

Expatriate population rebounds

144,000 new expats join workforce till June this year

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman's expatriate worker population, which had dropped by around 303,000 or 17.7 per cent in two years (2020 and 2021), is on the rebound. Over 144,000 expats have been added to the workforce in the first half of 2022.

With the government an-

nouncing a budget surplus due to windfall gains from high international crude prices, signs of economic recovery are palpable in the country.

Recruitment picked up in the first six months of 2022, with over 57,000 Bangladeshi workers, 35,000 Indians and 34,000 from Pakistan forming the bulk of the new arrivals.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information, there were 1,712,798

expatriate employees working in various sectors in the sultanate at the end of 2019. The number dropped to 1,443,128 in 2020 and 1,409,473 in 2021. But 2022 has seen a recovery; the expatriate workforce has gone up by 10.2 per cent - compared to the end of 2021 - to 1,553,981.

Year 2020 was the worst for the expatriate workforce, as over 269,600 left Oman, while 33,655 left in 2021.

In the two years combined, 303,325 expatriate workers left the country.

Sector distribution

The private sector, which employs the majority of expatriates, expanded by 10.5 per cent to 1,250,880 till June from 1,131,526 in 2021, while those engaged in the domestic/family sector grew up by nearly 13 per cent to 271,976 from 239,951. However, the number of ex-

patriates working in the government sector has fallen by 18 per cent to 31,125 from 37,996 at the end of 2021.

Bangladeshi workers continue to make up the bulk of the expatriate population, with their numbers rising by 10.7 per cent or 57,000 to 587,917 by June 2022 from 531,053 in 2021. The Indian expat worker population went up by 7.5 per cent or 35,000 to 506,184 from 471,178, while the Pakistani

worker population rose by 17.5 per cent or nearly 34,000 to 228,681 from 194,048 - making up the top three expatriate employee populations.

The construction sector - the largest employer of expatriates - employs 401,016 and has added 48,000 new workers in the first half of 2022, followed by wholesale, retail and repair of automobiles as one sector (224,251), domestic sector (211,025), manufacturing

(184,789), and accommodation and food services (115,271), accounting for the top five sectors for expat employment.

The governorate of Muscat is home to the largest number of expatriate workers (632,666), followed by North Batinah (221,723) and Dhofar (182,548).

The total population of Oman went up by 200,926 to 4,728,372 in June as compared to 4,527,446 at the end of 2021.

Of the total population in June, 1,894,657 were expatriates and 2,833,715 Omanis.



NEW ARRIVALS

Nationality	Bangladesh	India	Pakistan	Philippines
	57,000	35,000	34,000	2,000
Sector	Construction	Domestic	Retail, Repair	Manufacturing
	48,000	28,000	18,000	14,000

NEWS BRIEF

AGREEMENT SIGNED ON JABAL AKHDAR DEVELOPMENT

Jabal Akhdar - The office of the Governor of Dakhliyah signed a memorandum of cooperation (MoC) with Omran Group on Wednesday.

The MoC aims to achieve sustainable development in infrastructure, government services and public utilities in the tourism sector, as well as create an investment-attractive environment in Jabal Akhdar.

The MoC was signed by Hilal Said al Hajri, Governor of Dakhliyah, and Mohammed Abu-Bakar al Ghassani, Vice-Chairman of Board of Directors of Omran Group.



Jabal Akhtar to hold its first tourism fest in August



Oman boosts oil output nearly 10% in H1 as exports jump



OMANI LENS MAN RECOGNISED AMONG THE BEST

A photograph of Niyabat Tiwi taken by Omani photographer Qasim al Farsi was chosen among the ten best in the Creative Content Challenge organised by SkyPixel - one of the world's most popular aerial photography communities established by tech giant DJI. Farsi is a professional photographer who specialises in landscapes, travel and adventure, and aerial photography.



Qasim al Farsi



3 fuel stations face legal action for tampering meters

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has taken action against three filling stations for tampering fuel dispensing machines in North Batinah.

A statement issued by CPA said, 'The Directorate of Consumer Protection in North Batinah issued violation notices against three petrol filling stations for manipulation and malpractice related to the amount of fuel dispensed.'

CPA officials investigated the fuel stations and confirmed foul play in the fuel amount dispensed to customers. The officials took legal action against the fuel stations for violating the Consumer Protection Law.

The authority called on all petrol stations to respect the laws that protect the rights of consumers, affirming that it won't hesitate to apply the legal procedures prescribed by the law in order to ensure the rights of consumers.

Many citizens took to Twitter to denounce the fraud. Al Balushi tweeted saying that the fuel stations should be shut for six months and fined heavily for the violation.

Mazen Khalili said, 'We are tired of such practices where the victim is always the poor citizen.'

More than 500 died in 10-day heatwave: Spanish PM

Madrid, Spain - The ten-day heatwave that hit Spain left "more than 500 people" dead, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said on Wednesday.

"During this heatwave, more than 500 people died because of such high temperatures, according to the statistics," Sanchez said, referring to a public health institute estimate based on excess mortality rates.

"I ask citizens to exercise extreme cau-

tion," the premier said, noting the "climate emergency is a reality".

Spain was gripped by a heatwave affecting much of Western Europe which pushed temperatures as high as 45°C in some regions last week, sparking dozens of wildfires.

Sanchez cited figures from the Carlos III Health Institute which estimates the number of heat-related deaths based on the number of excess deaths when compared



to the average in previous years. The institute has qualified these figures in recent days, stressing that it was a statistical estimate and not a record of official deaths.

The heatwave pushed temperatures in Britain over 40°C for the first time on Tuesday. Britain's previous all-time temperature record of 38.7°C was set in Cambridge in 2019.

AFP

See also Page 11

Jabal Akhtar to hold its first tourism festival in August

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, in cooperation with cultural and hiking events organiser Oman From Horseback, will hold a tourism festival in Jabal Akhdar, the first in one of Oman most popular destinations, starting August 23. Jabal Akhdar Tourism Festival will run for five days.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Saif Ali al Rawahi, head of Oman From Horseback, informed that the festival aims to attract tourists from all over the world, besides supporting domestic tourism.

Open from 9am to 10pm, entry to the festival will be free.

"The festival will also support small and medium enterprises and promote their products," Rawahi added.

"Twenty SMEs and productive families will present their products, such as perfume and oils, while 12 farmers will participate in a fruits exhibition and



(Supplied photo)

market."

Other attractions for visitors will include horse shows, theatre for children and a horse trail for riding enthusiasts. "Ten riders are expected to participate in the horseback trail ride of two-day

duration covering about 50km. It will start at Alila Jabal Akhdar Hotel and end at dusitD2 Naseem Resort."

There are plans to make the festival bigger and better in the future, Rawahi informed. "Next

year, we are planning to hold the festival twice; one will be a rose festival and the second will focus on the pomegranate season."

He added that the idea behind holding such festivals is to promote Jabal Akhdar, which is

known for its production of roses and various fruits, pomegranate in particular.

"We call on citizens and residents to participate in the festival to support domestic tourism," Rawahi added.



(Supplied photo)

Rare sighting of honey badger in Al Wusta

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A rare sighting of a honey badger, usually found in Dhofar, was reported in Al Wusta.

Mohammed Saeed al Junaibi, head of the Environmental Monitoring Department in Al Wusta Governorate, informed that the Environment Department in Al Wusta was alerted by a citizen of sighting a 'strange' animal in the Juba area in the wilayat of Ma-hout.

A technical team was formed and the animal transferred to the wildlife reserve in the governorate for examination, to ensure its safety and to provide an appropriate environment for its survival.

"Honey badgers are endemic to dry areas and pastures, and are found in Dhofar governorate and parts of the central region of Oman. These are also found in many African countries and regions of South and West Asia," Junaibi added.

ONE DEAD, FIVE INJURED IN THUMRAIT-HAIMA ROAD ACCIDENT



One person died and five others of Asian nationality were injured when a car they were travelling in overturned on the Thumrait-Haima Road on Wednesday.

A statement issued by Royal Oman Police said, 'Police aviation transported injured people to Nizwa Hospital after they met with an accident due to poor tyre condition on the Thumrait-Haima Road' (Supplied photo)

Australian team visits UTAS



(Supplied photo)

Muscat - Dr Said Hamad al Rubai'e, chairman of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), received Dr David Templeman, Minister for Culture and the Arts; Sport and Recreation; and International Education and Heritage of the Government of Western Australia, and his accompanying delegation on Wednesday.

The two sides explored areas of cooperation in academic exchange, mutual student visits between universities in Western Australia and UTAS, and a mechanism for exchanging expertise in technical education.

The two parties agreed to activate several initiatives in the fields of education, research, consultation and student ex-

change.

UTAS has partnered with Edith Cowan University in Western Australia for an online course on renewable and alternative energy.

Work is underway to offer more courses through the same mechanism by cooperating with other Australian universities.

ONA

OPINION

SALEH MIRI, MUSCAT DAILY COLUMNIST, IS AN ARCHITECT WHO CAME TO OMAN IN THE EARLY 1980S



We will need new leaders, who have a long term vision, who can plan for the future of their people and the rest of the world, since we are all inhabitants of the same planet

After the weather disturbances and the incursion of Russian troops into Ukraine, many questions come to the mind for the inhabitants of this planet. They are essential survival questions. What will happen if the war starts using nuclear weapons? Would it mean the end of life on this planet?

With the creation of the United Nations in 1945, countries of the world wanted to ensure that wars will not start again after the debacle of the Second World War, where millions of people lost their lives and countries' borders changed. A Security Council was created to supervise the events and ensure that no one transgresses the laws. Then suddenly, one member of the same Security Council starts attacking its neighbour. The first reaction from Europe and the States is to shout its opposition to this action. Then we witness that many other countries, such as China, India and many African countries take the side of

Russia. According to Russian news, there are more people siding with Russia than those opposing their action. It is said that the majority of the world population is siding with Russia. Does this mean that it implies opposition to the US and Europe? Interestingly enough, at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Vladimir Putin was pushing Russia to become a part of Europe, but the Western world refused the appeal. Russians are blaming the

A NEW WORLD

West's refusal of cooperation and this has the negative effect of creating two opposing blocks.

We are witnessing some radical changes. The reaction of several countries is astonishing. Some want to join NATO, like Finland and Sweden, others like Hungary want to leave.

These events, are drafting the design of the new world order. The supremacy of the US, with its increasing

external debt, and the weakened European economy, shift attention to new areas. The Eastern part of the world is controlled by the Chinese, the Indians and the Russians, and no one will allow the West to grow in this areas. South America has its own problems and rules, and is not the focus for huge future revenues. Africa has already been divided in the early 50's into various spheres of influence. Although it is the richest continent on earth, it is the poorest because of corrupt managements, installed and promoted by the western world.

Europe, with its 27 members, has a global growth of around one per cent and needs new markets. That leaves the Middle East, with a gradual decline of Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, and Iran, which has influence over 550mn people in the region, from Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the countries between Russia and the Sea of Oman. Dealing with Mullahs however is not an easy task.

We will need new leaders, who have a long term vision, who can plan

for the future of their people and the rest of the world, since we are all inhabitants of the same planet and cannot afford any more fights between ourselves. The leaders need to be visionaries, be able to listen, dare to take risks and be motivated by results and not personal gains, which unfortunately seems to be the motto in many countries. Without such leaders, we are rushing into a collapse and the disappearance of planet Earth. Think of this the next time you are requested to vote. Think of your children and grandchildren, and at least try to do what your grandparents did for you.

A solution could be the establishment at the United Nation's level of a unique government selected by the world's population with deputies in each country, based on recognised values such as humanity, respect of environment, people, history etc. This would allow us to have at least coordinated decisions with a replacement of those selected, to be re-assessed on an annual basis. Maybe this could save us from a possible collapse.

The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Muscat Daily or Apex Press & Publishing

Heavy rains expected in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Heavy rains lashed Dhofar on Wednesday, with chances of the inclement weather extending to Thursday. Al Wusta and Al Hajar mountains are also likely to witness thunderstorms and rainfall of varying intensity.

An official from the Directorate General of Meteorology said, "Rains at this time of the year are a normal phenomena. Due to this, the temperature will also be affected around the country. In Muscat, the maximum and minimum temperatures will be 35°C and 29°C, respectively."

He added that visibility will be significantly affected in the coastal areas, in the southwest part of Dhofar in particular.

The Civil Aviation Authority urged all to take precautions during thunderstorms and stay away from low lying areas and avoid venturing into the sea.

"The rains and clouds will gradually move away to southwest in two days and chances of rains will be less after that," the official said.

Divers launch project to develop artificial coral reefs in Quriyat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Forty-three divers launched a project to develop artificial reefs in the wilayat of Quriyat on June 23, in cooperation with the Environment Authority (EA), with the objective of protecting the fisheries sector and preserving marine environment.

Artificial reefs are used by marine conservationists to restore coral reefs around the world. These provide a stable growing environment for corals, and habitat for fish and other marine organisms.

Calling themselves Quriyat Divers, the group headed by Juma Khamis al Amri, launched the first phase of the project to install artificial reefs in areas where corals are disappearing.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Amri informed that Quriyat Divers was established in January 2019.

"The idea for the project evolved over time as the team's divers found many areas in Quriyat where coral reefs were disappearing. In cooperation with EA, we launched the project on June 23. It will continue for two years."

Amri informed that the divers are taking turns; every weekend, a team of eight dives from 8am to 11am to install the artificial reefs.

"We will work in two phases. One is to instal artificial reefs, and the second involves transferring of some coral reefs to other places. We aim to grow four types of coral - Acropora, Porites,



(Supplied photo)

The biggest challenge for the divers during reef installation operations and carrying out clean-up efforts is the same which entangles and kills marine creatures – fishing nets

JUMA KHAMIS AL AMRI

Turbinaria and Platygyra."

Besides growing new corals and transferring cultivated corals to areas affected by natural factors, the divers will raise aware-

ness among fishermen, diving enthusiasts and the community about preserving corals.

Amri noted that Quriyat Divers is also working to rid the

sea of pollutants, which will help fishermen. Additionally, the divers hope to encourage interest among community members in marine activities by conducting environmental workshops for school students and fishermen.

The biggest challenge for the divers during reef installation operations and carrying out clean-up efforts is the same which entangles and kills marine creatures – fishing nets. Getting en-

tangled in nets in the depth of the sea is every diver's worst nightmare. "Occasionally, we also encounter strong waves, high water temperature and fear getting stuck in coral reefs." But the divers are determined to continue the project with the support and encouragement of their families.

"We also need financial support and diving equipment to complete the reef installation project," Amri added.



(Supplied photo)

397 violations of fishing law reported in June

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ten expatriate workers were arrested for violating fishing laws and regulations in June, according to statistics released by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR).

Additionally, 397 violations were registered for non-compliance with the regulations for fishing of marine resources.

Of the total violations, 325 were for violating licensing regulations, 31 instances of use of prohibited fishing methods and possession of unauthorised equipment, two violations of fishing in prohibited areas and time, ten cases of employment of unlicensed expatriate workers, eight instances of non-compliance

with placement of number plates on boats and vessels, and 21 other violations.

"In all, 220 items were seized, including ten boats, five engines, 76 nets, 76 cages, 23 fishing devices and other equipment," a ministry official said, adding that a total of 1,281.5kg of fish were confiscated in June.

Specialists of the ministry arrested 30 expatriates for violating provisions of the Marine Fishing Law and Protection of Living Aquatic Resources.

MAFWR organises monitoring campaigns in cooperation with relevant authorities, including the Coast Guard of Royal Oman Police, Royal Oman Navy, Maritime Security Centre and the Ministry of Labour regularly.



5,774 water licences issued in H1 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A total of 5,774 water licences were issued in the first six month of 2022, according to statistics issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR).

An official at MAFWR said, "The licences issued include requests for registering wells, dams and aflaj, for drilling wells, and de-

velopment projects in various governorates."

Of the total, 1,011 licences were issued in June. According to the official, the maximum number of licences – 303 – were issued in Dakhliyah, followed by 211 in Dhahirah, 137 in South Batinah, 126 in North Sharqiyah, 122 in North Batinah, 34 in South Sharqiyah, 33 in Muscat, 26 in Buraimi, 11 in Dhofar, six in Musandam and two in Al Wusta.

MAFWR strives to facilitate and simplify procedures for granting water licences, while preserving aflaj as a natural water resource, the official informed.

Oman received average rainfall of 123mm in 2020 and 183mm in 2019, according to MAFWR statistics.

Ministry data indicates that the volume of surface runoff in 2020 was 913mn m3 compared to 303mn m3 in 2019.

EA begins germinating 500,000 mangrove seeds in Al Wusta

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environment Authority (EA) has started germinating 500,000 mangrove seeds in Al Wusta governorate as part of its efforts to plant 10mn wild trees.

According to an official of the authority, specialists of the Department of Marine Environment Conservation collected seeds from Qurm Nature Reserve in the first stage of the ongoing project.

In the second phase, which commenced on Wednesday, the department started germinating the seeds to grow saplings, which will be planted in the final phase of the project.

The project is part of a national initiative to plant 10mn wild trees in the various governorates of the sultanate.



(Supplied photo)



In January 2020, EA, in cooperation with Petroleum Development Oman, launched the initiative to plant 10mn trees of indigenous species in the next ten years. These include ghaf, sumr, sidr, shue, tiq, talh, mitan, sarh

and alalan.

The national initiative aims to increase vegetation coverage, protect ecosystems, preserve and protect environmental systems and rehabilitate degraded land while spreading environmental awareness among members of society.

In 2020, the authority planted

6,500 mangrove saplings in various coastal areas. Mangroves are considered to have a significant impact in maintaining ecological balance and preserving beaches from erosion while helping the growth of commercially valuable fish and other marine creatures, according to an EA official.

ONE INJURED IN FUEL TRUCK ACCIDENT



(Supplied photo)

One person was injured in a fuel truck accident when it overturned in the wilayat of Sur, South Sharqiyah. In a statement, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority said, 'Our teams responded to the accident of a fuel truck in Sur. The teams secured the site and controlled the contents released from the overturned truck. The accident resulted in light injury to the driver.'

REGIONAL WEATHER

	Max	Min
Muscat	34	28
Abu Dhabi	42	32
Doha	39	31
Kuwait City	45	31
Manama	40	31
Riyadh	45	29

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4.07am
Sunrise	5.32am
Duhr	12.18pm
Asr	3.40pm
Maghrib	7.00pm
Isha	8.20pm

MARKET WATCH

MSX30	4,280.81
SENSEX	55,397.53

FOREX RATES
(RO1 equals)

Indian Rs	207.99
Pakistani Rs	585.22
Bangladeshi taka	244.16
Philippines peso	146.24
Sri Lankan Rs	935.31

*Rates as on JULY 20
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

UK approves major new nuclear plant

The UK government on Wednesday gave the go-ahead for the new Sizewell C nuclear power station in eastern England, which it says will generate low-carbon electricity for six million homes.

It hopes the construction of the 3,200MWe plant will help achieve its target of Britain becoming a net zero carbon emitter by 2050, AFP reported.

Ministers announced in January that the government will invest another £100mn to help support development of the project.

The extra cash is also aimed at attracting new partners to Sizewell C, which is led by French energy giant EDF and located on the Suffolk coast.

"The funding commitment... will be used to continue the development of the project," said a statement from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Oman boosts oil output nearly 10% in H1 as exports jump

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's daily average production of oil increased to 1.05mn barrels per day (bpd) during the first half of 2022, up by 9.7 per cent in comparison to 954,900 bpd output recorded in the same period of last year.

The sultanate's total oil production in the first six months of this year grew by nearly 10 per cent to 189.55mn barrels compared to 172.84mn barrels in the same period of 2021, according to the official data released on Wednesday by National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCISI).

Of the total production, crude output jumped by 13.2 per cent year-on-year to 150.47mn barrels during the first half of 2022 from 132.92mn barrels recorded in the same period a year ago. Condensates output, however, decreased by 2.1 per cent to 39mn barrels during January - June period this year.

Earlier in June, the Minister of Energy and Minerals said that the new discoveries of oil reserves by companies operating in Oman will help the sultanate increase its daily oil output between 50,000 - 100,000 bpd over the next two to three years.

Oman's daily average oil production has consistently remained above one million barrels per day during the first



The average price at which Oman sold its crude during the first half of 2022 surged by nearly 61% to \$90.4 per barrel against \$56.2 per barrel recorded in the same period of 2021

six months of 2022.

The sultanate's total oil exports grew by 16.2 per cent during the first six months of this year to 162.4mn barrels as compared with 139.8mn barrels recorded in the corresponding period of 2021, the NCISI data showed.

Total oil exports for the full year 2021 had inched up 0.7 per cent to 288.96mn barrels from 287mn barrels in 2020.

Oil exports to China, the biggest buyer of Oman's crude,

same period of 2021.

The average price at which Oman sold its crude during the first half of 2022 surged by nearly 61 per cent to US\$90.4 per barrel against US\$56.2 per barrel recorded in the same period of 2021. The average price for June stood at US\$102.4 per barrel, which is lower than US\$111 recorded in May, the NCISI data showed.

With global oil prices continuing to remain above US\$100 mark amid Russia - Ukraine conflict, Oman crude prices in the second quarter of 2022 rose to their highest level in more than eight years. Oman crude price on Wednesday stood at US\$104.63 per barrel (for September delivery) at the Dubai Mercantile Exchange.



Ibri Industrial City attracts 23 projects

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) is currently implementing the construction project of Ibri Industrial City, where the completion rate of the infrastructure project in phase 1 has surpassed 27 per cent.

Phase 1 of the project is being developed on an area of 3mn sqm and incorporates road works, services network such as sewage, rain and telecom networks, and wadi protection walls.

The number of localised projects in Ibri Industrial City in Al Dhahirah governorate has reached 23 projects on a total area of 250,000 sqm with an investment value of over RO9mn, Eng Nasser al Mabsali, director

general of Ibri Industrial City, said in a press statement.

These projects represent several sectors including building materials, oil and gas services, foodstuff and warehouses.

Mabsali pointed out that Ibri Industrial City is located on an area spanning 10mn sqm, and aims at localising a variety of industrial, commercial and service activities such as light and medium industries, commercial projects, administrative offices, industrial workshops, warehouses, and workforce township.

Madayn floated a tender earlier this year as an investment opportunity to establish a one-stop shop comprising a petrol station, rest area, and service station for trucks and vehicles passing through the road to Saudi Arabia.

Omantel Group's profit rises 18% to RO128mn in first half of 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) announced that its group net profit increased by 18.4 per cent year-on-year for the six months period ended June 30, 2022.

Omantel Group reported a net profit of RO128.6mn for the first six months of 2022 compared with RO108.6mn posted in the corresponding period of 2021, according to the company's preliminary financial results submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange.

Group revenues increased by 8.4 per cent to RO1.294bn during January - June period of this year from RO1.194bn recorded in the same period of last year. Net profit margin of the group increased to 9.9 per cent for the first half of 2022 compared with 9.1 per cent reported for the



same period of 2021.

Net profit attributable to the shareholders of Omantel came at RO34.6mn in the first six months of 2022, an increase of 6.8 per cent from RO32.4mn in the same period of 2021.

Omantel said its subsidiary Zain Group generated consolidated revenue of US\$2.7bn for the six months period ended June 30, 2022, while Zain

profit increased to RO37.3mn in January - June period of 2022 compared to RO36.1mn reported for the same period of the previous year.

Omantel's domestic net profit margin remained at 13.5 per cent for the first half of this year against 13.6 per cent reported for the same period of last year.

The company's total revenue from domestic operations increased by 4.2 per cent to RO276.8mn for the six months period ended June 30, 2022 against RO265.7mn in the same period a year ago.

"The increase in net profit is predominantly on account of sustainable revenue growth in postpaid mobile revenue (11.7 per cent) and fixed broadband revenue (2.1 per cent), cost optimisation measures, reduction in impairment provision against receivables and depreciation," Omantel said in its disclosure.

Iran and Russia's Gazprom ink \$40bn deal for energy projects

Ankara, Turkey - The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) and Russia's Gazprom inked a US\$40bn memorandum of understanding (MoU) for oil and gas projects and technological cooperation, Iran's oil ministry's news outlet Shana reported on Tuesday.

Signed during an online ceremony by NIOC CEO Mohsen Khojastehmehr and deputy chairman of Gazprom Vitaly Markelov, the deal includes the development of the Kish and North Pars gas fields, pressure enhancement of the South Pars field, development of six oil fields, gas and product swap, completion of LNG projects, construction of gas export pipelines, and other scientific and technological cooperation.

The decision on signing the MoU came on the same day that the Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Iran to hold talks with his Iranian and Turkish



counterparts.

Iran was the fifth-largest crude oil producer of the OPEC cartel in 2020 and the third-largest natural gas producer in the world in 2019, according to a country analysis report by the US Energy Information Administration (EIA).

The country also holds some of the world's largest deposits of proved oil and natural gas reserves, ranking as the world's third-largest and second-largest

reserve holder of oil and natural gas, respectively, in 2020.

At the end of 2020, Iran accounted for 25 per cent of oil reserves in the Middle East and 12 per cent in the world.

Despite its abundant reserves, Iran's crude oil production has fallen since 2017 because the oil sector has been subject to underinvestment and international sanctions for several years.

Anadolu Agency

Global electricity demand slowing sharply: IEA

Paris, France - Global demand for electricity is slowing sharply this year due to sluggish economic growth and runaway energy prices and the trend will likely continue next year, the International Energy Agency said Wednesday.

"Electricity demand growth is slowing significantly in 2022," the IEA wrote in its new Electricity Market Report.

"After global electricity demand grew by a strong six per cent in 2021, propelled by rapid economic recovery as Covid-19 lockdowns eased, we expect growth to slow to 2.4 per cent in 2022 - about the same as the average from 2015 to 2019," it said.

"This reflects slower global economic growth, higher energy

prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and renewed public health restrictions, particularly in China."

The electricity sector's carbon emissions were set to decline slightly this year, the report found.

"After having risen to an all-time high in 2021, CO2 emissions from the global electricity sector are set to decline in 2022, albeit by less than one per cent," it said.

The agency said renewable sources of energy were growing faster than demand and replacing fossil fuels.

"Strong capacity additions are helping global renewable power generation towards growth of more than 10 per cent in 2022," the report said.



Nevertheless, due to high gas prices and supply constraints, coal is replacing gas for power generation in markets with spare coal plant capacity, the IEA observed.

"In Europe, governments delayed coal plant phase-outs and lifted restrictions to increase the availability of coal generation,

thereby reducing gas consumption to improve security of supply."

The IEA said that wholesale electricity prices were skyrocketing in many countries.

"In the first half of 2022, gas prices in Europe rose fourfold and coal more than threefold from the same period in 2021, resulting in wholesale electricity prices more than tripling in many markets."

It said its price index for major global electricity wholesale markets had "reached levels that were twice the first-half average from 2016 to 2021."

The IEA said that Europe was gearing up to reduce its reliance on Russian fossil fuel imports by accelerating its clean energy transition.

"The implementation of the European Commission's 'REPowerEU' plan would greatly accelerate deployment of renewables in the coming years,

doubling their share in EU gross final energy consumption from 2020 to 2030 and significantly reducing fossil fuel use."

Looking ahead to next year, the IEA said that the main uncertainties affecting its 2023 forecasts for electricity demand and generation mix would remain fossil fuel prices and economic growth.

"As of mid-2022, we expect global electricity demand growth in 2023 to remain on a similar path as this year. Strong renewables growth of eight per cent and recovering nuclear generation could displace some gas and coal power, resulting in the electricity sector's CO2 emissions declining by one per cent," the IEA said.

AFP

Europe seeks to cut gas use by 15%

Brussels, Belgium – The European Commission on Wednesday urged EU countries to reduce demand for natural gas by 15 per cent over the coming months to secure winter stocks and defeat Russian "blackmail".

Announcing an emergency plan, EU commissioners also asked member states to give Brussels special powers to impose compulsory energy rationing if Russia cuts off Europe's gas lifeline.

A total shutdown of imports or a sharp reduction in the east to west flow could have a catastrophic effect on the European economy, shutting factories and forcing households to turn down the heat.

Last year, Russia represented 40 per cent of the EU's total gas use and any further disruption to supply would also push consumer prices ever higher and raise the risk of a deep recession.

"Russia is blackmailing us," European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen told reporters.

"Russia is using energy as a weapon and therefore, in any event, whether it's a partial major cut off of Russian gas or total cut



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (left) and European Commission Vice President Frans Timmermans give a press conference after the College meeting on the 'Save gas for a safe winter' package at the EU headquarters in Brussels on Wednesday (AFP)

off... Europe needs to be ready."

Russian President Vladimir Putin has played hot and cold in recent days with his threats to cut off gas deliveries to the bloc of 27 members, but Brussels is asking EU countries to prepare for the worst.

Since Moscow invaded Ukraine on February 24 and the West responded with sanctions, Russia has begun reducing its

gas deliveries, apparently to prevent EU countries from replenishing reserves.

'Not enough'

The EU has scrambled to replace Russia's supply from farther-flung sources such as the United States, Norway, Azerbaijan and Algeria.

But the International Energy Agency warned on Monday that

non-Russian gas resources "are simply not going to be enough".

According to the EU plan, each member state should "do its utmost" to reduce gas consumption by at least 15 per cent between August 2022 and March 2023, compared to the average of the last five years over the same period.

By the end of September, countries will have to detail their

EU business lobby warns gas rationing would be 'disastrous'

Brussels, Belgium – The EU's main business lobby warned on Wednesday that any decision to curb economic activity to cut back on Europe's use of Russian gas would have calamitous effects.

"Forced curtailment of production would have disastrous economic effects and often irreversible impact on busi-

nesses," said Markus Beyrer, director general of Business Europe, after the European Commission released a plan on cutting gas demand by 15 percent this winter.

"It should be considered only as an option of very last resort," he added in a short statement.

AFP

roadmap for achieving this.

EU energy commissioner Kadri Simson also outlined a proposal, which like the rest of the package will have to be approved by member states, to give the EU powers to impose demand cuts.

"If the member states are not making sufficient progress, or the situation deteriorates, we propose that the commission can declare a state of EU alert at any moment," she said.

"This will trigger a mandate or

obligation for the member states to meet the 15 percent cost reduction target."

There will be resistance among some EU capitals to mandatory measures.

But Von der Leyen told reporters the "binding phase" would only be triggered in the case of "a drastic reduction of Russian gas or a complete cut off of Russian gas".

'Winter test'

The plan showed that the com-

mission's main focus is on energy consumption by electric power companies and industry, since households make up only 37 per cent of total gas demand.

Brussels also asks that states "switch to nuclear power where it is an option" and advises countries wishing to abandon atomic energy to postpone planned closures of nuclear power plants.

And to minimise interruptions to gas-fired power plants, diesel-powered backup generators should be able to take over "for at least five days".

The EU's plans to survive the winter comes amid increased concern over how badly a Russian gas crunch would affect the European economy in the coming months.

The plan will not include an energy price cap, an idea that has been strongly endorsed by the US but that Europeans have so far excluded as a viable fix to their overdependence on Russia.

"This winter will be a test for the EU's energy system and for our Union as a whole. And it is a test that we will pass if we act with solidarity and resolve," Simson said

AFP

UK inflation hits new 40-year high

London, UK – British annual inflation surged to a new 40-year high in June on rising motor fuel and food prices, official data showed Wednesday, adding to a cost-of-living crisis.

The Consumer Prices Index (CPI) jumped to 9.4 per cent last month from 9.1 per cent in May, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement.

Analysts said the data put pressure on the Bank of England to raise interest rates by as much as 50 basis points, or half a percentage point, at its next policy meeting in August.

The central bank expects British inflation to top double figures this year.

"In the UK, we saw another eye-popping CPI reading and the pressure is on the BoE to do what it takes before it is too late to control inflation," said Naeem Aslam, chief market analyst at Avatrade.

Inflation has soared to the highest level in decades in many countries, fuelled by the war in Ukraine and the easing of Covid restrictions.

That has forced central banks



In this file photo a customer shops for food items inside a Tesco supermarket store in east London (AFP)

to raise interest rates, risking the prospect of recession as higher borrowing costs hurt businesses and consumers.

The Bank of England has raised its key interest rate five times since December, lifting it to 1.25 per cent from a record-low 0.1 per cent.

The BoE has not increased its

rates by more than 0.25 percentage points each time.

However, on Tuesday, BoE governor Andrew Bailey had said that "a 50-basis-point increase will be among the choices on the table when we next meet".

Summer of strikes

Separate data this week showed

that soaring UK inflation has caused the value of British wages to fall at a record pace.

And Britain is experiencing a summer of strike action as a result of the cost-of-living crisis.

Aircraft refuellers at London's Heathrow airport will strike for three days later this week, while this month sees also telecoms

giant BT facing its first staff walk-out since 1987.

Railway staff are preparing for further stoppages having last month carried out their biggest strike action in decades.

State-employed lawyers are also striking, while teachers and workers for the National Health Service are mulling action.

Britain's retail prices index (RPI) – which includes mortgage interest payments and is used by unions and employers when negotiating wage increases – rose to 11.8 per cent in June from 11.7 per cent in May, the statistics office calculated.

"More pain is on the way for household budgets as the high rate of inflation continues to outpace wage growth, bringing down the real value of incomes across the UK," said Yael Selfin, chief economist at KPMG UK.

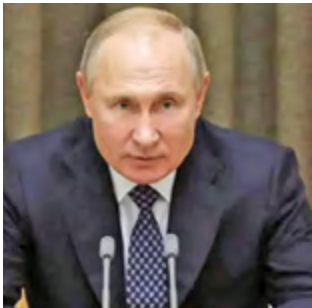
"We also expect the Bank of England to continue raising the base interest rate, which we now expect to reach 2.0 per cent early next year, to stave off further rounds of inflation rises."

AFP

Putin accuses Canada of delaying gas turbine for Nord Stream pipeline

Moscow, Russia – Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday accused Canada of delaying the return of a turbine for the Nord Stream pipeline, saying Ottawa was eyeing the European market itself. Russia's state-owned energy giant Gazprom has reduced flows to Germany via Nord Stream 1 by some 60 per cent in recent weeks, blaming the absence of a Siemens gas turbine that was undergoing repairs in Canada. The repaired turbine is currently understood to be en route to Russia, as routine maintenance work that completely halted deliveries via Nord Stream 1 is due to be completed on Thursday.

Moscow says the turbine is essential for the proper functioning of the Nord Stream pipeline, which delivers gas to Germany via the Baltic Sea. "One machine needs planned repairs, it is not given back from Canada because sanctions have been placed against Gazprom, although it is a



Vladimir Putin

Siemens plant," Putin said at a televised meeting in Moscow.

"I'll tell you why Canada did it: because it produces oil and gas itself and plans to enter the European market." The Nord Stream 1 pipeline has been shut down since July 11 for 10 days to undergo annual maintenance. Data from management company Gascade on Wednesday showed that gas was expected to begin flowing through the pipeline again on Thursday, although it remained to be seen how much would be delivered.

AFP

Netflix subscriber numbers drop two quarters in a row

San Francisco, US – Netflix reported losing subscribers for the second quarter in a row Tuesday as the streaming giant battles fierce competition and viewer belt tightening, but the company assured investors of better days ahead.

The loss of 970,000 paying customers in the most recent quarter was not as big as expected, and left Netflix with just shy of 221mn subscribers.

"Tough in some ways, losing a million and calling it success, but really we are set up very well for the next year," the company's co-chief and founder Reed Hastings said in an earnings presentation.

The company said in its earnings report that it had expected to gain a million paid subscribers in the current quarter.

Netflix shares were up slightly in after-market trades – a sign that investors were remaining faithful.

Analysts noted that the results, even if not as poor as feared, were still troubling.

"Netflix's subscriber loss was expected but it remains a sore point for a company that is wholly dependent on subscription revenue from consumers," said analyst Ross Benes.

Benes added that "unless it finds more franchises that resonate widely, it will eventually struggle to stay ahead of competitors that are after its crown."

Fewer free rides

Netflix executives have made it clear the company will get tougher on sharing logins and passwords, which allow many to access the platform's content without paying.

"It's great that our members love Netflix movies and TV shows so much they want to share them more broadly," director of product innovation Chengyi Long said Monday in a blog post.

"But today's widespread account sharing between households undermines our long term ability to invest in and improve our service."



In this file photo illustration taken on March 31, 2020, a computer screen displays the Netflix logo in Arlington, Virginia (AFP)

Long said that an "add a home" subscription feature that Netflix in March began testing in Chile, Costa Rica, and Peru will be expanded to Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

Netflix said it is aiming to have an account-sharing payment system deployed broadly by next year.

Meanwhile, Netflix is working with Microsoft to launch a cheaper subscription plan that

includes advertisements, which The New York Times has reported could launch by the end of this year.

Netflix opted to develop the lower-cost offering after a disappointing first quarter in which it

lost subscribers for the first time in a decade -- and after years of resistance against the very idea of running ads.

Microsoft will be responsible for designing and managing the platform for advertisers who want to serve ads to Netflix users.

"These earning results buy them time, and they need time to focus on stopping the bleeding," analyst Rob Enderle of Enderle Group told AFP.

"Netflix is facing a significant amount of competition; to hold on as well as they have is an example of how resilient they are but they are not out of the woods."

Netflix has been investing heavily in original content such as hit shows "Squid Game" and "Stranger Things" to fend off powerhouse competitors such as Disney, with its Marvel and Star Wars franchises.

The recently released fourth season of "Stranger Things" racked up 1.3bn hours of viewing in just four weeks at Netflix, mak-

ing it the platform's biggest-ever English language television release, according to the company.

Meanwhile, some 284mn hours were spent watching the latest season of "The Umbrella Academy," executives said.

Action-thriller film "The Gray Man" – based on a novel of the same name, and set for release on Netflix on Friday – is "mind-blowing," co-chief Ted Sarandos said in the earnings presentation.

"Netflix's ability to produce smash hit content is undoubted," said GlobalData managing director Neil Saunders.

"However, with the loss of almost one million members since the prior quarter, translating this into commercial success is proving to be more of a challenge."

Challenges facing Netflix include changing habits, as housebound people who signed on for the service during the height of the pandemic are re-evaluating their subscriptions now that they are resuming their former lifestyles, Saunders noted.

AFP

Industry experts discuss programme for Oman's first-ever Corrosion Confex

In preparation for the first-ever Corrosion Conference and Exhibition in Oman to be held from August 29 to 31 at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC), highly technical experts and senior industry leaders met at the OCEC to finalise the themes, topics and programme that will set the direction for the conference and the industry.

The industry experts representing the corrosion divisions of Oman's most reputable oil and gas, power and energy and port companies such as OQ, Nama Group, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), BP, Port of Sohar, Schlumberger and Hempel 'regorously discussed' the conference programme - anchored on six themes Corrosion Control and Management, Big Data Analytics, Asset Integrity Management, Failure Analysis, Surface Preparation and Coatings, and Risk Inspection: Use of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning.

They were gleaned from current challenges, requirements,



strategies and solutions, focusing on the need to broaden the scope of the corrosion discussion to include the less-examined marine and maritime sector, said a press statement. These were also founded on the necessity of

incorporating technological innovations and developments such as data management, data integration, and how they are utilised, and automating monitoring and inspection operations, among others, it added.

Gracing the event were representatives of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT), under whose patronage this specialised event is being organised.

Present at the exclusive meeting were Salim Mahrouqi, Trustee, AMPP Oman and Event Committee Chairman; Majid al Maqbali (MTCIT), Amjad Kharusi, AMPP General Manager and Material Corrosion Engineer,

PDO; Nasser al Behlani, Consultant; Khalid al Alawi, Asset Management Manager, Port of Sohar; Adil al Busaidy, SME Corrosion Measurements, Schlumberger; Dr Talal al Nabhani, Head Materials & Corrosion Engineering, PDO; Ashraf al Aasmi, Corrosion Materials & Inspection Engineer, BP Oman; Khalid al Fahdi, Acting Head, Asset Integrity & Reliability, OQ; Munzir Khan, Regional Oil & Gas Segment Manager, Energy Middle East & Oman at Hempel; Ahmed al Abri, Network Planning Manager, Mazoon Electricity; and. Also present were officials from Al Nimr Expo, Raya Services and Innovative Concepts, joint organisers of the event.

Discussions and presentations were structured into the formal forum, panel discussions, and dedicated workshops. An exhibition will provide a tangible platform for companies to present and showcase products, equipment, technologies, services, current and pipelined projects that will offer opportunities

for potential new business and investment, the release said.

An accompanying Youth Excellence Awards will recognise achievements and contributions to the field of materials, corrosion and integrity by university students and aspiring young engineers.

"We are glad to bring industry experts together to shape an agenda that promises real value to Oman's corrosion industry and provide support to its players and stakeholders," said Amjad Kharusi, General Manager, AMPP. "All the insights shared by the Committee members are critical to the advancement of a sector that has not particularly been spotlighted. We look forward to propel this event towards growth and the fulfillment of objectives aligned with Oman's economic development plan."

Oman Corrosion Conference & Exhibition is jointly organised by Al Nimr Expo, Raya Services and Innovative Concepts in partnership with AMPP Oman and hosted by PDO.



Heavy duty JAC Titan trucks light on pockets

JAC Motors has projected its celebrated Titan trucks as the best option for freezer/chiller, car carrier, water tanker, closed cargo body truck, grill body truck, tailgate application truck, or a crane application truck.

In a press release, JAC Motors said Titan LCV is "a truck that could be the best business partner and won't cause you an arm and leg".

JAC Motors is present in 130+ countries worldwide and has racked up more than US\$7bn in revenue with an annual production of 1mn units through a vast network of 500+ dealerships and 14 assembly plants across Latin America, Europe, Africa, The

Middle East, and Asia.

Titan is one of the most popular commercial vehicles JAC has to offer in Oman, mainly due to its versatile usage & extraordinary price.

JAC Titan comes in two variants: Titan - LCV 3 Ton Double Cab & Titan - LCV 3.5 Ton.

The 3 Ton JAC Titan truck is an excellent choice for drivers who transport goods on longer routes. With a max speed of 120km per hour and fuel tank capacity of 100 litres, it makes sure you keep going fast for longer, while ABS makes sure that your vehicle doesn't spin out of control. Titan 3 Ton truck comes with power steering and AC.

Alizz Islamic Bank honoured for engaging with disabled children

The Association for Children with Disabilities honoured Alizz Islamic Bank for its constant support of the organisation and its dedication in raising awareness by participating in the 7th 'Tadamon' Charity Exhibition which was held for three consecutive days at Al Shafaq Club in Athaibah.

The bank was represented at the event by Muna al Khusaibi, the Deputy Senior Manager of Marketing and Corporate Communications.

The purpose of the exhibition was to encourage people to donate and engage in a social activity in order to provide the best services to the 450 children that the association support, including comprehensive early intervention programmes for children with disabilities from birth until the age of nine.

These programmes cover areas such as rehabilitation, social and psychological needs,



daily life skills, education, and training, with a view to enrol children in regular schools, if possible, or develop their skills, and help them adapt to their disabilities, which in turn ensures a better quality of life for themselves and their families as well as facilitating their integration into society.

It is part of the strategy of Alizz Islamic Bank to embark on such humanitarian initiatives that serve society by taking care of each boy and girl who are going to take part in shaping

Oman's prosperous future.

The focus on children with disabilities and orphans in the sultanate is driven by government initiatives, represented by the Ministry of Social Development, ensuring that those with disabilities obtain all rights, be on equal footing with all other citizens of the sultanate, including their rights to be rehabilitated in differed rehabilitation institutions, so that they can be integrated into the society to play their role in its prosperity side by side with their fellow Omanis.

Ooredoo offers exciting packages for international travellers

Ooredoo's Passport World and Passport GCC bundles are giving away twice the data this summer for all customers to enjoy in selected countries. So make for happy travels with stress-free roaming and plenty of data and minutes to share with friends and family.

Ooredoo Passport GCC is available throughout the region while Passport World allows users travelling to any of 99 per cent of top visited countries and territories around the world.

Simply activate the Ooredoo Passport bundle, connect to an Ooredoo partner network upon arrival and roam

like you're at home. Passport GCC and Passport World are both available from RO15 to RO24, offering up to 6 GB data, 30 incoming, local and home minutes. Each bundle is available as a weekly and monthly bundle to help all Ooredoo customers stay connected and make the most of their travels.

Starting from July 7, the promotion is available until October 6 and can be activated through the Ooredoo App or in-person at any Ooredoo store across Oman.

Customers should always check that the destination is included in Ooredoo Passport before travel.

Global elite gun for glory, \$1.5mn prize money at Gamers8 event

Gamers8, the biggest Esports and gaming event worldwide, entered the next phase of its Professional Esports calendar with the inauguration of Dota 2 Riyadh Masters on Wednesday.

As the deepest multi-player action, real-time strategy (RTS) game ever created and one of the world's biggest Esports titles, the five-day Dota 2 tournament's 'must-see' status is already cemented, with a US\$4mn prize pool and US\$1.5mn winners' share adding to the widespread anticipation and excitement.

Held at Boulevard Riyadh City's next-generation venue and streamed live across official Gamers8 channels, the greatest Dota 2 teams on the planet will compete against each other with one directive: Destroy the enemy's ancient before they destroy yours.

With teamwork, skill, a little luck, and the discovery of new tactics, players must work together in teams of five to progress through the tournament and emerge victorious. For every team, 123 heroes are available to choose from, each with unique capabilities, personalities,

and backstories. And before entering to do battle, five must be chosen to form an all-star squad capable of conquering the opposing five-hero combination.

His Royal Highness Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Sultan, chairman of the Saudi Esports Federation, said, "Be it prestige, popularity, suspense, or gaming camaraderie, Dota 2 measures up with games' all-time greats in every possible way. These same factors were central behind us feeling as much determined as we did compelled to stage a brand-new Dota 2 tournament at Gamers8 - the Dota 2 Riyadh Masters. The global appeal of this Esports giant was enough in itself for the gaming community to be thrilled ahead of the event, yet the resounding success of Rocket League has fueled the build-up even further both on-site and online. On behalf of the Saudi Esports Federation, I implore everyone to fasten your seatbelts and enjoy the ride. Dota 2 Riyadh Masters is a tournament not to be missed and destined for great things, with further editions already planned beyond Gamers8."

GROUP STAGE SCHEDULE		
WEDNESDAY, JULY 20TH	THURSDAY, JULY 21ST	FRIDAY, JULY 22ND
A VS B 14:00	A VS B 11:00	A VS B 14:00
A VS B 14:00	A VS B 11:00	A VS B 14:00
A VS B 17:00	A VS B 14:00	A VS B 17:00
A VS B 17:00	A VS B 14:00	A VS B 17:00
A VS B 20:00	A VS B 17:00	A VS B 20:00
A VS B 20:00	A VS B 17:00	A VS B 20:00
A VS B 20:00	A VS B 20:00	A VS B 20:00
A VS B 20:00	A VS B 20:00	A VS B 20:00

'A Dota 2 stage like no other'

The competition begins with the group stages, with the 10 teams placed in two groups of five as they play each other twice in a best-of-two round robin format. The teams with the best overall record in their respective groups will advance straight to the semi-final stage, while those who finish second and third will secure quarter-final spots. Both quarter

and semi-finals will be best-of-five matches, with the grand final a best-of-seven matchup.

Given the competition format, Dota 2 Riyadh Masters will also see the world's elite compete in high-intensity situations. While many Dota 2 competitions are held online over several weeks, Dota 2 Riyadh Masters is a standout tournament due to its live land-play, elimination structure, and total prize fund - which

is the largest outside of 'The International' (TI), the biggest and most prestigious event on the Dota Pro Circuit (DPC).

'Test against the best'

China's hopes for Dota 2 Riyadh Masters victory are pinned on PSG.LGD, who are among the pre-tournament favourites with a roster boasting some of the world's most skilled and admired players. Despite falling short in

last year's TI final against Team Spirit, the Chinese outfit is still widely considered to be the world's number one - and relishing the upcoming test in the Saudi capital.

"Dota 2 Riyadh Masters is an excellent opportunity for us to play against pro players from different regions on the international stage," said Yiping 'Y' Zhang, PSG.LGD. "While we went through long, tedious yet must-play regional DPC circuits for the past three seasons in China, this new tournament will enable us to compete in a shorter but more pressurized Esports environment.

"Of course, we have huge admiration and respect for our Gamers8 opponents, and we are excited to test ourselves against them. After more than half a year, we finally have the chance to meet new opponents outside China and compete with them."

The field between PSG.LGD and Gamers8 glory could not be more competitive, with nine big names and mouthwatering match-ups in waiting. 2021 TI champions Team Spirit, former two-time TI victors OG, and

North America's well-fancied TSM FTX are all finalising their preparations. Nigma Galaxy is also in the running with some of the world's biggest Dota 2 stars, as is hometown heroes Saudi Deboosters.

How PSG.LGD fare against the world's greatest remains to be seen, although the tournament itself is not the only reason the players are excited.

"Much like China, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a vibrant Esports hub where many millions are gaming enthusiasts, while Gamers8 itself will shine a unique world-scale spotlight on Dota 2 and our team. With these factors in mind, it's an honour for us to be representing our nation on foreign shores where Esports is similarly embraced," explained Ruida 'Faith_Bian' Zhang, PSG.LGD. "There hasn't been many Middle East-based tournaments in the past. But in Saudi Arabia, which is a mysterious country to us, we can visit, play some Dota 2 and, besides this, explore and appreciate the attractive local culture and civilization, which we are also looking forward to."

Bank Muscat extends special home, personal finance offer

In line with its customer-centric strategy of developing and offering the best services and facilities possible for its customers, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, has announced an extension of its discounted offers on Baituna and Personal Finance till September 30 this year.

Available to employees of government and quasi-government institutions as well as select Tier 1 companies, the special offer features highly-competitive interest rates starting at just 4.5 per cent for Baituna Home Finance and 4.75 per cent on Personal Finance.

Customers can also enjoy lower interest rates on short-term personal financing that starts at just four per cent for a tenor of up to 12 months.

On this occasion, Abdullah Tamman al Mashani, General Manager - Products, Bank Muscat, said, "We are delighted to see rising demand for various financing products from our valued customers, especially at present, as they can take advantage of various special offers with reduced interest rates.

The current offer he said was "developed and launched as part of the bank's ongoing efforts to enhance financial inclusion in the sultanate, and to suit the needs of the largest number of customers".

"Bank Muscat is keen to pro-



vide the latest products and services to our customers as part of our customer-centric vision and we are thankful for all their strong support as well as confi-

dence in the bank," Mashani added.

To apply for Baituna home finance, the bank said customers may visit the bank's Baituna sales centres in Qurm, Maabelah, Barka, Sohar, Saham, Sur, Ibra, Nizwa, Ibri, Buraimi and Salalah or any Bank Muscat branch across different governorates in Oman. Financing up to RO500,000 and for a period up to 25 years is available to customers to construct or purchase new homes as well as to buy land for residential construction, it added, asserting that "fast pro-

cessing, documentation and prompt disbursement of financing make Baituna the best home finance option in Oman".

At the same time, customers who require personal finance can visit their nearest Bank Muscat branch with the required documents including a salary transfer letter from their employer and their ID cards, which will ensure speedy processing of their applications. Financing up to RO200,000 is available to customers based on fulfilment of the eligibility criteria, a statement added.

As the leading financial services provider in the sultanate for the last four decades, Bank Muscat has the largest banking network in Oman with 146 retail banking branches and over 800 ATMs, CDMs and FFM.

Its range of digital banking channels including Internet Banking and Mobile Banking are helping customers meet the vast majority of their financial needs 24/7. The bank offers various financing options aligned to customer needs and its aim of facilitating a high standard of living for people in Oman.



The Chedi Katara Hotel & Resort showcases heritage

General Hotel Management Ltd (GHM), the inimitable creator of stylish hotels and resorts worldwide, has entrusted leading multidisciplinary design firm WATG, and its interior design studio, Wimberly Interiors, with its third property in the GCC region, The Chedi Katara Hotel & Resort, Doha, Qatar.

Responsible for some of the world's most iconic hospitality landmarks, WATG has drawn on its 77-year legacy to reimagine Doha's luxury landscape with its interpretation of Mughal heritage with a touch of Ottoman influence.

Scheduled to debut in November this year, The Chedi Katara will offer 59 elegantly-appointed rooms and suites as well as 32 villas complemented by world-class culinary concepts along the beachfront of the Katara Cultural Village.

"For 30 years, GHM has introduced the exquisite touches of Asian hospitality to wondrous destinations all over the world, melding refined luxury with the best of each locale's offerings," said Tommy Lai, chief executive officer of GHM.

"We recognised WATG and Wimberly Interiors' mastery in honouring a sense of place and authenticity by seamlessly infusing sensory cues from the land and culture into beautiful design solutions," Lai said, adding that "this strategic partnership aligns well with our vision to expand

GHM's distinctive presence at the most captivating and culturally significant destinations with The Chedi brand's relentless pursuit of hospitality and design excellence."

The design of The Chedi Katara Hotel & Resort is heavily inspired by Mughal architecture and features elements of Ottoman heritage.

The hotel is comprised of 91 rooms, suites and villas in addition to five epicurean venues that include The Restaurant, The Lobby Lounge, The Cigar Lounge, The Beach Club and Marsa Katara. The hotel's orientation offers all guestrooms, lounge, and restaurant areas with privileged views of the main pool and private beach.

"With The Chedi Katara Hotel & Resort, we kept in mind the architectural elegance of the locale and fused this with the avant-garde building's design, materials and colours, with subtle but apparent injections of The Chedi's rich legacy," said Jeremy Heyes, Senior Vice President, WATG London. "The result is an authentic design that embodies the destination and breathes new life for all who enters to relish."

From carefully detailed frame fretwork to ensuring precise accuracy behind the hotel's figurative elements and moldings, all design elements of The Chedi Katara were curated to be authentic to the fabric of Mughal design.

Bank Nizwa's Sharia'a-compliant education finance scheme opens

A progressive bank that continuously devises innovative products and services to better serve its customers, Bank Nizwa recently announced the launch of its Education Finance scheme.

Based on the Islamic principle of Murabaha and Ijarah (Service Ijarah), existing and new customers who transfer their salaries to the bank will be able to avail the new Education Finance scheme. Offering flexible payment options and a comfortable repayment period, Bank Nizwa gives customers the choice to finance the entire course fees whilst making the most of attractive profit rates.

With an understanding of the varying needs of its customers, three distinct segments can benefit from the bank's new Education Finance scheme. Students who have completed high school and are looking to pursue a higher education degree aimed at employment can apply for finance jointly with their parents or guardians. Under this unique



scheme, the parent or guardian will have to pay only the profit amount during the education period and will additionally also get a grace period of one year after the completion of the education period to repay the full amount.

Commenting on the new offering, Arif al Zaabi - AGM of Retail banking of Bank Nizwa, said, "The youth of today are the future of Oman and knowledge is the most powerful tool they can equip themselves with to better prepare for the challenges that lie ahead. Aligning itself to Oman Vision 2040 and the emphasis it

places on the education sector, Bank Nizwa has always been dedicated to empowering the local youth." With the growing preference for Islamic finance in the community, Zaabi said, "Bank Nizwa decided to launch Oman's first Sharia'a-compliant education finance to benefit those who want to continue their learning journey. By helping build a knowledge-based economy where individuals reserve the skills and capabilities to drive transformational change, Bank Nizwa seeks to drive sustainable progress in the country."

Diet & lifestyle changes

Lifestyle changes mean modifying things we have control over. It involves factors that may bring on symptoms or make them worse, such as dietary changes or changes in daily routine. While diet does not cause gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), reflux and its most frequent complaint of heartburn can be aggravated by foods. Certain medications can aggravate symptoms. Disclose the use of any medications to your physician.



Dr Baha Yaseen Ali
Specialist Gastroenterologist
Aster Al Raffah Hospital

Heartburn is the burning sensation in the chest behind the breastbone that we feel when stomach acid refluxes back into the esophagus (food tube). If you have this symptom, there are a number of things that you may be doing that brings it on and some things you can do to help prevent it.

children should be suspended during, and for a time after, eating. Smaller meals and an upright, relaxed posture should help minimize reflux.

Tip: Avoid large meals, especially late in the day. Try to make your main meal the mid-day meal.

Position

Gravity plays an important role in controlling reflux. Those of us who have a less than perfect lower esophageal sphincter (LES) find that if we lie down after a large meal, food comes back into the esophagus and heartburn occurs. If you experience heartburn, think whether it occurs after meals, when you lie in bed at night, or if you take a nap after a meal. Maintaining an upright posture until the meal is digested may prevent the heartburn. If heartburn occurs regularly at night, consider raising the head of the bed or inserting a triangular wedge to keep your esophagus above the stomach. Avoid exertion after a meal. It contracts the abdominal muscles and forces food through a weakened sphincter. This is especially true of tasks that require bending such as lifting or cleaning the floor.

Tip: Don't lie down within 3 hours of eating. That's when acid production is at its peak, so plan early dinners and avoid bedtime snacks.

How you eat

How is perhaps more important than what you eat. A large meal will empty slowly from the stomach and exert pressure on the LES. A snack at bedtime is well positioned to reflux when you lie down. It is best to eat early in the evening so that the meal is digested at bedtime.

You might try having the main meal at noon and a lighter one at dinnertime. All meals should be eaten in relaxed stress-free surroundings. Trips to the kitchen to fetch food or the performance of other tasks such as minding

What you eat

Certain foods compromise the sphincter's ability to prevent reflux, and are best avoided before lying down or exertion. These differ from person to person. Many people find that fats, onions, and chocolate are particularly troublesome. Alcohol often provokes heartburn, by compromising the LES, irritating the esophagus, and by stimulating stomach acid production. Common beverages such as coffee (both caffeinated and decaffeinated), tea, cola, tomato juice, and citrus juice may aggravate symptoms by irritating the esophagus or stimulating stomach acid production.[3] Certain other foods may bother some people; upon their discovery a period of avoidance or reduction may be of benefit.

Tip: Experiment to find what does and does not work best for you. Start by reducing fatty foods, onions, and chocolate.

Some oral medications such as potassium supplements or the antibiotic tetracycline will burn if allowed to rest in the esophagus. To be safe, one should always swallow medication in the upright position and wash it down with lots of water.

Other factors

Being overweight can promote reflux. Excess abdominal fat puts pressure on the stomach and the loss of even a moderate amount of weight makes many people feel better. Pregnancy is often troubled by heartburn, particularly in the first three months. Certain hormones appear to weaken the LES, and the increasingly crowded abdomen encourages reflux. Generally, if there has not been too much weight gain, a woman's heartburn improves after delivery.

Renault Oman announces special offer on Koleos vehicles

Renault Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, has announced an attractive offer on Renault Koleos as part of its exclusive promotion for the benefit of its customers.

Renault Koleos effortlessly blends refined luxury with functionality offering business class comfort for everyday adventure.

Owners say it is a vehicle that offers the discerning driver a unique experience that combines innovative technology, unequalled comfort and uncompromising safety to perfectly serve all of their top-end vehicle expectations.

As part of the Renault Oman special scheme, customers who buy Renault Koleos can enjoy free registration, free insurance,



free periodic vehicle service package, three years/60000km manufacturer warranty, free AAA assistance card, and reference programme among others. Social media users who participate in the promotional campaign will also be eligible for attractive prizes.

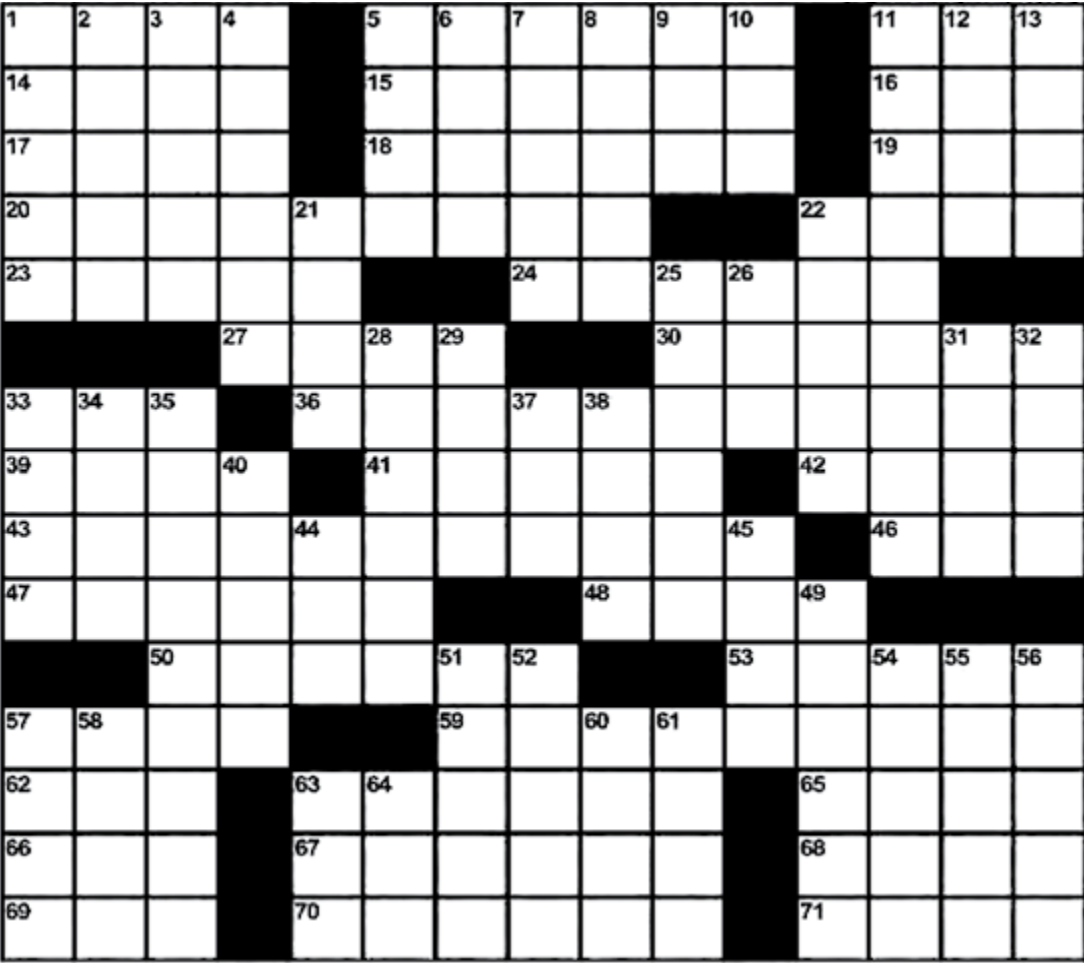
The Renault promotion which has already begun will go on till August 19 this year.

The unique offer boasts of a host of advantages for customers purchasing efficient Renault Koleos. All customers purchasing Renault Koleos from Suhail Bahwan Automobiles LLC will be eligible to participate in the campaign scheme. Vehicles purchased with commercial reg-

istration will not be eligible for the scheme. Vehicles bought for taxi, driving school, ministries, fleet, and rent-a-car usage will not be eligible for this scheme.

A spokesperson for Renault Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, said, "This is a great time to buy the athletic car. Well-defined edges make the overall profile of Koleos appear solid and athletic and is one of the most prominent features in this new version. A great combination of power and refinement, the Koleos makes its presence felt with large shoulders and muscular side panels that are further enhanced by a robust front end; broad, smart-looking tires; and a distinctly large wheelbase."

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Catch_ (start to get)
5) D.C. United's game
11) Obese
14) Lime-supplying fertil-
izer
15) Glorified
16) Once_ blue moon
17) Flattered most sin-
cerely
18) Bottled spirits
19) Summertime, in NYC
20) Service stripes, infor-
mally
22) 1052, in old Rome
23) Allegro_ (very fast, in
music)
24) Elaborate meal
27) Type of life insurance
30) Starting point
33) Plane without props
36) No fighting is allowed
here
39) Suffix with smack or
sock
41) Lively, as an imagina-
tion
42) Per person
43) Hesitating gait
46) Vietnam's My_
47) Pie chart portion
48) Olympic skater Hei-
den

50) " _ _ _ _ the brave"
53) Present time
57) Concludes
59) Biggest guy on a foot-
ball
field, often
62) Animal facility
63) Not at all chubby
65) Pirate's drink
66) Spreadsheet line
67) Allotted amount
68) High schooler's facial
concern
69) Raggedy doll
70) Crouches down
71) Deer with three-
pointed antlers

DOWN

1) Nebraska's largest city
2) Certain California
wines
3) Plait of hair
4) Been there, done that
5) Tale on an epic scale
6) German river
7) Bops on the bean
8) Like a brand-new dol-
lar bill
9) Very wide shoe size
10) Map abbreviations
11) What a farmer may
have in the spring?
12) "The King_"

13) M. Hulot's creator
Jacques
21) Way of carrying one-
self
22) Original Thanksgiving
fare
25) Middle- of-the_ (a
moderate)
26) Schubert's "The_
King"
28) Patriot Paul
29) "The Ghost and
Mrs._"
31) Machu Picchu resi-
dent
32) Classic soft drink
33) Heavyweight champ
Willard
34) Flamboyant Art Deco
designer
35) Land, as a plane?
37) Commercial prod-
ucts?
38) Ceremonial act
40) Graham and Pre-
minger
44) Hanks or Cruise
45) Worrisome car
sound
49) Mountain predator
51) On a scale of_ 10
52) Large book size
54) Drug agent, for short
55) Hag
56) A sphere lacks them

57) University founder
Cornell
58) Lunch time, for many
60) You may come to it

61) Twilights, poetically
63) 4th-yr. students
64) Huge chocolate con-
tainer

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
It might be time to start trimming back on your indulgences. Don't fret, though. You don't have to give up everything. It's just that your time has been disproportionately spent in some unproductive areas lately. Think about building your abilities in one or two tasks and put other things on the back burner. Miscommunication will be a part of a frustrating situation, and it won't take a rocket scientist to realize who's at fault (hint: not you).

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
Have you heard of "gilding the lily"? It means overdoing something so much that you turn what was already beautiful into something way over the top (and tacky). There's a danger of doing this today, so try to leave well enough alone. Things are going to be their best if you let them. It's tough to hold back when you get a strong vision, but if you wait, you'll be much more satisfied than you would have been otherwise.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
Achieving the perfect balance in life is next to impossible, but you need to make the effort today. Pay attention to your must-haves in life and fight for them! You must have respect, you must have freedom, and you must have affection. Finding all three in one place is tough but entirely possible. Evaluate your current situation and ask for what you're missing. An uncomfortable sacrifice might be required, but in the end you'll thank yourself for fighting for what you believe in: you.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
A wave of generosity hits you today, and you'll end up on both sides of the equation. On the one hand, you'll want to share all of your good news and give out all the affection and love you can give. On the other, a remarkable amount of generosity will be shown to you as well. Support, opportunity, respect, gratitude. These will be some of the things you get. Open your arms wide and understand how freeing it can be to accept what happens to you.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
You need to do your stretches this morning, because the wider you can spread your arms the better. Reach out and bring all the energy floating out there closer to your heart -- it's key to enjoying this magical day for all it's worth. Surprise a stranger with a friendly question or compliment and watch the effect you can have on others. You can do some good for the egos of everyone you meet.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
Whether you just need a small affirmation that everything's going fine or you're looking for a big leg up toward a firmer foundation, reach out for help today. There are people on the sidelines just waiting to get in on the action of your life. They have good ideas and strong shoulders, so you can lean on them without hesitation. It's all part of the exchange. You give to them and they give to you. Life is a collaboration and everyone needs help once in a while.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
You already know that the people in your life are valuable, and that's half the battle, but are you protecting your relationships enough? Forget the whole "keep your friends close and your enemies closer" baloney. Ditch your enemies and devote your free time to getting closer to your friends today. And given the fact that you should be sticking to a modest budget for a while, any type of get-together needs to be humble and quiet. Conserve your money to retain your friendships.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Burling down deep inside you is a huge, raging, powerful burst of creativity that's itching to be released. The inspiration may not come until later in the day or week, but it will come. Suddenly, a brainstorm will rush in, and you'll need to grab whatever's around you to fulfill your vision. Do whatever it takes to make a physical thing out of your ideas. It will take you to the next level.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
Visions are important today. Your imagination, dreams, and fantasies offer you insight and confirm a few suspicions. You've been in a fog about someone for a while, and a conversation with a mutual friend could illuminate some facts about which you were previously unaware. Don't get discouraged. Instead, be up-front and crystal clear about what you need and what you want. Go right to the source. Today is not a day to leave things open to interpretation.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
When you rise up higher on the ladder of success, there are inherently more people below you looking up and wondering what makes you so special. These green-eyed folks are motivated by their own fears, not your actions. Keep looking ahead, not back at them. Your pride is bubbling up into a positive attitude that's bringing a lot of joy to your family. They are awfully proud of you! Contact an older relative to thank them for what they've done for you.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
You've been on quite a productive streak lately, and that isn't about to change anytime soon. Some folks are starting to forget what you look like, so you might want to slow down and return a few phone calls. Check in with your support network and let them know you're doing well. They only need a quick update for the guilt trips to stop! Your confidence is booming, and they love the changes in you despite your absence in their lives. Soon you'll be able to spend more time with them.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
Introspection isn't the same as hibernation. Just because you feel like looking inward today doesn't mean you have to turn off your social life. So say yes to that invitation without feeling guilty that you're not working on bigger personal issues. In a social setting, you'll get the clues you need to make further progress on your own happiness. Being popular isn't a burden. It's a source of strength. So get out there and mix it up with your friends.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. By the time the first explorers from the West reached the remote Chilean island of Rapa Nui (Easter Island) in 1722, how long is it thought that the island had been settled?
A. 1,200 years
B. 6,000 years
C. Between 500 and 900 years
D. It was uninhabited when the Western explorers arrived

02. Who have lived for 20,000 years as hunter-gatherers, whose territory spans parts of South Africa, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland, Botswana, Namibia, and Angola, centred on a large arid to semi-arid sandy area?
A. Gorillas of the Mist
B. Swagmen of the Outback
C. Tuareg of the Sahara
D. Bushmen of the Kalahari

03. What is a property shared by molecules of water, sulphur dioxide, ammonia and carbon monoxide?
A. They are very stable, non-reactive
B. They break up all organic compounds when mixed with them
C. They are polar
D. They all include oxygen

Answers: 1. C 2. D 3. C

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

T	L	A	N
M	I	L	W
L	S	O	E
B	G	B	U

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

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

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

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

Erdogan presses case against Syria's Kurds at Iran-Russia-Turkey summit

Tehran, Iran - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan pressed his case for a military offensive against Syria's Kurds at a summit in Tehran on Tuesday, despite Iran's supreme leader warning against such a move.

The summit, hosted by Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi and also attended by Russia's President Vladimir Putin, was ostensibly aimed at ending more than 11 years of conflict in Syria, where Iran and Russia support the Damascus government and Turkey supports rebel forces against the regime.

But Turkey is also deeply opposed to a semiautonomous Kurdish administration in Syria's oil-rich northeast, and Erdogan has lately repeatedly vowed to launch an offensive against Kurdish militants, on the back of a 2019 onslaught.

A statement by the three presidents 'expressed their opposition to the illegal seizure and transfer of oil revenues that should belong to Syria', while they also 'rejected all attempts to create new realities on the ground... including illegitimate self-rule initiatives' in the war-torn country.

The trilateral statement came shortly after Erdogan had urged Russia and Iran to back his efforts to combat terrorism in Syria, contending that 'it should be understood clearly that there is no room in our region's future for separatist terror organisations'.

"We will continue our fight against terrorist organisations in the time to come," he said.



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (left) speaking with Russian President Vladimir Putin (right) as Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi listens, at the Tehran International Conference Hall in Tehran on Tuesday (AFP)

But he had earlier on Tuesday earned a rebuke for his push for an offensive against Syria's Kurds from Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei in a bilateral meeting ahead of the summit.

Khamenei told Erdogan such an offensive would be 'detrimental' for the region and called for the issue to be resolved through dialogue between Ankara, Damascus, Moscow and Tehran.

It was not immediately clear whether the trilateral statement at the summit reflected any alteration in Iran's or Russia's position on Turkey's threatened offensive.

Energy ties, Ukraine grain

Khamenei also on Tuesday urged strengthened energy cooperation

with Moscow in a meeting with Putin.

Russia's president travelled abroad for only the second time since ordering Russia's February invasion of Ukraine in order to attend the gathering.

The summit came days after US President Joe Biden visited the Middle East for the first time in his presidency, with stops in Iran's regional foes Israel and oil-rich Saudi Arabia, a country his government has pressed to increase oil output to ease a price spike related to the Ukraine war.

Khamenei called for stronger 'long-term co-operation' with Moscow, according to a statement on his official website that noted both Moscow and Tehran are afflicted by Western sanctions. Describing such ties as

'deeply beneficial to both countries', the supreme leader called for bilateral contracts and understandings in hydrocarbons to be 'followed up and implemented fully'. Prior to Putin's arrival, the National Iranian Oil Company and Russia's Gazprom signed a memorandum of understanding 'worth about US\$40bn', according to the Iranian oil ministry's official news agency.

Putin and Erdogan also held a bilateral meeting where the Russian president said he wanted to 'thank' his Turkish counterpart for progress on talks over Ukraine's grain, according to the Kremlin.

Russia's war on Ukraine has massively hampered shipments from one of the world's biggest exporters of wheat and other

grain, sparking fears of global food shortages.

Turkey - a NATO member on speaking terms with both Russia and Ukraine - has spearheaded efforts to resume the grain deliveries. Erdogan has for months been offering to meet Putin in a bid to help resolve heightened global tensions.

"I want to thank you for your mediation efforts," Putin told Erdogan during the bilateral meeting, according to comments released by the Kremlin.

"We have moved forward," Putin said, while adding 'not all issues have yet been resolved'.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell warned on Monday that Russia's blockade of Ukrainian ports threatens supplies to countless thousands vulnerable to starvation. On Sunday, a day after Biden ended his tour of the Middle East, Iran accused the United States of provoking crises in the region. Biden had vowed the US would not 'tolerate efforts by any country to dominate another in the region through military buildups, incursions, and/or threats', in reference to Iran.

In a speech at a Saudi summit of Gulf Arab states as well as Egypt, Jordan and Iraq, Biden assured those gathered that the US would remain fully engaged in the Middle East.

"We will not walk away and leave a vacuum to be filled by China, Russia or Iran," he said.

Following the meeting, a joint statement committed the leaders to 'preserve regional security and stability'.

AFP



Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said the country has the 'fatwa' with regard to weapons of mass destruction (AFP)

Iran says nuclear policy unchanged after 'bomb' remark

Tehran, Iran - Tehran gave assurances on Wednesday that its nuclear policy was unchanged and that it still adhered to a fatwa banning weapons of mass destruction, after an Iranian official said the country was able to make atomic bombs.

It is the second time in the past 18 months that Iran has reiterated its opposition to nuclear weapons following comments by an official.

'In regard to the topic of weapons of mass destruction, we have the fatwa', or religious edict, by Iran's supreme leader that prohibits the manufacture of such weapons, said foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani.

The fatwa declares the use of atomic bombs and other weapons of mass destruction to be 'haram', or forbidden by Islam, and it is often cited by Iranian authorities as a guarantee of Tehran's good intentions.

'It seems that there has been no change in the view and position of the Islamic Republic of Iran' regarding the nuclear policy, Kanani told a news conference. His comments came in response to a question about remarks made by Kamal Kharazi, head of Iran's strategic council of foreign relations to Al Jazeera on Sunday about Iran's capability to manufacture nuclear weapons.

"It is no secret to anyone that we have the technical capability to make atomic bombs, but we have not made a decision in this regard," Kharazi said, before reiterating Iran's position that it does not want to make a nuclear bomb.

Speaking to the media on Wednesday, Kanani said: "Iran's nuclear capacities are great, but, as it has mentioned many times, Iran's nuclear technology is completely peaceful and under continued monitoring of the (UN's) International Atomic Energy Agency." The remarks

came amid heightened tensions between Iran and Western powers as talks in Vienna to revive a 2015 nuclear deal have been stalled since March.

Vienna talks

Qatar hosted indirect talks last month between the United States and Iran in a bid to get the process back on track, but those discussions broke up after two days without any breakthrough.

The Vienna talks, which began in April last year, aim to return the US to the nuclear deal, including through the lifting of sanctions on Iran, and to return Tehran to full compliance with

It is no secret to anyone that we have the technical capability to make atomic bombs, but we have not made a decision in this regard

KAMAL KHARAZI



its commitments.

The 2015 agreement gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its atomic programme to guarantee that Tehran could not develop a nuclear weapon - something it has always denied wanting to do.

But the US unilateral withdrawal from the accord in 2018 under then-president Donald Trump and the reimposition of biting economic sanctions prompted Iran to begin rolling back on its own commitments.

On Tuesday, State Department spokesman Ned Price said US President Joe Biden 'has made a commitment that Iran will not acquire a nuclear weapon'.

AFP

'Unprecedented' rush at Jordan-West Bank crossing

South Shouneh, Jordan - The King Hussein (Allenby) crossing between Jordan and the Israeli-occupied West Bank is facing 'unprecedented' traveller numbers, a Jordanian official said on Tuesday, blaming Israeli authorities for overcrowding at the crossing.

There are a number of official crossings between Israel and Jordan, which signed a peace treaty in 1994. Palestinians can only use the King Hussein (Allenby) crossing with the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

"What is happening now is an unprecedented rise in the number



Passengers sit in a waiting room on the Jordanian side of the King Hussein Bridge crossing on Tuesday (AFP)

ber of travellers compared to previous years," the head of

bridge security, Colonel Raafat Maaytah, told AFP on Tuesday.

He cited reasons including an increase in travellers with the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, the recent Muslim hajj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia and the feast of Eid al-Adha. Maaytah said the number of passengers seeking to cross from Jordan was 'around 6,000-7,000' daily, adding that the Israeli authorities were only allowing entry for around '4,000-4,500' passengers, leaving some stranded.

Israel, the Palestinians and Washington announced during US President Joe Biden's visit to the region last week that the United States would provide assistance

to enable the crossing to stay open 24 hours a day, after Moroccan mediation on the issue. Media reports have said the extended hours are expected come into effect from September.

In the waiting hall inside the King Hussein Bridge building, where verification and passport procedures are handled, about 350 passengers were seen waiting their turn to board buses to cross to the other side.

According to the Jordanian authorities, the King Hussein Bridge has received more than one million travellers this year.

AFP

6 Iraqi cops killed in attack 'by IS militants'

Baghdad, Iraq - Six Iraqi police were killed and seven wounded early on Wednesday in an attack by militants on their position in a remote area north of Baghdad, a military source said.

"Between 10 and 15 Islamic State group fighters attacked this federal police forward position around 12:30am. The attack lasted around an hour," the source said, asking not to be identified. The attackers struck near the village of Al-Jillam in an area 140km north of Baghdad where militants remain active.

IS established a so-called caliphate across swathes of Syria and Iraq from 2014. It was defeated in Iraq in 2017 after offensives by Iraqi forces with the support of the US-led coalition that has included more than 80 countries, among them Britain, France and several Arab nations.

AFP

US adds Vietnam, Cambodia, Macau to trafficking blacklist

Washington, US - The United States on Tuesday added Vietnam, Cambodia, Brunei and Macau to a human trafficking blacklist that already counts Malaysia, alleging weak efforts to stop forced sex work or assist migrant labourers.

In an annual report, the United States also added authoritarian-ruled Belarus to the blacklist and, in a rare criticism of a Western ally, put Bulgaria on a watchlist over concerns it is not taking trafficking seriously.

"If you look at the report, you're going to see a mixed picture of progress," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said as he presented it. Blinken said that corruption was a 'top tool' of traffickers who count on a blind eye from governments.

"As we tackle issues like climate and corruption throughout our diplomacy, we also have to address how they intersect with trafficking in persons," he said.

The State Department's annual trafficking report has historically not spared close allies,



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken speaks during the 2022 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report launch ceremony at the State Department in Washington, DC, on Tuesday (AFP)

often causing friction, although US officials say the unflattering headlines have led governments to act.

Nations that are put on the blacklist - 'Tier 3' - are subject to US sanctions, although the administration routinely waives

punishment for friendly nations that promise improvements.

Kari Johnstone, a senior State Department official in charge of combatting human trafficking, said that several Asian governments were downgraded because they had previously been

on the watchlist and had not shown progress.

"Unfortunately, there were a number of countries this year within that region that did not make the increasing efforts," she told reporters.

Vietnam, which has a warm-

ing relationship with Washington due to shared concerns over a rising China, was downgraded to Tier 3, with the State Department saying that prosecutions dropped off in 2021.

Weak enforcement

The report especially found fault with Hanoi taking no action against a Vietnamese diplomat and embassy staff member posted in Saudi Arabia who were accused of complicity in trafficking several of their citizens.

In Cambodia, the State Department said that 'endemic corruption' has impeded efforts to help thousands including children trafficked to entertainment establishments, brick kilns and online scam operations.

"Authorities often overlooked, denied or downplayed labour abuses - including forced child labour - in factories and at brick kilns and colluded with brick manufacturers to arrest, jail and return indentured labourers who had attempted to escape," the report said.

In the semi-autonomous Chi-

nese city of Macau, a former Portuguese territory known for its bustling casinos and sex industry, the report said that authorities did not provide services to a single trafficking victim for a third consecutive year.

On Bulgaria, which along with Serbia was threatened with a downgrade to the blacklist without improvements, the State Department said that authorities investigated 'significantly fewer' traffickers and at times punished victims for the crimes against them.

Also newly added to the Tier 3 blacklist was the tiny Dutch Caribbean territory of Sint Maarten. Along with Malaysia, nations that remained on the list from the previous year were Afghanistan, Cuba, Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, Iran, Myanmar, North Korea, Nicaragua, Russia, South Sudan, Syria, Turkmenistan and Venezuela.

Algeria and the Indian Ocean archipelago the Comoros were upgraded off the blacklist this year following improvements.

AFP

Six-time PM elected Sri Lanka president

Ranil Wickremesinghe secured an absolute majority in the parliament to become the new president

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Six-time prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was elected as crisis-wracked Sri Lanka's new president in a parliamentary vote on Wednesday, with the backing of the disgraced former leader's party.

Official results gave the veteran politician 134 votes, an absolute majority in the 225-member parliament, after Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled the country and resigned in the wake of protesters overrunning his palace.

"Our divisions are now over," Wickremesinghe said in a brief acceptance speech in parliament, urging his defeated rivals 'to join me and work together to bring the country out of the crisis we are facing'.

Wickremesinghe takes charge of a bankrupt nation that is in bailout talks with the IMF, with its 22mn people enduring severe shortages of food, fuel and medicine. But he was backed by the Rajapaksas' SLPP party - still the largest in parliament - and is despised as a proxy for the former leader by

the protesters who forced him from his palace after months of demonstrations over the unprecedented economic crisis.

They have also been demanding the departure of Wickremesinghe, who has pledged to crack down hard if protesters take to the streets.

Hundreds of heavily armed troops and police stood guard outside the parliament, but there were no signs of demonstrators.

Outside the presidential secretariat, where protesters camped for months to demand Rajapaksa step down, actress Damitha Abeyrathne, 45, said: "We lost. The whole country lost."

The struggle would continue, she told AFP. "The politicians are fighting for their power. They are not fighting for the people. They have no feeling for people who are suffering."

Law and order

One by one, the legislators entered ballot booths set up on the floor of the chamber to choose between the three candidates.

Previous elections have been



Supporters of newly elected Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe celebrate in Colombo on Wednesday (AFP)

marred by allegations of corruption and vote-buying, and mobile phones were banned to prevent anyone taking photos of the ballots. Wickremesinghe is elected for the balance of Rajapaksa's term, which runs until November 2024, and the speaker's office said he would be sworn in on Thursday.

According to analysts he is likely to appoint his school-mate Dinesh Gunawardena, a strong ally of the once-powerful Rajapaksa clan, as prime minister.

Wickremesinghe appears to be indebted to the Rajapaksas, a clan of four brothers who have dominated Sri Lankan politics for much of the last two decades, for

his victory.

Gotabaya's departure wounded the group after two of his brothers also quit their posts as premier and finance minister earlier this year.

But former president Mahinda Rajapaksa, the deposed Gotabaya's elder brother and the head of the family, re-

mained in the country, and party sources said he had pressed SLPP legislators to support the veteran operator.

As acting president, Wickremesinghe extended a state of emergency that gives police and security forces sweeping powers.

On Wednesday, a court ordered the protesters to vacate their camp near the Presidential Secretariat and confine themselves only to an area designated as a protest site.

A top police official said anyone damaging state property would be dealt with severely. Protesters occupying a part of president's office have been ordered to leave by Wednesday evening or face eviction.

Opposition MP Dharmalingam Sithadthan said ahead of the vote that Wickremesinghe's hardline stance against demonstrators had gone down well with MPs who had been at the receiving end of mob violence, describing him as the 'law-and-order candidate'.

Political analyst Kusal Perera said he had 'regained the acceptance of the urban middle classes

by restoring some of the supplies like gas'.

Clearing government buildings of protesters also showed the 73-year-old's 'firmness', Perera said.

'Petrol and gas'

Wickremesinghe's main opponent in the vote was SLPP dissident and former education minister Alahapperuma, 63, a former journalist who was supported by the opposition and received 82 votes.

The third candidate, leftist Anura Dissanayake, 53, was embarrassed when the final tally showed that the pile of rejected votes was one more than the three he polled.

But 72-year-old Zarook, a retired seaman who gave only one name and lives in Slave Island, an impoverished area of the capital, was indifferent to the result.

"If Ranil comes, if another man comes, we have to do our daily jobs. So we don't care," he said.

He hoped for 'petrol and gas', he told AFP, 'the daily products we need'.

AFP

European Union supports Taiwan's 'sovereign' existence, says lawmaker

Taipei, Taiwan - A senior European Union lawmaker said on Wednesday that Taiwan's future should be decided by its own people and that the EU backs the island's 'sovereign' existence, in a pointed warning to Beijing.

Taiwan lives under the constant threat of invasion by China, which claims the self-ruled democratic island as part of its territory and has vowed to seize it one day, by force if necessary.

Beijing's increased sabre-rattling has spurred greater shows of diplomatic support for Taipei and prompted visits from Western politicians.

Nicola Beer, one of the European Parliament's vice-presidents, arrived on Tuesday for what Taiwan's foreign ministry described as 'the first official visit' by an MEP of her rank.

In a meeting with President Tsai Ing-wen, Beer voiced Europe's concerns over Beijing



European Parliament VP Nicola Beer (left) meeting with Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen at the Presidential Office in Taipei on Wednesday (AFP)

'moving in a direction that could unilaterally alter the status quo' with Taipei.

"This must not happen, under no circumstances, under no pretext. Only the Taiwanese people can decide on Taiwanese future," she said.

"Don't doubt Europe's reassurance in your strive for a democratic, peaceful and sovereign

existing."

Beijing's Taiwan Affairs Office has said the island's future should be decided by 'all Chinese people'. Beer said Europe will 'stand up against any provocation' and urged China to refrain from 'threatening gestures'.

China should play a constructive role in maintaining the status quo 'based on neutral and re-

spectful dialogue', she added.

Beer, a lawyer and a member of Germany's liberal Free Democratic Party, said upon her arrival on Tuesday that Europe must support Taiwan's democracy, citing Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China's crackdown in Hong Kong. Russia's assault on Ukraine has deepened fears within Taiwan and among key Western allies that Beijing might do the same under President Xi Jinping.

Beijing has ramped up military, diplomatic and economic pressure since the 2016 election of Tsai, as she views the island as a sovereign nation and not part of Chinese territory.

China often hits out at visits like Beer's, with government statements blaming foreign politicians for 'sending false signals' to advocates of Taiwan independence.

AFP

China condemns US warship passage through Taiwan Strait

Taipei, Taiwan - China on Wednesday slammed Washington as 'a destroyer of peace' in the Taiwan Strait, following the latest in a series of passages by US warships through the waterway.

Beijing views Taiwan as part of its territory to be re-taken one day - and the narrow body of water that separates the island and mainland China is a flashpoint between the two sides. In contrast to Beijing's position, the United States and other countries see the strait as part of international waters and thus open to all, and this year a US warship has transited the route almost every month.

On Tuesday, the Arleigh Burke-class destroyer USS Benfold 'conducted a routine Taiwan Strait transit ... through international waters', the US

Seventh Fleet said in a statement. "The ship transited through a corridor in the Strait that is beyond the territorial sea of any coastal State," it added. China's Eastern Theatre Command said on Wednesday it had deployed naval and air forces to 'follow and monitor the whole process'.

"The frequent US provocations and showboating fully demonstrate that the United States is a destroyer of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and a risk maker," said its spokesman Colonel Shi Yi. He added Chinese forces were always 'on high alert to resolutely safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity'.

Taiwan's defence ministry said it had closely monitored the destroyer's passage and 'the situation was normal'.

In June, Taipei clashed with Beijing over the latter's restating of its position that the strait was not international waters, accusing China of trying to endanger regional peace with its territorial claims.

British, Canadian, French and Australian warships have all made passages through the Taiwan Strait in recent years, sparking protests from Beijing.

The US destroyer's passage coincided with a visit to Taiwan by former US defence chief Mark Esper, who called Taiwan 'a good friend we must support and defend' during a meeting with President Tsai Ing-wen. Esper said the time had come for Washington to 'move away from strategic ambiguity' over whether it would intervene militarily on Taiwan's behalf.

AFP

Myanmar military landmine use amounts to war crimes: Amnesty

Bangkok, Thailand - Myanmar junta troops are committing war crimes by laying landmines on a 'massive scale' around villages where they are battling anti-coup fighters, rights campaign group Amnesty International said on Wednesday.

Fighting has ravaged swathes of the country since last year's putsch, which sparked renewed clashes with ethnic rebel groups and the formation of dozens of 'People's Defence Forces' now battling the junta.

During a visit to Kayah state near the Thai border, Amnesty researchers interviewed landmine survivors, medical workers who had treated them and others involved in clearing operations, the organisation said.

It said it had 'credible information' that the military had used mines in at least 20 villages, including on paths to rice fields, resulting in civilian deaths and injuries. Amnesty also said it had documented several instances where the military had laid mines around a church and on its grounds.

"Soldiers have placed land-



An M14 landmine found by deminers in Kayah State in Myanmar (AFP)

mines in people's yards, at the entrance of homes, and outside toilets," Amnesty said.

"In at least one documented case, soldiers booby-trapped a house stairwell with a trip-wire improvised explosive device."

Anti-junta group members were attempting to de-mine some areas, but the work was done 'by hand with only rudimentary equipment and without any professional training', it added. "We know from bitter experience that civilian deaths and injuries will mount over time, and the widespread contamination is already blocking people from re-

turning to their homes and farmland," said Rawya Rageh, the group's senior crisis adviser.

Myanmar is not a signatory to the United Nations convention that prohibits the use, stockpiling or development of anti-personnel mines. Its military has been repeatedly accused of atrocities and war crimes during decades of internal conflict.

Military violence against the Rohingya minority in 2017 sent around 750,000 people fleeing into neighbouring Bangladesh, bringing with them accounts of rape, murder and arson.

AFP

India's mango man, father of 300 varieties

Malihabad, India - Every day, Indian octogenarian Kaleem Ullah Khan wakes at dawn, prays, then ambles about a mile to his 120-year-old mango tree, which he has coaxed into producing more than 300 varieties of the beloved fruit over the years.

His footsteps quicken as he draws nearer and his eyes light up as he peers closely at the branches through his spectacles, caressing the leaves and sniffing the fruits to see if they are ripe.

"This is my prize of toiling hard in the scorching sun for decades," the 82-year-old said in his orchard in the small town of Malihabad. "For the naked eye, it's just a tree. But if you see through your mind, it's a tree, an orchard, and the biggest mango college in the world."

The school dropout was just a teenager when he conducted his first experiment in grafting, or joining plant parts to create new varieties. He nurtured a tree to produce seven new kinds of fruit, but it blew down in a storm.

But since 1987, his pride and joy has been the 120-year-old specimen, source of more than 300 different types of mango, each with their own taste, texture, colour and size, he says.



Kaleem Ullah Khan, locally known as the 'Mango Man' peels a mango at his orchard in Malihabad, some 30km from Lucknow, India (AFP)

One of the earliest varieties he named 'Aishwarya' after Bollywood star and 1994 Miss World beauty pageant winner Aishwarya Rai. To this day, it remains one of his 'best creations'. "The mango is as beautiful as the actress. One mango weighs more than a kilogram, has a tinge of crimson to its outer skin and it tastes very sweet," Khan said.

Others he named in honour of

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and cricket hero Sachin Tendulkar. Another is 'Anarkali', or pomegranate blossom, and has two layers of different skin and two different pulps, each with a distinctive aroma.

"People will come and go, but the mangoes will remain forever, and years after, whenever this Sachin mango will be eaten, people will remember the cricketer

hero," said the father of eight.

Famed fruit

Standing nine metres tall, his treasured tree has a stout trunk with wide-spreading, thick branches that yield a pleasant shade against the Indian summer sun. The leaves are a patchwork of different textures and smells. In some places, they are yellow and glossy, and in others, a dark, dull green.

"No two fingerprints are the same, and no two mango varieties are similar. Nature has gifted mangoes with traits like humans," Khan said.

His method for grafting is intricate, and involves diligently slicing a branch from one variety, leaving an open wound into which a branch from another variety is spliced and sealed with tape. "I will remove the tape once the joint becomes sturdy, and hopefully, this new branch will be ready by next season, and bear a new variety after two years."

Khan's skills have won him numerous accolades, among them one of India's highest civilian honours in 2008, as well as invitations to Iran and United Arab Emirates.

AFP

Russia expanding military aims in Ukraine, pummels Kharkiv

Kyiv, Ukraine - Russia said on Wednesday that its military aims in Ukraine have expanded beyond the industrial Donbas region as its forces launched deadly barrages over the east and the south of the country.

The warning came as the European Commission called on EU countries to slash demand for natural gas to relieve dependence on Russian energy and sidestep Moscow's energy 'blackmail'.

Russia's foreign minister Sergei Lavrov said in an interview that Moscow's military was no longer 'only' focused on wresting control of the east Ukraine regions of Lugansk and Donetsk, which have been partially controlled by pro-Moscow rebels for years. "The geography is different now. It is not only about the DNR and LNR, but also the Kherson region, the Zaporizhzhia region and a number of other territories," he explained to state media.

Russian forces, since invading on February 24, have steadily advanced into each of those regions and sewn destruction as they captured key cities and met fierce Ukrainian resistance.

The steady progress in the east came after Moscow's forces failed early in the invasion to capture the capital Kyiv and were pushed back from Ukraine's second city Kharkiv.

But Russian artillery outside the eastern urban hub has nonetheless pursued an almost constant shelling campaign, and strikes on Kharkiv on Wednesday left three dead, local authorities said.

A 'direct threat' to Russia
"There was a 13-year-old boy among them," the regional governor Oleg Syneghubov said in a



Police experts examine a crater left by a Russian missile strike at a bus stop in Saltivka, a northern district of Kharkiv on Wednesday (AFP)

statement on social media.

AFP journalists on the scene saw a man in shock kneeling over the body, covered by a blue sweatshirt and surrounded by shards of broken glass.

In the southern city of Nikopol, meanwhile, Russian shelling on a residential neighbourhood left two people dead, authorities announced. While the brunt of fighting in Ukraine in recent months has focused on Donbas, a Ukrainian counter-offensive in the south has slowly clawed back some Russian-held territory.

Ukraine and military analysts credit Western-supplied long-range artillery with shifting battlefield dynamics there and

Russian officials have taken note.

Lavrov said on Wednesday that Western arms deliveries to Ukraine had played into Moscow's decision to focus beyond the east and said its ambitions could expand even more if the shipments continue.

"We cannot allow the part of Ukraine that Zelensky will control or whoever replaces him to have weapons that will pose a direct threat to our territory and the territory of those republics that have declared their independence," Lavrov said, referring to Donetsk and Lugansk.

Mykolaiv, the largest city under Ukraine control near Russian-occupied Kherson and the southern front has been shelled

persistently since the beginning of the invasion. The regional governor on Wednesday announced the city would be closed 'for a day or two' in several weeks to process information on people believed to have been collaborating with Russian troops.

A day earlier, governor Vitaliy Kim promised a US\$100 reward for anyone who could help to identify people who have been collaborating with Russia by providing it with the locations of Ukrainian troops or coordinates of potential targets.

The announcement comes after Zelensky in Kyiv fired several senior law enforcement officials - including the head of the security services - accusing their

departments of failing to crack down on spies and Kremlin-sympathisers. The West has responded to Russia's invasion with several packages of damaging sanctions, which in turn has seen Russia cut natural gas supplies to the bloc, spurring a supply and cost crisis.

Announcing an emergency plan on Wednesday, the European Commission asked EU countries to reduce demand by 15 per cent to secure sufficient storage ahead of winter.

EU commissioners also asked member states to give Brussels special powers to impose compulsory energy rationing if Russia cuts off Europe's gas lifeline. AFP



Markus Potzel, acting head of UNAMA, speaks during a press conference in Kabul on Wednesday (AFP)

'Taliban carried out hundreds of rights violations'

Kabul, Afghanistan - The Taliban have carried out hundreds of human rights violations in Afghanistan since seizing power last year, the United Nations said on Wednesday, including extrajudicial killings and torture.

"There's no denying that the findings of our report are extremely serious," Markus Potzel, acting head of the United Nations mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), told a news conference in Kabul.

The Taliban have routinely denied accusations of rights abuses since overthrowing the previous Western-backed government, but a UNAMA report released on Wednesday listed multiple accounts.

It documented 160 allegations of extrajudicial killings, 56 incidents of torture and ill-treatment, and more than 170 arbitrary arrests and detentions against former government officials and national security force members since August.

The most common methods of torture included kicking, punching and slapping, beatings with cables and

UNAMA report documented 160 allegations of extrajudicial killings and 56 incidents of torture and ill-treatment since August

pipes, and the use of electric shock devices.

It documented more than 200 instances of cruel, inhumane or degrading punishments - including beating shopkeepers for not attending mosque - and more than 100 cases of excessive use of force.

Since the end of the war, security has vastly improved across the country with a huge drop in civilian casualties.

But the Taliban - notorious for their brutal reign of terror between 1996 and 2001 - have sharply restricted the freedoms of Afghans, particularly women and girls.

AFP

Rishi Sunak or Liz Truss to become Britain's next Prime Minister

London, UK - Conservative rivals Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss, offering competing visions for Britain's response to multiple crises, will duel in the coming weeks to become the next prime minister after the party's lawmakers held a last vote on Wednesday.

Former finance minister Sunak, running on a centrist platform of fiscal rectitude allied with 'green levies' to fight climate change, again headed the field with 137 votes in the fifth and final elimination ballot.

The crucial race for second



Britain's Foreign Secretary Liz Truss (left) and former finance minister Rishi Sunak will duel in the coming weeks to become the next PM (AFP)

place was narrowly won by Foreign Secretary Liz Truss on 113 votes, against 105 for former defence secretary Penny Mordaunt.

Sunak and Truss now take their case to Conservative party members, who will decide the new leader and prime minister after a series of nationwide hustings in August. The result will be announced on September 5. But Britain is already guaranteed to get either its first PM of colour, or its third woman leader.

Sunak's resignation as finance minister this month helped to

topple outgoing leader Boris Johnson after months of scandal including 'Partygate', and Downing Street is reportedly running an 'anyone but Rishi' campaign.

At his last session of Prime Minister's Questions in the House of Commons earlier on Wednesday, Johnson bowed out by saying 'Hasta la vista, baby!'.

In a hint of support for Truss's low-tax platform, the premier urged his successor to 'cut taxes and deregulate where you can to make this the greatest place to live and invest'. Truss tweeted

that she was 'ready to hit the ground running from day one'.

But whoever wins the Tory race, 'like some household detergent, would wipe the floor' with the main opposition Labour party, Johnson predicted.

Mordaunt - the one-time bookmakers' favourite - lapsed to outsider status after Truss's fellow right-winger Kemi Badenoch was eliminated on Tuesday.

In a bid to woo those MPs, Truss wrote in Wednesday's *Daily Telegraph* that her plan to

revive the economy would be 'based around tax cuts, deregulation and tough reform'.

Former minister David Davis, a backer of Mordaunt, accused Sunak of lending votes to Truss so he could face her in the runoff.

"He wants to fight Liz, because she's the person who will lose the debate with him," he said. A YouGov poll published before the vote indicated that, despite his popularity with colleagues, Sunak was the least appealing candidate to the members.

AFP

African cheetahs to be spotted soon in India

New Delhi, India - India and Namibia signed a deal on Wednesday to bring cheetahs into the South Asian country, with the first batch of eight wild cats set to arrive next month, officials said.

India has been working to relocate the animals since 2020, when the Supreme Court announced that African cheetahs could be introduced in a 'carefully chosen location' on an experimental basis. India in the past had Asiatic cheetahs, but the species was officially declared extinct within the country by 1952.

The deal inked on Wednesday will see Namibia's African cheetahs flown in next month to a wildlife sanctuary in the central state of Madhya Pradesh for captive breeding - a move expected to coincide with India's 75th Independence Day celebrations.

AFP

Europe counts cost of heatwave as French fires come under control

Bordeaux, France - Europe counted the cost of a record heatwave on Wednesday as French firefighters brought twin blazes near Bordeaux under control and climate change protesters pointed to the sizzling weather as a wakeup call for the continent.

Temperatures of more than 40 degrees Celsius over previous days have spelled misery for millions and shattered heat records, focusing attention on the impact of global warming.

Cooler air swept in on Wednesday, bringing relief to people from Portugal to Britain, but thousands of firefighters continued to tackle mass fires that have broken out in multiple countries in recent days after months of drought-like conditions.

"Our assessment is generally positive. The situation improved overnight," French fire service spokesman Arnaud Mendousse told AFP from the southwestern

Gironde region where two huge blazes have engulfed 20,600 hectares of tinder-dry forest since last week.

The infernos had barely expanded overnight, with lower temperatures and the construction of a 300-metre wide fire break helping stem the spread of the flames.

President Emmanuel Macron was set to visit later on Wednesday to speak to emergency services members and some of the 37,000 people who have been evacuated in the popular Atlantic Ocean region that is teaming with tourists in the summer months. Two firefighters were severely injured overnight, government spokesman Olivier Veran told reporters.

Separate blazes in the Monts d'Arree area of northwestern Brittany continued to rage on Wednesday, with aircraft dropping water from above.

Greek planes and helicopters were also in action against a



A De Havilland Canada Dash 8-400 MR aircraft drops water over a wildfire raging in the Monts d'Arree, near Brennilis, Brittany, France on Wednesday (AFP)

wildfire that has forced hundreds of people to flee mountainside suburbs north of Athens.

Greece had been spared the scorching heatwave experienced in western Europe, but the flames fanned by high winds

were threatening the suburbs of Penteli, Pallini, Anthousa and Gerakas, home to tens of thousands of people. "The civil protection authority was late in alerting us," a Pallini resident who lost his car and shed to the

flames told ERT television. "The fire was scorching our backs, we left in the nick of time. Had we stayed another 30 seconds it would have burned us."

Firefighters have also been pressed into action in Portugal,

Spain and Italy in recent weeks to tackle wildfires.

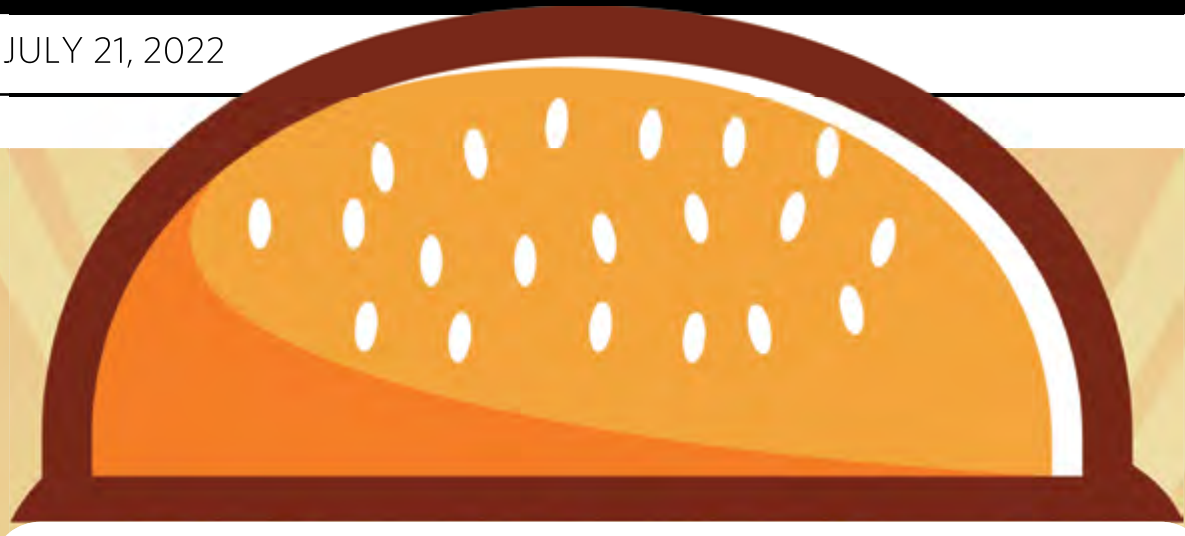
Heat records

The heatwave saw a host of local records set in France and a new all-time record for Britain where the national weather service clocked 40.3C in eastern England, surpassing the previous high set in 2019.

Grassland fires erupted on Tuesday on the edge of London, with one forcing the evacuation of 14 people as farm buildings, houses and garages were consumed by the flames.

Sixteen firefighters were injured around the capital with two taken to hospital, the London Fire Brigade said.

"Yesterday was the busiest day for the fire service in London since the Second World War," the city's mayor Sadiq Khan told Sky News on Wednesday, urging the public to remain vigilant despite temperatures now falling. AFP



{ UAE'S OWN SUPERFOOD }

HEALTHY BURGERS

Salicornia – the asparagus-like plant reduces sodium content by 40 per cent in the company's healthy burgers, which also contain chicken, quinoa and kale

A hardy plant grown using salt water is thriving in the UAE's desert farms and helping create 'healthy' burgers, showing sustainable agriculture's potential in the toughest conditions.

Salicornia, a succulent, is already being used as a salt replacement in burger patties - a rare farming success in the oil-rich United Arab Emirates, which imports nearly all of its food.

"You have the salty flavour with less sodium, but you also have other benefits," said Tina Siegismund, head of marketing and innovation at UAE-based Global Food Industries, a frozen food manufacturer. The asparagus-like plant reduces sodium content by 40 per cent in the company's healthy burgers, which also contain chicken, quinoa and kale.

Native to parts of North America, Eu-

rope, South Africa and South Asia, the plant is ideal for the UAE's inhospitable climate, and contains anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory properties, according to Siegismund.

Agriculture produces less than one percent of GDP in the UAE, a country on the frontline of climate change with temperatures regularly topping 50°C and rising rapidly.

Salicornia cultivation began last year in a number of farms across the UAE as part of an experiment using brine runoff from desalination plants by the Dubai-based International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA).

Augusto Becerra Lopez-Lavalle, chief scientist at ICBA, said research was now underway into generating more of the 'high-value crop', which sells for US\$20

a kilo in France.

"We went from... building this prototype, to piloting at scale with eight farmers, and now the question is how to scale up," Lopez-Lavalle told AFP.

In the future, salicornia could 'become a really important food ingredient' he added.

"If there is an economic value and the production system is developed for this, it can become a replacement for salt and any other micronutrients that are added today artificially to processed food."

For now, salicornia remains a niche product, its health benefits unknown to most, admits Siegismund.

"It's not a product that makes big, big profit, but we believe in it and we will continue," she said.

AFP



CLASSIFIEDS

SITUATION WANTED

A Sri Lankan qualified Civil Engineer with 15 years of experience currently in Muscat looking for a suitable position. Please contact: +968-78347065 Email: anverakthaas@yahoo.com

Logistics/Marketing
27 year old female Sri Lankan with an MSc and BSc in Logistics and Supply Chain and 4 plus years of experience seeking a job in Oman. Email ID: chamindrin@gmail.com

Phone: +94-760200699

Shipping & Logistics Operations
27 year old male Sri Lankan with an MSc in Logistics and Supply Chain and over 6 years of experience looking for a job in Oman. Email ID: meu.mithuranga@gmail.com Phone: +94-773492287

Indian female, Post Graduate in Computer Science, overall 13 years of experience in different areas

including Fleet/Logistics Management, Training Coordination, Resource Coordination, Document Control (including PDO projects) and IT. Seeking a suitable opportunity. NOC available. Contact: 79166904/99347132

FOR RENT
A large apartment in Darsait, 5 bedrooms, 4 bathrooms, a hall, and a balcony with sea view. Rent RO350 per month. Tel: 99315986

Are you looking for Professional Accounting, Book-Keeping & VAT Services?

We provide:
Accounting, Book-Keeping & VAT Services.
Backlog Accounting
VAT Consultation & Return Filing
Accounting Software / ERP Solutions
Periodic visits to the Clients office

Contact Us Placement 1st Accounting Outsourcing Solutions
Call / WhatsApp – 97971205 / 97971057

Email – accounts@placement1st.com

AUDIT, ACCOUNTING, VAT, TAXATION

Contact: 97239696/95355638

Gulf Center Consultancy & Audit
Muscat, Sohar, Salalah, Sur
Kumar@gccaoman.com

Send your request for Birthday/Anniversary wishes to wish@apexmedia.co.om with your resident card copy (It's free of cost)

SITUATION VACANT

BAHWAN METAL & GLASS ENGINEERING LLC

Required Sales Representative with minimum 2 years of work experience in sales. The candidate should have 1 year working experience in Oman. Having a driving license and a car is a must.

Please send your CV to mazzan@bahwanmge.com
Tel: +96896666685

FREE CLASSIFIED LISTING

Muscat Daily now offers free classified listings for individuals in the following categories: Situations Wanted/ Accommodation Wanted or Available/Sale of Household Items/ Car for Sale or Wanted/ Matrimonial Alliances (Word limit is 35) Please email your listing to dailyclassifieds@apexmedia.co.om or call 99104346

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 | Salalah 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

أوربيت ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

- Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
- Choose from a wide range of brands & models
- PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
- Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease



This file photo shows people protesting against state forced family separations and adoptions outside Central Family Court and Court of Protection in London (AFP)

BRITISH MOMS'
LIFETIME TRAUMA



FORCED ADOPTION

Campaigners and parents warn ‘forced adoption’ is rife today, with thousands of children taken away from their mothers, often because they suffer mental health issues or domestic violence

Sue O’Callaghan knows the utter despair that thousands of British mothers felt when they were forced to give up their babies.

“To go into labour knowing you’re going to lose your child... is just absolutely terrifying and the grief never goes away,” she told AFP.

O’Callaghan was pregnant with her fourth child around 20 years ago, having already lost access to her other three children after her husband told social services that she was mentally unfit to take care of them.

“On my due date... there was a knock on the door. Social services arrived with the police... They took the (children) out of the bath into the police car,” she recalled.

She then faced the prospect of having her newborn removed at birth.

“I went in to deliver her in hospital under lock and key,” she explained. “Social workers were at the door with a car seat ready to take her away.”

O’Callaghan, now in her 50s, was able to keep the baby after the psychiatrist on site gave her a clean bill of health.

But she said other mothers she now helps were not as lucky, and their babies have been taken from hospital at just five days old.

Campaigners and parents warn ‘forced adoption’ is rife today, with thousands of children taken away from their mothers, often because they suffer mental health issues or domestic violence.

‘Horrible beyond belief’

“I’ve watched fathers scream and scream so the whole hospital could hear it. One mother just went silent. She just didn’t speak for about three months.

“I wish people could see what happens because my experience is people say ‘there’s no smoke without fire’.

“But the trauma and the horror, even for the baby is unimaginable. You don’t treat animals that way. You don’t treat human beings like that. It’s horrible beyond belief.”

O’Callaghan eventually won her legal fight, but the trauma of the experience left her and her children suffering panic attacks.

She emigrated to New Zealand with her children, who are now in their late teens and early twenties.

She now campaigns for an overhaul of the system, and has written a book, *Taken*, which describes her

story - and that of hundreds of other mothers in Britain every year.

O’Callaghan complained the decision to take her children away was made by social workers and psychiatrists who had little contact with the family.

“The minute I walked in that door for a series of assessments over a three-month period, I knew the report about me had already been written,” she said from her home in Auckland.

Self harm

Social workers say they are following the law, which in England only takes into account the well-being of the child.

This means that mothers risk losing their children if they are victims of domestic abuse or suffering from mental health issues.

Mothers who have already lost children are then at high risk of having any future children removed at birth.

O’Callaghan said mothers faced an uphill battle against the system once their children had been removed.

O’Callaghan, who is now a trained trauma therapist, is one of a growing number of campaigners worried about the long-term effect of permanently removing children from their birth parents.

The numbers of children being adopted against their parents’ will rose sharply at the turn of the century.

Many of those removed will soon be turning 18, and be legally able to find out the details of their case.

“The innate need for us to understand where we come from is huge. So yes, all these children will want to know where they’re coming from,” added O’Callaghan.

“My children were returned to me within a year, and I can say that panic attacks, self-harm, suicidal ideation, identity crisis, depression has hit them all apart from the baby.”

AFP



The innate need for us to understand where we come from is huge. So yes, all these children will want to know where they’re coming from

SUE O’CALLAGHAN

MARATHON MAN

Abdullah Shafique stars as Pakistan break Galle record to beat Sri Lanka in first Test

Galle, Sri Lanka - Abdullah Shafique hit an epic 160 to anchor Pakistan's record chase of 342 at Galle as the tourists won a thrilling opening Test against Sri Lanka on Wednesday.

The opener capped his marathon display with the winning runs in the final session on day five, jumping for joy and pumping his fist as Pakistan triumphed by four wickets for a 1-0 lead in the two-match series.

Left-arm spinner Prabath Jayasuriya took a match haul of nine wickets but his efforts were in vain as the visitors battled past the previous best chase in Galle of 268 by Sri Lanka against New Zealand in 2019.

The 22-year-old Shafique excelled with his second Test ton. He built crucial partnerships including a 101-run third-wicket stand with skipper Babar Azam, who made 55 after his 119 in the first innings on a tricky pitch to bat on.

The teams had taken early tea before returning for the third session of play.

Shafique survived three dropped catches, on 70, 135 and 151, but deserved his luck and played the anchor's role to perfection as he surpassed his previous Test best of 136 not out.

Pakistan had a few anxious moments after Jayasuriya, who sent back talisman Azam before the close on day four, struck at the stroke of lunch to get debutant Salman Ali Agha out for 12.

Hasan Ali fell for five in the second over of the second session after being promoted up the order to hit out the remaining runs.

Lone man Jayasuriya

Jayasuriya, who took 12 wickets on debut in a series-levelling Test win over Australia last week at the same venue, six in each innings, kept up the pressure but Shafique stood firm.

It was difficult but with time it was easier. Babar is one of the best in the world. We have learnt so much from him. I enjoyed batting with him in the middle

ABDULLAH SHAFIQUE

"We know how to play spin so we believed," Azam said after the tense win. "When I was batting with Abdullah Shafique we were just trying to build a partnership. He has shown his class."

Shafique, who was named man of the match, said: "It was difficult but with time it was easier. Babar is one of the best in the world. We have learnt so much from him. I enjoyed batting with him in the middle."

The unbeaten Shafique finally combined with Mohammad Nawaz, 19 not out, to take the visitors home after a brief rain interruption halted their charge.

Pakistan resumed the day on 222-3 and Sri Lanka soon used up their remaining two umpire reviews, with Jayasuriya involved in both calls. Mohammad Rizwan opened his day's account with a boundary off Ramesh Mendis and kept up his positive intent by taking singles and twos, before he fell lbw to Jayasuriya for 40.

"With the ball we could not support Prabath from the other end. We had to give him more support," skipper Dimuth Karunaratne said of his lead spinner, who toiled for 95.2 overs in the two innings combined.

AFP



Pakistan's Abdullah Shafique celebrates after hitting the winning runs against Sri Lanka on the final day of the first Test in Galle on Wednesday (AFP)

Indian owners confirmed for new T20 league in South Africa

Johannesburg, South Africa - Cricket South Africa confirmed on Wednesday that the owners of six Indian Premier League teams were the successful bidders for franchises in the country's planned new Twenty20 tournament in January and February next year.

CSA said there had been a "rigorous process over the past few months" before the franchise owners were confirmed.

Tournament commissioner, former South African captain Graeme Smith, said the new league would be a world-class event.

"We have already contracted a number of leading international players who will be announced shortly. Combined with our strong South African player base, fans and stakeholders can be assured that the new league will showcase exciting talent and skill," said Smith.

CSA said there had been an open process which had attracted bids from 29 entities worldwide.

Reliance Industries, owners of Mumbai Indians, will own a team based at Newlands in Cape Town, while Chennai Super Kings won the rights to a team with headquarters at the Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg.

The owners of Delhi Capitals will have a team in Centurion, Lucknow Super Giants in Durban, Sunrisers Hyderabad in Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth) and Rajasthan Royals in Paarl.

CSA said the six successful bidders all had "extensive experience in operating franchises across multiple sports and deep cricketing expertise" through their ownership of teams in the IPL.

AFP

'We are not cars, you can't just fill us up'

London, United - England World Cup hero Ben Stokes was blunt when explaining his decision to retire from one-day internationals: "We are not cars, you can't just fill us up."

But despite the 2019 World Cup-winner's exit from 50-over cricket, meaningful reform of a fixture schedule that England Test captain Stokes has labelled "unsustainable" is unlikely.

International fixtures underpin a lucrative broadcasting contract the England and Wales Cricket Board has with Sky TV worth about £220 million (\$264 million) a year and are the main revenue-providers for most of the sport's leading nations. Since the start of 2017, England have had nearly 500 scheduled days of cricket, which puts them ahead of India in second place on 472.

Making matters worse, a knock-on consequence of the coronavirus pandemic is that several delayed fixtures have been shoehorned into this year's calendar.

AFP



South Africa's Aiden Markram (R) shakes hands with England's Ben Stokes (AFP)

South Africa deny Ben Stokes a farewell ODI win

Chester-le-Street, United Kingdom - Rassie van der Dussen's century helped South Africa spoil Ben Stokes's farewell to one-day international cricket as the Proteas won by 62 runs on the England star's Durham home ground to go 1-0 up in a three-match series.

Van der Dussen's career-best 134 was the cornerstone of South Africa's 335-5, their highest ODI total in England.

He also shared stands of 109 with opener Janneman Malan (57) and 151 with Aiden Markram, who made a stylish 77. Test captain Stokes did not

have a fairytale finish to a 50-over international cricket career that peaked with a player of the match display in England's 2019 World Cup final triumph.

The struggling 31-year-old paceman took an expensive 0-44 in five overs amid searing heat, after being cheered by his loyal home fans as he led England onto the field.

Stokes then made just five with the bat before he was lbw to off-spinner Markram, having missed a reverse sweep. Stokes had announced on Monday that this game would be his 105th and last match at this level.

'We will miss Stokes'

Fellow World Cup-winner Jos

Buttler, now England's white-ball captain, thanked Stokes for his ODI efforts.

"Three years ago (the 2019 World Cup final) will live long in the memory but every day he turns up, whether that be for training or in a match, he puts in 100 percent.

"He has been a fantastic ambassador for us in ODI cricket. We will miss him."

Joe Root took up the charge after Stokes's dismissal with a run-a-ball fifty.

But a target of 103 off the last eight overs, with England already six wickets down, was too much even for the world's top-ranked Test batsman.

AFP

GENETCO CARNIVAL
NOW BIGGER & BETTER!!
29th June to 27th August 2022

GS18GMAX60 18000 BTU | GS24GMAX60 22178 BTU | GS26GMAX60 24000 BTU | GS30GMAX60 27500 BTU

GIMAX60
MAXimum Power. MAXimum Cooling.

MAX Power - Stable Operation at high temperature
High-efficiency heat dissipation technology, results in stable cooling even at 55°C....

MAX Guard - 5 Anti-corrosion Measures
5 Anti-corrosion measures, for all-round protection, Longer service life and less maintenance.

MAX Safety
The Main board and electric box is enclosed in fire proof material for additional safety.

GS18GMAX60 18000 BTU EER: 11.70	GS24GMAX60 22178 BTU EER: 11.60	GS26GMAX60 24000 BTU EER: 12.00	GS30GMAX60 27500 BTU EER: 11.96
---------------------------------------	---------------------------------------	---------------------------------------	---------------------------------------

51 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

MUSCAT 97693496, 96742452
Available at Major Hypermarkets & Electronics Retailers

SALALAH 79011363

www.genetco.net
@GenetcoOman
@GenetcoOman
Genetco Oman

Who will be the top gun?

Mane and Salah renew rivalry with top African award up for grabs

Johannesburg, South Africa - Another chapter in the personal rivalry between former Liverpool teammates Sadio Mane and Mohamed Salah will play out in Rabat on Thursday when the African Player of the Year is named.

Mane was a key figure in the Senegal team that defeated Salah-captained Egypt in the 2021/2022 Africa Cup of Nations final and in a 2022 World Cup play-off.

Both the African title decider in Cameroon and the Qatar eliminator in Senegal were won by the Teranga Lions after penalty shootouts.

Mane scored in each shootout while the outcome of the final was decided before Salah could take his kick, and he uncharacteristically blazed wide from the spot in the play-off.

The two Senegalese successes have made Mane favourite to win a second straight Player of the Year award after 2019 -- the following two editions were cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Should Mane win in the Moroccan capital, he will become the first Bayern Munich star to be voted African Player of the Year.

The closest anyone from the German giants has come to first place in Africa was in 1999 and 2001 when Ghanaian Samuel Kuffour finished runner-up.

Mane moved to Bayern last month on a three-year deal after joining Liverpool in 2016 from Southampton and Anfield boss Jurgen Klopp calls him "a complete forward". "My only criticism of Sadio is that maybe at times he is the only one not to realise just how good he is."



Sadio Mane (L) and Mohamed Salah

The list of contenders was trimmed from 10 to three on the eve of the ceremony with Senegal and Chelsea goalkeeper Edouard Mendy the other survivor

Predatory instincts

Liverpool defender Andy Robertson hailed the predatory instincts of the 30-year-old: "Whenever

he is in front of the goal you do not think he will miss."

Salah lifted the award in 2017 and 2018 and the victory of

Mane the following year raised to four the number of winners from Liverpool with another Senegalese, El Hadji Diouf, topping the 2002 vote.

The Egyptian had an outstanding 2021-2022 season for the Reds, sharing the Golden Boot award with South Korean Son Heung-min of Tottenham Hotspur.

Salah was voted the 2021-

2022 Premier League Player of the Season by both the Professional Footballers' Association and the Football Writers' Association.

The list of contenders was trimmed from 10 to three on the eve of the ceremony with Senegal and Chelsea goalkeeper Edouard Mendy the other survivor.

Other potential individual

award winners from Senegal are national coach Aliou Cisse, and Young Player of the Year contender Pape Matar Sarr.

Nigeria, the powerhouse of women's football in Africa for decades, have one Player of the Year challenger in highly decorated Asisat Oshoala from 2022 European Champions League runners-up Barcelona.

AFP



Robert Lewandowski

Lewandowski joins Barcelona from Bayern until 2027

Barcelona, Spain - Robert Lewandowski is joining Barcelona in a 50 million euro deal until 2027, the Spanish club said on Tuesday.

Barca released a statement confirming the move three days after both clubs announced that a deal "in principle" had been struck for the Polish striker to move to La Liga.

"Barcelona and Bayern Munich have arrived at an agreement for the transfer of Robert Lewandowski for a total of €45 million + €5 million in variables," Barca said.

"The player will sign a contract with the Club for the next four seasons. The buy-out clause has been set at €500 million," it added.

Lewandowski, 33, has linked up with his new teammates in the US for a series of friendlies in Miami.

He is the Catalan side's fourth signing of the summer after Franck Kessie (AC Milan) and Andreas Christensen (Chelsea), arrived as free agents while Raphinha cost 70m euros from Leeds.

AFP

AC Milan's Bakayoko says Italy police stop could have ended badly

Rome, Italy - AC Milan midfielder Tiemoue Bakayoko said Wednesday that Italian police who pulled him from his car at gunpoint this month after mistaking him for a shooting suspect "clearly put our lives in danger".

A video of the July 3 police stop that went viral earlier this month showed the French midfielder with his hands up in the air and pressed to a patrol car being searched by a policeman.

The video shows another officer pointing her pistol at an unseen passenger still inside Bakayoko's car during the search. After a few moments, another officer approaches Bakayoko and the policeman patting him down, says something, and the policeman releases Bakayoko.

"The error is human, I have no problem with it, on the other hand I have a problem with the manner and methodology that were used," the player said.

AFP

Messi scores as PSG labour past Japanese champions

Tokyo, Japan - Lionel Messi scored but Paris Saint-Germain were made to work hard for a 2-1 win over Kawasaki Frontale on Wednesday in the first match of their pre-season Japanese tour.

Star forwards Messi, Neymar and Kylian Mbappe all started for PSG in front of a crowd of 65,000 at Tokyo's National Stadium.

Messi opened the scoring in the 32nd minute but a much-changed PSG line-up in the second half could manage only one more goal through substitute Arnaud Kalimuendo.

J-League champions Kawasaki pulled a goal back in the 84th minute when Kazuya Yamamura headed home unmarked.

New PSG manager Christophe Galtier, who has arrived from Nice, was happy with the work-out against a team in the middle of their domestic season.

"There were some good phases of play and some good combinations in attack," he said.



Paris Saint-Germain's Lionel Messi celebrates with Presnel Kimpembe and Neymar after scoring against Kawasaki Frontale on Wednesday (AFP)

"I liked the way we were able to put them under pressure high up the pitch, which led to some dangerous chances."

Mbappe was denied several times by goalkeeper Jung Sung-

ryong in the first half after combining well with Messi.

The Argentine had a shot cleared off the line but gave PSG the lead soon after when he guided a shot into the corner

from just inside the box.

Kawasaki gave the European heavyweights plenty of problems and Galtier said his defence would have to shape up before the new season.

"We gave away far too many chances in front of our goal," he said.

"This is where we have the most work to do. We have to keep the right balance and adjust more quickly to these transition situations."

PSG will play two more J-League sides, taking on Urawa Reds in Saitama on Saturday and Gamba Osaka in Osaka the following Monday.

The game against Kawasaki was played in energy-sapping humidity and PSG midfielder Vitinha said the heat took its toll.

"We are not used to the weather - it's difficult because it's very hot and we feel it in the field," said the Portuguese, who arrived this summer from Porto.

AFP

Free home delivery & timely service

oman OASIS
BALANCED DRINKING WATER

Oasis Water Co. SAOC,
PO Box 817, Ruwail 124,
Sultanate of Oman,
www.omanoasis.com

CALL TOLL-FREE
800 71 222
or GSM: 9275 5522

Winner of
His Majesty's Cup Award
in 2012 & 2013
for Best Five Factories

CR No. 1205402

mai alkaline
Alkaline Ionized Drinking Water

HYDRATE SMARTLY

- ✓ Ultra-hydrating
- ✓ Revitalizing
- ✓ Energizing

Toll-free 800 71 222 or
9275 5522

oman OASIS



Brazil's Alison Dos Santos celebrates after winning the 400m hurdles at the World Athletics Championships in Eugene, Oregon, on Tuesday (AFP)

HURDLES HAS A NEW KING

Alison Dos Santos dethrones Karsten Warholm at world championships

Eugene, United States - Alison Dos Santos ended Karsten Warholm's reign as hurdles king at the world championships on Tuesday while Britain's Jake Wightman won his country's first 1500m gold in 39 years on a day of upsets.

Warholm may have been behind one of the most iconic moments in Olympic history when he smashed the 29-year-old world record to win the 400m hurdles at the Tokyo Games in a time of 45.94sec.

But the 26-year-old came to Eugene on the back of a hamstring injury which ultimately put paid to his medal attempt here.

Instead, Dos Santos ran the third fastest time of all time and a championship record of

When I was watching him, he always says 'Allez, Stan.' I copy him a little bit because I like to say, 'Allez, Dan'. He has been a huge reason why I'm healthy now

DANIEL ALTMAYER

46.29sec to win gold ahead of Americans Rai Benjamin and Trevor Bassitt.

"It's pretty awesome to win the world title on this track. I didn't care about the time because this is the first time I win a world title," said Dos Santos.

Warholm led coming into the home straight but seized up badly and eventually came in seventh (48.42), breaking a winning streak of 22 races, including

18 finals, dating back to September 2018.

"It was a very tough race," Warholm said. "I had an injury but to me it's always your fight and giving your all and leaving it all on the track.

"I felt I did that. I hope looking back I'll feel proud of that even though I prefer to take a medal."

Whilst everyone knew Warholm was coming back from injury, serious hopes were

pinned on Olympic champion Jakob Ingebrigtsen in the men's 1500m.

But Wightman had not read the script, playing the Norwegian at his own game by kicking with 200 metres to run and holding his form through to the line.

Wightman sealed victory in 3min 29.23sec, Ingebrigtsen taking silver in 3:29.47, with Spaniard Mohamed Katir claiming bronze (3:29.90).

Family affair

In a bizarre twist, Wightman's father Geoff is in Eugene doing the in-stadium commentary.

Geoff, also his son's coach, was reduced to a cracked voice as he announced to Hayward Field: "That's my son and he's

world champion."

"For him to be part of my journey to get to this point, and actually part of the the actual race itself is so unique," Wightman said of his father.

"I talked to him and he's very happy. I'm glad he showed some emotion."

Following on from Norway's Olympic gold medalists in failing to nail a world title was 2019 champion Daniel Stahl, the Swede eventually finishing fourth in the discus.

Australian Eleanor Patterson won high jump gold in the fourth final of the night with 2.02m on countback from Ukraine's Yaroslava Mahuchikh, Italian Elena Vallortigara taking bronze.

AFP



Caster Semenya

Semenya welcome at world champs, says Sebastian Coe

Eugene, United States - Caster Semenya, who will make her first appearance in a world championships in five years when she competes in the women's 5000m, has every right to be there, World Athletics president Sebastian Coe said Tuesday.

The South African last competed at a world championships in London in 2017 where she won her third 800m world crown.

A year later she won double gold in the 800m and 1500m at the Commonwealth Games which is the last time she represented South Africa in a global international competition.

Semenya was forced to switch from her favoured distance to the longer event due to gender eligibility rules that required her to take testos-

terone-reducing drugs to compete in races between 400m to a mile.

World Athletics bars women athletes with high testosterone levels from competing in shorter races because the governing body says the hormone increases muscle mass and oxygen uptake.

"She's eligible to be here," Coe said of Semenya, who initially missed qualification when she only finished sixth at the African Championships last month, but has benefitted from a number of athletes dropping out.

"If she chooses to compete in a distance that is not a restricted distance that's entirely up to her and she'll get the same treatment and services as any athlete that's legitimately here," which she is.

AFP

Stenson stripped of Ryder Cup captaincy as LIV rumours swirl

London, United Kingdom - Henrik Stenson was Wednesday stripped of the European Ryder Cup captaincy, with the Swede understood to be on the verge of joining the Saudi-funded rebel LIV Golf series.

Following talks with Ryder Cup Europe officials, the decision was made to effectively sack the 46-year-old as skipper of the team for the event in Italy next year.

The move will deepen the rifts in the sport, with a growing number of big stars defecting to the cash-rich new circuit in defiance of the established tours.

Ryder Cup Europe said in a statement that Stenson's tenure as skipper for the biennial competition against the United States in Rome had been brought to an end "with immediate effect".

"In light of decisions made by Henrik in relation to his personal circumstances, it has become clear that he will not be able to fulfil certain contractual obligations to Ryder Cup Europe," it said.



Henrik Stenson

The statement added that confirmation of a new captain for the 2023 tournament would be made in "due course".

Stenson is reportedly on the verge of joining fellow Ryder Cup stars Lee Westwood, Ian Poulter and Sergio Garcia in jumping ship to the LIV series.

The US team next year looks likely to be without players of the calibre of Dustin Johnson, Brooks Koepka, Patrick Reed and Bryson DeChambeau, who have all been hit with indefinite bans by the PGA Tour and will therefore be ineligible to play.

AFP



Magnus Carlsen

Carlsen not to defend title at 2023 World Chess Championship

Oslo, Norway - Chess world number one Magnus Carlsen on Wednesday announced that he would not defend his world championship title in 2023, but stressed that he was not retiring from chess.

"I am not motivated to play another match... I simply feel that I don't have a lot to gain. I don't particularly like it," Carlsen said in

the first episode of his podcast "The Magnus Effect".

Carlsen has repeatedly hinted that, bored with a title he has held for nearly 10 years, he may give up his throne without a fight.

The 31-year-old crushed Russian Ian Nepomniachtchi 7.5-3.5 in his fifth straight victorious title match last December.

"Although I'm sure a match

would be interesting for historical reasons and all of that, I don't have any inclination to play and I will simply not play the match," Carlsen told the podcast released Wednesday.

A sixth successful title match would have brought Carlsen level with German Emanuel Lasker, the champion from 1894 to 1921, and Soviet Mikhail Botvinnik.

Botvinnik held the title between 1948 and 1963, although during that time he twice lost and regained the title and his two successful defences came in drawn matches.

"Overall I feel like it's my time to go from the World Championship matches. I don't rule out a return in the future but I wouldn't particularly count on it," Carlsen

said.

"Just so there is no ambiguity here, I'm not retiring from chess, I'm still going to be an active player."

He would next be heading to Croatia to play in the Grand Chess Tour, and then to India's Chennai to represent Norway at the Chess Olympiad.

AFP

**TRANSFER
YOUR SALARY
AND GET**

10 %

CASHBACK

