



FIRST DAY OF EID AL ADHA ON SATURDAY, JULY 9

Muscat - The moon sighting committee of the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MERA) announced the sighting of the moon for Dhul Hijja 1443 AH on Wednesday. Hence, Thursday, June 30, will be Dhul Hijja 1, 1443 AH, and Saturday, July 9, will be the first day of Eid al Adha.

On the occasion, MERA extended congratulations and greetings to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, praying to the Almighty Allah for his good health, happiness and a long life, and progress and prosperity for the Omani people and all Muslim countries.

Long-term visa for 'talented' expats

Investor Residency Programme to include more categories after nod from Council of Ministers

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman is considering giving long-term residency to expatriate innovators, creators, programmers and entrepreneurs in the second phase of the Investor Residency Programme (IRP).

Speaking at a press conference on Wednesday, Khalid al Shuaibi, head of National Programme for Investment and Export Development (Nazdaher) of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation and Follow-up Unit, said that the second phase of IRP will have



The press conference held on Wednesday where the proposal for more categories of long-term residency for expatriates was announced

more categories once approved by the Council of Ministers.

"After implementing the first phase, we discovered that there is an increasing demand from other potential categories of innovators and important segments of the economy. We have submitted this proposal to the Council of Ministers for approval," Shuaibi said.

Presenting the 2021 Annual Report of the unit, Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman al Kharusi, director of Digital Transformation Programme, said that the government digital transformation programme saved it about RO159mn.

He added that work is underway to review all indicators of Oman Vision 2040 and verify

their effectiveness in measuring and evaluating the path with clear targets every five years.

"The Digital Transformation Programme aims to enhance the efficiency of government institutions, find innovative solutions and improve the work environment by simplifying business models and providing channels and tools that make optimal use

of the rapid technological changes," Kharusi said.

According to Shuaibi, the number of initiatives under Nazdaher to support investments has reached 124, including 59 empowerment initiatives, 46 investment projects and 19 investment opportunities.

He informed that the programme works to enhance and

empower the role of the private sector in leading economic development by creating an attractive investment environment. "The programme's initiatives and projects are divided into two main parts, business environment and investment in sectors such as energy, mining, manufacturing, transportation, aviation, tourism, information technology, communication and food security."

Speaking about the National Employment Programme, Badr bin Hamoud al Kharusi, head of development of the programme, said, "It seeks to find sustainable employment solutions and job opportunities for Omanis by expanding the local market."

Also speaking at the press conference, Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, head of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation and Follow-Up Unit, stressed on the importance of the media's role in highlighting and informing the community about what of the Oman Vision 2040 goals have been achieved.

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Last tickets for Qatar World Cup on sale from July 5

28 deals inked to boost food security

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) signed 28 contracts, worth RO2.67mn, with several SMEs on Wednesday. The projects are spread over a total area of 980,000sqm in agriculture, livestock and industrial sectors in North Sharqiyah.

The agreements aim to support the economy and investments, while raising efficiency in sustainable land use to meet the needs of Oman for food security projects using modern and innovative scientific methods. H E Dr Muhammad al Mutawa, Under-secretary for Urban Planning,



represented MoHUP in the signing held at the Directorate General of Housing and Urban Planning in North Sharqiyah in Ibra.

Industrial sector

Usufruct contracts were signed in the industrial sector for establish-

ment of a mineral water purification and bottling plant in the wilayat of Wadi Bani Khalid at a cost RO150,000.

Livestock sector

Three agreements were signed for poultry farming in the wilay-

ats of Al Qabil and Mudhaibi on a total area of 124,000sqm at a cost of RO165,000. An agreement was also signed for breeding and selling livestock in Mudhaibi worth RO55,000.

Agricultural sector

A total of 23 agreements were signed for vegetable and fruit production in the wilayats of Al Qabil, Ibra, Wadi Bani Khalid, Mudhaibi and Bidiyah, on an area of more than 800,000sqm at a total cost of RO2.3mn.

With these agreements, MoHUP has inked a total of 62 usufruct contracts for various uses this year.

Syria recognises Ukraine's separatist republics

Damascus, Syria - Moscow ally Syria on Wednesday recognised the independence of eastern Ukraine's two separatist republics, making it the first state other than Russia to do so.

The breakaway states of Donetsk and Lugansk, whose independence Moscow recognised in February, are situated in the Donbas region at the centre of Russia's invasion and have escaped Kyiv's control since 2014.

"The Syrian Arab Republic has decided to recognise the independence and sovereignty of both the Lugansk People's Republic and the Donetsk People's Republic," a source at Syria's for-

eign ministry told SANA news agency. "We will communicate with both countries to agree on frameworks for strengthening relations, including establishing diplomatic relations in accordance with established rules."

This is not the first time that the Syrian government, which since 2015 has been heavily backed by Russia in its own civil war, has supported Moscow's recognition of breakaway states.

In 2018, Syria recognised South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent from the former Soviet state of Georgia, prompting Tbilisi to cut diplomatic ties.

AFP



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Nature reserve in Musandam to boost tourism, environmental diversity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A Royal Decree issued on Tuesday to establish the National Natural Park Reserve in Musandam has been hailed by experts and citizens.

Based on a survey conducted by the Environment Authority (EA) in cooperation with the Office of the Governor Musandam, the reserve is spread over an area of 1149.40sqkm.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, environmental specialist Ali Akak said the announcement is significant as it will preserve plant diversity, enrich the environment and wildlife, and encourage the cultivation of local trees. "The reserve will nurture diverse fauna and flora, characterised by distinct nutritional, medicinal and cosmetic properties."

Nasser al Hosni, an adventure enthusiast, noted that establishment of the reserve will support the local environment. "Besides enriching the wildlife of Oman, it will be a destination for families. The reserve will help preserve our unique ecological diversity and become a safe haven for



many wildlife species."

According to Hosni, the government attaches great significance to preserving the

environment in the sultanate in general and Musandam in particular.

Abdul Aziz Al Shehhi, a citizen

of the governorate, thanked His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the decree. "Hopefully, the reserve will attract a lot of

tourists and activate domestic tourism."

Shehhi said that Musandam's renowned natural features in-

The reserve will nurture diverse fauna and flora, characterised by distinct nutritional, medicinal and cosmetic properties

ALI AKAK



lands scattered across the governorate, such as A'Tair and the famous Telegraph Island. Among its beaches, Qada, Mokhi, Bassa, Hyout and Hill are big draws for tourists.

"The reserve is likely to receive many nature lovers and local and international photographers who will visit Musandam and promote the sultanate as a tourist destination."

According to an EA official, surveys have revealed that the waters around the governorate's islands have various types of coral reefs that attract fish, green turtles and other sea creatures.

EA surveys also confirm the presence of rich wildlife, including wild rabbit, hedgehog, lynx, mountain fox, red fox, wild cat and several species of reptiles, besides over 200 species of plants, some of which are wild, rare or endangered species.

A total of 20,566 nature enthusiasts visited wildlife reserves in Oman in 2020, compared to 359,225 in 2019 and 305,405 in 2018, according to National Centre for Statistics and Information and EA data.

SAYYID BADR RECEIVES ENVOY OF BELGIUM



H E Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, received H E Dominique Mineur, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Belgium to the Sultanate of Oman, on Wednesday to bid her farewell at the end of her tour of duty. H E Sayyid Badr expressed his appreciation to the ambassador for the efforts she exerted in enhancing relations between the two countries. He also wished her success in her future endeavours (ONA)

Jumeirah Muscat Bay starts welcoming guests today

Muscat - Jumeirah Group, the luxury hospitality company and a member of Dubai Holding, expands its international portfolio with the unveiling of its new resort Jumeirah Muscat Bay on Thursday.

Nestled within the secluded cove of Bandar Jissah between the Hajar mountains and Gulf of Oman, Jumeirah Muscat Bay will offer a true sense of serenity and escapism, a press release stated.

José Silva, CEO of Jumeirah Group, said, "Oman is a popular destination for those looking to combine nature and wellness with cultural interest. At Jumeirah Muscat Bay, we have focused on taking cues from the natural landscape and its restorative energy."

"We have brought this to life through design and architecture and in keeping with the hallmarks of Jumeirah Hotels and Resorts, our innovative dining concepts, signature service and exceptional experiences are well represented throughout this resort. As we continue to expand our portfolio, we are delighted to open the doors to this beautiful resort and bring our brand promise of Stay Different, for the first time to Oman."

Jumeirah Muscat Bay will offer 206 rooms and suites, with connecting rooms available for a



At Jumeirah Muscat Bay, we have focused on taking cues from the natural landscape and its restorative energy

JOSÉ SILVA

family holiday. In addition, five secluded summerhouses in two- and four-bed configurations, and a Sanctuary Villa, will provide the ultimate hospitality experience, each with a private pool, dedicated butler service and access to an exclusive private beach.

Modern arabesque design

features throughout the resort to ensure that Oman's natural beauty takes centre stage, while its interiors elegantly blend traditional Omani craftsmanship with light and modern hotel design.

With a focus on exceptional dining experiences, the new resort will be home to five diverse venues, overseen by culinary director Claudio Dieli, who brings over 26 years of experience in the global culinary industry, including tenures at several international hotels with three Michelin-stars.

Talise Spa will make its debut in Oman with the opening of Jumeirah Muscat Bay. With eight individual and two couple treatment rooms, the sanctuary will offer a world of wellness and

relaxation across a range of therapeutic and re-energising treatments that can be tailored to individual guest needs. Spread over two floors, there is also a hammam, sauna and steam room.

Those looking to immerse themselves in nature and embrace their adventurous side can take on the numerous hikes and scenic running and biking routes through the Hajar mountains to discover majestic views and lush wadis.

This new Jumeirah resort is situated in Muscat Bay, Oman's fully integrated resort village - a picturesque natural haven offering all the modern conveniences and Omani-flavoured luxury hospitality.

Agreement inked to develop digital system for Children's Public Library

Muscat - Oman India Fertiliser company (OMIFCO) and the Children's Public Library signed an agreement on Wednesday to develop a digital system for the management of the library.

The project aims to enhance the quality of digital services provided by the library and boost intellectual engagement for children.

The agreement was signed by H H Sayyida Dr Mona Fahd al Said, Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Children's Public Library, and Sheikh Khalid Mohammed al Fannah of OMIFCO.



6 arrested for illegal entry into Oman

Muscat - Royal Oman Police (ROP) arrested six infiltrators for attempting to enter the sultanate illegally.

In a statement, ROP said, 'The Dhofar Governorate Police Command arrested six infiltrators of different nationalities in the wilayat of Salalah, and a resident on charges of helping infiltrators enter the sultanate illegally and violating the laws of labour and residence of foreigners.'

'Legal procedures are being completed against them,' it added.

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Eid al Adha: Anticipation of nine-day break lingers

Shaddad al Musalmey
Muscat

Following announcement of the sighting of the moon of Dhul Hijja confirming the first day of Eid al Adha on July 9, Oman is now abuzz with excitement about an anticipated nine-day break even though the authorities have not announced the number of holidays.

The moon sighting committee of the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MERA) announced the sighting of the moon for Dhul Hijja 1443 AH on Wednesday. Consequently, Thursday, June 30, will be Dhul Hijja 1, 1443AH, and Saturday, July 9, the first day of Eid al Adha.

This Eid al Adha will be special because Oman, and most parts of the world, is no longer in the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions attached to it. With all precautionary measures lifted, most are looking forward to celebrate in a more relaxed atmosphere than the last two years.

A long Eid break is seen to benefit the local tourism industry, especially in Salalah, as many will want to spend such a long break there. "Families across Oman are looking forward to celebrate Eid and many of them will use the long holidays to go to Salalah to enjoy good weather. Many cannot afford international travel. Salalah is always a good option," a Muscat-based travel consultant said.

Mwasalat announced that it has increased its daily frequency



I just hope the authorities announce the holidays early so that we can plan ahead

YASER ABDULLAH

to Salalah from three to six starting July 1. In a statement, Mwasalat said with the increase in daily trips between Muscat to Salalah, it will offer nearly 600 seats per day.

The increase in Mwasalat's services is in line with a framework of its promotional plan for khareef season. The company will run regular routes for passengers to Salalah, Sahel Atin Airport, Salalah Port and other vital destinations.

Eid holidays have traditionally

been a social occasion when family and friends came together. "We anticipate a nine-day break and if it so happens, I look forward to a gathering of family and friends at a farmhouse. But we are yet to get confirmation because most farmhouses are already booked," said Amerat resident Abdullah al Balushi.

Being one of the most anticipated festivals in the Islamic calendar, elaborate preparations start weeks before the day, in-

volving shopping, planning outings and travelling for some.

"Eid celebrations are important for Muslims and hence deserve adequate preparations. We missed the real feel of the festival in the last two years. So we are happy that this time will be full of activities, as all COVID-19 restrictions have been removed. I have finished all my Eid shopping and I am now considering ways of enjoying the long break. I just hope the authorities announce the holidays early so that we can plan ahead," said Yaser Abdullah, a private sector employee. He is currently considering flight options to Azerbaijan.

Unlike earlier, Oman now has the same number of holidays for both government and private

sector employees for long breaks like Eid. "This helps us plan get together with family and friends during holidays," said Khalfan al Obaidani, a state-owned entity employee.

Shops selling clothes, shoes, accessories, jewellery and gift items have been witnessing heavy rush in the last few days. With shopping centres and malls wooing customers with special Eid offers, the Consumer Protection Authority is monitor markets for irregularities.

Muscat Municipality, too, will be make inspection visits during Eid al Adha to commercial establishments, including restaurants, cafeterias and foodstuff shops, besides slaughterhouses.

@shadadm

Returning with happy memories: Sri Lankan envoy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As the three-year tenure of H E Omar Lebbe Ameer Ajwad, Sri Lankan Ambassador to Oman, comes to an end, he looks back in time at various achievements and challenges that he faced in the sultanate.

Speaking exclusively to Muscat Daily, H E Ajwad said, "During my three-year period in Oman, I am glad that I was able to initiate many activities of bilateral importance and lay a strong foundation for the future cooperation between the two countries."

Commemorating the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Oman and Sri Lanka in 2021, the embassy guided by H E Ajwad organised a series of events. "We were able to create awareness among the public in both countries about the long standing relations between us and the opportunities available in both countries."

H E Ajwad was also named 'Person of the Year' by World Growth Forums magazine for creating milestones in diplomacy and bilateral relations in the year 2021.

Among the many programmes he undertook as ambassador are organising visits of business delegations and engaging in tree planting campaigns in Oman. He also planted Sri Lankan fruit saplings in Falaj al Saarani in Buraimi, wood apple saplings in the Directorate General of Agriculture and Animal Research Centre in Barka and Sri Lankan School Muscat.

"I also gifted Sri Lankan orna-



I am glad that I was able to initiate many activities of bilateral importance

H E OMAR LEBBE
AMEER AJWAD

mental plants to the Central Plant Nursery of the Royal Gardens. These plants were donated by Peradeniya Botanical Gardens in Sri Lanka."

During the pandemic, the embassy was led by the ambassador to reach out to Sri Lankan nationals. "We were in constant touch with our community members and assisted people in whatever manner possible we could. We guided them to take precautionary measures and distributed dry rations among the needy, accommodation facilities for vulnerable Sri Lankan migrant workers, ambulance services for COVID-19 patients, and repatriated those who lost jobs with free quarantine facilities in Sri Lanka, among other activities," he said.

He concluded, "I carry wonderful memories - of Oman's natural beauty, its friendly people who are ever ready to extend a helping hand, and more importantly Oman's tolerant and peaceful society."

Izki records 42mm rainfall in three days

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Heavy to moderate rains lashed several governorates the last three days, according to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

In a statement, CAA said, 'A number of wadis overflowed and there were low clouds and fog over parts of Oman.'

Data collected from the rain monitoring stations of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources showed that Izki recorded the highest rainfall - 42 mm - in three days from June 26 to 28.

Jabal Akhdar received 15mm of rainfall, followed by Ibri 12mm, Mudhaibi 10mm, Ibra 7mm, Yanqul 3mm, Hamra 3mm, Nizwa 2mm and Bahla 1mm.



Royal Oman Police arrested a citizen who tried to cross a flowing wadi in Jabal Akhdar,

Dakhliyah. 'ROP urges people to avoid venturing into wadis,' it stated.

Mysk al Mouj launches app to enhance guest experience

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To make the process of hotel booking and other formalities easy, Mysk al Mouj launched an app called i-Morafik on Tuesday.

The interactive application is designed to tailor-make a customised experience for guests before and during their stay. i-Morafik is available both in iStore and PlayStore.

Speaking about the app, Benali Sari Ali, marketing manager of the hotel, said, "i-Morafik will ease the hotel booking process and also help guests access information about the hotel, city, and places to visit. Various packages of wellness, dining and corporate



events and meetings can be booked through the application."

He added that these packages can also be booked via the hotel's website and by calling it.

At the launch, Mysk al Mouj also announced several offers and culinary delights to create

the ideal getaway for Eid al Adha.

Ehab Mourad, general manager of the hotel, added, "Whether enjoying the marina front views, taking part in a wide range of family-friendly water-sports in association with Oman Sail or enjoying a couple's massage, Eid is the perfect time to get loved ones together at Mysk al Mouj."

Families can relish culinary delights and an array of international flavours at the Salt and Pepper restaurant.

"Other interesting activities include learning a new skill by joining interactive cooking sessions conducted by our talented chefs. We also have a children's fun-filled activity zone," Mourad said.

CONDOLENCES



Condolences on the sad demise of
Mr. Pallonji Shapoorji Mistry
Founding Chairman
Oman Shapoorji Construction Company LLC

We extend our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family and pray for courage and fortitude through this difficult time.
May his soul rest in eternal peace.

The Chairman & Management Team
OHI Group of Companies

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Sustainable City Yiti signs escrow agreement with Sohar Islamic

Muscat - The Sustainable City - Yiti, set to be the first fully sustainable community in Oman, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Sohar Islamic Bank on Wednesday to open an Escrow Account for the newly launched master planned project in Muscat.

The agreement was made in abundance by Royal Decree No 30/2018, aimed to protect developers' funds. In light of that, the Sustainable City - Yiti can now offer Escrow services for the buyers of its upcoming 1,657 residential units - including 300 eco-friendly and energy-efficient villas, 1,225 apartments, and 132 luxury serviced apart-

ments.

The agreement was signed by Hashil Bin Obaid al Mahrougi, Chairman of Sustainable Development and Investment Company (SDIC), and Abdul Wahid Bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer, Sohar Islamic. The ceremony was also attended by key stakeholders from Omran Group, Diamond Developers and Sohar Islamic.

Commenting on this partnership, Mahrouqi said, "With an investment value of nearly US\$1bn, this project marks a unique milestone in our journey as we continue to invest, develop, and maximise the limit-

less potential of Oman's tourism sector. We are committed to working with our partners to ensure the smoothest experience for our buyers and investors. Our agreement with Sohar Islamic not only protects customers but assists in attracting investors to Oman's real estate market." Murshidi said that the bank always aspires to collaborate with key strategic partners in the development space.

"This agreement was a result of a very detailed dialogue and requirements definition exercise between the teams from both sides, and we are delighted to be offering bespoke services to The Sustainable City - Yiti buyers

and to support the property sector and the overall economic growth of the sultanate."

The Sustainable City - Yiti project is a partnership between Omran, the executive arm of the sultanate for developing the tourism sector, and Diamond Developers - the leading company in developing sustainable communities.

The project will be the largest operational sustainable community in the region, designed to deliver measurable outcomes across the three pillars of sustainability: social, environmental, and economic, and will achieve net-zero carbon targets by 2040, stated a press release.

Tasees, ASMED launch pre-incubation for startups

Muscat - Buoyed by the success of their association since 2019, Tasees, Khimji Ramdas Eshraqa's Entrepreneurship Academy and the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) has kicked off the fourth edition of 'pre-incubation programme for startups' at its premises in Azaba.

The programme was launched in the presence of Abood al Amri, Director General of Planning, ASMED.

Tasees' pre-incubation programmes aim to introduce entrepreneurs having creative and feasible ideas that help them transform their preliminary idea or concepts into viable product or service offerings, and eventually into real-time businesses, within specific phases.

The fourth batch of the three and a half month programme received around 120 applications. After review, 31 entrepreneurs were shortlisted to pitch their business ideas and join the programme.

Entrepreneurs taking part in the pre-incubation process will receive professional coaching and mentoring sessions in two modules that will help them understand the nuances of starting a business, preparing marketing and operations plans, assimilating accounts and finances, preparing budgets and financial projections, creating business plans and models, and making



investor pitches, stated a press release.

'Pre-incubation will thus act as a pipeline transfer, by helping startups complete the ideation and concept stages for the eligibility of participating in the next phase - incubation.'

Nailesh Khimji, Director, Khimji Ramdas Group, said, "We are elated to begin yet another pre-incubation for our talented startups in collaboration with ASMED. Tasees was launched to foster an entrepreneurial spirit among Omani nationals, build a thriving entrepreneurial environment and fast-track the nation's economic diversification and fiscal sustainability efforts, in line with Vision 2040. Since its launch, it has helped nurture the dreams of aspiring local entrepreneurs and has paved the way for several innovative busi-

nesses."

Mahmood bin Khalifa Al Saqri, Head of Eshraqa, Khimji Ramdas' Social Development Arm added, "At Eshraqa, we believe that corporate social responsibility has a profound positive impact on society, as it helps the nation meet its socio-economic aspirations."

Abood al Amri said that the pre-incubation programmes help entrepreneurs transform their ideas into effective business solutions.

"This programme is a prime example of our successful partnership with the private sector, as it supports small and medium enterprises, and provides a support platform to those with innovative ideas by providing them with the best training required for them to excel as entrepreneurs."



World Bank lends Tunisia \$130mn for grains hit by Ukraine war

Tunis, Tunisia - The World Bank has announced a \$130mn loan to help Tunisia cover the cost of cereal imports whose prices have spiralled since Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The package aimed "to lessen the impact of the Ukraine war by financing vital soft wheat imports and providing emergency support to cover barley imports for dairy production," the lender said.

It would also help buy "seeds for smallholder farmers for the upcoming planting season," it said in a statement late Tuesday.

Tunisia was already dealing with heavy public debt, a low credit rating and steep inflation before the Ukraine war, and has been left reeling by Russia's military blockade of Ukrainian ports on the Black Sea.

"Tunisia faces a major grain supply shock due to difficulties in accessing financial markets and rising global prices which affected the ability to procure imported grain," said the World Bank's Tunisia country manager Alexandre Arrobbio.

Last year Tunisia imported 60 percent of its soft wheat, used for bread, and 66 percent of its barley from the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

The loan approved Wednesday aims to ensure "affordable bread for the poor, barley for livestock, and agricultural inputs for

domestic grain production," the World Bank said.

Bread is a vital part of Tunisian's diets and bread shortages or price hikes have contributed to political upheaval in the past -- including shortly before the 2010 uprising that toppled dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and sparked the Arab Spring revolts.

The World Bank said its loan programme was "expected to reduce import dependency through incentives to sustainably increase domestic grain production," the World Bank said.

The lender has in the past urged Tunisia to focus on crops with "greater labour intensity", such as citrus fruits, arguing that Tunisia "does not have a strong comparative advantage in cereals".

In April the government unveiled a programme to support farmers with access to better seeds, technical assistance and state-backed loans in a push to boost its self-sufficiency in grains.

Tunisia is expected to start formal talks with the International Monetary Fund in the coming weeks for a bailout package of around two billion euros, in exchange for "ambitious reforms" to rein in public spending and reform state-owned companies.

AFP

Bankrupt Sri Lanka economy shrinks 1.6% in first quarter

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka's economy shrank 1.6 percent in the first quarter of this year as an unprecedented financial crisis began to impact commercial activity, according to official data.

The island nation's painful downturn has seen months of lengthy blackouts, runaway inflation and severe shortages of consumer goods. A shortage of foreign currency needed for the import of fuel, fertiliser and other essentials had a devastating effect on the economy just as the COVID-19 pandemic was receding. The January-March contraction was worsened by the "adverse effects" of inflation and



People queue to buy Liquefied Petroleum Gas cylinders near the Galle International Cricket Stadium in Galle on June 28, 2022 (AFP)

Sri Lanka's crashing currency, the statistics department said.

The agency noted that a ban on pesticide and fertiliser imports last year, since repealed, had a devastating effect on farm-

ers with the first-quarter rice harvest down 33 percent.

It added that an ongoing fuel shortage was having serious impacts on transport and industry.

AFP

Tesla cuts around 200 jobs in California

New York, United States - Electric vehicle manufacturer Tesla has closed an office in the California city of San Mateo, cutting around 200 jobs, according to multiple US media reports.

Tesla did not immediately respond to a request for comment from AFP seeking confirmation of the move on Wednesday.

The employees involved reportedly worked on the analysis of data from the vehicles' autopilot driver assistance system.

Most of them were hourly workers, Bloomberg reported. According to the specialist outlet TechCrunch, 81 members of the San Mateo team kept their jobs,

but will be transferred to Buffalo, New York. Tesla's unpredictable boss, Elon Musk, said last week that 10 percent of the company's full-time employees would be eliminated in the coming three months, but the number of hourly workers would grow.

Musk also indicated in a recent interview with a club of Silicon Valley Tesla owners that new factories in Austin, Texas and Berlin were "gigantic money furnaces," causing losses of billions of dollars.

As of the end of 2021, Tesla had nearly 100,000 workers worldwide.

AFP

How long will it take to get over the inflation hump?

Lisbon, Portugal - Inflation has surged back to levels not seen in many developed economies since the 1970s and 1980s. Economists and central bankers at the European Central Bank's conference in Portugal warn it will take time before price rises cool.

How did we get here?

For the ECB, established in 1998 to oversee the European single currency, the burst of inflation is without precedent.

"The current levels of food and industrial goods inflation have not been seen since the mid-1980s," ECB President Christine Lagarde said in her remarks at the conference on Tuesday. Likewise, the "increase in the relative price of energy in recent months is much higher than the individual spikes that occurred in the 1970s" during the oil shock, Lagarde said.

The take-off in inflation, over eight percent in the eurozone in May, was at the end of a "a sequence that happens in a chaotic world", Richard Baldwin, an economics professor at the Gradu-



(FROM L) President of ECB Christine Lagarde, Croatian PM Andrej Plenkovic, European Council's President Charles Michel and European Commission's President Ursula von der Leyen at EU Summit in Brussels (AFP)

ate Institute of Geneva, told AFP.

The supply shock caused by the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020 had been followed by a "demand twist" where people used their money more on goods, Baldwin said.

Instead of seeing this fading, the Russian invasion in Ukraine is causing "a huge spike in fuel and food prices" and heaping pressure on inflation, he said.

But it is not just energy. As

health restrictions fall away, consumers are turning back to services, while the pent-up demand for tourism is being released, Lagarde noted. "There is no playbook for this inflation," said economist Baldwin.

How long will it stay like this?

With no end in sight for the war in Ukraine, the disruptions caused to the supply of energy

could keep prices high for some time to come. Domestic factors could also prop up high inflation rates, with workers demanding higher and higher compensation to make up for the rising cost of living. Adding to the pressure are low unemployment rates, handing more leverage to workers looking for pay rises.

What can central banks do?

The message put out by central banks is one of their most powerful tools to calm markets and control prices.

But the task at hand "has become quite difficult in view of high inflation numbers" and as "people feel high inflation every day when they're buying food or going to the gas station", Isabel Schnabel, a member of the ECB's executive board, told AFP.

"We can do little about current inflation, but we will take decisive measures so that inflation returns to our (two-percent) target over the medium term," Schnabel said.

"Once inflation is there and it starts to increase the expectations and wages, monetary policy should act," Sebnem Kalemli-Ozcan, an economic professor at the University of Maryland, told AFP. That is what the ECB has planned to do, announcing an interest rate hike for July, its first in over a decade. But the institution has to be careful not to completely choke off sputtering growth.

AFP

EU split over climate fund to help most vulnerable

Luxembourg, Luxembourg - EU countries battled through the night to hash out the bloc's new measures to fight climate change, with negotiations focused on a "Social Climate Fund" for those most vulnerable in the green transition.

Late on Tuesday, environment ministers from the European Union's 27 member states adopted a common position on achieving zero-emission new cars by 2035, and on a special fund to help firms and consumers cover the cost of their climate efforts. But the proposal for the Social Climate Fund (SCF) -- a key component of the plan presented by the European Commission in July 2021 -- was the subject of tense debate late into the night.

Establishing the special budget would help offset the impact of price increases for the bloc's most vulnerable households, and would also go towards housing and road transport measures that would reduce



Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz (R) leaves after giving a press conference on June 28, 2022 at Elmau Castle, southern Germany, at the end of the G7 Summit (AFP)

costs. The subject is extremely sensitive for governments as inflation -- linked to energy prices -- is on the rise. With divisions still deep, the 27 member states agreed on the plan in principle but remained at odds on the size of the fund.

Initially the fund aimed to provide over 72 billion euros in EU funding from 2025 to 2032.

But richer countries -- like the Netherlands and Germany --

want a smaller fund, with the spending targeted towards innovation, while Eastern European countries are pushing for a bigger budget to help cover the cost of going green.

'Unable to meet challenges'

Berlin had initially proposed the allocation of 20 billion euros -- the smallest possible portion -- but finally on Tuesday raised it to

48 billion euros.

France, which holds the rotating presidency of the EU, rallied the majority of states to the amount of 59 billion euros for a shorter period (2027-2032), calling it a "fairly balanced compromise". The agreement did not convince Poland, which denounced "decisions that risk undermining popular support for the climate plan", while Latvia voiced concerns about a fund

"unable to meet the challenges faced".

Other issues, including a re-vamp of the EU's Emissions Trading System, were less contentious. By the early hours of Wednesday, member states announced they had agreed to gradually eliminate the free emissions allowances granted to certain industrial sectors.

In return, companies would be protected by a carbon tax on imports from third countries at the EU borders, something known as the carbon border adjustment.

Free quotas allocated to airlines would be eliminated by 2027. Member states also validated the inclusion of maritime transport in the carbon emission market, but with special exceptions for winter navigation, public service routes and services to small islands. The bloc's ETS carbon market, in which companies must buy credits to emit CO2, is a cornerstone of the bloc's climate agenda.

AFP

Germany plans return to debt-limit rules in 2023

Berlin, Germany - Germany will reinstate its so-called debt brake in 2023 after suspending it for three years to cope with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, sources in the finance ministry said Wednesday.

The government will borrow \$18.1mn next year, adhering to the rule enshrined in the constitution that normally limits Germany's public deficit to 0.35 percent of overall annual economic output, despite new spending as a result of Russia's war in Ukraine, the sources said.

The new borrowing set out in a draft budget to be presented to the cabinet on Friday is almost 10 billion euros higher than a previous figure for 2023 announced in April. However, "despite a considerable increase in costs, the debt brake will be respected," one of the sources said.

After taking on almost 140 billion euros of new debt in 2022, Germany will next year benefit from the end of many expenses related to the coronavirus pandemic, as well as higher tax rev-



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz

enues, the sources added.

Although Germany is traditionally a frugal nation, the government broke its own debt rules at the start of the coronavirus pandemic and unleashed vast financial aid to steer the economy through the crisis.

The government has this year unveiled a multi-billion-euro support package to help companies in Europe's biggest economy weather the fallout from the Ukraine war and sanctions against Russia. Berlin has also spent billions to diversify its energy supply to reduce its dependence on Russia.

AFP

China accuses G7 of 'creating division' over trade criticism

Beijing, China - China accused Group of Seven countries on Wednesday of irresponsibly sowing division after the forum condemned Beijing's trade practices in a statement.

G7 leaders had slammed China's "non-transparent and market-distorting" international trade tactics on Tuesday, in a statement that also vowed to reduce "strategic dependencies" on the Asian giant.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian on Wednesday hit back at the criticism, saying the statement showed the allies were "keen to create divisions and confronta-



tions without any sense of responsibility or morality".

The G7 should "advance globalisation" rather than encourage division "at a critical time for the international community fighting the pandemic and striving for economic recovery," Zhao said.

The G7 statement, in which leaders pledged to "foster diver-

sification and resilience to economic coercion, and to reduce strategic dependencies," came hours before the leaders joined a larger group of their counterparts at a NATO summit in Madrid.

There, the alliance was also poised to toughen its stance against Beijing.

AFP

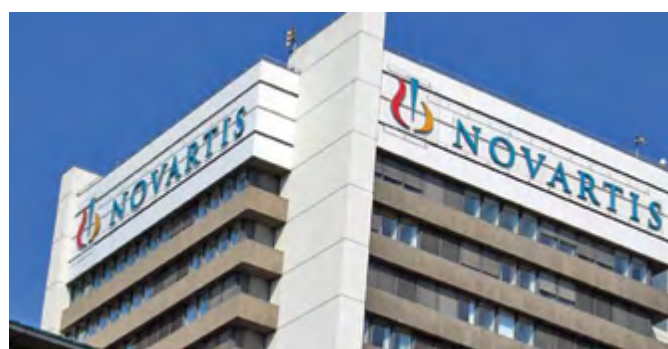
Novartis slashes 8,000 jobs worldwide

Zurich, Switzerland - Swiss pharmaceutical giant Novartis is slashing around 8,000 jobs worldwide, or just over seven percent of its global workforce, as part of a large restructuring push.

Novartis, which currently employs some 108,000 people around the world, confirmed late Tuesday that it would shed thousands of jobs as part of a restructuring plan announced in April.

Under that plan, the company aims to simplify its structure, among other things gathering oncology and other pharmaceutical activities in a single division.

No figures were initially given for the layoffs, but Swiss media



reported the global number Tuesday, and also said the company planned to slash 1,400 jobs in Switzerland -- about 12 percent of its workforce in the country.

In an email sent to employees, Novartis chief Vas Narasimhan explained the com-

pany's new structure, which he promised would be "both leaner and simpler".

But this "will unfortunately entail layoffs," he wrote, according to the Tages-Anzeiger newspaper.

Some jobs will be transferred to the Czech Republic and to

India, but others, which become superfluous with the restructuring, will be eliminated, it said.

The company aims to "rationalise our global functions", a Novartis spokesman told AFP, adding that jobs in finance, legal services and communications would be cut.

"We recognise the impact these changes will have on our people," he said, vowing that the company would "ensure we meet all requirements for employee consultation, via representative bodies where applicable, and provide outplacement and career counselling support to those who are impacted."

AFP

JOB VACANCIES



Aligned with the national recruitment campaign of the Oman Investment Authority and its subsidiaries and in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, Oman Electricity Transmission Company is pleased to announce a number of job opportunities as per the following details:-

Job Title	Job Code
1- Training and Development Analyst	IRC15949
2- Senior Economic Analyst	IRC15970
3- Cyber Security Expert	IRC15730
4- Cyber Security Engineer	IRC15971
5- Load Dispatch Center Technical Expert	IRC15950

Interested candidates may apply for this post through www.omangrid.com/vacancies by not later than 16th July 2022.

Please attach the following when applying:

- CV
- University Degree
- Transcript

Note: Incomplete applications will be excluded and only shortlisted will be contacted



Oman Electricity Transmission Company S.A.O.C.
MUSCAT-Mawaleh
Way No.2153, Buliding No.4230, Square No.321
Tel: 91293517
Website: www.omangrid.com



وظائف شاغرة



ضمن حملة التوظيف الوطنية لجهاز الإستثمار العماني والشركات التابعة له وبالتنسيق مع وزارة العمل، يسر الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء الإعلان عن عدد من الفرص الوظيفية وذلك حسب التفاصيل المذكورة

رمز الوظيفة	الوظائف
IRC15949	١- محلل التدريب والتطوير
IRC15970	٢- محلل أول إقتصاد
IRC15730	٣- خبير الامن السيبراني
IRC15971	٤- مهندس الامن السيبراني
IRC15950	٥- الخبير الفني لمركز توزيع الاحمال

على من لديه الرغبة في التقدم الى الوظائف أعلاه، يرجى زيارة موقع الشركة www.omangrid.com/vacancies في موعد أقصاه ١٦ يوليو ٢٠٢٢م.

يرجى إرفاق الاتي عند تقديم الطلب :

- السيرة الذاتية
- الشهادة الجامعية
- كشف الدرجات

ملاحظة: سيتم استبعاد الطلبات غير المكتملة، وكذلك سيتم التواصل فقط مع المترشحين الذين استوفوا الشروط ومتطلبات الوظيفة.



الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء ش.م.ع.م
مسقط - الموالح
رقم البناية ٢١٥٣ ، مبنة رقم ٤٢٣٠ ، المزم رقم ٣٢١
هاتف: ٩١٢٩٣٥١٧
Website: www.omangrid.com



Renault Oman offers benefits

Renault Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, has announced attractive value benefits for customers as part of its special promotion.

As per the Renault Oman special scheme, customers who buy specific Renault vehicles can enjoy free registration, free insurance, free periodic vehicle service package, three years/100000km manufacturer warranty, free AAA assistance card, and reference program 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, a press release said. The unique offer boasts of a host of advantages for customers purchasing efficient Renault models.

All customers purchasing Renault vehicles from Suhail Bahwan Automobiles will be eligible to participate in the campaign scheme. However, vehicles purchased with commercial registration 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 SBA said, "We have worked out value offers which the customers can avail during this promotion period. This is the best time to own the innovative and fuel-efficient Renault vehicles.

We are confident that the exclusive offer will meet the aspirations of our customers."

All customers purchasing Renault Megane, Duster, Koleos, Dokker Van and Master Van during this scheme period will be eligible for free first year vehicle registration.

Applicable to the extent of private registration only. For commercial registrations, additional amount including passing needs to be borne by customer.

All customers purchasing Renault Megane, Duster, Koleos during this scheme period will be eligible for free first year vehicle insurance (Oman & UAE only).

The insurance amount is applicable for private registrations only. For commercial registration, additional amount needs to be borne by the customer.

All customers purchasing Renault Megane, Duster and Koleos during this scheme period will be eligible for Free Periodic Maintenance Service Package for 3years/60,000 km, and Dokker Van, Master Van for 2 years/30,000km limited to 6 services.

This offer is applicable for only the service intervals of 10,000km.

Maisarah offers travel finance

Maisarah Islamic Banking Services continues to offer customised packages that meet the various finance requirements of customers with exclusive features and added value benefits to credit card holders.

For those who plan to travel this summer, Maisarah's Travel Finance covers all types of travel expenses, including flight tickets, car rentals, transportation costs, accommodation expenses, package tours, etc. Customers can also utilise this financing option for Hajj or Umrah, and they get to enjoy the various added benefits with a flexible payment period of up to 3 years. We have forged tie-up agreements with leading travel service providers for further convenience to our customers.

Travel Finance is based on the Islamic principle of Service Ijarah where Maisarah purchases the travel package from a third party agency and leases the service to the customer for a certain pre-agreed period against the payment of service charge that is paid back by the customer on a monthly basis.

For more convenience, Maisarah also offers Shari'a-compliant credit cards that are based on the concept of Qard Hassan



(utilising the principle of Ujrah for providing certain services with a fixed monthly fees as per agreed terms and conditions). Both Gold Credit Card and Titanium Credit card come with exclusive offers and promotions, and discounted rates on certain products/ services, along with free airport lounge access, global emergency assistance and global ATM network.

Customers can avail these exclusive finance options at any of Maisarah's branches in Azaiba, Al Hail, Salalah, Sohar, Birkat Al Mouz, Greater Muttrah, Al Khuwair, Sur, New Salalah and Araqi.

MHD ITICS gets digital transformation accolade

Mohsin Haider Darwish's (MHD) ITICS, the Infrastructure, Technology, Industrial and Consumer Solutions cluster of MHD, was recently conferred with the Leadership in Digital Transformation Solutions at OERLive's Digital Transformation Conference and Awards 2022.

Conducted at Sheraton Oman Hotel on June 29, the key industry event witnessed in attendance industry leaders, C-suite executives and market experts from diverse fields. The chief guest, H Hi Sayyid Kamil al Said, chairman, ITHCA Group, presented the award to Jayaprakash Menon, CEO of MHD ITICS.

MHD ITICS has earned a top accolade at this prestigious award ceremony for the second consecutive year for its role in enabling digital transformation within organisations.

MHD ITICS offers a range of superior products and services for infrastructure and construction, technology, communications and enterprise solutions, office automation, consumer durables, and a varied array of industrial products for large, medium and small enterprises.

"We are extremely happy to have won this distinguished prize. This award recognises our long-term strategy and perseverance in delivering tailor-made solutions to businesses.

MHD ITICS has been assisting and empowering businesses



as they further their digitalization journeys. This has enabled our clients to improve operations, boost productivity and get the most out of their investments. Through our various endeavours we will continue to future-proof businesses," said Menon.

Bank Nizwa finances Nissan, Toyota

As Oman's leading Islamic bank, Bank Nizwa has been pioneering innovative digital financing solutions through strategic FinTech collaborations.

Earlier in the year, Bank Nizwa agreed with the Islamic Finance Initiation Network (IFIN) to introduce the first-of-its-kind Shari'ah-compliant FinTech proposition that enables customers to avail of on-the-spot financing for their dream car, a press release said.

Starting the offer with instant auto finance solutions, the '10-minute financing process' time provided a significant impetus to the proposition, enhancing the customer experience. In addition to the previously attained Mazda, Bank Nizwa recently joined hands with two more car dealers, Nissan and Toyota, in response to the dynamic demands of the market.

Khaled al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa, said, "Bank Nizwa has become synonymous with 'innovation' as we continue to explore untapped avenues, leverage it to our advantage and open new doors of opportunities that the entire Islamic banking sector can capitalise on. Our partnership



with IFIN to introduce instant auto finance is one such initiative and its growing preference in the local market further validates this decision.

On the one hand, the proposition has helped Bank Nizwa strengthen its bonds with retailers, SMEs, corporate companies and regulators. On the other, it has led to improved customer satisfaction levels."

Adding Nissan and Toyota to Bank Nizwa's 'Instant Car Financing' proposition will give customers an enhanced range of options to choose from when buying a new car. In addition, owing to a versatile credit decision engine, customers will benefit from an easy application process, quick turnaround time and an overall seamless purchasing experience. Customers can complete the entire car financing process at the participating car dealers' showrooms without visiting the bank's branches.

Al Kayed added, "Making the most of our ongoing investments in technology, we were able to digitalise and automate workflows, thereby reducing operational costs, mitigating the risks of Shari'ah non-compliance and most importantly, minimising processing time. In an era where time is directly linked to customer satisfaction levels, we emphasise delivering a '10-minute financing process' time - a unique feature that has contributed to giving the proposition considerable momentum."

'Made in Oman' yogurt very popular among consumers

Oman's locally produced food items are becoming increasingly popular among consumers, thanks to them being fresh, with less time from farm to homes.

With temperatures soaring through the sky, some of these products become essential consumption items with pretty convincing health benefits that even the most discerning experts do agree on. One such example is yogurt, a press release said.

To be more inclusive and take into consideration the preferences of those who like it less solid, let's also include laban. Given Oman's long summers, these products are increasingly popular amongst the local population.

With consumers becoming more health-conscious, the Omani milk production market attained a high of 241 million tonnes in 2020. A recent report by the American research firm,



Expert Market Research, also revealed that the industry is expected to grow at a compound annual rate of 1.60% between 2022 and 2027.

Keeping these figures and the general sentiments of consumers in mind, it is evident that

leading local brands have been carving their niche and leading sales in the industry. There is an undoubted growing preference amongst individuals to 'go local'.

Four reasons for this fondness includes the fact that Oman's Dhofar region provides the most ideal climate for cattle rearing in the entire GCC. Making the most of this blessing, the oldest dairy company, A'Safwah, has established its dairy farms in the region. A strong believer in the idea that nutritious milk comes from cows that are well-cared for, A'Safwah also works closely with environmental advisors and local and regional environmental regulators to implement all the necessary steps to ensure that the cattle are well-nurtured and raised in the most hygienic conditions.

The cattle are given feed that is organic, locally grown, and nutritious as this is also an important factor that affects the quality of milk produced.

The efforts of local dairy producers are directed towards enhancing the freshness, nutrition, and taste of products through continuous innovation in processes while placing a keen emphasis on optimising delivery channels so as to ensure a quick farm-to-table experience for consumers.

Also, when it comes to daily, dairy staples like yogurts and laban, the demand for natural, fresh and wholesome products is on a steep rise.

Brands like A'Safwah pride themselves on offering consumers precisely that with an extensive range of fresh yogurt and laban drinks that have impressive nutritional profiles. Boosting immunity, digestion, and heart health are just some of their innumerable benefits.



BIG conducts Immunology Workshop

Business International Group (BIG), a division of the Zubair Corporation and one of the leading business houses in the Sultanate of Oman, recently organised a scientific talk and immunology workshop the Crowne Plaza Muscat.

The workshop was conducted in coordination with its principal company, SNIBE Diagnostics, a Global Bio-Medical Company specialized in clinical laboratory instruments and in vitro diagnostic reagents, a press release said.

Highlighting the importance of the workshop, Sunny Peter, general manager of BIG, said, "SNIBE Diagnostics is one of the global IVD pioneers that have been focusing on chemiluminescence immunoassays for 27 years and represents 147 countries.

The workshop followed the BIG and SNIBE partnership discussions, make the best use of mutual capabilities, expertise, and resources, to enable the latter to introduce the products and technologies to healthcare institutions and professionals across the Sultanate.

We are proud to be partnered with SNIBE and align with their innovations that will benefit the local medical industry."

The event saw the presence of around 65 delegates, including senior consultants in biochemistry, microbiology and immunology.

Also in attendance were medical pathologists and several laboratory professionals from various institutions across the country, such as the Ministry of Health, the Royal Hospital, Khoula Hospital, Al Nadah Hospital, Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, Royal Oman Police Hospital, Ministry of Defence Hospital, Diwan clinic and other major private hospitals and laboratories.

Over the course of the workshop, scientific talks took place, with insights from both Omani and international speakers. Eng Ghadah al Mahrouqui, BME, Business International Group kicked off the talks with his opening speech and was the moderator of the programme.

Dr Manal Khalifa al Kindi, presented the clinical application for Anti-Mullerian Hormone, while Professor Sergio Bernardini, professor of Clinical Biochemistry and Clinical Molecular Biology from the Tor Vergata University of Rome shed light on the latest updates in Autoimmune CLIA testing and was part of the Infectious Disease panel discussion, besides presentations by Askar Ali of BIG.

Muscat Bay to open showroom at Shatti Waterfront

Muscat Bay, Oman's only fully integrated resort village recently announced the opening of its new showroom in the heart of Muscat city for easy access to impress even the most discerning buyer.

The new location, at the Shatti Waterfront boasts a new show space and office with a luxurious meeting space to present various new promotions on offer to clients and partners. Within its varied offerings, Muscat Bay Waterfront office will also showcase several deals on the global luxury hospitality brand,



Jumeirah Muscat Bay Hotel - the Village Resort's latest addition, a press release said.

On the occasion, the Muscat Bay team hosted the Privilege Club event for its growing sales partnership network to celebrate Muscat Bay's new hotel launch and the village resort's growing sales momentum. In addition to

its headquarters at Muscat Bay Experience Centre, the new office space is already attracting new leads, and new awareness to buyers and sales partners.

Jawad Sajid, vice president - Sales at Muscat Bay, noted, "We are proud to host our partners at our newest addition and focus on a continued sales growth curve. The decision to expand and open a second office at the Waterfront is a logical step in our business growth strategy. It is critical that we meet clients where their needs can be served most effectively.

"As part of the strategy to have the best offerings in a constantly evolving marketplace, Muscat Bay has created a more diversified sales and marketing resource base to service the different facets of an Integrated Tourism Complex - individual luxury properties, investor-aligned properties, and mixed-used assets.

"For example, we now have a dedicated Business Development Executive purely serving the needs of our sales partners, locally, regionally and internationally."

Obesity in Oman, a cause for concern

Dr Baha Yaseen Ali, specialist gastroenterologist, Aster Al Rafah Hospital, Sohar, has cautioned about obesity becoming an increasing medical concern worldwide since its rate is steadily rising.

The WHO reported that the obese population exceeds 500 million globally. Among all Arab Gulf countries, the prevalence of obesity and overweight is increasing, where more than 30% of the population is obese. Such higher percentages of obesity and overweight are also seen in Middle Eastern, United States, New Zealand, Canada, Australia'.

Obesity is a well-known risk factor for many medical conditions like type 2 diabetes, hypertension, dyslipidemia, and Nonalcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD) among adults'. It has been reported that all ranges of obesity, from overweight to obese and severely obese, are associated with NAFLD.



Dr Baha Yaseen Ali

The definition and diagnostic modalities for NAFLD depend on imaging or histopathological evidence of hepatic steatosis after excluding all possible secondary causes like alcohol consumption, teratogenic drugs, or genetic disorders. The overall prevalence of NAFLD diagnosed by imaging is between 14-31%'. Increasing incidence of obesity, insulin resistance and Type 2 diabetes in Oman sensibly predict an associated increase in NAFLD incidence.

QA floats special promotions

Qatar Airways (QA) is seeing an increase in demand for travel during the upcoming Eid and summer holidays across its network compared to the previous year. The airline is pleased to provide its passengers with promotional offers including a discount of up to 20 per cent off on select routes Premium and Economy Class to explore Europe this summer.

The 10-day promotion will run from July 6 for travel up to 30 September 2022. Tickets can be booked online through qatarairways.com, Qatar Airways sales offices, or from preferred travel agents, a press release said.

The journey will connect passengers through Qatar's state of the art hub, and the World's Best Airport, Hamad International Airport, before reaching their desired destination in Europe.

Passengers can also enjoy the airline's newly integrated rewards currency - Avios - providing passengers even greater opportunities to accumulate points and leverage exciting innovations in redeeming and spending their rewards. In addition, Qatar Airways loyalty programme members will retain their well-earned rewards balance and will be able to continue enjoying the redemption opportunities they currently have.



Ooredoo app on iOS enables donations

Caring for the community and enriching lives across Oman, the Ooredoo App now allows customers using iOS devices to donate to charitable causes.

Users can choose from a range of organisations including the Ministry of Health, Oman Charitable Organisation, Dar Al Atta'a, the Omani Bahja Orphan Society, Oman Cancer Association, Oman Diabetes Association, the Association of Early Intervention for Children with Disability, the Al Rahma Association for Motherhood and Child Welfare, and the Omani Association for the Hearing Impaired and many more, a press release said.

Transactions are processed securely and within seconds, ensuring the valuable programmes offered across the country can continue to run and Ooredoo customers can have a positive impact on the lives of the people who depend on these services.

Subscribers with an Android device can also donate to charitable causes through the app. Donations are easy to make and are unlimited.

OQ wins two awards for digital technologies

OQ Group has been the recipient of two awards at a conference on 'Digital Shift' held under the patronage of H H Kamil bin Fahad al Said, Secretary General at the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, at Sheraton Oman hotel.

The first award recognises the company's efforts in using technology in both, upstream and downstream, business of oil exploration and production. The second award was granted to honour OQ's achievements as the best company to implement alternative energy strategies in the Sultanate of Oman for the year 2022.

Maryam al Shibani, vice president of People, Technology, and Culture at OQ stated, "We are extremely proud to have received two awards that recognize all the efforts exerted by OQ Group in utilising technology in both, upstream and downstream processes of oil exploration and production, which has directly contributed to reducing oil production costs".

"As a diversified energy group, OQ has been successful in integrating all its activities, right from exploration to operation and marketing. This has contributed to increasing oil production and empowering new assets by enhancing their operational efficiency in addition to the deployment of several digital initiatives such as block chain technology, she added.

"Winning the best company award for implementing alternative energy strategies for the year 2022 comes as a result of the efforts exerted by the group in attracting investment and seeking partnership in hydrogen projects and other eco-friendly initiatives. The utilisation of alternative energy resources has proved to be a promising area to position OQ as a leading integrated and sustainable energy company and a new avenue for sustained, long-term growth, she concluded.

Genesis Electrified GV70 unveiled at Goodwood Festival

Genesis Motor Europe revealed its Electrified GV70 at this year's Goodwood Festival of Speed in partnership with Mastercard 2022.

The eagerly anticipated Electrified GV70 is the third electric car to be launched by the brand this year, following on from the GV60 and Electrified G80, and was unveiled on the Genesis stand at the world famous British automotive event by Andrew Pilkington of Genesis Motor UK, and the Duke of Richmond, a press release said.

Electrified GV70 embodies the brand's award-winning 'Athletic Elegance' with the highest standards in luxury, comfort and versatility. It is also underpinned by state-of-the-art electrical architecture that delivers exceptional driving performance, an impressive range and state-of-



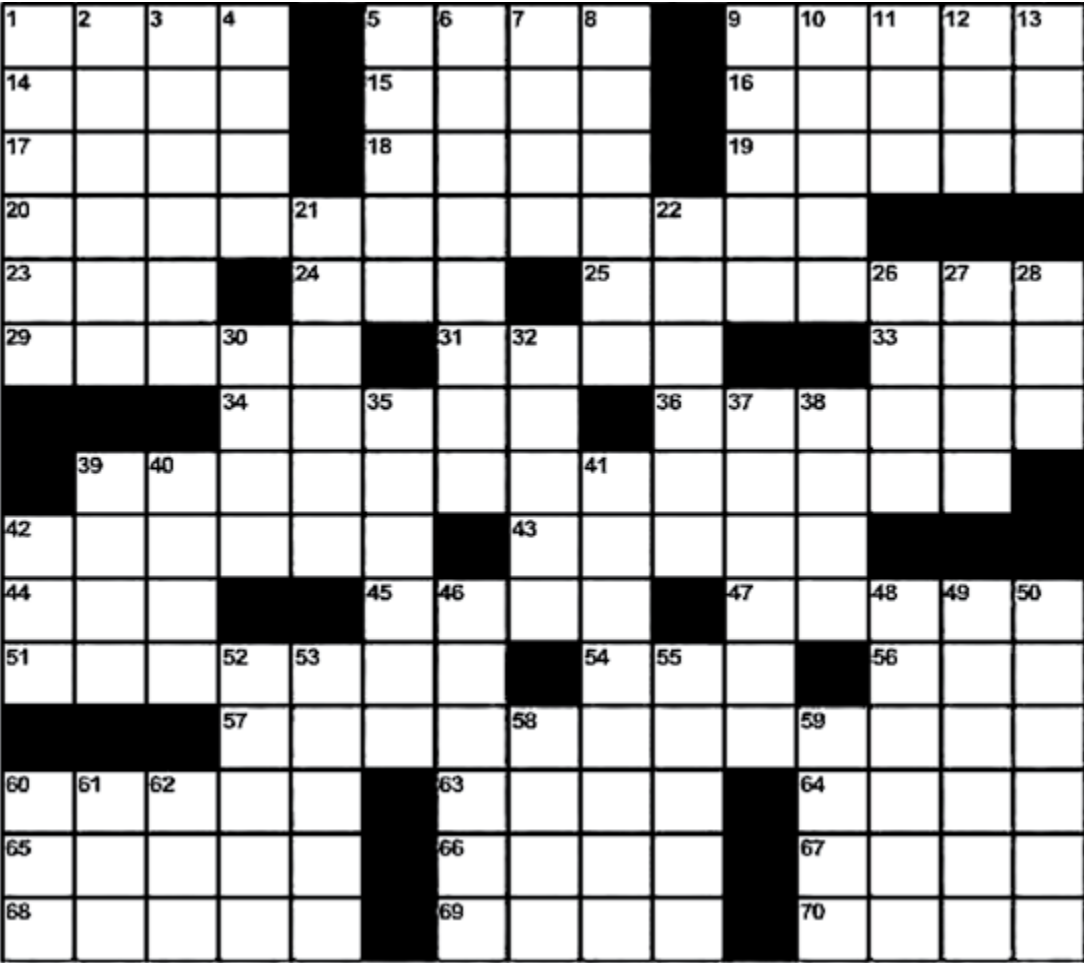
the-art charging flexibility.

Dominique Boesch, managing director for Genesis Motor Europe, commented, "We are delighted to unveil Electrified GV70 for the very first time in Europe at the world-famous Goodwood Festival of Speed.

Featuring our cutting edge electrical architecture and focus on luxurious sustainability, it represents another big step in our commitment to deliver an all-electric line-up of vehicles by 2025.

"As with our other SUV models, it retains exceptional versatility and usability, as well as unrivalled comfort and driving pleasure. As the third new electric car from Genesis to be launched in Europe in under a year, Electrified GV70 is further evidence of the brand's bold ambitions for the region".

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**

 - 1) Additional thought pre-ceder
 - 5) Guernsey's grazing areas
 - 9) Having a sharp taste
 - 14) Whopper teller
 - 15) Unwanted aquarium organism
 - 16) _ apso (dog breed)
 - 17) Pinnacle
 - 18) Cow's hurdle, in rhyme
 - 19) It may be tucked by a doctor
 - 20) Wisher's object
 - 23) Mauna _ (Hawaii's highest point)
 - 24) Get droopy
 - 25) Potential ring ac- ceptor
 - 29) Actress Potts
 - 31) Islamic leader, one way
 - 33) "Who_ Seen The Wind?"
 - 34) Kansas, e.g.
 - 3 6) Casual wear
 - 39) Big Dipper, for one
 - 42) Nurture
 - 43) Scots trills
- DOWN**

 - 1) Nome's home
 - 2) Mossy growth
 - 3) Certain islander
 - 4) A favorite with milk
 - 5) Female monster
 - 6) Stretch out
 - 7) Overly eager
 - 8) Grandchild of Japanese immigrants
 - 9) Site for some rites
 - 10) Grouch
 - 11) Farm butter?
 - 12) Skeptic or cynic fol- lower
 - 13) "Our_ Will Come"
 - 2 1) Fly from Africa
 - 22) Deposit on teeth
 - 26) "Birthplace of Avia- tion"
 - 27) Loft locale
 - 28) Quick or slow attach- ment
 - 30) Does not exist
 - 32) Peach_
 - 35) Like a body in New- ton's first law
 - 37) Water source
 - 38) Vent sound
 - 39) Rope fiber
 - 40) City where "The Scream" was stolen
 - 41) Inspirational celebrity
 - 42) Dandy dresser
 - 46) English county known for sheep
 - 48) Port on Commence- ment Bay
 - 49) Shakes an Etch A Sketch
 - 50) Show mercy
 - 52) Worth
 - 53) Land in a lake, e.g.
 - 55) Lassos
- NOTE PAD**
-

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

In addition to a few personal conflicts, there could be quite a few almost insurmountable scheduling conflicts that throw a wrench into your plans for most of the day. But don't try to solve all the problems alone. Making everything work is not your responsibility. You can't make everyone happy, so don't waste your time trying. As the day moves forward, things may free up, so don't worry about things not working out until you absolutely have to.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Today, it might feel like you're stuck inside one of those snow globes and someone has just picked it up and shaken it. Hard. Everything in your life is knocked off of its normal moorings right now and floating around with little if any direction. But it's easy to make lemonade out of this lemon-like experience. Look upon this as a turning point, when the slate is wiped clean and the future is yours to create in a new way. Dictate your dreams and go.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

An awkward silence can easily evolve into a long period of miscommunication. So if you put your foot in your mouth today, rely on honesty to dig you out of that hole. Be real, 'fess up, and all will be forgiven. The worst thing you can do is dance around the truth. You'll only end up looking suspicious. Conversely, if you're on the receiving end of a tacky comment, be generous and try to create an environment where the other person can be real and admit it.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

There has been a lot of change going on in your life lately, and it's normal to feel like you don't have a clear idea of what to do next. Clarity will come if you listen to your instincts and cut yourself some slack. If you feel distanced from the people who really matter in your life, that is a problem that can be easily remedied. Pick up the phone, ask them what they're doing for dinner tonight (or lunch next week or breakfast tomorrow) and invite them out.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Not everyone knows when to step back and give someone else their time in the limelight, but you sure do! So today, when the praise starts getting heaped upon you, step away and make sure everyone gets their fair share. Celebrate the fact that you're secure enough in yourself not to feel threatened when the people you care about get some credit too. Plus, there could be some fragile egos at stake, and you'll be feeling generous.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

In one of your newer relationships, things are well on their way toward gaining real momentum. This is a partnership built on mutual respect and a shared sense of what is right. Finding a person who brings out the best in you no matter what mood you're in is rare. This is a person you can rely on, a person you should rely on. You are starting to align yourself with the people who deserve you. Let others from your past stay there.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

From time to time, looking deep inside your own heart is the very best way to see the truth about the world around you. If you feel you're moving into an introspective time, then just go with it. The Universe is reminding you that you're the most important thing in your life. After all, if you can't take care of yourself, how can you take care of the people you love? It's not selfish. It's smart. The answers lie within you.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You have been in the thick of things for quite a while now, busy with school or work and not feeling particularity in sync with a very special person in your life. This is something you should work on changing today. If you're in the midst of making a big decision, ask this person to help you sort things out. You have to invite them into your life if you want them to be in your life, right? Not everyone wants to barge in and invade your privacy.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

If you're considering turning back on an emotional journey today, try to hang in there for one more day! If you just keep going a little further, you can turn a corner very soon and see a broad, beautiful road ahead of you. Your continued effort and commitment to improving yourself are powerful signs to show the Universe. It's something that can't be denied. For moral support, look to the people in your life who are always there for you.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Whatever has been holding you back has got to get out of your life today! You need space, time, and silence to get your tasks under your firm control. If a high maintenance friend sends you a desperate email or leaves you a frantic voicemail, promise you can give them all the time they need some other day. Right now, you can't respond to every bomb thrown your way. Prioritize yourself first. There's absolutely nothing wrong with that!

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Today, the cautious, humble side of you is telling you to stop for a moment to review the situation. Listen to this little voice inside of you and don't let yourself get caught up in the moment. You shouldn't be in any hurry to get anywhere right now, so take all the time you need to map out your plan of action. Things will go smoothly if you plan well, so be patient. Your hot opportunities are things you earned. They aren't going anywhere.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

If you feel like you've been giving more than you've been getting in an old relationship, you just might be right. But before you approach your friend with these suspicions, consider the significant value this relationship has in your life. Is this issue a deal breaker? These extra sacrifices might be temporary, and if you make a big issue out of them, you might be causing more drama than you need in your life right now. Try to hold your tongue and keep the peace.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Which European country did not finally lose its territory in India until 1961?

A. Portugal
B. Spain
C. Great Britain
D. China

02.Members of which Californian rock band formed the group known until 2001 as Kara's Flowers?

A. Maroon 5
B. John Mayer Trio
C. Sugar Ray
D. The Donnas

03.Where is the South American railway stretch popularly known as "El Zig-Zag" found?

A. Between Callao and Huancayo and Cerro de Pasco, Peru
B. Between Guayaquil and Quito, Ecuador
C. Between Cusco and Machu Picchu, Peru
D. Between Antofagasta, Chile, and Uyuni and Oruro, Bolivia

Answers: 1.A 2.A 3.C

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

A	O	E	O
T	O	S	U
O	B	N	L
Y	R	B	S

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

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

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

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

United States opens probe after 51 migrants die in hot trailer

San Antonio, US - The death toll of undocumented migrants who were abandoned in a scorching-hot trailer in Texas rose to 51 on Tuesday, as President Joe Biden blamed ‘criminal’ professional smugglers for the tragedy.

Rebeca Clay-Flores, a Bexar County official, reported the new tally of ‘39 men and 12 women’ dead, following the Monday discovery of the tractor-trailer on an isolated road in her district.

She did not say how many survivors remained in hospital, but the number could be around 11 based on initial figures that officials gave, including possibly four children.

The Department of Homeland Security announced it had opened a criminal investigation, as Biden took aim at human smuggling gangs.

“The tragic loss of life in San Antonio, Texas that took place yesterday is horrifying and heart-breaking,” he said in a statement.

“This incident underscores the need to go after the multi-billion dollar criminal smuggling industry preying on migrants and leading to far too many innocent deaths,” he said.

Intense heat

Federal law enforcement agents on Tuesday arrested two men at the address linked to the tractor-trailer’s registration, court documents showed.

Juan Francisco D’Luna-Bilbao and Juan Claudio D’Luna-Mendez, both Mexican nationals



Residents cry as they attend a vigil for the victims found in an abandoned truck in San Antonio, Texas on Tuesday (AFP)

whose US tourist visas had expired, were illegally in possession of multiple firearms, the documents alleged.

A third person, suspected of being the driver of the tractor-trailer, was arrested nearby while ‘very high on meth’, reported the local daily *San Antonio Express-News*, citing a law enforcement officer. According to Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, of the dead whose identities are known, 22 were from Mexico, seven from Guatemala and two from Honduras. “It’s a tremendous misfortune,” he told reporters.

It was the deadliest single incident involving migrants along the southern border in memory, and drew more attention to the risks that hundreds of thousands

of people face seeking to enter the United States from Mexico without permission.

On Monday, the high temperature in San Antonio was 39.4 degrees Celsius, and the temperature in the unvented trailer would have been much higher. By Tuesday afternoon, authorities had removed the trailer from where it had been abandoned with its human cargo, on a narrow road sandwiched between train tracks and auto junkyards.

Replacing it were makeshift crosses adorned with artificial flowers.

“I feel that if these people walk hundreds of miles to get over here, it wouldn’t hurt us to walk maybe one mile to put the crosses and candles,” said Angelita Olvera, who lives nearby.

“Hopefully, whoever had them in the trailer will pay the consequences,” she said.

Common route

San Antonio Police Chief William McManus said authorities were first alerted to the trailer by an emergency call at about 5:50pm local time (2250 GMT) on Monday. “A worker who works in one of the buildings up here behind me heard a cry for help,” he told reporters.

The worker ‘came out to investigate, found a trailer with the doors partially open, opened them up to take a look, and found a number of deceased individuals inside,” McManus said.

The tragedy came five years after 10 migrants were found

dead in a trailer with broken air conditioning and clogged ventilation holes near San Antonio.

In recent weeks Border Patrol officers have discovered other attempts to bring undocumented travelers into the country in large trucks.

On June 14, 80 people from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador were discovered inside a tractor-trailer when it was inspected by agents at a highway checkpoint north of Laredo, a border hub in south Texas.

Three weeks earlier, agents intercepted a trailer with 48 people inside near Sierra Blanca in western Texas.

Jesus Thompson, 60, lives just across the train track from where the people in the trailer were found.

“People from Mexico and Guatemala come here to seek the American dream,” he said.

“I would tell the people who are there and who are fleeing to think about it before coming here, because there is a tremendous risk, and especially now that the weather is very hot.”

The case immediately became a focus of politics when Republicans attacked Democratic President Biden for allegedly being soft on immigration.

“These deaths are on Biden. They are a result of his deadly open border policies,” said Texas Governor Greg Abbott.

AFP



Relatives mourn during the funeral of Palestinian Mohammad Marei in the hotspot town of Jenin in the occupied West Bank on Wednesday (AFP)

Palestinian gunman killed by Israel army in West Bank clash

Jenin, Palestinian Territories - A Palestinian gunman from the Islamic Jihad group was shot dead by Israeli troops during clashes on Wednesday in Jenin, a flash point in the occupied West Bank hit by waves of recent violence.

Mohammad Marei, 25, died from a bullet wound to the chest, the Palestinian health ministry said.

Islamic Jihad, a Palestinian armed group present in the West Bank and the Israeli-blockaded Gaza strip, said in a statement that Marei was one of their fighters and a ‘martyr’ who died while confronting a raid ‘by occupation forces... in Jenin at dawn on Wednesday’.

The Israeli army said it conducted overnight ‘counter-terrorism activities’ in several West Bank locations.

In Jenin, Palestinian gunmen opened fire on troops, the army said.

“A number of suspects also hurled explosive devices at soldiers, who responded with fire. A hit was identified,” the army added, without specifically commenting on Marei’s death.

His killing comes amid spiralling violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Nineteen people - mostly Israeli civilians inside Israel - have been killed since late March, mainly in attacks by Palestinians and Israeli Arabs.

Israeli security forces have responded with near-daily raids in the West Bank, including in and around Jenin.

Forty-eight Palestinians have been killed, mostly in the West Bank - among them attackers and suspected militants but also non-combatants, including Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, who was killed by Israeli army fire while covering a raid in Jenin, according to the United Nations.

Three Israeli Arab attackers have also been killed since late March.

AFP

1 dead, 1 missing as landslides hit Austria

Vienna, Austria - One person has died, while another has been reported missing, officials said on Wednesday, after landslides caused by heavy rains cut off access to several communities and waged widespread damage in southern Austria.

Record rain falls overnight on Tuesday to Wednesday sparked the landslides, sending mud and debris into populated regions and causing stream banks to burst in the mountainous Villach-Land district in Carinthia state, which borders Italy and Slovenia.

“One person has been found dead unfortunately... outside the home,” a police spokeswoman, who declined to be named, told AFP. She added that authorities were still looking for another person who has been reported missing while travelling in a car.

Austrian news agency APA said the dead victim was a 82-year-old man.

“Three villages have been completely cut off... the army and firefighters are trying to clear the streets’ to gain access,



A van and a horses trailer are stuck among debris and streaming water in Treffen, in the Villach-Land district, Austria, on Wednesday (AFP)

said Melanie Reiter, a spokeswoman for the Red Cross in Carinthia.

District head Bernd Riepan said ‘many’ houses had been partially buried, though the exact number was not yet known.

Photos showed debris-strewn

streets and houses partially submerged in water and mud in Villach-Land.

“We are fighting on several fronts,” Riepan told AFP.

“We have dispatched several helicopters... but some of the farms are very remote, and they

have yet to be reached.”

President Alexander Van der Bellen called the destruction in Carinthia ‘dramatic’, appealing to people to take care of themselves and others.

Another community in adjacent Salzburg state was also put on alert as a stream passing through it was threatening to burst its banks, according to the Austrian news agency APA.

In some areas of the region, there has never been such a large amount of rain in such a short time since the start of measurements, according to the Central Institute for Meteorology and Geodynamics (ZAMG).

ZAMG said it rained as much in just a few hours as it does for the entire month of an average June.

Austria is currently experiencing a heatwave and authorities have warned of thunderstorms.

Experts say climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of heatwaves and other extreme weather events.

AFP

Migrants in Libya forced into rape for food: UN investigators

Geneva, Switzerland - Migrants detained in Libya face horrific abuse, with women especially facing sexual violence, and often forced to submit to rape in exchange for food, UN investigators said on Wednesday.

In a fresh report, the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya reiterated that the worst crimes under international law were likely being committed in the war-ravaged country, with migrant women suffering some of the worst abuse.

“The mission has reasonable grounds to believe that the crimes against humanity of murder, torture, imprisonment, rape, enforced disappearance and other inhumane acts have been committed in several places of detention in Libya since 2016,” it said.

Migrants are routinely detained by authorities, human

traffickers and others in Libya - a key departure point for tens of thousands of people mainly from sub-Saharan Africa hoping to reach Europe.

Human traffickers have profited from the chaos that has raged since the 2011 toppling and killing of Libyan dictator Muammer Gaddafi.

Talks between rival Libyan governments are being held in Geneva this week over the rules for long-awaited elections, with an aim to end the chaos.

‘Inhumane acts’

The fact-finding mission report, to be presented to the UN Human Rights Council next week, said it had gathered broad evidence of ‘the systematic use of prolonged arbitrary detention’ of migrants in Libya.

The investigators, who made several trips to Libya, described how migrants in deten-

tion face ‘acts of murder, torture, rape and other inhumane acts’.

The report highlighted ‘sexual violence at the hands of traffickers and smugglers, often with the aim of extorting families’. “The mission has also documented cases of rape in places of detention or captivity whereby migrant women are forced to have sex in order to survive, in exchange for food or other essential items,” it said.

In fact, the known risk of sexual violence is considered to great, the report said, that ‘some migrant women and girls get fitted with a contraceptive implant before travelling there to avoid unwanted pregnancy due to such violence’.

The fact-finding mission, which was created by the UN Human Rights Council in June 2020, will see its mandate expire in a few days.

AFP

US must abandon ‘Trump method’ in nuclear talks, says Iran

Doha, Qatar - Iran warned the US to abandon the ‘Trump method’ on Wednesday after the two sides opened indirect talks to revive a nuclear deal that was torpedoed by the former American president.

But Iranian officials said they were hoping for progress in the talks in Qatar, which come after international meetings to return to the deal hit a roadblock.

Iran agreed to curb its nuclear programme in return for sanctions relief in 2015, before then US president Donald Trump pulled out of the deal three years later.

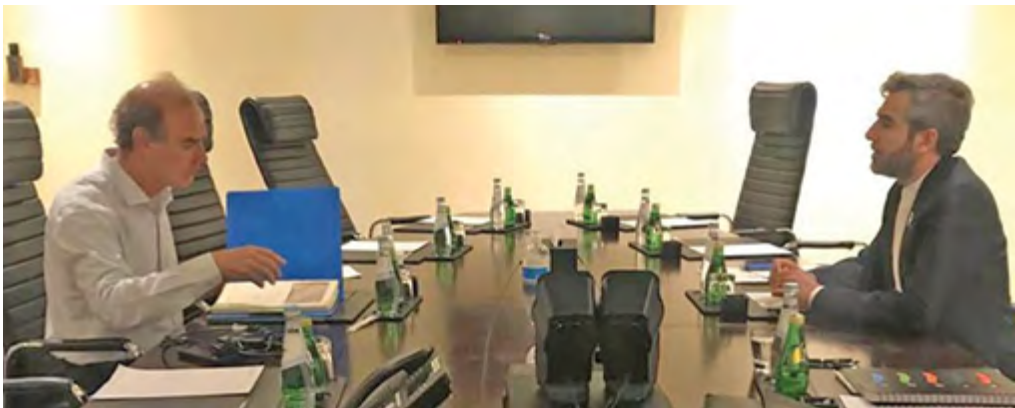
“We hope that, God willing, we can reach a positive and ac-

ceptable agreement if the United States abandons the Trump method,” Iranian government spokesman Ali Bahadori-Jahromi said.

He described the ‘Trump method’ as ‘non-compliance with international law and past agreements and disregard for the legal rights of the Iranian people’.

The indirect talks - with the rival delegations sending each other messages from different parts of the same hotel - come just two weeks before US President Joe Biden makes his first official visit to the region, with Iran high on his agenda.

Soaring oil prices and the lack



Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani (right) meeting with the European Union’s nuclear talks coordinator Enrique Mora in Qatar’s capital Doha on Tuesday (AFP)

of spare capacity could also make this an opportunity for Tehran to push for the lifting of sanctions on Iranian crude, said

Alex Vatanka, director of the Iran programme at the Washington-based Middle East Institute think tank.

Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said Iran was open to a deal in Doha, but wouldn’t cross its ‘red lines’.

“We are serious’ in our desire to finalise an agreement, he said, stressing that his country would not retreat from the ‘red lines’ it has drawn.

“If the American side has serious intentions and is realistic, an agreement is available at this stage and in this round of negotiations,” he said, quoted by IRNA state news agency.

IRNA has previously described the ‘red lines’ as lifting all sanctions as related to the nuclear agreement, creating a mechanism to verify they have been lifted, and making sure the US does not withdraw from the deal.

The indirect negotiations

held by US special envoy Robert Malley and Iran’s Ali Bagheri come after more than a year of European Union-mediated talks in Vienna on a return to the 2015 agreement.

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

It has been hanging by a thread since 2018, when Trump unilaterally withdrew from it and began reimposing harsh economic sanctions on America’s arch-enemy.

AFP

Indian city gripped by communal tensions

To prevent potential sectarian violence, authorities put the city of 450,000 people under curfew

Udaipur, India - Hundreds of police were deployed in an Indian city on Wednesday following the murder of a Hindu tailor allegedly by two Muslim men after comments by a ruling party official about the Prophet Mohammed that have inflamed sectarian tensions.

The cold-blooded attack in the western city of Udaipur was captured on video, quickly going viral online and gripping a country with a long and explosive history of deadly communal violence.

The video showed the tailor Kanhaiya Lal being attacked in his shop. Further footage showed the two accused purportedly brandishing large knives and threatening to kill Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

They then justified their murder for Lal's alleged support of comments about the Prophet Mohammed by a spokeswoman for Modi's Hindu nationalist ruling BJP party, remarks that have triggered protests across parts of the Muslim world in recent weeks. Hundreds had gathered outside Lal's house ahead of his funeral on Wednesday, a day after several hundred gathered to protest and chant Hindu slogans in response to the killing.

People on motorcycles and cars waved saffron flags - the colour of the Hindu faith - and shouted slogans demanding the death penalty for the accused.

The two young men were arrested on Tuesday as they attempted to flee Udaipur by motorbike, news reports said.

To prevent potential sectarian violence, authorities deployed



Policemen carry out a flag march through a street in Ajmer on Wednesday, following the alleged murder of a Hindu tailor by two Muslim men in Udaipur (AFP)

600 extra police and put the city of around 450,000 people under curfew, snapping mobile internet access there and in other parts of Rajasthan state.

Local authorities issued a month-long order banning four or more people from gathering anywhere in the state.

"Both the accused in the killing have been arrested and we will ensure strict punishment and

speedy justice," said Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot.

Gehlot appealed to people to not share the video as it would 'serve the attackers' motive of creating discord in society'. On social media members of the ruling BJP party and supporters depicted the killing as an attack on all Hindus, with thousands of tweets carrying hashtags like #IslamicTerrorismInIndia.

Diplomatic storm

The remarks about Mohammed by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) spokesman Nupur Sharma at a TV debate in late May sparked protests that turned violent in some parts of India and demonstrations across the Islamic world. She was sacked by the party after her comments, which saw the governments of nearly 20 countries summoning their

Indian envoys to express their displeasure. Lal's wife told broadcaster NDTV that on June 10 her husband was arrested over a social media post supporting Sharma and released on bail a day later.

Five days later the father of two said he had received death threats but on Tuesday returned to work in his shop, she said.

The purported video of the

killing - which police have not yet confirmed is genuine - showed Lal measuring one of the men for new clothes before he and his accomplice attack him.

Indian Home Minister Amit Shah said the National Investigation Agency (NIA) would take over the investigation of the 'brutal murder'. "The involvement of any organisation and international links will be thoroughly investigated," Shah tweeted.

Sporadic violence

India has a seen sporadic sectarian violence between majority Hindus and Muslims, who make up around 14 per cent of the 1.4bn-strong population.

Inter-religious riots in the capital New Delhi left 53 people dead in 2020, while in 2013 62 people were killed in the nearby city of Muzaffarnagar.

In 2002 at least 1,000 perished in Gujarat when Modi was state premier. Most of the victims were Muslims.

Rajasthan also saw riots earlier this year, when almost 100 people were arrested after police fired tear gas to stop fighting and stone-pelting.

AFP



Ocean Rebellion activists with fishes in their mouth stage a protest in front of Altice Arena during the UN Ocean Conference, in Lisbon on Tuesday (AFP)

Aquaculture drives aquatic food yields to record high

Lisbon, Portugal - The amount of fish, shellfish and algae caught in the wild and farmed in aquaculture hit a record 214mn tonnes in 2020, the Food and Agriculture Organization said on Wednesday.

Driven by a sustained surge in aquaculture, the new record is good news for a world facing price hikes and food shortages due to the war in Ukraine, disrupted supply chains, and inflation. "The growth of fisheries and aquaculture is vital in our efforts to end global hunger and malnutrition," said FAO director Qu Dongyu. But overfished oceans, climate change and pollution - if left unaddressed - could threaten that potential, the UN agency warned in its 2022 state of the world fisheries report.

"Aquaculture growth has often occurred at the expense of the environment," it said.

"Sustainable aquaculture development remains critical to supply the growing demand for aquatic food."

Production of aquatic animals in 2020 - totalling 178mn tonnes - was evenly divided between fisheries and aquaculture.

The remaining 36mn tonnes was algae production.

Yields of fish, shrimp and other shellfish destined for human consumption is more than 60 per cent higher than during the 1990s, far outpacing population growth, according to the report, released during the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon.

On average, people worldwide consume over 20kg of aquatic foods per year today, more than double the amount 50

years ago.

Globally, 17 per cent of the protein consumed by humans comes from aquatic sources. In many Asian and African countries, that figure rises to more than 50 per cent, according to the report.

Wild and farmed food from the seas and inland waters are also a critical source of essential omega-3 fatty acids and micronutrients, recent research has shown.

"Aquatic foods are increasingly recognised for their key role in food security and nutrition," Qu said.

Nearly 90 per cent of aquatic animal production is for human consumption, with the rest destined for non-food uses such as fishmeal and fish oil.

Asian countries were the source of 70 per cent of the world's fisheries and aquaculture of aquatic animals in 2020.

China remaining by far the top fisheries producer, followed by Indonesia, Peru, Russia, the United States and Vietnam.

So-called capture fisheries in the wild - which have stagnated since the mid-1990s - dropped by four per cent in 2020 compared to the average of the previous three years.

Part of the drop can be attributed to disruptions caused by the COVID pandemic, but long-term decline is due to overfishing.

"The FAO estimates that 34 per cent of caught fish come from overfished stocks," University of British Columbia economist and fisheries expert Rashid Sumaila told AFP.

AFP

Spain to 'fully' cooperate with migrant death probes

Madrid, Spain - Madrid will offer 'total collaboration' with the Spanish and Moroccan investigations into the deaths of 23 migrants during a mass attempt to enter Spain's Melilla enclave, Pedro Sanchez said on Wednesday.

The Spanish premier's remarks came a day after the United Nations denounced authorities on the border between Morocco and Spain for using 'excessive force', describing it as 'unacceptable'.

The tragedy happened at dawn on Friday, when around 2,000 migrants, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa, tried to break through the fence from Morocco into Melilla, one of Spain's two tiny North African enclaves.

"I regret the loss of human life and express my solidarity with the families of the migrants who died," Sanchez told Cadena Ser radio, pledging his government would work with investigators to understand what happened.

Sanchez stressed that three investigations had been opened, one by Moroccan prosecutors, one by Spain's public prosecutor and a third by the Spanish rights ombudsman.

"We have to trust these institutions and I pledge the government's total collaboration with their efforts to clarify what happened," he said.

Moroccan authorities said some of the victims had fallen while trying to scramble over the fence, giving an initial toll of 18 dead, but later raising it to 23 after another five migrants died of their injuries. Few details about the incident were available, but Spanish media showed footage of people on the ground, some with bloodied hands and torn clothes.

The death toll was by far the worst recorded in years of attempts by migrants to cross into Spain's Ceuta and Melilla

enclaves, which have the EU's only land borders with Africa, making them a magnet for those desperate to escape grinding poverty and hunger.

In Morocco, prosecutors are pressing charges against 65 migrants, mostly Sudanese, for trying to storm the border, a defence lawyer in Rabat said.

Spain's public prosecutor on Tuesday opened its own investigation 'to clarify what happened', citing the 'seriousness and gravity' of the incident.

Images of the violence provoked an unusually strong response from the United Nations, which hit out at the

border authorities.

"We saw the use of excessive force by the authorities, which needs to be investigated because it is unacceptable," said UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres's spokesman Stephane Dujarric on Tuesday.

"People who are on the move have human rights and those need to be respected and we're seeing them all too often disrespected. We've seen it on both sides of the border," he added.

Sanchez had on Friday blamed 'human trafficking mafias' for what he said was 'a well-organised violent assault'.

AFP

Hong Kong's blurring border with China a sign of things to come

Lok Ma Chau, China - From the hill in northernmost Hong Kong where Jasper Law stood, the border with China was obvious - a narrow river dividing farmlands and fishponds from the gleaming skyscrapers of megacity Shenzhen.

Friday is the 25th anniversary of Hong Kong's transition from British to Chinese rule.

While the view from the hilltops of Lok Ma Chau suggests Hong Kong remains clearly distinct from mainland China, the territory is fast being subsumed into Beijing's blueprint for southern China.

And as the border is chipped away, the lack of public consultation has done little to ease the lingering discomfort some Hong Kongers feel about living on the mainland's doorstep.

"In the 25 years since the handover, the border has become more and more blurry," said Law, a pro-democracy politician from the border area. The softening boundary has preoccupied many Hong Kongers.

And it was one of the catalysts for the huge democracy protests in the finance hub three years ago, a movement initially triggered by an attempt to allow extraditions to China's mainland.

Beijing's subsequent crackdown has only sped up Hong Kong's absorption.



An aerial view of residential buildings in the Tin Shui Wan district next to the mainland Chinese city of Shenzhen (AFP)

Security agents roam free

The integration of Hong Kong's population and economy with mainland China has been under way for decades.

Between 1997 and 2021, more than 1.1mn people migrated from China via a limited-quota 'one-way permit' scheme, almost a seventh of Hong Kong's current population.

Mandarin was increasingly pushed in schools, sparking resentment among those who felt the city's distinct Cantonese culture was being eroded.

Hong Kong's borders were also tweaked, most notably in the 2010s with an expansion of China's high-speed rail into the city. Part of the terminus in Hong Kong came under Chinese jurisdiction, meaning the mainland's Communist Party-controlled legal system applied there.

Beijing's imposition of a sweeping national security law to curb dissent following the 2019 protests has further eroded the legal firewall between Hong Kong and the mainland.

Under the law, which was imposed by Beijing directly rather

than passed through the legislature, the mainland's security agents can now operate freely in Hong Kong, immune from the city's laws.

Beijing says it can now also try the most serious national security offences in mainland China.

And the COVID-19 pandemic has further whittled away at the boundaries. While the border has been mostly closed under China's strict zero-COVID rules, mainland medics were granted exemptions to work in Hong Kong's hospitals.

AFP

8-year-old US boy shoots dead baby girl with father's gun in Florida

Washington, US - An eight-year-old boy shot dead a baby and wounded her toddler sister while playing with his father's gun in Florida last weekend, police said.

The father, 45-year-old Roderick Randall, was arrested and charged with culpable negligence, unlawful possession of a firearm and concealment of evidence, Escambia County Sheriff Chip Simmons said.

The tragedy took place in a motel where Randall, who has a criminal record that forbade him from owning a gun, met with his girlfriend. He had brought his son, while his girlfriend had brought along her two-year-old twins and her one-year-old daughter.

At one point, Randall went out and left his weapon 'in the closet', said the sheriff during a press conference. Knowing where it was hidden, his son took it out and started playing with it while the girls' mother was asleep.

"He pulls the gun from the holster, starts playing with it and fires a round into the one-year-old toddler, ultimately killing the one-year old. The bullet then goes through and strikes one of the two year old toddlers who's injured but is expected to recover."

AFP

Russia invasion: US vows to shore up Europe's defences

Alliance leaders said in Madrid that Russia 'is the most significant and direct threat to allies'

Madrid, Spain - The United States vowed on Wednesday to shore up Europe's defences in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as NATO declared Moscow the West's greatest threat.

Meeting in Madrid, alliance leaders said Russia 'is the most significant and direct threat to allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area'.

This came as NATO welcomed Sweden and Finland as invitees to join the alliance and US President Joe Biden announced new deployments of US troops, ships and planes.

Biden boasted the US announcement was exactly what President Vladimir Putin 'didn't want' and Moscow, facing fierce resistance from Ukrainian forces equipped with Western arms, reacted with predictable fury.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov denounced the US military build-up, and warned NATO members that the shifting balance of power 'would lead to compensatory measures on our



US President Joe Biden (right) speaks with Netherland PM Mark Rutte (second from right), Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (left) and FM Mevlut Cavusoglu (third from left) before the first plenary session of the NATO summit in Madrid, on Wednesday (AFP)

part'. 'I think that those who propose such solutions are under the illusion that they will be able to intimidate Russia, somehow restrain it - they will not succeed,' he said.

NATO leaders have funnelled billions of dollars of arms to Ukraine and faced a renewed appeal from President Volodymyr Zelensky for more long-range artillery.

"Ukraine can count on us for as long as it takes," NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said, announcing a new NATO strategic

overview that focuses on the Moscow threat.

"We cannot discount the possibility of an attack against allies' sovereignty and territorial integrity," the document, updated for the first time since 2010, said.

In a summit statement, they said: "Russia's appalling cruelty has caused immense human suffering and massive displacements, disproportionately affecting women and children."

Zelensky had earlier addressed the NATO chiefs by videoconference, calling for

stricter economic sanctions, but afterwards his foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba thanked Ukraine's western friends.

'A clear-eyed stance on Russia'

"Today in Madrid, NATO proved it can take difficult but essential decisions. We welcome a clear-eyed stance on Russia, as well as the accession for Finland and Sweden," he said.

"An equally strong and active position on Ukraine will help protect Euro-Atlantic security and

stability."

As Western leaders met in Madrid, in Ukraine officials complained that Russian missiles had hit civilian housing and businesses in and around the cities of Dnipro, Mykolaiv and Kharkiv, leaving at least seven dead and 14 wounded.

In Kremenchuk, the town where a Russian missile on Monday destroyed a shopping centre and - according to local officials - killed at least 18 civilians, clearing operations continued.

AFP

Turkey seeks extraditions under NATO deal

Istanbul, Turkey - Turkey said on Wednesday it would seek the extradition of 33 alleged Kurdish militants and coup plot suspects from Sweden and Finland under a deal to secure Ankara's support for the Nordic countries' NATO membership bids.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan dropped weeks of resistance to the two countries' NATO ambitions at crunch talks held on the eve of an alliance summit on Wednesday focused on Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Erdogan emerged from the meeting declaring victory after securing a 10-point agreement under which the two countries vowed to join Turkey's fight against banned Kurdish militants and to swiftly extradite suspects.

Turkey put the deal to the immediate test by announcing that it would seek the extradition of 12 suspects from Finland and 21 from Sweden.

"We will seek the extradition of terrorists from the relevant countries within the framework of the new agreement," Justice Minister Bekir Bozdag said in a statement.

"We ask them to fulfil their promises."

The unnamed suspects were identified as being members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and a group led by a US-based Muslim preacher that Erdogan blames for a failed 2016 coup attempt. The European Union

and Washington both recognise the PKK as a 'terrorist' organisation because of the brutal tactics it employed during a decades-long insurgency against the Turkish state.

But the agreement also stipulates that Sweden and Finland vow to 'not provide support' to the YPG - a PKK offshoot in Syria that played an instrumental role in the US-led alliance against the Islamic State group.

Sweden and Finland abandoned decades of military non-alignment in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and were formally invited into the alliance at Wednesday's summit in Madrid.

'Financing terror'

Their applications appeared to be headed for swift approval until Erdogan stepped in.

The Turkish leader accused Finland and particularly Sweden of providing a haven to Kurdish fighters and financing terror. Erdogan also wanted the two countries to lift embargoes on weapons deliveries they imposed in response to Turkey's 2019 military incursion into Syria.

The memorandum appears to address many of Erdogan's concerns. It says Finland and Sweden pledge to 'address Turkey's pending deportation or extradition requests of terror suspects expeditiously and thoroughly'.

AFP

Australian bee 'vampire' spreads despite lockdown

Sydney, Australia - Over six million bees were euthanised across Australia's east coast this week, an official said Wednesday, in an attempt to eliminate a devastating parasite which has continued to spread despite a lockdown of hives.

600 hives have been destroyed since the 'Varroa destructor' mite was detected, with each containing anywhere between 10,000 and 30,000 bees, New South Wales agriculture minister Dugald Saunders said.

"It's a lot of bees," he said, noting the number was likely to grow.

Bee ecologist Jay Iwasaki from the University of Adelaide described the tiny red-brown Varroa mites as 'a little vampire' that feeds on larval honey bees.

They can also spread 'some very serious viruses' through honey bee colonies, which are not native to Australia but vital to the country's agriculture industry. "Even if this incursion is snuffed out, the global nature of trade will continually bring infested honey bees to Australia," Iwasaki said.

Australia is the only major honey-producing country where the mite is not already endemic, prompting a biosecurity lockdown of hives after it was detected at the country's border earlier this week.

Hives within a 10km radius of four varroa mite zones must be destroyed, while keepers elsewhere in New South Wales will not be able to move hives, bees, honey or comb until further notice. The state's Department of Primary Industries said the measures aimed at 'ensuring we eradicate the parasite'.

AFP

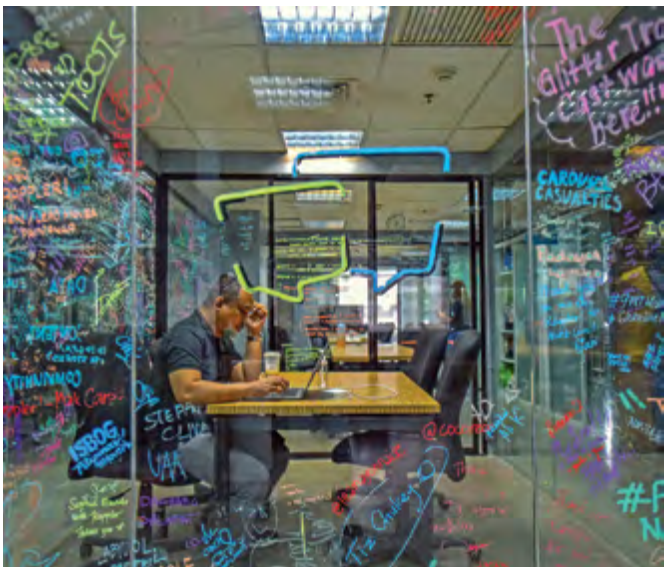
Philippines' Ressa says 'business as usual' for Rappler

Manila, Philippines - Philippine Nobel Peace Prize winner Maria Ressa's news company Rappler was ordered to shut down, a statement said on Wednesday, a day before President Rodrigo Duterte is due to leave office, but she vowed to keep the site running.

Ressa has been a vocal critic of Duterte and the deadly drug war he launched in 2016, triggering what media advocates say is a grinding series of criminal charges, probes and online attacks against her and Rappler.

The latest blow was delivered by the Philippine Securities and Exchange Commission.

In a statement on Wednesday, it confirmed the 'revocation of the certificates of incorporation' of Rappler for violating 'constitutional and statutory restrictions on foreign ownership



An employee of online portal Rappler works inside their office in Pasig City, suburban Manila on Wednesday (AFP)

in mass media'.

Rappler said the decision 'effectively confirmed the shutdown' of the company and

We continue to work, it is business as usual. We can only hope for the best under Duterte's successor Marcos Jr

MARIA RESSA

site would continue to operate as they followed the legal process.

"We continue to work, it is business as usual," Ressa told reporters, adding 'we can only hope for the best' under Duterte's successor Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

Marcos Jr, the son of the Philippines' former dictator who presided over widespread human rights abuses and corruption, takes over from Duterte on

Thursday. Activists fear Marcos Jr's presidency could worsen the situation for human rights and freedom of speech in the country.

'Retaliation'

Rappler has had to fight for survival as Duterte's government accused it of violating a constitutional ban on foreign ownership in securing funding, as well as tax evasion. It has also been accused of cyber libel - a new criminal law introduced in 2012, the same year Rappler was founded.

Duterte has attacked the website by name, calling it a 'fake news outlet', over a story about one of his closest aides.

The news organisation is accused of allowing foreigners to take control of its website through its parent company Rappler Holdings' issuance of 'depository receipts'.

Under the constitution, investment in media is reserved for Filipinos or Filipino-controlled entities. The case springs from a 2015 investment from the US-based Omidyar Network, which was established by eBay founder Pierre Omidyar.

Omidyar Network later transferred its investment in Rappler to the site's local managers to stave off efforts by Duterte to shut it down. "Let the law take its course, and allow the Securities and Exchange Commission perform its mandate," presidential spokesman Martin Andanar said in a brief statement.

Ressa, who is also a US citizen, and Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in October for their efforts to 'safeguard freedom of expression'.

AFP

Final countdown begins for France's historic 'speaking clock'

Paris, France - For nearly 90 years, anyone in France needing to know what time it is down-to-the-second could ring up the Paris Observatory and get an automated, astronomy-based response.

But the final countdown for the world-first service has begun.

Nostalgia fans hoping to dial 3699 and get the soothing voice of France's 'speaking clock' will have to move fast because telecoms operator Orange is pulling the plug on July 1.

"When I was a kid my mom never stopped asking me to use the speaking clock," recalled Claire Salpetrier, an English teacher in Magnanville, west of the capital.

It all started when in 1933, the astronomer and Paris Observatory director Ernest Esclançon, got fed up with people clogging up the centre's only phone line to ask the official time - an essential service in the days of mechanical clocks.

So he developed a concept that would later be adopted worldwide, incorporating the latest technologies as the decades went by.

Orange, the former state telecom monopoly, said the Observatory got several millions of calls in 1991, when dedicated infrastructure was set up to provide times accurate to the 10th millisecond.

"The utility was pretty strong back then, but bit by bit we



This file photo shows an employee working in the laser datas laboratory where atomic measures are calculated to set the French legal time at Paris' observatory on February 5, 2013 (AFP)

started seeing an erosion," Orange's marketing director Catherine Breton told AFP.

"There were just a few tens of thousands of calls in 2021." Hearing the famous 'At the

fourth beep, the time will be...' in alternating men's and women's voices last stood at €1.50 a pop

(US\$1.58), which may also have proved dissuasive in the era of smartphones. "I was surprised it still existed. It's something we knew about as kids, when we didn't yet have cell phones," said Antonio Garcia, a health clinic director in Meulan-en-Yvelines, outside Paris.

"It was super handy when you needed to take a train or a plane - I can still remember the 'beep, beep, beep,'" he said.

The current version is the fourth generation of the service and is calculated from Coordinated Universal Time in a temperature-controlled room by the Time-Space Reference Services lab (SYRTE) housed at the Observatory.

AFP

BACK PAIN RELIEF



Do you want to prevent back pain? Always maintain a good posture while standing, sitting, bending, and lifting things. But, if you get caught off guard, a few exercises to stretch and strengthen your back can be helpful

With a hectic work schedule to follow everyday, back pain is inevitable for many people, especially those above 35 years of age. Back pain, particularly lower back pain, can leave you feeling miserable in the midst of a busy day and can sometimes last longer than a week or keep coming back. There are a few simple exercises that can help ease the pain if your condition is not serious. *Try these stretches suggested by Mayo Clinic and experience tremendous relief:*

1



Knee to chest stretch
Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Using both hands, pull up one knee and press it to your chest. Tighten your abdominals and press your spine to the floor. Hold for 5 seconds. Return to the starting position and repeat with the opposite leg. Return to the starting position and then repeat with both legs at the same time. Repeat each stretch 2 to 3 times — preferably once in the morning and once at night.

2



Lower back rotational stretch
Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Keeping your shoulders firmly on the floor, roll your bent knees to one side. Hold for 5 to 10 seconds. Return to the starting position. Repeat on the opposite side. Repeat each stretch 2 to 3 times — preferably once in the morning and once at night.

3



Bridge exercise
Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Keeping your shoulders and head relaxed on the floor, tighten your abdominal and gluteal muscles. Then raise your hips to form a straight line from your knees to your shoulders. Try to hold the position long enough to complete three deep breaths. Return to the starting position and repeat. Start with five repetitions each day and gradually work up to 30.

4



Cat stretch
Position yourself on your hands and knees. Slowly arch your back, as if you're pulling your abdomen up toward the ceiling. Then slowly let your back and abdomen sag toward the floor. Return to the starting position. Repeat 3 to 5 times twice a day.

5



Seated lower back rotational stretch
Sit on an armless chair or a stool. Cross your right leg over your left leg. Bracing your left elbow against the outside of your right knee, twist and stretch to the side. Hold for 10 seconds. Repeat on the opposite side. Repeat this stretch 3 to 5 times on each side twice a day.

6



Shoulder blade squeeze
Sit on an armless chair or a stool. While maintaining good posture, pull your shoulder blades together. Hold for five seconds and then relax. Repeat 3 to 5 times twice a day.

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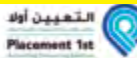
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YOU

ANIMAL MOVES

HAVE YOU
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ZUU? IT'S AN
INTENSE
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CUES FROM
THE ANIMAL
KINGDOM...
AND IT'S
PICKING UP
LIKE WILD FIRE

Forget Zumba, Aerobics, CrossFit...if you don't have time for formal workouts and group routines, just bring out the animal in you - quite literally - to gain a superior level of fitness naturally.

A new form of intense fitness has now been gaining popularity, called Zuu. And people of all ages are going for it as it renders individuals with not just lasting fitness but also a good level of agility to do daily tasks with ease.

"We have definitely forgotten how to move," says Greg Small, from the Register of Exercise Professionals at SkillsActive. 'The majority of machines in the gym are based on sitting down and most only involve our bodies using a frontal plane.'

There are three directions - or planes - in which the human body can move. Frontal planes involve moving forward and backwards, lateral (or transverse) is left to right and sagittal is diagonal.

"By focusing on single movements, you are hindering the body," says Small. "Look at body-builders and how slow and robotic they are compared to the flexibility of a baseball player, who needs to be able to squat, side-lunge, twist really fast and push with his arm in one smooth movement pattern."

Exercises that inspire natural movement are not only

more fun but they are also more challenging. "By stimulating the body as much as possible, by using as much muscle mass as possible, stretching our fascia and engaging these natural systems, your body will feel more mobile," says Small.

What is Zuu?

Zuu refers to a particular type of High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT), designed by Australian fitness guru, Nathan Helberg. It's built around so-called primal animal moves - the hopping motion of a frog, the all-fours scrambling of a bear, the squat power stance of a gorilla, and many more.

The idea is to repeat several sets of 'animal moves' during an intense, 30-minute session, burning maximum fat and toning lean muscle. And you can add an element of fun by making animal noises - that's optional, of course.

Zuu uses 30 animal movements such as the bear crawl (walking on all fours), frog squat (a dynamic squat position) and gorilla walks (jumping like an ape) and mixes them with bodyweight exercises for muscle, aerobic and anaerobic work.

The exercise is exactly what it sounds like - very short bursts of traversing a gym floor on your hands and knees. The frog squat starts much like a regular deep squat - think sitting on an imaginary step a few inches off the floor - except you press your elbows against your knees. The frog jump. Just

imagine a frog jumping and approximate it.

Physical spontaneity is part of the point. Realistically, you'll never move that much like a bear - your aim here is only to seek the sensation of bear movement so ardently that you forget how much easier it is to stand on two feet.

Zuu was actually designed for armed forces and front-line troops, because it works on bodyweight resistance. You can basically Zuu anywhere. You don't need fancy gym equipment or even free-weights to get started.

Over the last decade, Zuu gradually transitioned from a niche military exercise regime into a global fitness craze (following the basic Zumba-slash-F45 hype mould). It's now in 68 countries across three continents, with 250 certified 'Zuu Partners' worldwide.

How does Zuu work?

Zuu is all about low-impact bodyweight training. It can be done solo or in groups. Zuu also offers online training modules, if you want to workout remotely. Like other HIIT disciplines, each Zuu class is divided into sections of various exercises, with each section being repeated multiple times.

The animal-style exercises follow seven broad categories of human movement - push, pull, squat, lunge, bend, twist, locomotion. Each one has a zoological-type name, like Frog Squat or Donkey Kick. You might feel a bit silly, hopping around your gym, but that's all part of the Zuu experience. It's designed to be fun.

Suitable for everyone

Zuu is a high-intensity workout, and like any serious training, it's not without risks. Trainers are pretty up-front about post-workout muscle soreness, which you'll most likely feel for a few days. It might be a good idea to consult your physician before taking it up.

Over time, the idea is that Zuu can help build fitness, improve flexibility and mobility, and obviously burn fat. Some even believe it can turn back the clock and fight the ageing process.

"As we age we lose flexibility, mobility, functional strength, cardiovascular fitness and muscle mass. The unique movements we use in Zuu challenge all of these aspects," trainer Matt Henderson states in a recent article about this new fitness regime.

If you've done an F45 or CrossFit class, some fundamental Zuu movements will be familiar. 'Body drops' are essentially burpees, and Zuu classes often include regular press-ups and basic cardio manoeuvres, like rapidly running backwards and forwards.

Helberg has added his own special 'wildlife' exercises too, and if you'd like to incorporate some free weights into your Zuu routine, you can check out Iron Zuu - a Zuu variant that includes 50/50 weight and functional training.



THE BEAR CRAWL

Just hop on the ground and crawl - don't overthink it - just crawl like a bear forward and reverse. The benefits of a bear crawl are endless, because all your joints and muscles are moving and you elevate your heart rate. In reverse, if you want to make it more intense, do it quicker - push hard to build top-half strength. As it elevates the heart rate so rapidly, it's like doing sprint drills, yet it's low impact.

SOME POPULAR MOVES

THE IGUANA

Lower your body on to all fours with your legs stretched behind you on the balls of your feet. Move your left hand forward and your right leg up a bit - foot off the floor - and slightly bend it with the knee facing outwards. Then push your body down into a press-up position. As you come up from this position, put your right hand in front, bend your left leg with the knee facing outwards, and place the right foot back on the floor. Then do a press-up on this side. Continue this moving forwards. It works your arms, legs and core in one dynamic motion, and will also increase your range of motion.



THE FROG SQUAT

Start with your feet a little bit wider than shoulder width, squat down and tuck your elbows, inside your thighs. Then go through a deep squat and stand up repeatedly, arms pinned against the inside of your legs. The deeper you go, the more you open up your hips, which is where your power's transferred from in your legs. On top of that, it also lengthens your quads, which is awesome for building muscle strength."



FINAL CHANCE FOR FANS

Last World Cup tickets for the tournament in Qatar to go on sale from July 5 to August 16, says FIFA

Doha, Qatar - The remaining tickets for this year's World Cup in Qatar will be available on a first-come, first-served basis from next week, FIFA said on Wednesday.

About 1.8 million tickets were sold in the first two batches of sales, FIFA said, without saying how many are now available.

Qatar will host the first World Cup in the Middle East from November 21 to December 18 at eight stadiums in and around the capital, Doha. The latest tickets will go on sale online from July 5 at 12pm Doha time (0900 GMT) until 12pm on August 16, FIFA said in a press release.

"Huge worldwide interest is anticipated in the new sales period," the world body said.

Officials said three million tickets are available in total, including those allocated to sponsors.

Last week, the World Cup's chief organiser Hassan Al Thawadi said 1.2 million tickets

Aside from Qatar, the top countries where fans bought tickets are Canada, England, France, Germany, India, Saudi Arabia, Spain, the United Arab Emirates and the United States

had been sold so far.

Aside from Qatar, the top countries where fans bought tickets are Canada, England, France, Germany, India, Saudi Arabia, Spain, the United Arab Emirates and the United States.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino said there were five million ticket requests just for the final at the 80,000-seat Lusail stadium.

Doha, with a population of about 2.4 million and limited accommodation, is bracing itself for a huge influx of visitors for the 32-team tournament.

Last month, Qatar announced scores of daily shuttle flights from neighbouring Gulf countries, allowing fans to stay elsewhere and fly in to watch games.

AFP



FIFA World Cup trophy

Lukaku 'very happy' as he arrives in Milan ahead of Inter return



Romelu Lukaku

Milan, Italy - Romelu Lukaku said he was "very happy" to be back after the Belgian international striker arrived in Milan on Wednesday ahead of his return to Inter Milan on loan from Chelsea.

A beaming Lukaku emerged from Linate airport in the early hours of Wednesday morning and gave his short but delighted response to the handful of reporters awaiting his arrival.

The 29-year-old will undergo a

medical later in the day before making his long-awaited Inter comeback official.

Chelsea agreed to a reported deal in which Inter will pay an initial eight million euros (\$8.42 million) plus a further potential three million euros in bonuses for the loan.

Lukaku will again lead Inter's attack as they attempt to regain the Serie A title after taking a pay cut -- a reported 8.5 million euros for the coming campaign.

Lukaku leaves London after failing to make an impression for a second time at Chelsea, not meeting high expectations following a £97.5 million move from Inter last summer.

He had made himself a fan favourite over two years at Inter after scoring 64 times in 95 games and driving them to their first Serie A title in over a decade, the 2021 Scudetto ending both an 11-year drought and Juventus' grip on Italian football.

However the financial problems of Inter's owners the Sunning Group, exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic led to coach Antonio Conte leaving the club almost as soon as the title was won.

He claimed the cost cutting required by Inter would have prevented him building the team he wanted to challenge domestically and in Europe.

Lukaku followed Conte out the door after then European

champions Chelsea offered a whopping sum which eased some of Inter's financial issues, and started well on his return to Stamford Bridge.

Coach Thomas Tuchel said "he was the type of guy we were missing" after he netted four times in his first four games, but his next goal didn't come until early December and injury, Covid-19 and poor form kept him out of the team.

AFP

Australia's Lyon bags five in spin battle at Galle

Galle, Sri Lanka - Nathan Lyon's five-for helped Australia bowl out Sri Lanka for 212, before the hosts hit back with three wickets in a fast-moving opening Test on Wednesday.

The tourists reached 98 for three at stumps after Sri Lankan spinner Ramesh Mendis struck twice, including David Warner's key wicket for 25, on a turning pitch at the picturesque Galle stadium.

Steve Smith was run out on six after a mix up with opener Usman Khawaja, unbeaten on 47, and returned to the pavilion waving his hands in dismay.

Khawaja and fellow left-hander Travis Head, on six, were batting with Australia still trailing by 114 runs in their first innings.

Mendis, an off-spinner, trapped Warner lbw after the left-handed opener hit five boundaries in an attacking stay



Australia's Nathan Lyon celebrates after taking five wickets on the first day of the first Test against Sri Lanka at Galle on Wednesday (AFP)

at the wicket.

Marnus Labuschagne was out to an attempted reverse sweep but it was Smith's wicket that brought the home crowd alive. The former captain was turned down midway for a quick single by Khawaja and failed to make the crease despite a desperate dive.

Khawaja, who survived a missed stumping by wicket-keeper Niroshan Dickwella, kept up the fight till close of play.

Earlier, Dickwella made a defiant 58 before the Sri Lankan innings folded in the third session following the hosts' decision to bat first at the start of the two-match series.

AFP

'Lankans hold Warne in their hearts for tsunami aid'

Galle, Sri Lanka - Former Sri Lanka captain Arjuna Ranatunga on Wednesday paid tribute to Australian great Shane Warne, saying the spinner found a place in the hearts of the island nation's fans for coming to the country's aid after the 2004 tsunami.

Sri Lanka paid tribute to the late Australian, who died aged 52 of a suspected heart attack in March, ahead of the first Test against Australia in Galle - a venue where Warne took his 500th Test wicket.

The wrist spinner won over the South Asian country on a relief tour to Galle following the devastation of the Boxing Day



Shane Warne

tsunami. "Everyone knows he has been a brilliant player, but especially after the tsunami he got very close to the Sri Lankan

we heard the news."

Warne helped raise more than \$1 million to rebuild the Galle International Stadium after it was ruined by the tsunami, which killed more than 200,000 people around the world -- 31,000 of them in Sri Lanka.

Ranatunga, who had many on-field run-ins with Warne, said the Australian was "a wonderful player and a tough competitor".

The left-handed batsman, one of Sri Lanka's greatest cricket stars, led the team to the 1996 50-over World Cup title when they beat Australia by seven wickets in Lahore.

AFP

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Championship leader Ahmed al Harthy targeting more LMGTE silverware as ELMS resumes at Monza

Muscat - European Le Mans Series LMGTE championship leader Ahmad al Harthy returns to Italy this weekend for the third round at legendary Monza, where the Aston Martin racer is hoping to deliver another star performance and further enhance his points tally.

After a historic outing at Imola just over a month ago - where Al Harthy stormed to a sensational maiden ELMS race victory in the LMGTE class in his second outing in the championship - Oman's number one racing driver is looking for a repeat performance.

Al Harthy, and teammates - Sam De Haan and Aston Martin factory driver Marco Sorensen -

won't be taking the challenge lightly for they know how bad things can go, as it happened at the start of their campaign at Paul Ricard in France in April, when they had to retire with a broken steering after the first lap.

But they bounced back in the best possible style, with an outstanding performance in Imola. Flawless in qualifying, Al Harthy dominated to secure a dream LMGTE pole position. He continued his form in the four-hour race where he set things up perfectly for the victory bid with a superb double-stint, calmly dealing with several Full Course Yellow and Safety Car interventions. De Haan completed hour three of



Ahmad al Harthy

ELMS - LMGTE DRIVER STANDINGS (AFTER RD2)		
1. Ahmad Al Harthy/Marco Sorensen/Sam De Haan	26pts	
1. Varrone/Pierre Ehret/Memo Gidley	26pts	
1. Chaves/John Hartshorne/Jonathan Adam	26pts	

the race before Sorensen took the run to the flag in hour four - winning a lap clear of the sister TF Sport-run Oman Racing car.

It is that same teamwork which the team is determined to replicate on Saturday and Sunday at Monza, where Al Harthy and Oman Racing have enjoyed great success in the past in GT3 racing.

It is three years since the Omani last raced at Monza. On his previous visit in 2019, he achieved a top three podium finish in the Pro-Am class of the then Blancpain Endurance Cup - now known as the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup. In 2017, he raced to his first

Pro-Am victory in GTWCE at Monza with Jonny Adam.

"I can't wait to be back at Monza, it's been a while since we last raced there so I really am looking forward to driving there in the LMGTE car," said Al Harthy, who is backed by the Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS.

"Imola was incredible, absolutely incredible, and we all hope to deliver a similar performance this weekend.

"Everyone in the team worked so hard, the TF guys did an amazing job with the strategy and Sam and Marco were fantastic. Personally, I was delighted with my

own performance and to have achieved the first ELMS win for Oman is something so special. Obviously, taking the lead of the LMGTE championship was the icing on the cake for us and we hope to build on that in Imola and put some space between ourselves and our rivals."

Oman Racing's first track time at Monza with the No.69 Aston Martin Vantage GTE will be on Friday, with the opening free practice ahead of a standalone session for the 'Bronze' graded drivers, such as Al Harthy. Free practice two will be on Saturday with LMGTE qualifying beginning at 13.40 local time.

Race three of the ELMS season, the 4 Hours of Monza, will get underway at 11.30 local time on Sunday, 3rd July, and all of the action will be streamed LIVE online at: <https://live.europeanlemansseries.com/en/>

Oman Sail team confident of doing well at Star Sailors League in Switzerland

Muscat - Oman Sail's team started the Star Sailors League season with a Qualifying Series on Lake Neuchâtel, Switzerland. The top two from the group will join other qualified teams in the draw for the SSL Gold Cup 2022 Finals Series when the knockout stages begin in October.

Oman team comprises Ahmed al Balushi, Ahmed al Hasni, Abdul Rahman al Mashari, Yasir al Rahbi, Musab al Hadi, Raad al Hadi, Haitham al Wahaibi, Waleed al Kindi, Zakaria al Wahabi, Husain al Jabri and skipper Nasser al Mashari.

Marwa al Khaifi will also join the squad as the team administrator.

Nasser al Mashari said the team was ready for the challenge.

"The Star Sailors League is a great challenge and a tough test of teamwork, speed, and tactics. Our team joined the event last season and it was an invaluable experience, and we hope to improve on that performance. Cuba, Mexico, and Guatemala



Oman Sail's team in action



Nasser al Mashari

are all good teams but we have been training on the boat used in the Star Sailors League and we feel ready," said Al Mashari.

Star Sailors League, a World Sailing Special Event, is the ultimate challenge between sailing nations. The SSL Gold Cup Finals Series, to be held in Bahrain from October 28 to November 20, follows a group format where two sides from a four-team group advance to the next round.



Lewis Hamilton (L) and Nelson Piquet (R)

Piquet apologises for racist slur towards Hamilton

Paris, France - Three-time Formula One world champion Nelson Piquet on Wednesday apologised "wholeheartedly" to Lewis Hamilton after using a racially offensive term to describe the Mercedes star.

Hamilton said the "time has come for action" following Piquet's remarks, while Formula One and motorsport's governing body the FIA condemned the 69-year-old Brazilian.

"I apologise wholeheartedly to anyone that was affected, including Lewis, who is an incredible driver, but the translation in some media that is now circulating on

social media is not correct," Piquet said in a statement.

Piquet was discussing an accident between Hamilton and Red Bull's Max Verstappen in last year's British Grand Prix when he used the term. His daughter, Kelly, is Verstappen's partner.

"What I said was ill thought out, and I make no defence for it, but I will clarify that the term used is one that has widely and historically been used colloquially in Brazilian Portuguese as a synonym for 'guy' or 'person' and was never intended to offend," said Piquet.

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WIMBLEDON ROUND-UP

IS THIS THE FINAL ACT?

Serena’s career at a crossroads after first-round defeat

London, United Kingdom - With her 41st birthday just months away and without a Grand Slam title since 2017, Serena Williams faces searching questions over her future after a painful first-round Wimbledon exit.

The American was back on Centre Court on Tuesday after a year away from singles tennis but it was a miserable return to the scene of some of her greatest triumphs.

The 23-time major winner was cheered as she entered the court and supported throughout by a crowd desperate to see her recapture former glories against unseeded Harmony Tan of France.

But she looked a pale shadow of her former self, making 54 unforced errors in an uncharacteristically sloppy display that ended with a tame forehand dumped into the net.

Despite her lack of form and fitness, Serena, who lost 7-5, 1-6, 7-6 (10/7), looked to have the match in her grasp at various

Maybe tomorrow I could have given more. Maybe a week ago I could have given more

SERESERENA WILLIAMS

points.

She served for victory when 5-4 up in the decider and even in the tie-break raced into a 4-0 lead before her game fell apart.

Putting a brave face on her defeat, the American said it was “definitely better than last year”, when an ankle injury forced a tearful exit in her first-round match against Aliaksandra Sasnovich. The 40-year-old only returned to tennis last week, teaming up with Ons Jabeur in the doubles at Eastbourne.

Asked if she might have played her final Wimbledon, she said she was unsure.

Uncertain future

“I don’t know,” she said. “Who knows? Who knows where I’ll pop up?”

Questioned as to whether she would be happy if the defeat by 115th-ranked Tan was her final memory of Wimbledon, she said: “Obviously not. You know me. Definitely not.

“But today I gave all I could do. Maybe tomorrow I could have given more. Maybe a week ago I could have given more. But today was what I could do.”

The former world number one, handed a wildcard to compete at the All England Club, first won Wimbledon way back in 2002.

But despite her bitter disappointment she sounded motivated to play on, even though she is nearly twice as old as world number one Iga Swiatek

“It definitely makes me want to hit the practice courts because, you know, when you’re playing not bad and you’re so close,” she said.

AFP



Serena Williams’ game on Wednesday was littered with unforced errors and she had to pay the price (AFP)



Harmony Tan celebrates after beating Serena Williams (AFP)

Harmony Tan blasted as unprofessional for pulling out of doubles

London, United Kingdom - Harmony Tan pulled out of the Wimbledon doubles tournament on Wednesday, just hours after she had stunned Serena Williams, leaving her partner “sad, disappointed and angry”.

French player Tan was scheduled to play women’s doubles with Tamara Korpatsch but withdrew with a thigh injury.

“She just texted me this morning,” Germany’s Korpatsch wrote on Instagram.

“Let me wait here 1 hour before the match started. I’m very sad, disappointed and also very angry that I can’t play my 1st Doubles Grand Slam.

“It’s really not fair. She asked me before the tournament if we wanna play doubles and I said yes. I didn’t ask her, she asked me.

“If you’re broken after a 3h match the day before, you can’t play professional. That’s my opinion,” said Korpatsch, who lost her first-round singles match to Britain’s Heather Watson.

Tan needed three hours and 11 minutes to knock out seven-time champion Williams in the first round of the singles in a tie that finished just after 10:30 pm London time on Tuesday.

AFP



Novak Djokovic returns the ball to Thanasi Kokkinakis during their second-round match on Wednesday (AFP)

Sweet sixteen as Djokovic eases into Wimbledon last 32

London, United Kingdom - Defending champion Novak Djokovic reached the Wimbledon third round for the 16th time on Wednesday as potential semi-final opponent Casper Ruud crashed out.

Top seed Djokovic brushed aside 79th-ranked Thanasi Kokkinakis of Australia 6-1, 6-4, 6-2 and will face Serbian compatriot Miomir Kecmanovic for a last-16 place.

Third seed and French Open runner-up Ruud was knocked out by 112th-ranked Ugo Humbert, 3-6, 6-2, 7-5, 6-4.

“I’m very happy with my per-

formance. I started very well, solid from the back of the court,” said Djokovic, who is looking to join Pete Sampras as a seven-time Wimbledon champion.

“I made him work for every point and worked him around the court,” added the 20-time major winner.

Kokkinakis had likened Djokovic to a “brick wall” before the match.

“It was one-way traffic. I got chopped today,” said the 26-year-old Australian after his Centre Court torment.

In the women’s event, second

seed Anett Kontaveit lost 6-4, 6-0 to Germany’s Julie Niemeier as the Estonian endured another Grand Slam to forget.

Kontaveit has made the quarter-finals of a major just once in 29 attempts.

Ninth seed and 2017 champion Garbine Muguruza also exited in her delayed first-round clash, losing 6-4, 6-0 to Belgium’s Greet Minnen.

Lesia Tsurenko came out on top in three sets over Ukrainian compatriot Anhelina Kalinina to make the third round for the second time.

AFP

Nadal ‘feels great’ despite practice partner’s Wimbledon COVID exit

London, United Kingdom - Rafael Nadal said he “feels great” even though Wimbledon practice partner and 2021 runner-up Matteo Berrettini withdrew from the tournament with Covid on Tuesday.

Italy’s Berrettini, widely regarded as one of defending champion Novak Djokovic’s biggest threats and a potential semi-final opponent for Nadal, said he was “heartbroken” to pull out.

He joined 2017 runner-up Marin Cilic, who also tested positive before his first-round match, in withdrawing.

French player Alize Cornet added to questions over the health protocols in tennis by saying there had been an “epidemic of Covid” at the recent French Open but “nobody talked about it”.

Nadal practised with Berrettini at Wimbledon last week but the Spanish star shrugged off any concerns over his health.

“It’s difficult to be a close contact when you are outside, when you are practising,” said Nadal.

“For the moment I am feeling great, no problems at all. The main thing is I feel very sorry for him because he was playing fan-

tastic, winning two tournaments before the tournament starts.”

Nadal was speaking after overcoming a scare in his Wimbledon opener, fighting back from dropping the third set and falling a break down in the fourth to eventually see off Argentina’s Francisco Cerundolo.

The second seed, playing on grass for the first time since his 2019 Wimbledon semi-final loss to Roger Federer, triumphed 6-4, 6-3, 3-6, 6-4 over 41st-ranked Cerundolo, who was making his All England Club debut.

The All England Club said in a statement that protocols re-

mained in place to minimise the risk of infection.

“We are following UK guidance around assessment and isolation of any potential infectious disease,” the statement said.

“Our player medical team also continue to wear face masks for any consultation.”

Wimbledon was cancelled in 2020 due to the pandemic while the 2021 edition was run at reduced capacity with players confined to a bubble. Cornet claimed that at Roland Garros earlier this month there had been an “epidemic” of coronavirus.

AFP



Rafael Nadal celebrates winning a point against Francisco Cerundolo during their first-round match on Tuesday

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