type
6) Not me or them
7) Sick
8) Sandpiper relative
9) Umpire's scream, sometimes
10) Developing egg
11) Cook's exhortation
12) The "Good Times" family
13) Nickname for a noncom
18) Winter malady
19) Take a seat
23) Culinary guru
24) It signals danger

- 26) Sound like a snake
27) Hairy twin in the Bible
28) Freshly cut, as a lawn
29) Academy freshman
31) Bangkok buck
33) "And now, without further_ ..." 34) AAA offerings
36) Auctioneer's batch
37)Partofaflower
38) City in India
39) Billiard sticks
40) Make-meet connector
42) Dried up
46) Bottle top capacity
48) Some cologne scents
49) Get the knots out
50) It might go from 1 to 10
51) "Rocket Man" singer
52) "Norma_" (1979 movie)
54) San Francisco hill
55) Prefix with "jet" or "prop"
57) Unnamed quantity
59) Stadium seating level
60) Famed gymnastics coach
Karolyi 61) " _just have to do"
62) Changes color

- 64) This puzzle's theme
- 65)_-two punch



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES

MARCH 21-APRIL 19

In order to encourage your ambitions to grow, you have to stop setting so many impossible goals. It's not aiming high that gives you a hunger for success, it's getting a taste of it. Start setting more reasonable, attainable goals. Show yourself that you can accomplish things and you'll have the confidence to keep pushing harder and harder. Trying to climb the highest mountain when you've never hiked a day in your life isn't ambitious; it's an excuse not to succeed.



LEO

JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Some less than thrilling news could be waiting for you today, so it isn't a very good time for shopping or other potentially expensive activities. Your responsibilities come first, personal whims second. Also try to avoid getting involved in any new projects that sound too good to be true. That investment your friend told you about? They're not trying to steer you wrong, but probably isn't going to be as lucrative as they think it is.



SAGITTARIUS

NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

Today, in a social or professional group setting, you should just play along with everyone else. Sure, it might be boring to play those games that people play, but it's a lot easier than trying to reinvent the wheel. The road map to conversation is there, so why not follow it? You can still display your charm within the framework of small talk or business speak. You don't have to thrill the room with long tales of your latest adventure. Try not to stand out too much.



TAURUS

APRIL 20-MAY 20

The rush of energy you get early today may be stimulating and seductive, but try not to let it accelerate the pace of your day. There is no reason to be in a hurry, especially when this day brings so many nice things to savor. So slow down and keep a reasonable rate of speed. Wait for people to catch up to you so that you can enjoy their company longer. You'll only be alone and bored if you rush ahead without the people who make the day so pleasant.



VIRGO

AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You can share your feelings and opinions today, but don't share your resources. If a friend forgot their wallet, offer them some of your lunch, but don't offer to buy them their own. It's not about being selfish or mean. It's about not setting any precedents. Make sure you draw proper boundaries between you and others. And when it comes to money or time, you should draw them all the more carefully for your own protection.



CAPRICORN

DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

It's going to be critical that you stay on your toes today. You've got to be ready to move in any direction quickly, because the situation might change with no notice. Luckily, the Universe has been sending you tons of good energy that will ensure your mind stays sharp and your eyes stay focused on the task at hand. You're showing those in power that you're ready for more responsibility, and they may reward you with more of it soon.



GEMINI

MAY 21-JUNE 21

A friend or family member who's been going through a rough time could use a kind word from you. It means more to them than you might realize. Your encouragement and approval are important to them, so make sure you communicate them. Share your own worries too. They want to know that you need them just as much as they need you. Healthy communication is a two-way street. Make sure you're giving your trust as well as your ear.



LIBRA

SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Rely on your good energy to give you solid footing and a sense of direction today. When you have faith in yourself, you can do anything you set your mind to. Are you unsure about a new person you're forced to work with? Stay charming and engaging and it won't take any time at all to get to know them better. There's no reason to be intimidated by them. Now is the time to reach out and connect with other people. They need to see what you're capable of.



AQUARIUS

JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

An upcoming family gathering offers you a great opportunity to reconnect with someone who can give you a fresh perspective on where you want to take your life -- so make every effort to go! There are patterns in your life that you want to change, and it's the people who love you the most who can help you do it. Instead of resisting their input, take it all in and be grateful they care so much about you. You're lucky to have these people as a resource, don't take it for granted.



CANCER

JUNE 22-JULY 22

You need to stand tall against anyone or anything that intimidates you today. Despite the way they might act from time to time, your boss (or other authority figure) isn't any better than you. Equality is something you have the right to assume, so if you're feeling friction with authority figures today, you know something isn't right. Your first urge might be to defend yourself and push back, but you'll get a lot further if you use charm to get them to treat you better.



SCORPIO

OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You might start to see someone you've known very well for a very long time in a whole new light today, and believe it or not, they're starting to see you in a new light too. If you're ready to start something with them, this is a great time to do it. But if you're not ready to take things in a new direction, don't worry that hitting the brakes will send the wrong message. This person respects and trusts you. There's no rush with this. You have all the time in the world.



PISCES

FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Wrangling together all of the different details of your day won't be a chore for you right now. It's a delightful puzzle that you take great pleasure in solving. Your creativity is thriving, and it's the enabling you to see everything in a much more positive light. Call it spin, call it self-delusion, call it whatever you want, but the net result is that you'll be able to say cool and happy no matter what the day throws at you.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. In the USA it is called a bathrobe. What do the British call it?
- A. Dressing gown
B. Smoking jacket
C. Dickey suit
D. Sou'wester

02. The phrase "Victorian Values" is most associated with which 20th century British Prime Minister?
- A. John Major
B. Harold Wilson
C. Edward Heath
D. Margaret Thatcher

03. How many teams competed in the Rugby World Cup 2011?
- A. 22
B. 20
C. 12
D. 84

Answers: 1. A 2. D 3. B

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

I	C	E	I
S	D	C	T
O	T	N	E
I	M	I	A

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates after defeating Russia's Daniil Medvedev in the US Open final on Sunday

PURE GOLD!

Djokovic downs Medvedev at US Open to win record-tying 24th Slam

New York, United States - Novak Djokovic defeated Daniil Medvedev in straight sets on Sunday to win his fourth US Open and a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam singles title, avenging his loss to the Russian in the final two years ago.

The 36-year-old Djokovic won 6-3, 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 to become the oldest men's champion in New York in the Open era and match Margaret Court's all-time mark for most Grand Slam victories.

The Serbian is the first man to win three Grand Slam events in the same season four times, crowning his impending return to world number one in the most fitting of ways inside Arthur Ashe Stadium.

Medvedev defeated Djokovic in straight sets in the 2021 final to prevent the Serbian from becoming the first man to win all four Grand Slams in the same year since Rod Laver in 1969.

Djokovic admitted to feeling overwhelmed on that occasion, but there were few senses of nerves as he quickly took command of Sunday's championship match.

The second seed burst out of the gate with a confident hold sealed by successive aces and struck at the first opportunity, punishing Medvedev for a double-fault to break for a 2-0 lead.

A third ace consolidated his advantage before Medvedev got on the board in the fourth game.

The pair traded holds largely

FACTFILE

NOVAK DJOKOVIC

Date of birth: **May 22, 1987**
Place of birth: **Belgrade**
Professional debut: **2003**
Career earnings: **\$169,791,880**
Highest ranking: 1 (388 weeks in total from Monday)

CAREER HONOURS

Total ATP titles: **96**
Grand Slams: **24**

Australian Open (10)	2008, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2023
French Open (3)	2016, 2021, 2023
Wimbledon (7)	2011, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022
US Open (4)	2011, 2015, 2018, 2023
ATP Tour Finals (6)	2008, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2022
Davis Cup (1)	2010

The Serbian is the first man to win three Grand Slam events in the same season four times, crowning his impending return to world number one in the most fitting of ways inside Arthur Ashe Stadium

untroubled until Djokovic again put pressure on Medvedev as the third seed served down 2-5.

Medvedev dug in to twice stave off set points, but Djokovic calmly made the set his the following game.

Medvedev dethroned last year's champion Carlos Alcaraz

with a "12 out of 10" performance in the semi-finals, but he struggled to replicate his very best consistently against an imperious Djokovic.

Attempting to be the first player to beat the top two seeds en route to the title since 1975, Medvedev once more repeat-

edly found himself under the pump early in the second set.

He was able to resist, hitting a sweeping volley to fight off break point as he secured a gutsy hold for 4-3 before finally asking questions of Djokovic.

A leaping overhead gave Medvedev his first break chance of the contest the very next game, but Djokovic responded with a brilliant scoop on the half-volley to save it.

Djokovic wobbled serving at 5-6, double-faulting twice as Medvedev brought up set point. But Djokovic was waiting as Medvedev went cross-court, and put away the volley to force a tie-break.

Medvedev seemed to have the momentum on his side after winning an astonishing rally to nose 5-4 ahead only for Djokovic to bag the next three points, snatching a marathon 104-minute second set and closing in on a historic triumph.

Djokovic sportingly offered to help Medvedev to his feet after the Russian took an awkward tumble early in the third set, but there was no such goodwill when two break points came about soon after.

Medvedev pumped a backhand long to hand Djokovic a 3-1 advantage. He gave the break straight back, but Medvedev faltered again and there was no mistake second time around as Djokovic wrapped up the title before the emotions started to pour out.

AFP

Djokovic honours Bryant after US Open win

New York, United States - Novak Djokovic paid tribute to late basketball star Kobe Bryant after he won his record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title at the US Open on Sunday, wearing a "Mamba Forever" shirt during the trophy presentation.

Djokovic beat Daniil Medvedev 6-3, 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 to clinch his fourth US Open crown and gain revenge for his loss to the Russian two years ago which shattered his dreams of a calendar Grand Slam.

Afterwards Djokovic revealed a t-shirt with an image of him alongside Bryant - the ferociously competitive basketball great whose nickname was "Mamba". On the back was 24, the number worn by the Los Angeles Lakers



Serbia's Novak Djokovic displays a T-shirt in tribute to late basketball star Kobe Bryant (AFP)

icon during his NBA career.

Djokovic said Bryant, who died in a helicopter crash three years ago, had helped him through some of the most challenging times of his career - notably a career-threatening elbow injury in 2017.

"I thought about doing this t-shirt a few days ago," said Djokovic.

"I didn't share it with anybody. Kobe was a close friend of mine, we chatted a lot, about the winner's mentality.

"When I was struggling with injury and trying to work my way back to the top he was one of the people I relied on the most he was always there for support in the most friendly way."

AFP



DJOKOVIC not setting any limit on Grand Slam titles

New York, United States - Novak Djokovic said he plans to play as long as possible while he is still capable of competing for the biggest prizes after winning a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title at the US Open on Sunday.

The 36-year-old Djokovic defeated Daniil Medvedev in straight sets to pull level with Margaret Court's all-time mark for most major singles crowns.

Half of Djokovic's Grand Slam triumphs have come since he turned 30. The Serbian has also won seven of the past 10 majors he has entered.

"I'm going to keep going. You know, I feel good in my own body. I still feel I got the

support of my environment, of my team, of my family," said Djokovic.

"Grand Slams... have been always the highest goal and the priority of mine in the whole season.

"I don't play as much in terms of other tournaments, so I try to, you know, prioritise my preparation so that I can peak in Slams."

Alcaraz is the only man to have beaten Djokovic this year at a Grand Slam.

His five-set win in the Wimbledon final ruined the Serbian's bid for a calendar Grand Slam, but any indication that signalled the passing of the torch was shown to be premature in New York.

AFP

Medvedev salutes 'great' Djokovic after defeat in final

New York, United States - Daniil Medvedev lavished praise on Novak Djokovic after the Serbian star defeated the Russian at the US Open on Sunday for a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam crown.

Medvedev, who joined the exclusive club of players to have beaten Djokovic in a Grand Slam final with his victory at the US Open in 2021, was unable to repeat the feat on Sunday.

Speaking after Djokovic completed a 6-3, 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 victory to capture his fourth US Open crown, Medvedev revealed how the Serbian great had treated him earlier in his career.

"When we first played I was probably 500th in the world. And he was super kind to me," Medvedev said. "Nothing special, but he treated me like a normal person. And he still does. Nothing changed: 24, 30, 12 Grand Slams? Nothing changes. And I think that's something great



Serbia's Novak Djokovic reaches down to help Russia's Daniil Medvedev

about a person you can say."

Medvedev said that beating Djokovic at the US Open final was the greatest achievement of his career to date.

"From one side I can say, and

really I find this amazing, that I beat Novak in a Grand Slam final, which probably at this moment is the pinnacle of my career," he said. "At the same time, maybe if he and Rafa (Nadal) didn't exist ...

I played five finals against them and I only managed to win one. I don't know if it's good or bad. But you know, [Djokovic] pushes me to be better."

Medvedev meanwhile was left

ruing his inability to level Sunday's final at one set apiece after holding a set point in a gripping, 104-minute second set.

Instead, Djokovic saved the set point and forced a tie-break which he would go on to win to take a stranglehold on the match.

"Should have won it," Medvedev said of the second set. "Should have won it, but sometimes tennis is not that easy.

"Second set was the best set I played and I didn't win it. So that's why it's kind of normal that the match went that way.

"Because first and third he was kind of better and not much to say. If I'd won the second, it maybe could have been a different game.

"If I wanted to win the match, I had to win that set."

Medvedev had produced a scintillating display to upset defending champion Carlos Alcaraz in the semi-finals.

AFP

Refuelling drama at Fuji spoils Al Harthy's stunning start

Muscat - Sensational driving from Oman's Ahmad al Harthy and an absolutely outstanding start to his first ever 6 Hours of Fuji were ultimately unrewarded at the Japanese track on Sunday, 10th September, when a major refuelling issue at the first round of pit-stops cost an insurmountable amount of time.

Lining-up an uncharacteristic 12th on the GTE Am grid for the penultimate race of the FIA World Endurance Championship season, after losing tyre



Oman's Ahmad al Harthy in action

performance later in the drying qualifying session the day before, Al Harthy was nonetheless confident for the beginning of the big race.

While stormy weather and typhoon conditions had been a threat for most of the race meeting, for raceday the track was dry and the Omani aimed to make one of his customary fantastic starts and challenge for as many points as possible.

Exceeding his own expectations, the Oman Ministry of Cul-

ture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS partnered sportsman made a truly electrifying launch in the No.25 Aston Martin Vantage GTE and put together a terrific opening to the race. Slicing his way through the order, passing no fewer than six cars, Al Harthy continued his march towards the podium battle and moved into the top five - right on the tail of the fourth placed No.77 Porsche 911 RSR at the end of the first hour.

After challenging well for

fourth, there was soon an unfortunate incident with one of the LMP2 cars and as a result Al Harthy dropped to seventh. Although disappointing and frustrating, realistic hopes of a solid points result remained.

But at Oman Racing's first scheduled pit-stop, there was a problem with the refuelling rig and the pit crew was unable to put any fuel in the car. Costing time and badly impacting the team's strategy, there was no other choice than for Al Harthy

to rejoin the race and try and pit again.

Thankfully working at the second time of asking, the huge delay effectively ended all hopes of a strong result. After taking on the required amount of fuel, Al Harthy was all the way back in 12th place and with a mountain to climb but he did the best he could and lapped competitively.

The same was true during the subsequent stints for teammates Michael Dinan and Charlie Eastwood.

THE UNDISPUTED KING

Novak Djokovic has a knack of courting controversies, but his quest for tennis immortality is unmatched

New York, United States - Novak Djokovic, who won his fourth US Open and all-time record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title on Sunday, is driven on through controversy by his determination to be the greatest ever.

The Serb's victory over Daniil Medvedev at Flushing Meadows - his third major triumph of 2023 - took him two Slams clear of great rival Rafael Nadal at the top of the list of men's Slam champions.

For 36-year-old Djokovic, it matters to be the best, and he has a strong sense of his historical place in tennis.

He also keeps ploughing on through the highs and lows because it is "a great school of life".

"I would like to send a message to every young person out

there. I was a seven-year-old dreaming that I could win Wimbledon and be world no.1 one day," he has said.

"I am beyond grateful but I feel I had the power to create my

admired, Djokovic continues to divide opinion.

His staggering achievements on the court have often been overshadowed by blunders and missteps off it.

semi-final rival Carlos Alcaraz wilted with cramping.

Djokovic remains indifferent to the critics.

"I don't mind. It's not the first; probably not the last. I'll just keep winning," said Djokovic.

His most controversial moment was his refusal to be vaccinated against Covid, which culminated with Djokovic being deported from Melbourne on the eve of the 2022 Australian Open.

His uncompromising stance on the vaccine also saw him barred from the United States and unable to play in last year's US Open.

Even before that, the Serb was seemingly doomed never to be held in the same saintly esteem as Federer or Nadal, the undisputed people's champions.



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates a point against Russia's Daniil Medvedev

China's Yin Ruoning becomes women's golf world number one

Washington, United States - China's Yin Ruoning became the world number one in women's golf on Sunday by finishing third at the LPGA Queen City Championship.

The 20-year-old became only the second Chinese woman to claim the world number one ranking after Feng Shanshan, who reached the summit from November 2017 to April 2018.

"It means a lot. For me it's like dream come true," Yin said.

"I've got goosebumps. World number one is the big step on the way to chasing Shanshan."

Yin will play on a Chinese team coached by Feng in the Asian Games, which open on September 23 on home soil at Hangzhou. "I didn't get a lot of chance to chat with Shanshan," Yin said. "But I'm looking forward to going back to China and play the Asian Games and spend more time with her, considering she's the head coach on our national team."

Yin, who needed a top-four result to overtake American Lilia



Yin Ruoning

I've got goosebumps. World number one is the big step on way to chasing Shanshan

YIN RUONING

Vu for the top spot, missed out by two strokes on a playoff for the Queen City title between Australia's Minjee Lee, who won the title with a birdie on the sec-

ond extra hole, and England's Charley Hull.

But Yin fired a final-round five-under par 67 to finish third on 14-under 274 at Kenwood Country Club in Cincinnati, Ohio, and become the fifth different player atop the rankings this year.

"It's just amazing," Yin said.

"My mind is blank right now."

Second-ranked Yin won her first major title in June at the Women's PGA Championship, two months after collecting her first LPGA victory at the LA Open.

Sweden's Norrman wins Irish Open as McIlroy's title bid falls apart

Straffan, Ireland - Sweden's Vincent Norrman won the Irish Open as Rory McIlroy's title bid fell apart in Sunday's final round at The K Club.

Norrman hit a superb 65 to finish on 14 under par, one shot ahead of second-placed Hurlly Long.

Former champion Shane Lowry was part of a four-way tie for third on 12 under.

Norrman was six shots behind overnight leader Long at the start of the round, but he fired six birdies in the space of eight holes from the seventh and then two-putted the par-five 18th.

Long was briefly on the same score thanks to a birdie on the 12th, but bogeyed the next two holes and was unable to make an eagle on the last to force a playoff.

McIlroy had started the final round two shots behind Long, with birdies on the first and fourth holes giving him hope of victory.

But he found water on the



Sweden's Vincent Norrman celebrates with the Irish Open trophy on Sunday

seventh, 11th and twice on the 16th as he stumbled to a disappointing round of 74.

"It means everything," Norrman said after his second DP World Tour title in two months following his triumph at the Barbasol Championship in July.

"It's such a cool event to play, the fans have been incredible and I really had a fun week out there. I can't believe this happened."

"I was starting off a little so-so and I made two birdies and got a rain delay, had a coffee and then went out and flushed it."

"I knew there were a few chances out there. I didn't really have a number in my head. I just tried to press on with some birdie looks and saved a few great pars too to keep the momentum going."

Lowry, who began the week facing questions about his Ryder Cup wild card after recording just one top-10 finish in 2023, recorded a third 68 of the week which featured a tap-in eagle on the fourth and four birdies.

South Africa off mark as Wales avoid Fiji Rugby World Cup slip-up

Paris, France - Fly-half Manie Libbok was named man of the match as South Africa opened the defence of their Rugby World Cup title with victory over Scotland on Sunday as Wales held out against a spirited Fiji comeback.

Libbok's highlight was a second-half no-look assist for Kurt-Lee Arendse as the Springboks began their search for a record fourth Webb Ellis trophy in clinical fashion in the Marseille heat, winning 18-3.

Former World Player of the

Year Pieter-Steph Du Toit had crashed over earlier in the tie for Jacques Nienaber's outfit in Pool B.

Their next major test to reach the quarter-finals will be world number one side Ireland on September 23, six days after facing Romania.

"I think it could have been a slippery one. Scotland are a good side, they are not number five in the world for nothing," South Africa coach Nienaber told the BBC.

"I thought we had a little bit



South Africa's fly-half Manie Libbok takes a penalty kick as their flanker and captain Siya Kolisi looks on during their match against Scotland

of dominance in the first-half but we had to grind the win out."

Fiji late comeback

Wales began their campaign by overcoming Fiji 32-26 in Bordeaux, avoiding defeat to the highest ranked side in Pool C.

Winger Josh Adams claimed one of four tries for Wales as experienced fly-half Dan Biggar crossed the 100-point mark for his country at World Cups, surpassing Neil Jenkins' 98-point record.

"You can never write Fiji off.

Right at the end they could have won the game," Adams told S4C after his side led by 18 points with less than a quarter of an hour to play.

"We don't want another game like that," he added before next Saturday's match with Portugal.

Fiji, coached by ex-Newport lock Simon Raiwalui, had launched a late comeback thanks to tries from Josua Tuisova and Mesake Doge in the final seven minutes but they were unable to repeat their fa-

mous 2007 World Cup victory over Wales.

The Pacific islanders had a lot of confidence before the game, especially after last month's first ever win over England, and they would have felt frustrated by referee Matthew Carley's reluctance to show yellow cards to ill-disciplined Wales.

Fiji will now have to target next Sunday's game with Australia if they are to keep alive their hopes of a first quarter-final spot in 16 years.

AFP

KISS AND FALL

Spanish football chief Rubiales resigns over scandal

Barcelona, Spain - Spanish football federation president Luis Rubiales has resigned following fierce criticism for kissing Jenni Hermoso on the lips at the Women's World Cup victory ceremony.

The already suspended Rubiales sent his resignation to the federation's interim president, he said in an open letter, and also explained his decision to eventually step down in a television interview.

"I'm going to (resign), yes, because I cannot continue my work," the 46-year-old told television show "Piers Morgan Uncensored".

"(Family and friends) say to me, 'Luis, you need to focus on your dignity and continue your life. If not you are going to damage people you love and the sport you love.'"

Rubiales sparked a worldwide backlash after forcibly kissing midfielder Hermoso during the medal ceremony following Spain's World Cup triumph in Sydney on August 20.

After he refused to resign, FIFA provisionally suspended him for 90 days, while Spanish public prosecutors have filed a lawsuit against him for alleged sexual assault and coercion.

Hermoso, 33, had filed a complaint at the National Court on Tuesday, formally accusing Rubiales of sexual assault.

In an open letter published by Rubiales on Sunday night, he said he had informed the federation he was also stepping down as a vice-president of European foot-

ball governing body UEFA.

"After the swift suspension carried out by FIFA, plus the rest of the procedures opened against me, it is evident that I will not be able to return to my position," said Rubiales in the letter.

"Insisting on waiting and clinging to it is not going to contribute to anything positive, neither for the federation nor for Spanish football. Among other things, because there are powers that be that will prevent my return."

Rubiales, who insists the kiss was consensual, said he did not want Spanish football to be hurt by "such a disproportionate campaign" against him.

"I have faith in the truth and I will do everything in my power so that it prevails," he wrote.

Rubiales said his departure would contribute "stability" to the 2030 men's World Cup bid in which Spain are involved.

As the pressure ramped up in recent weeks on him to quit, Rubiales' mother Angeles Bejar went on a hunger strike in protest, locking herself in a church.

'It's over'

Some Spanish politicians hailed Rubiales' downfall.

"We are with you, Jenni, and with all women," said second deputy prime minister Yolanda Diaz on social media platform X, formerly Twitter. Spain's equality minister Irene Montero wrote "It's Over" on X, a slogan used by Hermoso and her fellow players in protest against Rubiales.

Over 80 players went on strike from the women's team in



Demonstrators take part in a protest against Luis Rubiales in Madrid on September 1



(Family and friends) say to me, 'Luis, you need to focus on your dignity and continue your life. If not you are going to damage people you love and the sport you love'

LUIS RUBIALES

protest after Rubiales' fierce defensive speech following the incident, in which he had railed against "false feminism" and said he would not step down.

The players said they would not return until the leadership of the RFEF (Spanish football federation) was changed.

Controversial women's coach Jorge Vilda was sacked on Tuesday in the fallout from the scandal.

The RFEF, under interim president Pedro Rocha, also apologised for the "totally unacceptable behaviour" of Rubiales.



Kyle Walker scored his first ever England goal in Saturday's 1-1 draw against Ukraine (AFP)

Southgate convinced Walker not to retire from England duty

Glasgow, United Kingdom - England manager Gareth Southgate says he has twice persuaded Kyle Walker not to retire from international duty.

Walker scored his first ever England goal in his 77th appearance during Saturday's 1-1 draw against Ukraine in Wroclaw.

The Manchester City right-back's memorable moment in the Euro 2024 qualifier came after his future for both club and country was uncertain during the close-season.

Only an intervention from City boss Pep Guardiola saw Walker stay with the treble winners after Bayern Munich expressed interest in the 33-year-old.

Southgate revealed he also had to change Walker's mind after both the Euro 2020 final defeat to Italy and last year's World Cup in Qatar.

"I've talked him out of retirement twice from international football," Southgate said.

"After the Euros and after the World Cup, I think he loves being

here and he's wanted to keep going and now he's thinking about how many caps he can get.

"He's critical to us. If we're talking about world-class players in their position in our team then he's probably one of them.

"I think he didn't realise how much value we have for him and how important he is for us. He's probably not going to thank me for sharing that!"

Southgate has given Walker all but 20 of his senior England caps and he praised the defender for continuing to improve.

Asked if Walker has got better with age, Southgate said: "I think he has. It doesn't always happen but he's not only playing but also seeing him around in training, the way I hear him speak when he's interviewed, his influence on the group, he's become a really mature leader for us.

"Two or three days into the training his focus was really clear, the way he was organising on the pitch and I think he's enjoying the extra responsibility."

Weghorst keeps Netherlands on course for Euros as Ireland stumble after taking lead

Dublin, Ireland - Wout Weghorst kept the Netherlands on course for Euro 2024 as he came off the bench to bag the decisive goal in his side's 2-1 win against the Republic of Ireland on Sunday.

Ronald Koeman's team suffered an early shock when Adam Idah's penalty put Ireland ahead in Dublin in their Group B game.

But Liverpool's Cody Gakpo netted a penalty soon after and the visitors wrapped up the points thanks to Weghorst's second half strike.

Currently on loan at German side Hoffenheim from Premier League club Burnley, the towering Weghorst's introduction at



Netherlands striker Wout Weghorst celebrates at the final whistle of their Euro 2024 qualification match against Republic of Ireland on Sunday

the interval proved a masterstroke by Koeman.

Weghorst had scored in the victory against Greece on Thursday and he showed no signs of sulking despite being initially left on the bench at the Aviva Stadium. A third win from their four Group B matches lifted the Netherlands into second place, six points behind leaders France with a game in hand.

The top two will qualify for next year's European Championship in Germany and Koeman's men are in control of their own destiny.

They have a game in hand on third placed Greece, who are level on points with the Dutch, and sit six points ahead of Ireland. Beaten in four of their five matches, Stephen Kenny's hosts look certain to miss out on a place at the Euros.

After failed bids to reach the Euros two years ago and last year's World Cup, it is shaping up to be another grim qualification campaign for the Irish.

"To beat one of the best teams in Europe you have to see out those difficult periods and we didn't do that for the second goal," the under-fire Kenny said.

"We've got two matches in October and after that it's certainly not my decision (to remain manager). We'll have to see if we have a play-off."

Gambia book place in Africa Cup of Nations

Johannesburg, South Africa - Gambia reached the Africa Cup of Nations finals on Sunday after a 2-2 draw with Congo at a Moroccan stadium in the area of an earthquake that claimed more than 2,120 lives.

Goals from substitutes Yankuba Minteh and Muhammed Badamosi in the last 11 minutes of regular time earned Gambia the point they needed to seal back-to-back qualifications.

Gambia hosted the final Group G fixture in Marrakech because they lack an international-standard stadium. When the quake struck late on Friday 72 kilometres (45 miles) southwest of the central city, Gambian and Congolese players fled their hotels and slept outdoors.

Voeller tasked with getting Euro 2024 hosts Germany back on track

Berlin, Germany - Nine months before Euro 2024 kicks off in Germany, the hosts have turned to Rudi Voeller to get the team back on track before Tuesday's friendly against France after coach Hansi Flick was sacked.

Flick became the first German coach in history to be relieved of his duties after his side slumped to a 4-1 loss to Japan in Wolfsburg on Saturday, the latest in a run of poor results which included a group-stage exit at the World Cup in Qatar last year.

The German Football Association (DFB) have turned to 1990 World Cup winner Voeller to take over on an interim basis for the friendly against 2022 World Cup finalists France in Dortmund.

While Voeller's first point of call will be to inject some pride



Rudi Voeller

and stability into the struggling team, his broader task is to right the ship before next year's European Championship on home soil. Voeller, who was part of the Flick set-up as the DFB's sporting director, was also appointed on an interim basis after Germany's

disastrous group stage exit at Euro 2000.

He took the side all the way to the final at the 2002 World Cup, before losing 2-0 Brazil, but 63-year-old Voeller said on Sunday this time he will not be in the hot seat for long.

"The most urgent task is to hire a national coach who will quickly get the team back on track and prepare us for the big European Championships next year," Voeller said.

He said the sacking was "not an easy moment for me... I joined in February to support Hansi Flick so that he could be successful."

"I firmly believed that as a national coach he could manage to get our team back on track."

Voeller will be assisted by Under-20s manager Hannes Wolf and former Bayern striker Sandro Wagner.

Several candidates have been mentioned to take the position on a permanent basis, with Julian Nagelsmann, who replaced Flick at Bayern Munich only to be sacked in March, believed to be the frontrunner.

TOO HOT TO HANDLE

Kohli, Rahul, Yadav star as India crush Pakistan in Asia Cup super four

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Virat Kohli and returning KL Rahul hit unbeaten centuries to lead India's 228-run thrashing of Pakistan in a rain-hit Super Four clash of the Asia Cup on Monday's reserve day.

Kohli (122) and Rahul (111) put together 233 runs as India reached 356-2, a total defended after they bowled out Pakistan for 128 in the 50-over contest in Colombo.

Pakistan ended on 128-8 in 32 overs with injured bowlers Haris Rauf and Naseem Shah not turning out to bat. India spinner Kuldeep Yadav returned figures of 5-25.

India resumed on 147-2 after rain ended play early on Sunday and pushed the match into an additional day set aside by the tournament, which is a precursor to the ODI World Cup.

Rain again delayed the start but no overs were lost and then the Kohli-Rahul pair roused the Indian fans at a largely empty stadium.

Rahul, who returned from an injury lay-off, raised his bat to celebrate his hundred and was hugged by Kohli, who soon brought up his own ton after surpassing 13,000 ODI runs.

Half-centuries from skipper Rohit Sharma and fellow opener



India's KL Rahul celebrates with teammate Virat Kohli after scoring a century in their Asia Cup match against Pakistan in Colombo on Monday (AFP)

Shubman Gill got India off to a good start on Sunday with a 121-run stand. Kohli and Rahul resumed cautiously on their overnight scores of eight and 17 before they took to the Pakistan attack with 100 runs in 102 balls.

Pakistan suffered a blow when officials said fast bowler Rauf had suffered a strain and would take

no further part. Later fellow quick Naseem also walked off with some discomfort to his hand.

Rahul smashed 12 fours and two sixes, including whipping Shadab Khan over mid-wicket, in his 106-ball knock.

Kohli finished the innings with a six down the ground against a bowling attack that lacked sting.

Sloppy fielding added to Pakistan's woes. Pace spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi and Shadab got a wicket each on Sunday.

Ground staff worked tirelessly to get the field ready after Monday's early rain.

Pakistan were never in the chase after they lost two early wickets including skipper Babar

Azam bowled for 10 off an impressive in-swing by Hardik Pandya.

Rain once again interrupted play but not the Indian momentum as the bowlers kept up their charge after resumption and Kuldeep sent back Mohammad Rizwan with his left-arm wrist spin.

Williamson, Southee boost New Zealand's ODI World Cup squad

Wellington, New Zealand - Kane Williamson and Tim Southee were included Monday in an experienced New Zealand squad for next month's 50-overs World Cup in India.

Williamson will captain the Black Caps despite still working his way back to fitness after a serious knee injury last April.

The 33-year-old led New Zealand in their nail-biting defeat by England in the 2019 World Cup final and was named player of the tournament. Williamson's return to the crease will boost the Black Caps as he has scored more than 6,500 runs in one-day international cricket.

New Zealand coach Gary Stead said it is unclear whether Williamson will be ready in time for their opening World Cup game against England on October 5 in Ahmedabad.

"We haven't put a date on whether he will be available for that first game or not," Stead told reporters on Monday.

"That's still three or four weeks away and time will tell a little bit closer, but he is doing everything in his powers to make that happen."

Southee, New Zealand's Test-match captain, leads a powerful bowling line-up alongside Trent Boult, one of the world's best ODI seamers. Boult returned to the Black Caps by taking three wickets in Sunday's 79-run defeat to England when he knocked the top off the hosts' batting line-up on his 100th ODI appearance,



Kane Williamson

his first for nearly a year.

"He's a real weapon for us with the new ball. It was very pleasing to see," Stead said of Boult's bowling performance to dismiss England's Jonny Bairstow, Joe Root and Ben Stokes. All-rounder James Neesham, who came within a whisker of glory for New Zealand when the 2019 World Cup final was settled by a tense Super Over, also made the 15-man side.

Only six of the squad will be playing at their first ODI World Cup, while this will be their fourth for both Southee and Williamson.

NEW ZEALAND SQUAD:

Kane Williamson (capt), Trent Boult, Mark Chapman, Devon Conway, Lockie Ferguson, Matt Henry, Tom Latham, Daryl Mitchell, Jimmy Neesham, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Mitchell Santner, Ish Sodhi, Tim Southee, Will Young

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Wake your body up

IF YOU'RE NOT IN THE MOOD FOR AN EARLY MORNING JOG OR A RUN, OR EVEN A TRIP TO THE GYM, TRY MORNING YOGA – THE EASY WAY TO WAKE UP AND WAKE YOUR BODY UP

MORNING YOGA

do you have five minutes to spare when you wake up each morning? If yes, set it aside diligently for 'morning yoga' the best way to wake up your mind and body before you take on the daily grind each day.

"Yoga can help to wake up your body and get it ready for the day," says Neha Gothe, director of Exercise Psychology Lab at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. The right poses can stretch the major muscle groups and warm up the joints, while slow breathing promotes focus and can reduce stress and anxiety, she says in a recent article in New York Times.

The best part of morning yoga is that no equipment is needed, and the bonus is the fact that you don't even have to sweat it out. It is good to start your morning yoga routine right after you wake up, and ideally, before you reach for your phone or the toothbrush, adds Laura Schmalzl, a neuroscientist and certified yoga instructor at the Southern California University of Health Sciences.

Here is a yoga routine recommended by experts to get your day going:

Knees-to-chest

Start by lying on your back and hugging your knees to your chest. You should feel a gentle stretch in the spine. Breathe in and out through the stretch. You may do it even before jumping out of bed!

Half cobra

Release your legs and roll onto your chest, allowing

your forehead or cheek to rest on the floor. Rest your forearms and place your palms on the ground, directly under your shoulders, while keeping your bent elbows tight against your sides. Then gently push away from the floor, lifting your chest and forehead. Feel your spine gently stretch as you continue to slowly breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Stay here for three breaths.

Alternating cat-cow

This pose is useful to encourage spine mobility and flexibility. Rise to a kneeling tabletop position, keeping your hands shoulder-width apart and your knees hip-distance apart directly under your hips. On the inhale, arch your back into a cow pose, easing your belly toward the floor, and bringing your head and chest upward so you are gazing toward the sky as you inhale. Then exhale, releasing your breath and pulling your belly up and in and rounding your back into a cat pose.

Alternate between these two poses as many times as you like, feeling your spine and neck stretch in both directions.

Reclining twist

There are several ways to do this pose, depending on your flexibility and what part of your spine you want to target. Start by lying down on your back and bringing your knees up toward your chest. Hug your knees and place your right hand on your left knee. Let your left arm lie flat, extended on the floor beside you. Twisting from your core, exhale and gently

guide your bent legs to fall together to the right side of your body.

Bring your knees toward the floor until you feel a stretch in your back and hips. Then turn your head to look toward your left hand. On an inhale, come back to the center before switching over to the other side.

Spinal flex

This gentle back stretch is especially good for people who spend all day sitting at a desk. Sit down on the floor in a cross-legged position and place your hands on your ankles or knees. While inhaling, gently arch your back and lift your chest and chin forward and up. Relax, and while exhaling, round your spine, bending forward slightly and tucking your chin toward your chest. Repeat this sequence five times.

Upward salute

Stand with your feet hip-distance apart. Feel your feet connecting with the floor, and shift your hips forward slightly, remembering to engage your core. Slowly raise your arms overhead and in line with your ears, shoulder-distance apart. Then, turn your palms toward each other and, if you can, let them touch. Bring your gaze up to your hands and feel a stretch in your neck and arms. If you want, try to raise yourself up onto your toes. Find your center as you take several breaths. When you're ready, slowly lower your arms and the rest of your body to release the pose. Take a few moments to shake out your arms and legs to release any lingering tension.



PLANT-BASED DIETS - NUTRITIONAL NEEDS



Starting on a plant-based diet, one always wonders about nutrient availability. Some plant-based diets carry a risk of not meeting nutritional requirements, particularly proteins, some vitamins, and minerals. However, these risks can be overcome by careful selection and planning of meals.

The major nutrients of concern when on a plant-based diet are:

- **Proteins** - One of the most vital nutrients, proteins, which is found in every cell, plays an important role in tissue repair, muscle growth, etc. A vegan diet which is purely plant-based provides proteins which are of poor quality when compared with proteins derived from animal foods. Protein

Quality tells us how useful dietary protein is for the growth and maintenance of tissue. In simple words, a diet with poor protein quality cannot sustain growth, when compared with good quality protein.

- **Calcium** - A nutrient that ensures strong bones and teeth, and also helps in the regulation of muscle contraction. Dairy is the key source of Calcium. Very few plants contain calcium.
- **Omega-3** fatty acids - This brainy fat is mainly found in animal foods like fish but is also found in some plant foods like flax seeds, chia seeds, walnuts, and linseed oil.
- **Vitamin B12** - a vitamin that keeps nerve and blood cells healthy is found only in animal foods and hence is a matter of concern.
- **Iron** - A great nutrient for boosting immunity and for the formation of Hemoglobin is best absorbed by the body from animal foods, like eggs, red meat,

etc. Plant foods, like greens, beans and nuts do contain iron but absorption by the body is poor.

- **Zinc** - Another important nutri-



Those on a plant-based diet or vegan diet, can get most of their nutrients easily, provided they select, plan, and combine foods intelligently

ent, vital for immunity and in processing macronutrients, mainly comes from animal foods. But some plant foods like seeds do provide this mineral.

Overcoming protein challenge
This can be overcome by the correct combination of plant foods smartly. Combining rice or wheat with pulses or beans gives protein quality a boost which is as good as animal protein. Recipes like chickpea pulao or Mexican rice with beans or hummus and bread or bean curry/dal with bread/rice or khichdi, a popular Indian meal, are all examples of traditional recipes with high protein quality.

In addition, there are some soya-based foods like Tofu, tempeh, and edamame which provide complete or high-quality protein. Another one is Quinoa, an equally good example of complete protein.

Calcium can be overcome by looking out for plant-sources of this nutrient. For instance, sesame seeds, ragi or finger millet, and green veggies are all good sources of calcium and hence should be included in the

diet regularly.

Oxalates are an element found in green veggies like spinach and Swiss chard that reduces calcium absorption. Steaming or boiling spinach reduces the oxalate content.

Including foods like, prunes, dates, whole wheat, beans, and greens can help to meet Iron needs. And foods like, nuts, tofu, and quinoa can provide zinc to a certain extent.

Vitamin C helps in the absorption of Iron. Vitamin C-rich foods coming from red, yellow, green peppers or tomatoes help in the absorption of Iron.

Like Oxalates, phytates found in nuts, seeds and beans do affect the absorption of iron and zinc. Hence, soaking or germinating these foods before use can reduce the impact.

Vitamin B12 is always a challenge and therefore, when on a vegan diet, do get your levels checked periodically to know if you need supplements.

To conclude, those on a plant-based diet or vegan diet, can get most of their nutrients easily, provided they select, plan, and combine foods intelligently.

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

HIIT WORKOUTS

BURN **FAT** FAST

HIGH-INTENSITY FITNESS PROGRAMMES ARE DESIGNED TO BURN FAT AND BUILD MUSCLE FAST BY STRESSING MUSCLES MORE THAN OTHER WORKOUTS. THESE PROGRAMMES CAN INCLUDE HIGH-INTENSITY INTERVAL TRAINING, KNOWN AS HIIT

High-intensity interval training, better known as HIIT, workouts is meant for those who need quick results and are willing to work for it. However, it is best suited to only those for whom fitness is already a way of life. Hence, if you have not yet initiated fitness in your daily routine, HIIT is best avoided as it could cause unexpected injuries. HIIT workouts consist of short bursts of intense work that typically last between 15 seconds to 4 minutes. These are followed by a quick recovery pe-

riod and then right back to the tough work. These cycles are repeated several times and can include a variety of exercises in each round. HIIT workouts can include the use of a stationary bike, treadmill, bodyweight, kettlebell, dumbbells, or jump rope. They help you burn a lot of calories in a short amount of time. Research has also showed that you keep burning calories for hours after your workout is finished. The biggest danger to health, however, is an inactive lifestyle, which is much more widespread than overdoing exercise. The goal should be to slowly overload the body for higher levels of performance, rather than to suddenly increase activity levels. While high-intensity exercise can lead to

overuse injuries or muscle and joint injuries, these are less likely to occur with the right preparation. Inactive people who aren't experienced with exercise or those who haven't regularly exercised in a while tend to push themselves too much. In these situations, people often aren't aware of how hard they can and should work. Pain is a big sign that a workout is causing trouble. If any exercise causes pain, don't push through it. It's a good idea to start slowly increasing physical activity and intensity. This will allow you to learn the difference between pain and being uncomfortable. Focus on improving your mobility, stability, strength, and cardiovascular fitness. This will eventually allow you to do any physical activity you choose. Before diving into tough exercise, spend six to 12 months (or more) improving your diet, working on mobility and addressing movement issues, steadily increasing strength, and developing cardiovascular fitness with exercises like walking, cycling, swimming.

Tailor-made solutions
HIIT sessions are also highly customisable, making them easy to tailor to your personal schedule and preferred training style. From running and strength training to rowing and boxing, there's a HIIT workout that will work for you. A true HIIT session incorporates several rounds of short high-intensity cardiovascular bursts — usually not more than 20 seconds — followed by brief periods of rest. This allows you to complete a workout that delivers substantial fitness results in just 30 minutes or so. It usually requires little to no equipment, and you can pick your preferred method of cardio. One consistent thread through any HIIT programme, however, is that workouts are composed of short periods of intense work followed by a subsequent period of rest. To be most effective, 'Intensity' is the most important part of the HIIT equation - participants should be working near or at peak effort during the intervals, then backing off during the breaks.



HIIT
PROTOCOL

Here are some of the different types of equipment and training styles you can use as part of a HIIT protocol:

- Bodyweight workouts
- Strength training exercises (dumbbells, kettlebells, etc)
- Treadmill sprints
- Stationary bike sprints
- Rower sprints
- Ski-Erg sprints
- Boxing rounds
- Battle Ropes
- Sled pushes and pulls

How do you get started?

For those new to HIIT, once per week is a good starting point. While you can do a HIIT session by itself one can combine it with 'super sets' of combined movements like squats and lunges, and then finishing with a 10-minute HIIT workout. Once you are comfortable with them, aim for two to three sessions per week, but not more, to avoid injury. Avoid HIIT if you have a cardiac condition, are recovering from injury or regularly experience vertigo. In the beginning, you might have to shorten the length of an interval or two to catch your breath. But after about a month of regular HIIT, you should be able to get through one and notice an improvement. You can perform HIIT at home, at the gym or in a group class setting, and it requires little to no equipment — though if you have access to a treadmill, bike or rowing machine, they work well. Short bursts of running, jumping jacks, burpees, mountain climbers or squat jumps can also be effective. This makes HIIT convenient, and also easy to do when traveling. If you're new to the HIIT format, a good way to ease in is to pick a single cardio-focused machine or exercise. The treadmill is often the least intimidating for beginners. After a warm up, try sprinting as fast as you

can for 10 seconds, then walking or resting for 50 seconds. Repeat this six times. That's it, you're on your way to mastering HIIT. As you get comfortable, try shortening the rests to 20 seconds, and then even 10.



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