



NEWS BRIEF

ISRAELI PM THANKS SAUDI AFTER EMERGENCY LANDING

Jerusalem - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday thanked authorities in Saudi Arabia - with which his country has no formal ties - for their "warm attitude" following an emergency aircraft landing in Jeddah.

The Air Seychelles flight laden with Israeli passengers was heading from the Seychelles to Tel Aviv.

Saudi airspace had been closed to flights to and from Israel until July 2022, when it opened to coincide with a visit by US President Joe Biden to the region.

The Air Seychelles flight made an emergency landing on Monday in the Saudi coastal city of Jeddah due to technical difficulties.

On Tuesday, the Israeli foreign ministry said an Israeli charter flight retrieved the Israelis from Jeddah.

"I greatly appreciate the warm attitude of the Saudi authorities to the Israeli passengers whose flight was in distress and was compelled to make an emergency landing in Jeddah," Netanyahu said in a brief video statement.

According to Israeli media, there were 128 Israeli passengers aboard the Air Seychelles flight. They were welcomed and given overnight accommodation in the Red Sea city.

Though Saudi Arabia was not one of the Gulf and Arab countries to normalise ties with Israel as part of the 2020 US-brokered Abraham Accords, speculation has grown of an impending deal.

Tender Board makes support to local goods, services mandatory

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a significant move aimed at bolstering local industries, the Secretariat General of Tender Board unveiled a mandatory list to support locally manufactured products on Tuesday.

The initiative, in coordination with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, was announced during a press conference held at Diplomatic Club. The event saw the patronage of H E Qais Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Government-affiliated contractors must now procure products and services included in the list exclusively from domestic factories or local vendors. This regulation will be integrated into all forthcoming government tenders and procurements. As an initial step, the board will roll out this directive as a pilot for a six-month duration.

In its inaugural phase, the wide-ranging list will include nine product categories, encompassing 57 items - from construction materials, electrical components and oil apparatus, to everyday essentials like food and furniture. Within services, 11 distinct categories - a total of 96 services, including electrical, construction and IT - are included in the mandatory list.



(Supplied photo)

Tender Board also launched a programme called 'Maeen' - an initiative aimed to elevate the potential of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). By facilitating continuous training and education for entrepreneurs, the programme envisages a more competent and skilled business landscape. A unique mentoring aspect of Maeen ensures that seasoned experts provide SME owners invaluable business advice and insights.

The event also marked the formalisation of three collaboration agreements. The first, a partnership involving the National Employment Programme, the Ministry of Labour, the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development and Muscat Municipality, seeks to establish SMEs specialising in periodic maintenance for government vehicles.

The second, with Invest in Oman Hall, focuses on promoting local investment opportunities and industries. The third, in collaboration with Bank Dhofar, ensures a streamlined financing process for self-employed entrepreneurs, enabling smoother access to government tenders via the 'Isnad' platform.

H E Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Undersecretary for Commerce and Industry in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said that the objective of the list is to fortify the industrial domain and highlight the local essence in national products. "The intent is not just to support our existing industries but also to stimulate quality and diversification, thereby responding adeptly to local market needs."



The intent is not just to support our existing industries but also to stimulate quality and diversification

H E DR SALEH BIN SAID MASAN

Additionally, Ahmed bin Mohammed al Hamidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, said the civic body is set to offer specialised technical training to young Omanis, priming them to helm SMEs in vehicle maintenance.

1,667 foreign investment projects registered in N Sharqiyah in 2022

2,342 commercial entities were set up in the governorate in 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has reported a considerable increase in foreign investment projects in North Sharqiyah. In 2022, the governorate registered 1,667 projects, marking its significance as an emerging economic destination.

An official from MoCIIP attributed this growth to North Sharqiyah's investment initiatives, which have transformed the governorate into a vibrant economic hub. Notably, in 2022, the governorate saw the establishment of 2,342 commercial entities. Emphasising the collaborative

nature of these projects, the official stated that the ministry is actively aligning with Governor's Office, government and private sectors in the governorate. Their collective vision is a comprehensive plan tailored to bolster North Sharqiyah's development trajectory. "The strategy hinges on streamlining procedures, facilitating the organisation of annual events, and launching activities that galvanise the local economic landscape," he explained.

"MoCIIP has set an ambitious agenda for this year, introducing 48 initiatives across commercial and industrial sectors, complemented by 50 fresh industrial investment prospects," he said shedding light on the ministry's



nationwide efforts.

A pivotal step last year was the unveiling of over 20 services on the 'Invest Easy Portal', which has since been rebranded to 'Oman Business Portal'.

The official further highlighted MoCIIP's commitment to stimulating foreign investment, saying, "In a bid to incentivise foreign entrepreneurs, we've strategically reduced investment-related fees."

Highlighting the outcome of such measures, he cited, "As of August 21, 2023 the total number of Investor Residency Cards has swelled to 2,700. Moreover, there's been a 66.4% surge in automatic investment licences, with 203,591 issued in 2022, in contrast to the 135,038 in 2021."

Foreign investment in 2022 reached RO1.7bn, registering a 2.1% growth over 2021.

Hotel revenues up 27.8% to RO122.5mn in July

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The latest data from National Centre for Statistics and Information indicates a 27.8% increase in revenues of 3- to 5-star hotels in the sultanate to RO122.530mn at the end of July compared to R95.842mn in the same period of 2022.

This revenue growth aligns with a notable 25.8% increase in the number of guests, totalling 1,098,157 till July this year, compared to 872,796 in the corresponding period of 2022. Occupancy rate rose 10.3%.

Breaking down the figures, the data showed Omani

guests accounted for 411,551 of the total. The number of GCC guests rose 19.1% to 99,947, while European guests increased 44.4% to 259,649.

There were 33,420 American guests, up 3.3%, while those from the African continent increased 37% to 6,365. The number of Asian guests increased 47.1% to 163,779, and guests from Oceania surged dramatically by 242.7% to 24,755.

Hotels in the sultanate are experiencing a remarkable growth in revenues fueled by a substantial rise in guest numbers from various regions around the globe.



SQU team in PetroBowl Championship finals



Lylnk & Co opens first showroom in Oman

Malnutrition affects physical, cognitive development of 7.5mn children in region

Cairo, Egypt - The regional directors of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) Region, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in MENA, the World Food Programme (WFP) in MENA, and the World Health Organization (WHO) in the Eastern Mediterranean Region have launched a pioneering framework for regional UN nutrition collaboration as part of their collaborative effort to address the pressing issue of malnutrition in the region.

Launched in Cairo, Egypt this important initiative marks a milestone in the ongoing commitment of the four agencies to



5MN CHILDREN UNDER 5 OVERWEIGHT/OBESE

unite their efforts and expertise in supporting countries to prioritise and take effective and timely action on nutrition. The framework aims to facilitate joint support and systematic technical collaboration and coordination at the regional level to accelerate action on nutrition in the countries of the region.

Despite commendable strides made since 1990, and with the prevalence of chronic undernutrition decreasing from 19.1% in 2012 to 15.3% in 2022,

challenges persist in the region. Notably, the high prevalence of stunting affecting children under five in six out of 25 countries is concerning - jeopardising the physical growth and cognitive development of 7.5mn children.

More than half the population in the Arab states, or 162.7mn people, could not afford a healthy diet in 2020

ABDULHAKIM EL WAER

Wasting, the most lethal form of malnutrition, remains a significant issue in specific countries. The average regional wasting rate of over 6% masks alarming levels exceeding 15% in certain countries. The number of children under five years of age living with overweight and obesity in the MENA region has remained stagnant at 5mn for the past decade

"While there has been progress, we must recognise that malnutrition, driven by lack of access to nutritious foods, essential services and optimal feeding practices, continues to impact millions of children. This collaborative framework sets the stage for collective action to address

these persistent issues and ensure that every child's right to nutrition is safeguarded," said Adele Khodr, UNICEF Regional Director in MENA.

Abdulhakim el Waer, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for the NENA, said, "The Arab region continues to suffer from multiple forms of malnutrition. The prevalence of stunting (20.5%) and overweight (10.7%) among children under five years of age was high in 2020. More than half the population in the Arab states, or 162.7mn people, could not afford a healthy diet in 2020. We rely heavily on this framework in providing innovative solutions to overcome these challenges."

SQU team advances to PetroBowl Championship finals in USA in Oct

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A team from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has qualified for the final round of PetroBowl Championship, which will be held in San Antonio, Texas, USA in October.

The four-member team consists of Reem al Riyamia, Noor al Manaia, Anwaar al Muqbalia and Mahmood al Busaidi.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, Anwaar said, "The PetroBowl Championship is an annual academic competition organised by the Society of Petroleum Engineers, attracting universities from all over the world. The competition is known for its rapid-fire section that tests participants' knowledge of the petroleum industry."

The team's remarkable performance in the PetroBowl regional competition held in Egypt in July helped secure a spot in the 22nd PetroBowl Championship.

According to Anwaar, the team's achievement reflects its



(Supplied photo)

members' commitment to learning and their passion for petroleum engineering.

The competition aims to enhance students' scientific and practical experiences in petroleum engineering. Participation in the PetroBowl Championship final will not only expand their expertise but also give them a platform to connect with peers from around the world.

"The rapid-fire nature of the competition demands extensive knowledge, requiring rigorous study. Additionally, factors like travel arrangements and financial aspects contributed to the challenge," Anwaar said.

She and her team are grateful to Halliburton for its support, highlighting the significance of industry collaboration in fostering young talent.

"Participating in the regional PetroBowl competition has helped improve the team's abilities and scientific knowledge, while also strengthening professional relationships and facilitating the exchange of valuable experiences," Anwaar said.



(Supplied photo)

Potential of associations discussed to promote Oman as MICE destination

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism observed Omani Associations Day on Tuesday to bolster local association networks, foster collaborative ties and facilitate an exchange of knowledge - all with an aim to promote the sultanate as a Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) destination.

Held under the patronage of H E Azzan bin Qassim al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Tourism in MHT, the event witnessed the participation of several professional associations.

Such initiatives reiterate Oman's aspirations to be recognised as a centre for association

activities while enhancing international dialogue and cooperation, MHT stated.

Sharing insights into the event's conception, Khalid al Zadjali, Director of Conferences at MHT, said, "This gathering was orchestrated to shine a light on avenues for local associations to refine their operations and amplify member services. It's about drawing from global best practices and making these resonate on home ground."

Zadjali also underscored the crucial role of local entities in maintaining robust ties with international networks, advocating for proactive engagement in global events.

The day was structured around three thought-provoking sessions.

Onam in Oman: Bringing communities together

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In Oman, thousands of miles away from the lush landscapes of Kerala, the Malayali diaspora fervently keeps its roots alive through the vibrant festival of Onam. The whole community comes together to revel in its shared cultural heritage.

Homes, malls, restaurants and even office corridors in Muscat are decorated with *pookalam*, a signature of Onam, as Keralites dressed for the occasion in traditional attire, admire the intricate floral decorations. On weekends, visitors may chance upon an actor dressed up like King Mahabali, who as the legend goes, visits his subjects during Onam, sharing blessings amid lavish feasts.

Indu Baburaj, a Muscat-based homemaker, said, "Onam offers a unique chance to connect with fellow Indians and revisit our cherished traditions. The elaborate floral *pookalam* and grand Onam *sadya* feast evoke



(V K Shafeer)

memories. This year, Onam falls on a weekday, limiting our initial plans. But the festivities will kick off in earnest from Friday, enriched with numerous cultural programmes in which I am excited to participate."

Highlighting the role of bananas in Onam traditions, she

added, "Banana preparations like banana curry and chips are staple dishes, typically served on banana leaves."

Vinu Thomas, who works in the healthcare sector in Sohar, stressed the universal appeal of Onam. "Though rooted in Hindu traditions, Onam transcends re-

ligious lines, being celebrated by various South Indian communities. Men and women, irrespective of their background, don traditional clothes, share meals and partake in festivities that extend till October end. For many of us, far from our homeland, this festival offers a momentary

return, a comfort during our foreign sojourn. It's heartening to witness diverse individuals uniting over shared traditions."

Month-long celebrations spotlight traditional arts at cultural programmes featuring dance, music and more. Club competitions infuse a lively edge to these festivities. In all of this, elaborate floral designs meticulously crafted with multicoloured petals remain the centrepiece.

Anirudh Adarsh, a Grade 10 student of Indian School Ghubra, recounted his experiences, saying, "Most of my Onams have been celebrated in Muscat. Our school organised a flower carpet competition; there was a lot of enthusiasm and creativity. For me, the ten-day festival is synonymous with these flower designs, a tradition I eagerly take part in with my family. Today, being a holiday, I lent a hand in preparing the *sadya*."

In Oman, Onam is a testament to the enduring power of traditions that binds communities together.

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Oman's trail running champions prepare for epic Mont Blanc

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's trail running champions are poised to shine on the international stage as four exceptional athletes - Hamed al Harthi, Hamdan al Khatri, Issa al Abri, and Mohammed al Shizawi - prepare for the epic challenge of the 2023 UTMB Mont Blanc event.

This year's race will see these exceptional runners from Oman compete across varying distances, embodying the nation's spirit of endurance and adventure.

With the kick-off of the Omani runners' respective distances set for Friday, these athletes are not only striving for performance goals but also proudly representing Oman on a global platform. The journey that awaits them is a physical one, but also a testament to the nation's spirit and determination.

Hamed al Harthi, speaking on behalf of the group, emphasised the honour of representing Oman at the UTMB Mont Blanc. "We carry the heart of Oman with us as we prepare to embrace the challenges of this prestigious event. It's not just about competing; it's about showcasing determination and resilience."

Harthi added, "We are immensely grateful for the support we receive from our technical team representing Himam Trail Run Race, Ahmed al Fahdi, Ali al Balushi, and Sultan al Shereiqi. Their expertise in preparedness, diet, planning, and recovery are invaluable to our performance."

Hamdan al Khatri shared a



Hamed al Harthi



Mohammed al Shizawi



Issa al Abri

Our participation in the global event is a testament to Oman's growing prominence in the world of trail running

HAMDAN AL KHATRI

sentiment echoing Harthi's words. "Our participation in the global event is a testament to Oman's growing prominence in the world of trail running. We are excited to showcase what we can achieve and push the boundaries on an international level."

Oman has been witnessing a

surge in popularity of trail running, attributed to the country's abundance of natural and traditional trails that span its varied landscapes. The extensive Al Hajar mountain range, with peaks reaching up to 3,000m, offers a unique setting for trail enthusiasts. The diversity of ter-

rains and captivating beauty of the Al Hajar Mountains have garnered attention from athletes and adventure seekers around the world.

In a unique synergy, the Himam Trail Run Race will also make its presence felt at the race village, inviting participants to partake in the event scheduled for November 23 - 25. This race promises an array of distances - from the challenging 110km Al Hajar ULTRA to the Skyward Canyon 55KM, the Scenic Sprint 25KM, and family runs - across

four distinct cities in Oman.

The event is supported by the Governor of Dhakhiliya and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, reflecting its significance in promoting Oman's diverse natural beauty and spirit of adventure.

The UTMB Mont Blanc, scheduled from August 28 to September 3, will also include the first UTMB World Series Finals. The event has seen a remarkable increase in applicants, with registrations crossing previous numbers.



MHT promotes GDS to increase hotel bookings, boost tourism industry

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) on Tuesday organised a workshop on Global Distribution Systems (GDS) for reservations at Crowne Plaza Muscat OCEC.

The workshop was held to propel Oman's tourism industry to a greater height by increasing bookings in hotels and enabling tourism establishments to leverage these systems to attract more visitors to their facilities.

GDS are central booking platforms that provide travel agents in different countries real-time access to tourism services, such as flight and hotel rates, car rental information and other essential travel products.

These systems serve as a crucial link between travel service providers (hotels) and reservation sources (travel agents), allowing them to efficiently manage bookings and distribute their offerings on a global scale.

The workshop was part of MHT's implementation of several initiatives and programmes aimed at promoting the sultanate as a tourist destination, ensuring a prosperous future for the hotel sector in the country,

the ministry said in press release.

Held under the patronage of H E Azzan bin Qassim al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Tourism in MHT, the workshop brought together numerous hotel establishments in Oman in the presence of two major providers of GDS services - Travelport and Amadeus. Representatives of these platforms presented their innovative solutions by facilitating direct communication between service providers and the hospitality sector in Oman across various categories.

MHT seeks to enhance Oman's presence in the global tourism market and boost revenue flows in line with the sultanate's tourism strategy and comprehensive tourism development plan.

Haitham al Ghassani, Director General of Tourism Promotion in MHT, said that the ministry recognises the positive impact that the hospitality sector in Oman will gain from working with these platforms. "Integrating hotels into these global platforms will offer a multitude of benefits, including expanding the reach to a wide network of travel agencies and online booking platforms, leading to a significant increase in reservations," he added.

Royal Opera House Muscat unveils stellar 2023/24 line-up

Muscat - With the season of moderate temperature and pleasant weather condition expected around the corner, Oman is getting ready for celebrations unhindered.

To take the lead, the Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) unveiled a mosaic of world-class performances under the theme 'Stars, Legends, Dreams' for the forthcoming season.

With an impressive lineup spanning popular operas, Arab music concerts, classical symphonies, ballets, jazz evenings, world music performances, and other spellbinding shows, the 2023/24 season seems set to be an enriching experience for aficionados and newcomers alike.

Opera galore

The season kickstarts with Rossini's enchanting *The Barber of Seville* orchestrated by Antonino Fogliani (Sept 28 and 30). Gaetano Donizetti's comedic *Don Pasquale* and Giacomo Puccini's poignant *La Bohème* are among the highlights. Of special note is Benjamin Britten's rendition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a collaboration



with Teatro Carlo Felice di Genova, intertwining Shakespeare's classic tale with music (Feb 8 and 10).

Symphonic evenings

Classical enthusiasts can look forward to performances from the Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della Rai under the

direction of Michele Gamba, featuring cellist Ettore Pagano (Sept 29). Adding to the season's grandeur, bass baritone Erwin Schrott introduces a fusion of Spanish song and dance (Dec 15), while the ROHM pipe organ will be the centrepiece of a musical feast on May 4, 2023.

Arab music

The season's Arab music segment salutes tradition with concerts featuring luminaries like Majida el Roumi (Oct 17 and 18) and Ragheb Alama (Feb 1 and 2). Special attention is directed towards celebrating the legendary Mohamed Abdul Wahab, with a series of events



and concerts devoted to his enduring legacy. Cairo Opera brings the legend of Scheherazade from *1001 Nights*.

Jazz and world beats

Jazz legends Randy Brecker and Igor Butman are slated to perform in October. Expanding its global reach, ROHM will host



the eminent sitar virtuoso, Nishat Khan, and the soulful voice of Portuguese fado by Cristina Branco.

Broadening horizons

This season, ROHM offers a diversified range of shows, from the Xi'An Acrobatic Troupe's rendition of *Swan Lake* to the in-

ternationally renowned *Stompi!* making its debut in the Middle East. The *Symphony on Ice* is another unique offering, turning the stage into a skating spectacle (Jan 4-6).

Ballet brilliance

Ballet aficionados are in for a treat as the acclaimed Bolshoi Ballet graces the stage with Glazunov's *Raymonda* (Jan 25-27). The Prague National Ballet's portrayal of the romantic comedy *La Fille Mal Gardée* will add charm to the lineup (Mar 6 and 7).

Empowering education

Central to ROHM's mission is fostering a love for the arts in the younger generation. This year's educational calendar offers two open house events, *The Sound of Music* (Dec 16) and *Making Music* (Feb 24), granting students a hands-on experience with professionals. The season's highlight will be immersive activities surrounding *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, designed to bring Shakespeare's magic to life for the youth.

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Source: xe.com

BRIEFS
UK delays post-Brexit border checks until 2024

The British government said Tuesday it will delay introducing post-Brexit border controls on food and fresh produce from the European Union, postponing the start date to January 2024.

The UK had delayed implementing the checks several times since leaving the EU's customs union and single market in January 2021, but British exports have faced controls for products heading in the opposite direction.

The UK was planning to finally roll out its new import controls in phases over 12 months from October 31 this year.

It added that further controls for EU imports will also have a revised timetable "to give stakeholders additional time to prepare for the new checks".

Global Recycle opens tyre recycling plant in Saham

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Global Recycle Company has opened a state-of-the-art tyre recycling plant in Saham in the North Batinah region. With an investment of over RO1.3mn, the tyre recycling factory will have an annual processing capacity of 6,000 metric tonnes of discarded tyres.

The official inauguration ceremony for Global Recycle's plant took place in Muscat on Monday, with H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, presiding over the event.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, the company said that their factory, equipped with cutting-edge technology, will play a pivotal role in waste reduction, resource preservation, and mitigating the adverse environmental impact associated with discarded tires.

On the occasion, Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Omari, chairman of the Environment Authority, underlined the sultanate's national focus on the circular economy. He noted that the authority has introduced regulations governing waste exports and imposed fees on various waste types to promote local recycling, enhance value addition, and stimulate domestic industry growth in this sector. He added that this factory stands as a pioneering endeavour in tyre recycling across different types and sizes.

Omari further noted that since the issuance of waste management regulations in April 2021, Oman has seen the emergence of 30 factories engaged in recycling various types of waste, with some still under construction and set to commence operations early next year.



The factory will have an annual processing capacity of 6,000 metric tonnes of discarded tyres (ONA)

H E Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of North Al Batinah, highlighted how this factory aligns with the rapid expansion of major industrial and economic projects in the region. He anticipates that the facility will contribute to waste reduction, value creation within the waste recycling sector, and job opportunities in the field.

Gaurav Sekhri, general manager of Global Recycle, said, "The factory strictly adheres to the highest international standards, enabling the utilisation of resulting materials across various industries. This approach reduces the burden on landfills, conserves energy and raw materials, fosters the circular economy, curbs pollution, and advances sustainable development goals."

The tyre recycling is a promising industry, witnessing increasing demand both within Oman and the region. Used tires are sourced from various governorates in the sultanate, particularly from be'ah and PDO, to undergo recycling and treatment before being shredded.

OAB's first-half net profit surges 64% to RO11.5mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has reported a consolidated net profit of RO11.5mn for the first half of 2023, marking a robust growth of 64% compared to a net profit of RO7mn in the same period last year.

This sharp increase in OAB's profit represents the highest year-on-year growth among the banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange.

The bank's net loans and advances (including Islamic financing) grew by 12% to RO3.258bn as of June 30, 2023, compared to RO2.907bn a year ago. Customer deposits also increased by 11% to RO3.201bn as of June 30, 2023, from RO2.889bn a year ago.

Oman Arab Bank's net interest income from conventional banking and net income from Islamic financing reached RO49mn for the six-month period ending on June 30, 2023, compared to RO48.9mn for the same period in 2022.

Operating income remained steady compared to the first-half results of last year at RO61mn, while operating expenses decreased by 1% compared to the same period in 2022, reaching RO35.8mn.

In a press statement, Sulaiman al Harthi, CEO of Oman Arab Bank, said, "Our performance, which leads the industry in the sultanate in the first half of 2023, demonstrates Oman Arab Bank's ever-increasing profile. These gains have been powered by the hard work and dedication of our team, in conjunction with the introduction of several market-leading banking solutions and innovative promotions during this period."

He added, "OAB's successes reflect positive movements across the banking sector in Oman and the nation's overall economic performance, which continues to go from strength to strength, further enhancing the sultanate's regional and global standing. We will strive to build on these figures in the second half of 2023 as the bank marks 50 years at the pinnacle of the industry in Oman."



Al Maha signs deal for lubricants supply to regional markets

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Saudi-based Now Fuel Company for the supply of Ampro Lubricants for Saudi markets.

The agreement was signed by Al Maha CEO Eng Hamed bin Salim al Maghdri and Now Fuel Company CEO Mohammed bin Hamad al Qarawi, in the presence of Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and other top management members of both companies.

Maghdri underscored Al Maha's commitment to establishing professional collaborations that propel regional business growth.

"Now Fuel Company has the right experience and expertise to sell our products in these markets," he said.

Qarawi said that his company had been looking for a suitable Omani partner for sourcing, marketing and selling lubricants and found the right choice in Al Maha who are well established in the business for the past 30 years.

Both entities, with their experiences and complementary strengths, are poised to cover the regional lubricants landscape, driving innovation and superior service for discerning customers.



As part of its strategy to connect various investment projects, residential areas, and commercial properties to its water network, the Centralized Utilities Company (Marafiq) has successfully executed a water network expansion project in certain sections of the Sayy neighborhood within the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

Eng Said al Sarhani, acting chief operations officer at Marafiq, stated in a press release that this expansion aims to enhance the efficiency of the potable water sector within SEZAD. Its primary goal is to make the zone more attractive to new projects, particularly within the areas where these expansion initiatives have been carried out.

He emphasised that Marafiq's strategic focus lies in ensuring an ample supply of high-quality water across various investment

Marafiq implements water network expansion project at SEZAD in Duqm

Our Correspondent
Muscat



A Marafiq-run water desalination plant in Duqm

and residential zones within SEZAD. The company is committed to optimizing water resources, thereby promoting sustainability and efficient utilization.

Sarhani further explained that Marafiq is operating according to a well-defined timeline that encompasses ongoing network expansion in several SEZAD schemes. This expansion aligns with the region's urban growth, investment demands, and population increases.

The recent project, as detailed by Sarhani, involved expanding the water distribution network within parts of the Sayy neighborhood, specifically schemes 53, 54, and 55, covering a total length of 15km.

Marafiq completed a water network expansion project in the Sayy new commercial district last year, spanning 19km. This achievement facilitated the connection of existing projects in the area to the water network, reducing reliance on water transportation tanks for drinking water.

Sarhani pointed out, "Currently, the total length of water pipelines in the region stands at 46km, while the length of the water distribution network pipelines extends to 131km."

Throughout the project's implementation phase, Marafiq provided opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises, including tasks such as drilling and pipe installation. Sarhani highlighted that companies operating in the water sector reaped substantial benefits from this network expansion, in addition to the broader economic and social advantages it brought.

Furthermore, Sarhani elaborated on Marafiq's cooperative schedule with SEZAD, which encompasses network expansion in three new areas. He emphasised the company's dedication to enhancing the performance of the drinking water sector within SEZAD.

OpenAI launches business version of ChatGPT as popularity wanes

San Francisco, US - OpenAI on Monday said it was launching a business version of ChatGPT as its artificial intelligence sensation grapples with declining usership nine months after its historic debut.

ChatGPT Enterprise will offer business customers a premium version of the bot, with "enterprise grade" security and privacy enhancements from previous versions, OpenAI said in a blog post.

The question of data security has become an important one for OpenAI, with major companies, including Apple, Amazon and Samsung, blocking employees from using ChatGPT out of fear that sensitive information will be divulged.

"Today marks another step towards an AI assistant for work

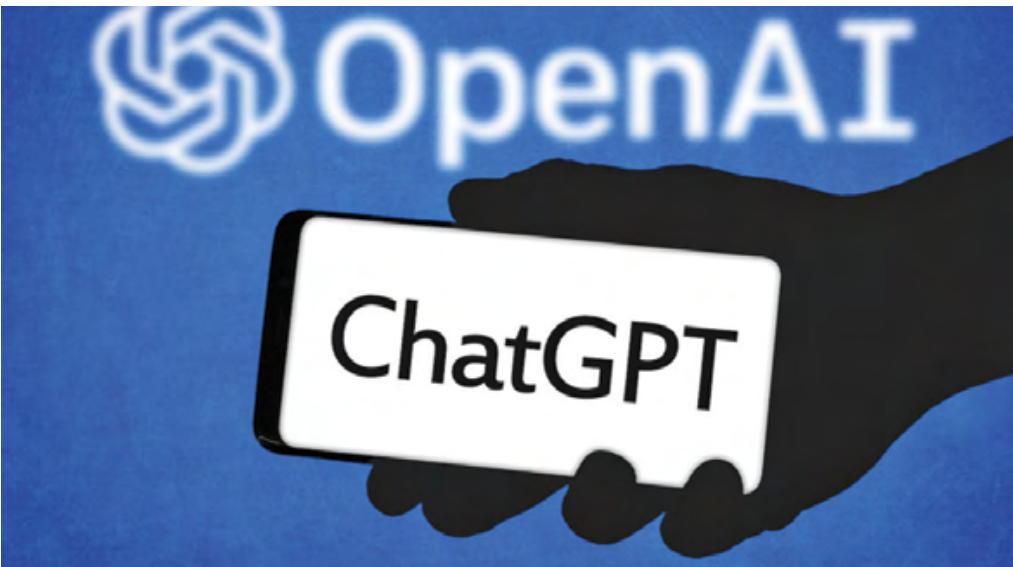
that helps with any task, is customised for your organisation, and that protects your company data," OpenAI said.

The ChatGPT business version resembles Bing Chat Enterprise, an offering by Microsoft, which uses the same OpenAI technology through a major partnership.

ChatGPT Enterprise will be powered by GPT-4, OpenAI's highest performing model, much like ChatGPT Plus, the company's subscription version for individuals, but business customers will have special perks, including better speed.

"We believe AI can assist and elevate every aspect of our working lives and make teams more creative and productive," the company said.

It added that companies including Carlyle, The Estée Lauder Companies and PwC were already early adopters of ChatGPT Enterprise.



ChatGPT Enterprise will be powered by GPT-4, OpenAI's highest performing model

The release came as ChatGPT is struggling to maintain the excitement that made it the world's fastest downloaded app in the weeks after its release.

That distinction was taken over last month by Threads, the Twitter rival from Facebook-

ChatGPT Enterprise will offer business customers a premium version of the bot, with "enterprise grade" security and privacy enhancements

owner Meta.

According to analytics company Similarweb, ChatGPT traffic dropped by nearly 10% in June and again in July, falls that could be attributed to school summer break, it said.

Similarweb estimates that roughly one quarter of ChatGPT's users worldwide fall in the

18-24 demographic.

OpenAI is also facing push-back from news publishers and other platforms - including X, as Twitter is now known, and Reddit - that are now blocking OpenAI web crawlers from mining their data for AI model training.

A pair of studies by pollster Pew Research Center released on Monday also pointed to doubts about AI and ChatGPT in particular.

Two-thirds of the US-based respondents who had heard of ChatGPT say their main concern is that the government will not go far enough in regulating its use. The research also found that the use of ChatGPT for learning and work tasks has ticked up from 12% of those who had heard of ChatGPT in March to 16% in July.

AFF

China warns US against trade curbs

Beijing, China – China’s premier warned US officials Tuesday that moves to “politicise” trade issues would prove “disastrous” for the global economy, state media reported.

US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo is currently on a four-day bridge-building visit to China aimed at better managing tensions between the world’s two largest economies.

But a meeting with Premier Li Qiang Tuesday saw the top official lay into American trade curbs against Beijing, which Washington insists are necessary for its national security but which China says are meant to clip its economic rise.

“Politicising economic and trade issues and overstretching the concept of security will... seriously affect bilateral relations and mutual trust,” he told Raimondo, according to China’s official Xinhua news agency.

They “also undermine the interests of enterprises and people of the two countries, and will have a disastrous impact on the global economy”, he added.

Relations between the two countries have plummeted to some of their lowest levels in decades, with US trade curbs near the top of the list of disagreements.

This month, Biden issued an executive order aimed at restricting certain US investments in sensitive high-tech areas in China – a move Beijing blasted as being “anti-globalisation”. The long-anticipated rules, expected to be implemented next year,



Gina Raimondo (left) is shown the way by Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng as they head to their meeting at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing (AFP)

IMF chief to visit China today

Beijing, China – International Monetary Fund chief Kristalina Georgieva will visit China Wednesday ahead of scheduled stops in two other Asian countries, a spokesperson said.

“During August 30 to September 3, the Managing Director will be visiting China to engage in bilateral discussions with China’s senior leadership team,” the IMF spokesperson

said.

During a visit to Beijing earlier this year, Georgieva said that she expected 2023 to be “another challenging year”, and that uncertainty was “exceptionally high”.

The IMF chief urged China’s policymakers in March to seek to raise productivity and rebalance the economy away from investment and towards more

durable consumption-driven growth.

After visiting China, Georgieva will proceed to the Indonesian capital Jakarta from September 4 to 7 for a gathering of leaders of regional bloc ASEAN.

She will then head to New Delhi, India, from September 8 to 10 to attend a G20 summit.

AFP

target sectors such as semiconductors and artificial intelligence.

Premier Li on Tuesday urged the US to change tack, saying “the two sides should strengthen mutually beneficial cooperation, reduce friction and confrontation, and jointly promote world economic recovery and cope with global challenges”.

While Li used their meeting to condemn US policy, Raimondo stressed the importance of open communication between the two powers.

Pointing to areas of “global

US-China relations have plummeted to some of their lowest levels in decades, with US trade curbs near the top of the list of disagreements

concern” like climate change, Artificial Intelligence and fentanyl addiction, she told Li that Washington wants to “work with you as two global powers to do what is right for all of humanity”.

“The world is expecting us to step up together to solve these problems,” she said.

Raimondo also reiterated the US position that it is not seeking to decouple its economy from China’s. “We seek to maintain our \$700bn commercial relationship with China, and we hope that that relationship can provide stability for the overall relationship,” she said.

Earlier on Tuesday, Raimondo met China’s vice premier, He Lifeng, describing the US-China commercial relationship as “one of the most consequential” in the world. “Managing that relationship responsibly is critical to both of our nations and indeed to the whole world,” she said during a part of the meeting open to journalists.

She stressed the US would “never compromise in protecting our national security”, but added

that Washington did not seek “to hold China’s economy back”.

Raimondo heads to China’s economic powerhouse Shanghai later on Tuesday and will leave the country on Wednesday.

‘Reduce misunderstanding’

The commerce secretary is one of a number of senior US officials to visit China in recent months – part of an effort by Washington to improve its working relationship with its largest strategic rival.

She has used the trip to seek more open discussions with the Chinese over restrictive trade curbs. On Monday she met with Commerce Minister Wang Wentao, with the two sides agreeing to set up a working group to iron out the laundry list of trade disputes between them.

They also agreed to set up what Washington called an “export control enforcement information exchange” – described as a platform to “reduce misunderstanding of US national security policies”.

Beijing has throughout the trip painted a less rosy picture than the United States, saying Wang had raised “serious concerns” over Washington’s trade curbs.

Those included “US Section 301 tariffs on Chinese goods, its semiconductor policies, restrictions of two-way investment, discriminatory subsidies, and sanctions on Chinese enterprises”, Beijing’s commerce ministry said.

AFP

Glitch halts Toyota factories

Tokyo, Japan – Toyota said Tuesday it has been hit by a technical glitch forcing it to suspend production at all of its 14 factories in Japan.

The world’s biggest automaker gave no further details on the stoppage, which began Tuesday morning, but said it did not appear to be caused by a cyberattack.

The company said the glitch prevented its system from processing orders for parts, resulting in a suspension of a dozen factories or 25 production lines on Tuesday morning.

The company later decided to halt the afternoon shift of the two other operational factories, suspending all of Toyota’s domestic plants, or 28 production lines.

“We do not believe the problem was caused by a cyberattack,” the company said in a statement to AFP.

“We will continue to investigate the cause and to restore the system as soon as possible.”

The incident affected only Japanese factories, Toyota said.

It was not immediately clear exactly when normal production might resume.

The news briefly sent Toy-



Toyota said the technical glitch prevented its system from processing orders for parts (AFP)

ota’s stocks into the red in the morning session before recovering.

Last year, Toyota had to suspend all of its domestic factories after a subsidiary was hit by a cyberattack.

The company is one of the biggest in Japan, and its production activities have an outsized impact on the country’s economy.

Toyota is famous for its “just-in-time” production system of providing only small deliveries of necessary parts and other items at various steps of the assembly process.

This practice minimises costs while improving efficiency and is studied by other manufacturers and at business schools around the world, but also comes with risks.

The auto titan retained its global top-selling auto crown for the third year in a row in 2022, and aims to earn an annual net profit of 2.58tn yen (\$17.6bn) this fiscal year.

Major automakers are enjoying a robust surge of global demand after the Covid-19 pandemic slowed manufacturing activities.

AFP

Google courts businesses with ramped up cloud AI

San Francisco, US – Google on Tuesday said it was weaving artificial intelligence (AI) deeper into its cloud offerings as it vies for the business of firms keen to capitalize on the technology.

The internet giant unveiled new AI-powered features for data searches, online collaboration, language translation, images and more at its first annual Cloud Next conference held in-person since 2019.

The gathering kicked off a day after OpenAI unveiled a business version of ChatGPT as tech companies seek to keep up with Microsoft, which has been ahead in powering its products with AI.

“I am incredibly excited to bring so many of our customers and partners together to showcase the amazing innovations we have been working on,” Google Cloud chief executive Thomas Kurian said in a blog post.

Most companies seeking to adopt AI must turn to the cloud giants – including Microsoft, AWS and Google – for the heavy duty computing needs.

Those companies in turn partner up with AI developers – as is the case of a major tie-up between Microsoft and ChatGPT creator OpenAI – or have developed their own models, as is the case for Google.

Google is also opening its cloud platform to artificial intelligence from other companies including Meta and Anthropic, hoping to position itself as a one-stop shop for AI.

More than 70% of generative AI startups considered “unicorns” because of valuations greater than a billion dollars are Google Cloud customers, global AI business vice president Philip Moyer said during a briefing.

The list of AI unicorns using Google Cloud included Anthropic, Jasper, and Runway.

“All of these are organizations



Google is also opening its cloud platform to AI from other companies including Meta and Anthropic

that are providing their models alongside Google’s foundation models,” Moyer said of the generative AI’s underpinnings.

Collaborations already include US car maker General Motors, which is working with Google to add conversational AI to millions of their vehicles.

GE Appliances is intent on putting AI to work creating personalised recipes for people based on food in the kitchen, Moyer said of collaborations in progress.

‘Once in a generation’

The number of generative AI customer accounts at Google Cloud grew 15-fold in the re-

cently ended quarter, with interest in such projects “staggering,” said Google Cloud vice president June Yang. Google is also ramping up AI features in productivity tools such as Meet and Docs at Workspace, which boasts having more than 3bn users.

AI enhancements at Workspace include a digital assistant that can take notes during online meetings or even attend in a person’s stead, according to Google.

The feature lets people who are double-booked “be at two places at once”, taking notes at an online meeting but not commenting on a person’s behalf, executives explained.

Generative AI is also being put to work writing code on request, creating images, and for cybersecurity.

Amid increasing worry about the uncontrolled proliferation of problematic AI imagery, Google also said it will adopt a watermark at the pixel level to indicate that images were created by artificial intelligence, the company said.

AFP

UBS posts first result since Credit Suisse merger

Zurich, Switzerland – As UBS prepares to post earnings this week, investors and employees are eagerly awaiting clues as to how Switzerland’s largest bank is faring after swallowing up its fallen rival Credit Suisse.

UBS is due to release its second-quarter income statement early Thursday – the first results presented since the mega-merger that rocked the Swiss banking scene earlier this year.

Keen attention will be paid to layoff plans and the fate of Credit Suisse’s Swiss division, which have been at the heart of swirling rumours in recent months.



Swiss authorities strangled UBS into the \$3.25bn takeover on March 19 to prevent its closest domestic rival from going under – which could have had catastrophic consequences for the global financial system.

But since the complex merger was completed in June, UBS has divulged little about its plans.

In the meantime, the number of questions around the repercussions of the deal has swelled.

“The list is long,” Andreas Venditti, an analyst at Swiss investment manager Vontobel, told AFP.

In particular, he added, he will be looking for details on the retention of Credit Suisse staff and clients, and hopefully a timeline for the integration process.

Venditti also said there would be less focus this time around on UBS’s net profit – usually a key

measure of how the bank is faring – since it will be distorted by a string of exceptional items.

UBS has already indicated that the results should include an exceptional accounting gain of nearly \$35bn due to the difference between the purchase price and the recognised net assets of Credit Suisse.

While little has been said publicly about Credit Suisse’s results, the SonntagsZeitung weekly newspaper cited insiders at the bank suggesting it suffered a loss of 3.5 billion Swiss francs (\$4 billion) during the second quarter.

AFP

MHD-ITICS wins prestigious contract for ODB's digital banking platform

Mohsin Haider Darwish Infrastructure, Technology, Industrial and Consumer Solutions (MHD-ITICS) has delightfully announced its recent triumph in securing a significant contract for the design, development, deployment, and maintenance of Oman Development Bank's (ODB) digital banking platform.

This prestigious project underscores MHD-ITICS' commitment to driving digital transformation in the sultanate's banking sector.

The contract was officially signed at the bank's premises, in the presence of Hamed bin Salim al Harthy, Acting CEO of ODB; Jayaprakash Menon, CEO of MHD-ITICS, and key stakeholders.

As per the agreement, the Digital Business Unit of MHD-ITICS Technology and Communications Division will create a custom platform aligned with ODB's digital transformation goals.

"MHD-ITICS is poised to set new benchmarks for customer



experiences at the intersection of finance and technology," stated Jayaprakash Menon, on the sidelines of the signing ceremony.

"In line with this, we are pleased to contribute to, and work closely with Oman Development Bank on their transformative journey. This collaboration reaffirms our dedication to providing cutting-edge solutions in the banking and financial services sector."

Hamed al Harthy expressed his optimism about the project.

"Our commitment to delivering innovative banking services that meet the evolving needs of our customers led us to select MHD-ITICS for this pivotal project. We believe this collaboration will enable us to establish new standards in digital banking and enhance customer satisfaction."

MHD-ITICS secured this opportunity through a rigorous selection process, triumphing over strong global and local competition.



Jetour Dashing offers futuristic drive experience

The latest addition to the Jetour line-up from Mohsin Haider Darwish Automobiles LLC, the official distributor of Jetour in Oman, the Jetour Dashing embodies a harmonious blend of groundbreaking technology, sleek design and uncompromising comfort. Moreover, the vehicle marks a significant leap forward in the realm of automotive excellence and smart innovations.

Highlighting the technological aspects of the Jetour Dashing, Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD Automobiles, said, "We believe that the innovative Voice Command feature, seamlessly integrated into the Jetour Dashing will elevate our customers' driving experience by allowing

them to control almost every feature of the vehicle with voice commands.

"This not only enhances convenience but also adds a layer of safety, allowing them to stay focused on the road ahead. Combined with the Jetour Dashing's array of advanced and smart features, this innovation emphasises the futuristic drive experience that is vehicle is renowned for, enabling our customers to take on even more enjoyable journeys."

The Jetour Dashing hosts a 1.6TGD I turbocharged 4-cylinder engine, capable of generating up to 197hp and 290nm of torque, ensuring enhanced power and stability. Notable features of the

vehicle include the cutting-edge Intelligent Voice Control, smart keyless entry and remote start.

In addition, the Dashing hosts Intelligent Driver Assist Systems including adaptive cruise control to ease long rides and advance hill ascent and gentle descent systems for effortless performance. The interior encompasses sport-designed seats, a spacious 5-seater cabin configuration, 15.6-inch smart touchscreen.

Other features also include a panoramic sunroof, smart safety assistance such as a 360° panoramic visual parking assist, AEBs (advanced emergency braking system), LDWS (lane departure warning system and RCTA (rear side collision alert).

Sharakah's vision: Expanding services, impact, outreach

Embracing a future teeming with possibilities, Oman's premier SME development company Sharakah is unwavering in its commitment to extend its influence, broaden its service horizon, and further empower businesses to impact the community.

For a remarkable span of 25 years, Sharakah has held a pivotal role in the SME development arena, incessantly evolving to blend with shifting market currents and embrace emerging prospects. The company's resolute dedication to nurturing entrepreneurial zeal has consistently positioned it in the frontlines in championing the dreams of budding entrepreneurs.

Sharakah's staunch dedication to excellence is epitomised through its array of impactful initiatives, including renowned programmes like BP Khazzan, HSBC Istidama 'Tahfeez', NFC Intimidat, and the transformative Calculate It Right workshops.

Each of these endeavours resonates with practical wisdom and unwavering support, strategically tailored to guide entrepreneurs across the spectrum of their endeavours.

These programmes have proven pivotal in elevating individuals, propelling their advancement, and leaving an indelible mark on the triumphant journey



Sharakah wholeheartedly embraces the mission to advance In-Country Value... It supports Oman's SMEs through an array of services, including awareness campaigns, equity financing, loans, grants

of Oman's entrepreneur SME sector.

Having firmly established itself, Sharakah's abiding legacy is illuminated through its substantial financial backing, tailored advisory offerings, unwavering project support, employment generation, enlightening workshops, strategic alliances, and triumphant initiatives.

These collective endeavours bear witness to Sharakah's profound imprint on Oman's socio-economic canvas. The company's dedication to nurturing advancement, nurturing growth, and ushering in prosperity remains unwavering. As its stand on the precipice of the future, Sharakah anticipates embarking on its continuing odyssey

of transformation within the SME development territory.

In resonance with Oman's Vision 2040, Sharakah intricately weaves its goals and strategies, placing a robust emphasis on digital transformation and technology-propelled advancement.

Through wholehearted adoption of digitalisation, the company ensure its services seamlessly align with the nation's enduring vision, thus catalysing the evolution of a digitally empowered economy.

Its deep-seated commitment to foster transformative industries makes Sharakah extend its sphere of support to diverse domains including hydroponic farms, fish processing, logistics, tourism, technology, and innovation. Infusing digitalisation and technology into these sectors, it aims to empower entrepreneurs to harness nascent opportunities and steer growth through inventive solutions.

Additionally, with unwavering resolve, Sharakah wholeheartedly embraces the mission to advance In-Country Value (ICV), ardently striving to nurture a vibrant local market characterised by competitive and enduring capabilities. It supports Oman's SMEs through an array of services, including awareness campaigns, equity financing, loans, and grants.

Crowe Oman organises 'full-day tax workshop' in Muscat

Crowe Oman, a leading firm of auditors and business advisors in Oman, recently hosted a one-day tax workshops, at Crowne Plaza Muscat.

The event - first in a series of full-day tax workshops - was well attended by CFOs, members from the Tax Authority, banking professionals, finance managers, accountants, and other finance professionals.

In his opening remarks, Antony Kallukaran, Partner - Tax Advisory Services at Crowe Oman, welcomed the gathering of almost 100 participants. He spoke about international taxat



tion and the objectives of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

He commended the steps taken by the Oman Tax Authority as a member of the OECD framework agreement, to align

with the objectives of the organisation.

The workshop was divided into multiple sessions, the first of

which was VAT law and its recent amendments, presented in length by Taysir Naseeb al Rawahi, Director - Tax Advisory

Services at Crowe Oman.

The VAT session continued with emphasis on sector/ industry wise effects and analysis by

Aastha Rangan, Director - Indirect Taxes at Crowe Oman. The session covered impacts of VAT on oil and gas, financial services, healthcare, education, ancillary services, transportation, real estate etc.

The final sessions covering aspects of Oman Income Tax Law, withholding taxes as well as the newly introduced UAE Corporate Law was presented by Ramya Annadurai - Director - Direct Taxes.

Crowe Oman is set to host the next full day tax workshop at Crowne Plaza Hotel, Salalah on August 31.

Education 2030: MoE begins two-day workshop in cooperation with Unesco

The Ministry of Education (MoE) on Tuesday began a two-day workshop on preparing reports and monitoring indicators of the fourth goal of the sustainable development goals - Education 2030, under the auspices of H E Prof Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambosaidi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, and head of the team.

The workshop - hosted by the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, in cooperation with the Unesco Regional Office in Doha - is taking place at Muscat Hall in the Ministry's General Diwan, said a press release.

The workshop began with a welcome speech by H E Prof Dr Ambosaidi. The Undersecretary thanked the team members for their presence and dedication in carrying out the tasks entrusted to them. He also stressed on the importance of this workshop in providing the members with the skills necessary to draft reports related to the fourth goal and the use of qualitative data to



calculate standard indicators, the proposed structure and areas of content, data sources and the analytical plan for the fourth goal report, monitoring, and analysing it.

Farida Abudan, Educational

Programs Specialist at the Unesco Regional Office for the Arab Gulf States and Yemen indicated that this workshop comes within the framework of the Unesco's cooperation with the Sultanate of Oman with re-

gard to the fourth goal in particular, and the sustainable development goals in general.

This workshop also comes on the sidelines of the Sultanate of Oman preparation for the second voluntary report on the

goals of sustainable development - 2030, which will highlight the efforts of the Sultanate of Oman in comprehensive development in accordance with the principles of Oman Vision 2040.



This workshop comes on the sidelines of Oman's preparation for the second voluntary report on the goals of sustainable development - 2030

The workshop, presented by Dr Subramaniam Venkatraman, an international expert specialised in the reports of the fourth goal and monitoring related indicators related, included several themes,

including: Indicators of the fourth goal of the sustainable development goals, issues related to data, challenges of their availability during the preparation of reports, and their standards and quality that affect the monitoring of the fourth goal of sustainable development goals.

The workshop's themes also included the use of qualitative data, the preparation of case studies, and the use of national surveys to monitor the fourth goal of the sustainable development goals, and the formulation of the monitoring report of the fourth goal of the sustainable development goals: Contents, data sources and analytical plan.



Badr Al Samaa Hospital, Sohar opens advanced cardiac cath lab

Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals and Polyclinics launched advanced GE Optima Cardiac Catheterisation Laboratory (CathLab) at its hospital in Sohar which is all set to deliver advanced therapeutic treatment to heart patients of the Batinah governorate.

Mohammed Abdullah Ali al Busaidi, Governor of Sohar and Acting Governor of North Batinah was the chief guest of the launch ceremony.

The ceremony was attended by managing director of Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals Dr P A Mohammad, executive director Firasath Hassan, CEO Sameer PT, COO Jacob Oommen, consultant - Interventional Cardiology Dr Kamal Pasha, regional head Manoj Kumar and several government officials, doctors, administrative staff and other dignitaries.

The event marks a significant milestone in our commitment to improving patient outcomes and revolutionizing cardiac interventions.

Busaidi expressed happiness on this occasion and said that such technological advancements in private healthcare sector of North Batinah governorate will benefit the people in many ways and will prove life saving. He appreciated management of Badr Al Samaa for continuously upgrading the services and introducing cutting edge technology.

In a joint statement, by managing directors of Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals, Abdul Lath-

ef and Dr P A Mohammed said that this launch is the part of their vision of making the standards of private healthcare in Oman reach global standards. They said that addition of new modalities and clinical services is a continuous process and very soon more services will be added in Badr Al Samaa Hospital, Sohar.

Moideen Bilal and Firasath Hassan, executive directors of Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals said that the need for advanced cathlab was felt to ensure heart patients gets the right and timely treatment which they deserve. They said with this technology Badr Al Samaa has on-boarded well experienced cardiology consultant, Dr Kamal Pasha and cardiology technicians and nurses, which makes it the best department in the region.

Dr Kamal Pasha said that this CathLab at Badr Al Samaa Hospital, Sohar, boasts of the latest cutting-edge infrastructure and state-of-the-art technology, which will offer a comprehensive array of diagnostics and therapeutic procedures in cardiology. Equipped with advanced imaging capabilities, interventional cardiology procedures will now be more precise and efficient, providing accurate diagnosis and targeted treatments for patients suffering from various cardiac conditions.

This GE Optima CathLab has cutting-edge imaging system which enables cardiologists to visualise intricate details of the cardiovascular system.

Visa partners with Lahunna Oman to shape young women leaders through 'Sidrah'

Visa (NYSE: V), the world's leader in digital payment, partnered with Lahunna Oman to shape young women leaders and strengthen financial literacy through a local initiative with Sidrah, a Youth Leadership Program for Omani women.

The Sidrah Leadership Program supports young women through mentorship and leadership training for personal and professional development. It is a holistic learning experience that focuses on nurturing leadership qualities, personal and professional development and encourages young women to envision themselves as future leaders and change makers.

From workshops to outward-bound experiential learning and networking opportunities, the program equips young women with the skills and knowledge



needed to face their future with confidence.

Taking the initiative to a broader audience, another initiative was introduced called Rialy; which included workshops and a gamified online competition for more than 1,000 students across

various educational institutions across the Sultanate of Oman.

Students were exposed to essential financial concepts while enjoying a fun and engaging learning experience which fostered motivation among learners as top performers were also re-

warded with prizes.

"The positive impact of the Sidrah program is evident in the growth and achievements of our participants," said Carl Manlan, Visa's Head of Inclusive Impact & Sustainability for Central and Eastern Europe, Middle East and

Africa region.

He acknowledged that Visa's support has made it possible to reach a wide audience, ensuring that Sidrah has a far-reaching impact. By partnering with Lahunna Oman, Visa continues to focus on upskilling women and nurturing growth in the workforce.

"We are confident that the skills acquired will inspire them to embrace opportunities, break barriers, and make a significant difference in their lives and their communities."

As a testament to the success of the Sidrah Leadership Program, the young women cited several opportunities that resulted from taking part in the program, including internships, job opportunities, scholarships, public speaking opportunities and presenting projects to Oman Vision 2040.



Indian School Muladha celebrates Onam with gaiety

Onam, the traditional festival of Kerala, was celebrated with great enthusiasm at Indian School Muladha on Monday.

The feel of the celebration was created with the colourful pookkalam of different coloured flowers welcoming the students, parents and teachers. It was the gathering of all the participants as well as the teachers in their traditional Kerala attire to wish everyone 'Happy Onam'.

A wide variety of cultural programmes were organised by the

Department of Malayalam to mark this day. A Anil Kumar, president of the school management committee (SMC) along with other committee members graced the occasion.

The programme started with a prayer song. The principal reminded the students that India is a Land of Festivals and the festival of Onam brings happiness to the hearts of all the people. The whole gathering applauded and welcomed the Maveli.

The school choir sang two

melodious songs - a group song and a folk song reviving the spirit of Onam. The tiny tots of the Kindergarten section also stamped their presence in the celebration with a beautiful song.

It was a treat to the eyes as dance students performed the famous Thiruvathira dance and a folk dance.

Other attractions of the day were vallam kali, kalari payattu and pulikali.

The president wished everyone on the occasion.

Bank Muscat provided 85 scholarships, held 414 training courses in H1

Working toward enhancing its leadership role in developing human resources in the banking sector in Oman, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, is celebrating its achievements in learning and training designed for employees during the first half of the year.

The bank's strategy in this regard contributed to improving the skills of employees and refining their talents, thereby supporting Omani cadres to this vital sector.

The programmes and training courses conducted for employees in various specialties and departments enabled them to carry out their responsibilities and gave them the opportunities for growth.

The bank organised, since the beginning of this year until June, 414 courses which witnessed the participation of a large number of employees from different departments

and branches of the bank. The courses offered covered different areas related to banking, soft skills and innovation.

The bank also provided 85 scholarships for employees to complete their higher studies in reputed universities inside and outside the sultanate.

During last year, Bank Muscat organised 1023 training programmes as part of the bank's strategy to develop human resources and maximize their performance.

Bank Muscat has a full-fledged Learning and Development department - Jadara Academy - which is affiliated with the Global Association of Corporate Universities and Academics.

The department focuses on developing skills and capabilities through e-learning modules, scholarships, professional certifications, management and leadership training programmes.

Japan slams China harasssment over Fukushima water release

Tokyo, Japan - Tokyo demanded on Tuesday that China ensure the safety of Japanese citizens as it reported a brick being thrown at its embassy in Beijing in an escalating row over the release of Fukushima water.

Last week, China banned all seafood imports from its neighbour as Japan began releasing treated wastewater from the crippled plant in an operation the UN nuclear watchdog has declared safe.

Since then, Japan has urged its tens of thousands of citizens in China to keep a low profile and has increased security around schools and diplomatic missions.

Japan's foreign minister on Tuesday confirmed media reports that the brick was thrown at its mission and echoed calls from Prime Minister Fumio Kishida for China to calm the situation. "We would like to urge the Chinese government again to take appropriate measures immediately, such as calling on its citizens to act calmly to prevent the situation from escalating, and to take all possible measures to ensure the safety of Japanese residents and our diplomatic missions in China," Yoshimasa Hayashi told reporters in Tokyo. He added that China should 'provide accurate information' about the Fukushima water release 'rather than unnecessarily raising people's concerns by providing information without any scientific basis'.

In Beijing, a spokesperson at the Japanese embassy told AFP that staff were 'extremely wor-



Police and security personnel stand outside the entrance of the Japanese embassy in Beijing on Tuesday (AFP)

China banned all seafood imports from its neighbour as Japan began releasing treated wastewater from the crippled plant in an operation the UN nuclear watchdog has declared safe

ried". "Some individuals have come to our (embassy) entrance," the spokesperson said.

"They took these kinds of actions, then were led away by armed police."

In response, foreign ministry

spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Tuesday that Beijing 'protects the safety' of foreigners in China, dismissing the 'so-called concerns of the Japanese side'. "Ignoring the strong doubts and opposition of the international community, the

Japanese government unilaterally and forcibly started the discharge of contaminated water from the Fukushima nuclear accident, which aroused strong indignation among people of all countries," he added. "This is the root cause of the current situation."

'Don't speak loudly'

Analysts say that China's sharp criticism of the Fukushima release is partly motivated by its geopolitical and economic rivalry with Japan.

On Sunday, Japan's foreign ministry urged its citizens in China

to be 'cautious in your speech and behaviour. Do not speak Japanese unnecessarily or too loudly'. Eggs and stones have also reportedly been thrown at Japanese schools in China.

Japanese residents in China vented their fears on X, formerly known as Twitter.

"I'm a bit scared... We have to worry about our own children being harmed by something we can't control. I don't know what to think," tweeted Miki, a Japanese woman living in Shanghai according to her profile.

AFP

7.1-magnitude quake, aftershocks rattle Bali residents

Denpasar, Indonesia - A strong, deep 7.1-magnitude earthquake and several aftershocks rattled Bali and other Indonesian islands on Tuesday, the USGS reported, sending panicked tourists into the streets but causing no major damage.

The quake struck at a depth of around 515km off the northeastern coast of Bali at around 3:55am local time (1955 GMT Monday), according to the US Geological Survey.

The tremors were felt across Bali, and also in the nearby islands of Lombok and Sumbawa. Bali residents said a second aftershock sent 'longer and stronger' tremors than the first.

"When the first earthquake struck, I woke up my husband. Not long after that, the second earthquake struck, so we immediately took our children outside," said Ardylla Yulicitra, 31.

"The first earthquake made me sway like on a boat, and the second made my house

tremble."

The USGS reported a 5.4-magnitude and a 5.6-magnitude aftershock within minutes of the initial quake.

Hotels evacuated their guests as staffers checked beaches for fear of a possible tsunami.

"We calmed (guests) and provided mineral water and towels for those who were evacuating. Then after 15 to 20 minutes, when things felt safe, the staff invited guests to return to their rooms," said Nimas Ayu, spokesperson of the Artotel hotel in Bali's eastern Sanur area.

The epicentre was 181km northeast of the Gili islands off Lombok, a short boat ride from Bali. Indonesian authorities ruled out a tsunami and said no immediate damage was reported. "Our teams are carrying assessments as they are still collecting reports from the people," the Bali disaster mitigation agency said in a statement.

AFP

Guatemala: Party of Arevalo suspended

Guatemala City, Guatemala - Guatemala's Supreme Electoral Tribunal suspended the political party of president-elect Bernardo Arevalo on Monday while affirming his victory in the August 20 vote.

The move is unlikely to impact Arevalo's swearing in as president on January 14 but unless resolved, it could limit his party's ability to preside over committees in Congress.

A tribunal resolution said Arevalo's Movimiento Semilla, or Seed Movement, party had been provisionally suspended - a move blasted by Arevalo as 'illegal'.

'There is a process of political persecution' weaponising the justice system 'against the Movimiento Semilla and against our candidacy', he told a news conference.

Arevalo, a 64-year-old sociologist and former diplomat, had campaigned against government corruption by the political establishment, a message that resonated with voters seeking fresh faces in power.

Ahead of the vote, he accused authorities of political



Guatemala's president-elect Bernardo Arevalo (AFP)

persecution, after prosecutors tried to suspend Semilla and ordered raids against his party offices.

After the first round of voting on June 25, Guatemalan judge Fredy Orellana, at the request of prosecutor Rafael Curruchiche - both on a US list of 'corrupt actors' - ordered the electoral court to suspend Semilla amid an investigation into alleged anomalies in its registration as a party.

The court did not comply with the judge's order, saying a party could not be suspended in the middle of the election, which went to a runoff on August 20.

AFP

Kim calls for boosting North Korea's navy

Seoul, South Korea - Kim Jong Un has called for boosting North Korea's navy, saying the country's waters brimmed with 'the danger of a nuclear war', state media reported on Tuesday, as Seoul, Washington and Tokyo carried out joint naval drills.

Kim slammed growing trilateral cooperation between the 'gang bosses' of the United States, South Korea and Japan, saying they had recently 'closed with each other', the official Korean Central News Agency reported, in an apparent reference this month's Camp David summit. He accused Washington of being 'more frantic than ever before' by conducting joint naval exercises and deploying nuclear strategic assets in the waters around the Korean peninsula on a permanent basis, the report said.



Kim Jong Un visiting the Naval Command of the Korean People's Army to mark Navy Day (AFP)

"Owing to the reckless confrontational moves of the US and other hostile forces, the waters off the Korean Peninsula have been reduced into the world's biggest war hardware concentration spot, the most unstable waters with the danger of a nuclear war," Kim said, according to

KCNA. "To achieve the successes in rapidly developing the naval force has become a very urgent issue in view of the enemies' recent aggressive attempts."

Kim acknowledged that the North's navy 'had not been armed with up-to-date weapons and combat equipment' but said

that even so, it had managed 'great achievements of more weighty significance' than the country's better-funded army.

He also promised that the navy would be given new weapons as part of North Korea's policy for 'expanding the tactical nuclear weapons operation'.

The navy will become a 'component of the state nuclear deterrence', he added.

Photos carried by the official *Rodong Sinmun* newspaper showed Kim, accompanied by his young daughter, inspecting the navy command and taking photos with scores of naval officers.

"South Korea, the United States and Japan agreed to strengthen military cooperation and decided to conduct joint military exercises on a regular basis at the Camp David summit," Cheong Seong-chang, researcher at the Sejong Institute, told AFP.

"Therefore, North Korea may feel an urgent need to strengthen its naval power," he said, adding that some intelligence reports suggested Russia and the North were considering holding joint naval training.

AFP

US judge sets March 4 for historic trial of former president Trump

Washington, US - A judge on Monday set March 4, 2024 for former president Donald Trump's election subversion conspiracy trial - placing one of the biggest criminal cases in American history at the height of the next White House race.

The date - a full two years before the defense team's proposal - is the eve of 'Super Tuesday', when more than a dozen states will pick between Trump and one of his rivals to be the 2024 Republican presidential nominee.

"Setting a trial date does not depend on the defendant's professional obligations so Mr Trump will have to make a date work," US District Court Judge Tanya Chutkan told the hearing in Washington.

The decision could harm Trump's hopes of recapturing the White House, and he posted an angry reaction on his social

network Truth Social, calling lead prosecutor Jack Smith 'deranged' and complaining of 'election interference'. "Today a biased, Trump Hating Judge gave me only a two month extension, just what our corrupt government wanted, SUPER TUESDAY. I will APPEAL!" he said, although trial dates are usually not appealable.

Molly Gaston, prosecuting, said Trump was accused of 'historic crimes' and described an 'extraordinary public interest' in a quick trial.

The 77-year-old has been slapped with four criminal indictments this year - twice by Smith and once each by state prosecutors in New York and Georgia.

But the case before Chutkan may pose the greatest legal peril to Trump - particularly if it ends up being the first of what is shaping up to be a busy legal calendar for the former president.



A Trump impersonator holds a sign outside the E. Barrett Prettyman US Courthouse in Washington, DC, on Monday (AFP)

Trump pleaded not guilty to the charges in an early August court appearance and was not

required to attend Monday's procedural hearing. Smith had asked to begin on

Setting a trial date does not depend on the defendant's professional obligations so Mr Trump will have to make a date work

TANYA CHUTKAN

January 2 but Trump's lawyer John Lauro described that proposition as 'a request for a show trial, not a speedy trial', calling the idea of having just four months to prepare 'absurd and ridiculous'.

"We will certainly abide by Your Honor's ruling, as we must," he told Chutkan after she announced her decision. But he added: "The trial date will deny

President Trump the opportunity to have effective assistance of counsel."

Attack on US Capitol

Trump is to go on trial in New York later in March on charges of paying election-eve hush money to a porn star, and in Florida in May for allegedly mishandling top secret government documents. Trump and 18 co-defendants also face racketeering charges in Georgia over their efforts to overturn the 2020 election result in the southern state and are due to enter pleas at an arraignment next Wednesday.

The judge presiding over the Georgia case has not yet set a firm date for that trial to begin.

The case before Chutkan accuses Trump of conspiracy to defraud the United States and conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding - the January 6, 2021

joint session of Congress that was attacked by a mob of Trump supporters.

Trump, the sole defendant in this indictment, is also accused of seeking to disenfranchise American voters with his false claims he won the 2020 election.

Whit Ayres, a veteran political consultant, said that if Trump, who enjoys a commanding lead over the Republican 2024 field, is acquitted in his first trial he would be all but certain to win the party's presidential nomination. "I don't know any way you'd stop him," he said in an online interview.

"But if he gets convicted of a serious felony charge, I don't know how people would react to that, because we've never had anything remotely close to a similar situation," the Republican pollster added.

AFP

Sudan army chief visits Egypt as deadly violence grips Darfur

Cairo, Egypt - Sudan's army chief travelled on Tuesday to Egypt on his first trip abroad since the outbreak of war in April, with the latest violence killing dozens of civilians in battle-scarred Darfur.

As Abdel Fattah al-Burhan departed, medics and witnesses said 39 civilians were killed, most of them women and children, in shelling of Nyala, Sudan's second city in South Darfur state where fighting between the army and paramilitary forces has intensified. The general was to hold talks with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, a key ally, on the developments in his war-ravaged country and bilateral ties, said the Sovereign Council, Sudan's highest authority.

Burhan, who traded his trademark military fatigues and green beret for a suit and tie, was greeted by Sisi in Egypt's northern coastal city of El Alamein after flying from Port Sudan, Egyptian media reported.

The war between Burhan and his former deputy turned rival Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), has raged since April 15.

It has spread from Khartoum and the western region of Darfur to Kordofan and Jazira state, killing thousands and forcing millions to flee their homes.

For months, the RSF had besieged Burhan inside military headquarters in Khartoum, but last week the general made his first public foray outside the



Sudanese Army chief General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan (right) boarding an airplane heading for Egypt at Port Sudan's airport on Tuesday (AFP)

We are mobilising everywhere to defeat this rebellion, defeat this treason, by these mercenaries who come from all over the world

ABDEL FATTAH AL-BURHAN

compound to review troops in parts of the country.

On Monday he was in Port Sudan where he made a fiery address to troops, vowing to fight the RSF who he branded mercenaries to 'end the rebellion'.

"We are mobilising everywhere to defeat this rebellion, defeat this treason, by these

mercenaries who come from all over the world," Burhan told cheering soldiers.

"There is no time for discussion now. We are concentrating all our efforts on the war, to put an end to the rebellion," he said.

His comments came a day after Daglo released a statement detailing a 10-point 'vision' to

end the war and build 'a new state'.

The plan calls for 'civilian rule based on democratic norms' and 'a single, professional, national military institution' - the very sticking point which turned the former allies into rivals.

New Darfur violence

Fighting in Nyala on Tuesday killed at least 39 civilians when shelling hit their homes, witnesses and a medical source said.

"The entire members of five families were killed in a single day," said Gouja Ahmed, a

human rights activist originally from Nyala.

Images posted online showed dozens of bodies on the ground covered in shrouds as well as men placing the dead in a large grave.

Darfur has long been the site of deadly clashes since a war that erupted in 2003 and saw the feared Janjaweed - precursors of the RSF - unleashed on ethnic minority rebels.

Since August 11 more than 50,000 people have fled Nyala due to the violence, the United Nations says.

AFP

Air pollution more dangerous to public health, says benchmark study

Washington, US - Air pollution is more dangerous to the health of the average person on planet Earth than smoking or alcohol, with the threat worsening in its global epicenter South Asia even as China fast improves, a study showed on Tuesday.

Yet the level of funding set aside to confront the challenge is a fraction of the amount earmarked for fighting infectious diseases, said the research from the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago (EPIC).

Its annual Air Quality Life Index (AQLI) report showed that fine particulate air pollution - which comes from vehicle and industrial emissions, wildfires and more - remains the 'greatest external threat to public health'.

If the world were to permanently reduce these pollutants to meet the World Health Organization's (WHO) guideline limit, the average person would add 2.3 years onto his or her life expectancy, according to the data, which has a 2021 cutoff.

Fine particulate matter is linked to lung disease, heart disease, strokes and cancer.

Tobacco use, by comparison, reduces global life expectancy by 2.2 years while child and maternal malnutrition is responsible for a reduction of 1.6 years.

Asia and Africa bear the greatest burden yet have some of the weakest infrastructure to deliver citizens timely, accurate data. They also receive tiny slices of an already small global philanthropic pie.

For example, the entire continent of Africa receives less than US\$300,000 to tackle air pollution.

"There is a profound dis-

Air pollution is more dangerous to the health of the average person on Earth than smoking or alcohol

connect with where air pollution is the worst and where we, collectively and globally, are deploying resources to fix the problem," Christa Hasenkopf, director of air quality programs at EPIC, told AFP.

While there is an international financing partnership called the Global Fund that disburses US\$4bn annually on HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, there is no equivalent for air pollution.

AFP

Tropical Storm Idalia strengthens off Cuba, barrels toward Florida

Miami, US - Tropical Storm Idalia strengthened as it passed by the western tip of Cuba on Monday, taking aim at the Gulf coast of Florida as forecasters predicted it could become a hurricane 'at any time'.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis warned the storm - likely to make landfall there as a major hurricane by Wednesday - could have major impacts along the Gulf of Mexico, telling a news conference that evacuations would take place and residents should prepare.

"The combination of a dangerous storm surge and the tide will cause normally dry areas near the coast to be flooded by rising waters moving inland from the shoreline," the National Hurricane Center (NHC) said in an 11pm (0300 GMT) update.

"There is a danger of life-threatening storm surge inundation along portions of the Florida Gulf Coast," it said in a statement on social media.

US President Joe Biden spoke with DeSantis earlier on Monday and approved an emergency



People walk in a flooded area of Batabano, Mayabeque Province, Cuba, on Monday (AFP)

declaration for the state, promising it would have his full support, a White House spokesman said.

Various NHC warnings have been put in place in Florida, Georgia and South Carolina as heated Gulf of Mexico waters turbocharge the storm.

The NHC also expected hurricane and tropical storm condi-

tions in parts of western Cuba through Tuesday morning. It predicted the highest storm surges north of Tampa Bay, a metropolitan region with about 3.2mn residents, saying that 'inundation of between eight to 12 feet above ground level is expected'.

Flash and urban flooding may hit other parts of Florida, includ-

ing the state's panhandle region, and southern Georgia into Wednesday, the NHC said. Flooding could reach parts of South Carolina Wednesday into Thursday. The US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is already preparing for the storm's impact.

AFP

Tears as Malaysia-born panda cubs head to China

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - Tearful Malaysians said goodbye to two panda cubs on Tuesday as authorities prepared to send them to China after years of delays because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Yi Yi and Sheng Yi - born in 2018 and 2021 respectively - were to be transported as part of an agreement between the two countries to send cubs born in captivity to China when they reach two years of age.

The female pandas are the offspring of Xing Xing and Liang Liang, animals China loaned to Malaysia in 2014 for a decade to celebrate 40 years of diplomatic relations. They will remain in the country.

Watching videos of the animals at Malaysia's National Zoo, panda lovers like 24-year-old photographer Cindy Lai gathered in hopes of catching a glimpse of the pair before their departure later in the day.

"It is an emotional send-off. I feel very sad since I will not be able to see the two lovely cubs," she said.



This file photo shows a zoo attendant carrying giant panda cub Sheng Yi at the National Zoo in Kuala Lumpur on May 25, 2022 (AFP)

"I will definitely cry when they are loaded into the truck to be transported to the airport."

Housewife Tracey Lee, 37, choked back tears as she recalled visiting the pandas every week to make TikTok videos.

"I have been crying for many days at home. I will not be able to see them again," a red-eyed Lee

told AFP.

"This morning before coming to the zoo, I cried when I saw an old video of Yi Yi and Sheng Yi."

Yi Yi and Sheng Yi will be taken on a cargo flight to the Chinese city of Chengdu at 10:30pm local time, an official familiar with the travel plan told AFP.

AFP

Kyiv hits out after Pope hails legacy of 'great Russia'

Vatican City, Holy See - The Vatican sought on Tuesday to defuse a row with Ukraine after Kyiv accused Pope Francis of spreading 'imperial propaganda' in a video message to young Catholic Russians.

The pope told the group gathered in a Catholic church in St Petersburg that 'you are children of great Russia, of great saints, of kings, of Peter the Great, of Catherine II, of a Russian people of great culture and great humanity', according to a video posted online.



Pope Francis greets the crowd from the window of the apostolic palace during the weekly Angelus prayer on Sunday in The Vatican (AFP)

"Never forget this great legacy. You are heirs of the great Mother Russia, go forward with that." Ukrainian foreign ministry spokesman Oleg Nikolenko said the pope's language was 'very unfortunate'. "It is with this kind of imperialist propaganda, 'spiritual staples' and the 'need' to save 'great Mother Russia', that the Kremlin justifies the murder of thousands of Ukrainians and the destruction of hundreds of Ukrainian cities and villages," he said late on Monday.

"It is very unfortunate that

Russian great-power ideas, which are, in fact, the cause of Russia's chronic aggressiveness, are consciously or unconsciously coming from the mouth of the pope, whose mission, in our understanding, is precisely to open the eyes of Russian youth to the destructive course of the current Russian leadership."

Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni issued a statement on Tuesday saying the pontiff's 'off the cuff' remarks were intended to 'encourage young people to preserve and promote what is

positive in Russia's great cultural and spiritual heritage'. The comments were 'certainly not (intended) to glorify imperial logic and government personalities'.

Pope Francis regularly calls for peace in Ukraine, though in the early months after Russia's February 2022 invasion he drew criticism for not naming Moscow as the aggressor.

He appointed a top cardinal earlier this year to try to broker peace, who has since visited both Moscow and Kyiv.

The Vatican's official media

portal reported on the pope's video message to mark Russian Youth Day on August 25, but did not include a video or the specific quotes Kyiv objected to.

Instead, it reported the pope calling on the Russian youths to be 'artisans of peace' and to 'sow seeds of reconciliation'.

The Kremlin, for its part, welcomed the pope's remarks.

"The pontiff knows Russian history. That's very good," government spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

AFP

India-administered Kashmir to host Miss World beauty contest

New Delhi, India - The Miss World beauty contest will be held in the disputed territory of Indian-administered Kashmir as part of a month-long series of events across India, organisers have said.

Control of the Muslim-majority territory is split between India and Pakistan, both of whom claim it in full but administer separate portions, divided by the Line of Control.

For decades, an insurgency seeking independence or a merger with Pakistan - and military operations to crush that movement - have seen tens of thousands of civilians, soldiers and rebels killed.

But India is now promoting tourism in the region - home to spectacular mountain scenery - and more than a million Indian citizens visited last year.

Miss World Organization chair Julia Morley said that India will host a month-long series of events for the annual international beauty pageant from November to December, with part of the schedule to be held in Kashmir.

"This is a blessed place for tourism," Morley told reporters while on a visit to Srinagar on Monday, the region's main city.

Competitors will take part in 'talent showcases, sports challenges, and charitable ini-



Miss World 2022 Karolina Bielawska and Miss India World 2022 Sini Shetty ride a boat in the Dal lake in Srinagar

tiatives' to shortlist participants before the grand finale in December, the organisation said.

Miss World organisers say the contest 'celebrates the beauty, intellect, and humanitarian efforts of women'.

The pageant has in the past sparked protests from critics who say it perpetuates the objectification of women and contributes to a beauty industry that pressures women to appear a certain way.

In May, India hosted a G20 tourism meeting in Srinagar under tight security in a bid to show that what officials call 'normalcy and peace' were returning after a massive crack-

down following New Delhi's revocation of the region's limited autonomy in 2019.

Dissent has been criminalised, media freedoms curbed and public protests limited in what critics say is a drastic curtailment of civil liberties by Indian authorities.

Miss World 2022 Karolina Bielawska said she was stunned by Kashmir's scenery.

"I cannot wait to welcome 140 nations, and all my friends and family, to bring them here to India and to show them places like Kashmir, like Delhi, Mumbai... you have so many beautiful places", the Polish model said on Monday.

AFP

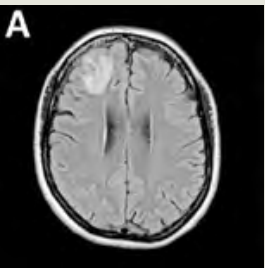


Photo received from ANU shows a brain scan (AFP)

Australian doctors find live parasitic worm in woman's brain

Sydney, Australia - A parasitic roundworm typically found in snakes has been pulled 'alive and wriggling' from a woman's brain in a stomach-churning medical first, Australian doctors said on Tuesday.

Baffled doctors performed an MRI scan on the 64-year-old Australian woman after she began suffering memory lapses, noticing an 'atypical lesion' at the front of her brain.

It was an eight-centimetre (three-inch) roundworm, called *Ophidascaris robertsi*, which researchers said was a common parasite in kangaroos and carpet pythons - but not humans.

"This is the first-ever human case of *Ophidascaris* to be described in the world," said infectious disease expert Sanjaya Senanayake. "To our knowledge, this is also the first case to involve the brain of any mammalian species, human or otherwise."

AFP

Pakistan court suspends ex-PM Khan's graft sentence: Lawyer

Islamabad, Pakistan - Imran Khan's prison sentence for a graft conviction was suspended on Tuesday, his lawyer said, but it was unclear if the former Pakistan prime minister would be immediately released.

A spokesman for Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party said the Islamabad High Court had overturned a lower court's decision this month to imprison him for three years, a judgement which barred him from contesting upcoming elections.

Khan's party and lawyers said he was granted bail, but they feared the 70-year-old would be rearrested over one of more than 200 cases levelled against him since he was ousted by parliamentary vote last year.

"We have filed a separate application requesting the court pass an order barring the authorities from arresting him in any other case," Gohar Khan, one of the lawyers, told AFP. "If authorities arrest him in any other case, it will be against his legal rights."

Khan has been in prison for three weeks since a judge found him guilty of failing to properly declare gifts he received.

Anticipating his release, Khan's legal team said they would head for Attock Jail, a century-old prison around 60km (40 miles) west of the capital, Islamabad. However, he has previously been denied bail in at least nine other cases, including three in anti-terrorism courts and six in



Lawyers and supporters of Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan shout slogans as they celebrate outside the Islamabad High Court in Islamabad on Tuesday (AFP)

Khan's party and lawyers said he was granted bail, but they feared he would be rearrested over one of more than 200 cases

the district courts of Islamabad.

Political commentator Omar Quraishi told AFP 'it remains to be seen if the former prime minister will be released and if so, when'.

Khan behind bars

Pro-PTI lawyers chanted 'Release Imran Khan!' and 'Khan your devotees are countless' outside court as news of the suspension broke. The charismatic 70-year-old is Pakistan's most popular politician and claims his ousting and subsequent legal cases have been orchestrated by the powerful military establishment to deny him a second term.

Khan was also briefly jailed on graft charges in May, sparking days of civil unrest, but since

then, his PTI party has been targeted by a major crackdown which has vastly diminished his street power and seen most of his senior leadership jump ship or be locked away.

Islamabad said it was targeted by 'anti-state' violence during backlash over that arrest.

But rights groups say authorities used overly broad anti-terror laws to suppress PTI, and the domestic press reported pressure to censor or smear Khan on the airwaves. While Khan was imprisoned this month, Pakistan's parliament was dissolved at the request of his successor Shehbaz Sharif to pave the way for a caretaker government which will usher in elections.

AFP

Berlin closes probe against Lindemann

Berlin, Germany - Berlin prosecutors said on Tuesday they had closed an investigation into Till Lindemann, the frontman of German metal band Rammstein, following claims of women being drugged and sexually assaulted at concerts.

An evaluation of all available leads 'did not provide any evidence' the claims were true, the prosecutors said in a statement, and no charges will be filed.

The investigation was opened in June after several women claimed on social media that they had been drugged and recruited to engage in sexual activity with Lindemann, 60, at Rammstein after-show parties.

Lindemann had denied the allegations, with his lawyers calling them 'without exception untrue'.

Rammstein, an industrial metal band founded in 1994, is known for grinding guitar riffs, taboo-breaking antics and theatrical stage shows heavy on pyrotechnics.

Their songs have dealt with



This file photo shows German singer of group Rammstein, Till Lindemann arriving for the 2017 Echo Music Awards in Berlin, on April 6, 2017 (AFP)

subjects ranging from cannibalism to necrophilia, and the band name itself evokes the 1988 Rammstein air show disaster that killed 70 people and injured more than 1,000.

Berlin-based law firm Schertz Bergmann welcomed the closure, saying it 'proves that there was no basis for the very serious allegations against our client on social media and in the press'.

Complaints against Lindemann had not been filed by the women but by third parties, the firm said.

Legal action would be taken against 'incorrect representations' of Lindemann in the press and on social media, it added.

The scandal erupted after a young Irish woman posted on social media that she had been drugged and propositioned by Lindemann at a backstage party in Vilnius, Lithuania.

West has failed to isolate Iran, says president Raisi

Tehran, Iran - Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi said on Tuesday that the West had failed to isolate his country, while also holding out the prospect of resuming talks on reviving a nuclear deal.

"The enemy tried to follow two strategies: one was to isolate Iran from the world and the other was to discourage the Iranian nation," Raisi said.

"It failed with both strategies. It didn't succeed in isolating Iran," he told a news conference in Tehran.

Raisi was referring to sanctions imposed on Iran since the United States torpedoed the nuclear deal in 2018, as well as protests that erupted in September 2022 over a young woman's death in custody.

The ultraconservative president said Iran was continuing to seek 'the lifting of sanctions' through negotiations to revive the 2015 nuclear accord.

But he added 'we are not tying



Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi greets media representatives after a press conference in Tehran on Tuesday (AFP)

the country's economy to the wishes' of Western countries.

Tensions between Tehran and Washington eased this month with the announcement of an agreement for Iran to release five American prisoners in exchange for the return of US\$6bn in Iranian funds frozen in South Korea.

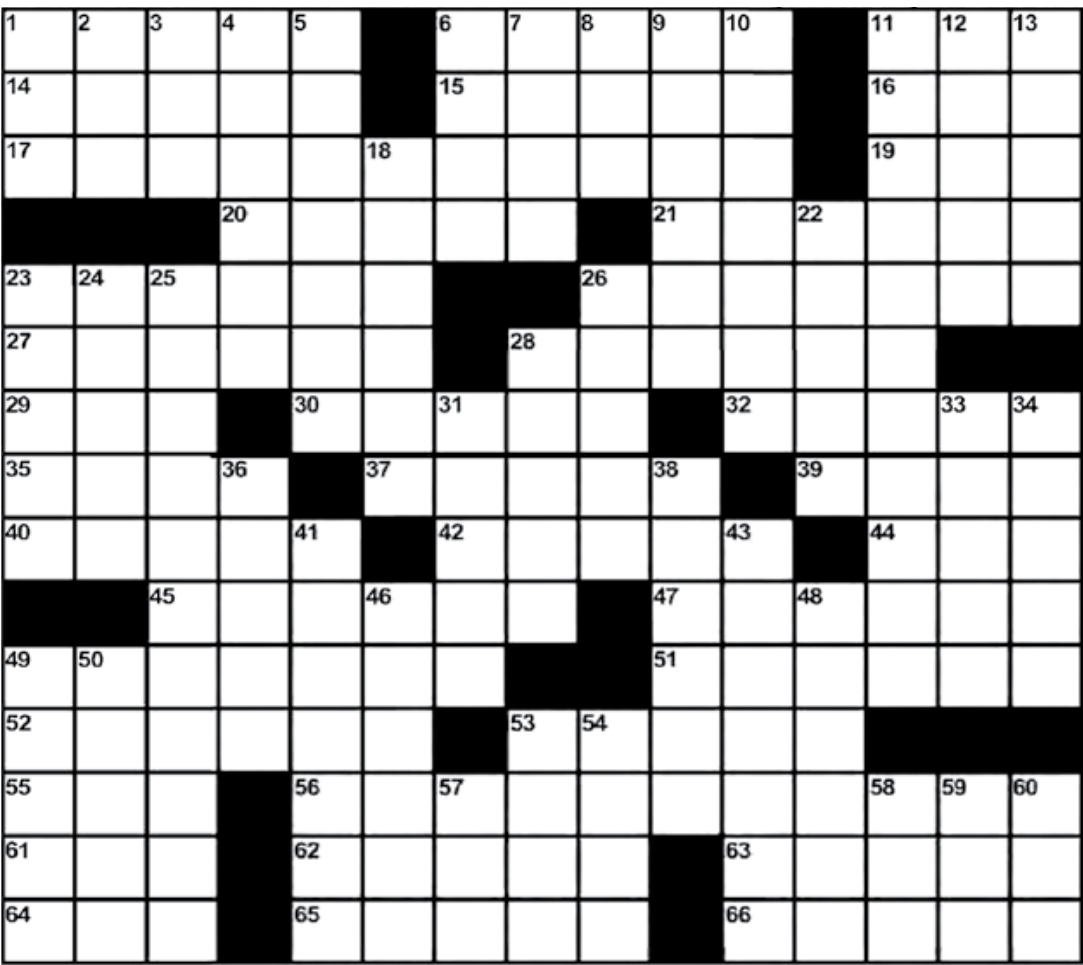
But the delicate agreement does not include the possibility of a return to the nuclear deal in the run-up to the 2024 US presidential election.

Raisi highlighted diplomatic successes, including rapprochement with Arab countries like Saudi Arabia along with its membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and invitation to join the BRICS grouping.

Such alliances with emerging countries 'represent a good opportunity to counter American unilateralism', he said.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Butcher's discards
6) Vegetables in gumbo soup
11) Four winter wks.
14) Flared dress style
15) Type of bench in front of keys
16) No way to be conceived?
17) Basic
19) Regret bitterly
20)_ out a living (barely making do)
21) They walk on two feet
23) Cause of many a split
26) Moves back, as a hair-line
27) Back somersault dive
28) Dehumidifying gel
29) Illumination unit
30) Lopsided wins
32) Some burial sites
35) Small things in wallets
37) Abnormal breath sounds
39) "Nobody doesn't like,_ Lee"
40) Angler's boot
42) Bob Marley was one

- 44) Tom, Dick or Harry, e.g.
45) Word with "free" or "travel"
4 7) Painter of zaftig women
Peter Paul
49) Indian appetizers
51) Familiar with
52) Relative of "Skoal!"
53) They bring tears to one's eyes
55) Large flightless bird
56) Certain fragrant pink flowers
61) Day's end, in poems
62) Related on the mother's side
63) Word with spitting
64) EPA-banned bug killer
65) Grown dogie
66) Tie for a dandy
- DOWN**
- 1) Clumsy goof
2) Cold and_ season
3) Shark sighting, often
4) From the mountains of Peru
5) Less likely to stay inflated
6) Accepting customers
7) Juan Carlos, for one

- 8) "You dirty_!" (famous film line)
9) Cornell's_ Taylor Hall
10) Formally request
11) Like some cheap sale goods
12) Outwit, as a posse
13) What God can do
18) Medicine chest door, often
22) River to the Rio Grande
23) Beaming
24) Flora's partner
25) It cannot be negotiated
26) Ascends
28) Spread apart, as fingers
31) Chagall and Anthony
33) Main impact
34) Ultimate authority
36) Bell-shaped flowers
38) Went on the offensive?
41) Has a dwelling
43) Vienna's country
46) Floating on water
48) Brooms of twigs
49) Risk a ticket
50) Holding one's piece?
53) Item on a social schedule
54) Friendly intro?

- 57) "Diamond Lil" star West
58) Yolk_ (egg part)
59) Bighead's problem
60) Tennis match division

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You could start feeling more detached or distant from your favorite people right about now, but there is nothing to worry about. Don't let your emotions convince you of things that aren't true. These people haven't changed, you haven't changed, but the situation has changed. And it will change again. So whatever weirdness is going on right now won't go on forever. Just be patient and know that these people care about you. You still have a place in their lives.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

If you look beneath the surface of pleasant small talk today, you're sure to find some clues that point to the real intentions that lie behind what people are saying. There's a big disconnect between what they're saying and what they're feeling, but the mystery as to why they're acting like this isn't yours to solve. Just make sure that you're the one person who's truly saying what they mean. It will help you persevere and succeed in your latest venture.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You will be able to make just about anything entertaining today, given the huge wave of creative energy you're riding on right now. You know how to keep your brain exercised and have fun in very subtle ways. You don't have to be laughing hysterically to enjoy what you're doing. For you, just taking a walk outside and enjoying the scenery will be enough. Small gestures, quiet conversations, and unconscious actions will be a hallmark of today.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Don't let someone else establish the framework of a particularly important conversation today. If the topic involves deep emotions, make sure that you say what you need to say without getting too defensive. Watch for nonverbal clues that someone might not be telling the whole story and then ask them about it. Communication is always important, but right now you have to make sure that it's as healthy as it is effective.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You're starting to think twice about a compromise you recently made with a friend. What you thought was going to happen isn't happening, and now you're wondering if you made a mistake. Well, you're stuck with the consequences of your actions, so just make the best of them and try not to have any regrets. You can be up front about any concerns you have with the other person, but you can't expect them to make a change to suit your needs. It's just not realistic right now.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

It's true that you need friends in order to lead a fulfilling life, but it's not a good idea to get too hung up about how many friends you have. It's all about quality, not quantity. It's nonsense to think that just because you aren't always part of a big gang of people that you don't have the level of support you need. All you really need is someone who is willing to listen without judgment. That person could be a teacher, coworker, or even stranger.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

It's important to stay on your toes today, but staying sharp isn't just about being alert -- it's about being healthy. So make sure you start this day with a good breakfast. None of this dessert-type stuff either. You need solid brain-building food to keep you focused and thinking positively. Too much sugar too early in your day just about guarantees that you're going to run out of steam by the afternoon. So make vegetables and grains your new best friends for the next few days.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

People notice when anyone stands up for their principles, and they'll notice when you stand up for yours today. Sure, by sticking to your guns you might make things inconvenient for one or two folks, but so what? You can't change your way of doing things just to make someone else happy. If people consider it selfish to not go along with the crowd, that's their problem. Be prepared to go it alone for the next few days if you must. It will be worth it.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Your deep feelings for someone are getting even deeper today, when they do something that reminds you just what a special person they are. Take time to express to them how they make you feel, and don't be afraid to get flowery with your words. Just because you may have told them how much you care about them in the past doesn't mean you shouldn't remind them about it again and again! It feels good to be admired, and don't you want to make them feel good?



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Be careful who you get involved with, especially in terms of any business dealings. Your urge to get what you want is so strong that it could be blinding you to some major red flags that are popping up left and right. There's been too much focus on instant gratification in your life lately, and you need to start changing that. When you get what you want when you want it, the value is lessened. But when you work and save for something over time, it's all the more valuable when you finally attain it.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

People are very different on the inside than what their outside appearance may lead you to believe. Of course, this isn't news to you, but it's something to keep at the front of your mind today. When you meet someone new, you need to go beyond not judging this book by its cover. You need to go ahead and read a few pages before you come to any conclusions about who they are and what they could bring to your life. Give them respect and some of your time.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You need to confront someone about a difficult issue, but you've been putting it off. It's totally understandable. After all, complicated conversations aren't fun. But the longer you put things off, the worse they'll get. Today, stop being wishy-washy about how you feel. It will be exhilarating and liberating to step up and just get something off your chest. It's only once you do that you'll realize just how heavily it was weighing on you.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. The Trendalyzer software, which enabled display of information in animated bubble graphs, was originally developed by a team working where?

- A. Bjarne Stroustrup
B. Google
C. Linus Torvalds
D. Gapminder Foundation

02. The warm Agulhas Current runs along what African coastline?

- A. Mediterranean Sea
B. The southwest Indian Ocean
C. Red Sea
D. Southeast Atlantic Ocean

03. A "bench press" is used in what activity?

- A. Wrestling
B. Wheel-making
C. Furniture making
D. Body building

Answers: 1. D 2. B 3. D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

A	U	K	T
A	C	C	M
O	R	B	A
E	M	A	R

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

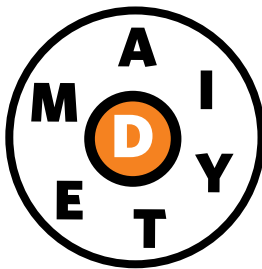
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

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



Coco Gauff of the United States celebrates a point against Laura Siegemund of Germany (AFP)

Gauff slams officials after stormy win in US Open first round

New York, United States - American teenager Coco Gauff slammed US Open officiating after battling to a stormy first round victory over German veteran Laura Siegemund on Monday.

The 19-year-old American sixth seed - tipped by many as one of the favourites for the this year's title - was forced to dig deep before winning 3-6, 6-2, 6-4 in 2hr 50min on the Arthur Ashe Stadium.

But an ill-tempered clash was marked by angry confrontations by both players with chair umpire Marijana Veljovic.

Gauff remonstrated with Veljovic at length during the third set, accusing the Serbian official of failing to properly enforce time violation rules against Siegemund.

Siegemund - who was warned

twice for slow play, eventually costing her a game in the final set - also confronted Veljovic during a tetchy encounter.

Gauff later said she had snapped in frustration at Veljovic's perceived failure to crack down on Siegemund's pace of play.

"I felt like the rules were being bent," Gauff said. "That's why a lot of players get mad when these time violations are called because one ref is letting them go over, the other is more strict on the time."

"I think tennis needs to be more strict on the rules for everybody regardless of every situation."

Gauff's coach Brad Gilbert could be heard repeatedly telling the teenager to raise the time-keeping issue with the umpire throughout the match.

SMOOTH TAKEOFF

Djokovic cruises on US Open return, retains world number one spot

New York, United States - Novak Djokovic thrashed Frenchman Alexandre Muller 6-0, 6-2, 6-3 on his long-awaited US Open return on Monday, guaranteeing he will take back the world number one ranking from Carlos Alcaraz.

The 36-year-old Serbian star, who missed last year's tournament over his refusal to be vaccinated against Covid-19, is chasing a 24th Grand Slam title and plays Spain's Bernabe Zapata Miralles in round two.

Djokovic, a three-time US Open champion, reeled off the opening eight games of the match before Muller belatedly got on the board, earning sympathetic applause from a crowd including former US President Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle. The second seed showed little mercy to his over-matched rival, breaking serve eight times and clinching victory in an hour and 35 minutes.

"I started tremendously well out of the blocks," said Djokovic, whose match didn't begin until after 11pm following a ceremony honouring Billie Jean King and the 50th anniversary of equal prize money for men and women at the US Open. "I knew it was going to be a late night for me, late start of the match. Nevertheless, I mean, I was excited to go out on the court," said Djokovic.



Novak Djokovic of Serbia returns a shot against Alexandre Muller of France during their first-round match at the US Open on Monday (AFP)

I started tremendously well out of the blocks. I knew it was going to be a late night for me, late start of the match. Nevertheless, I mean, I was excited to go out on the court

DNOVAK DJOKOVIC

"I didn't care if I started after midnight because I was looking forward to this moment for few years, to be out on the biggest stadium in our sport, the loudest stadium in our sport, playing night session."

"Everyone knows in tennis that night sessions at Arthur

Ashe definitely are the most exciting, fun, loud, energetic sessions you can have out there on the tennis world," he added.

Djokovic's previous match in New York was the 2021 final he lost to Daniil Medvedev, a defeat which stopped him from completing a calendar Grand Slam.

Fourth seed Rune crashes out after losing to Carballes Baena

New York, United States - Danish fourth seed Holger Rune crashed out of the US Open on Monday, losing in four sets to Spanish journeyman Roberto Carballes Baena.

Rune, beaten in the quarter-finals of Wimbledon by Carlos Alcaraz, succumbed 6-3, 4-6, 6-3, 6-2 in 2hr 42min.

Carballes Baena, a clay-court specialist ranked 63rd in the world who has never been further than the third round at a Grand Slam tournament, will face either Russia's Aslan Karatsev or the Czech Republic's Jiri Lehecka in the second round.

The defeat was the latest in a series of disappointing early exits for Rune, the 20-year-old regarded as one of the brightest young talents in men's tennis.

Since his quarter-final loss to Alcaraz at Wimbledon, Rune has suffered first round losses at the Canadian Open, the Cincinnati



Holger Rune of Denmark returns a shot against Roberto Carballes Baena of Spain (AFP)

Open and now the US Open.

The young Dane, who reached the third round of the US Open last year, had lashed out at organisers before this tournament, complaining about the decision to place his opening game on Court No.5 of the USTA's Billie Jean King National Tennis

Center. However Rune refused to blame the choice of court for his defeat on Monday.

"It's not difficult, but it's different," Rune said. "You're more close to all the people. It's a nice atmosphere. It's no problem with the court."

AFP

Starstruck Rybakina on the mend

New York, United States - Elena Rybakina said she was doing "much better" following her first-round win at the US Open on Monday after preparations for the tournament were disrupted by injury and late-night scheduling.

Last year's Wimbledon champion was among several players to retire from the tune-up event in Cincinnati, days after her Montreal quarter-final finished around 3am local time.

"I wasn't feeling the greatest physically after Montreal and Cincinnati, but we had time to recover and then practise again so now I'm feeling well," said Rybakina. The Kazakh fourth seed powered into the second round in New York with a 6-2, 6-1 win over Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk, partly inspired by the experience of seeing Lionel Messi in the flesh.

Rybakina watched Messi make his Major League Soccer debut on Saturday, the Argentine scoring in a 2-0 win for Inter Miami.

Wozniacki wins on Grand Slam comeback at US Open

New York, United States - Caroline Wozniacki won her opening match in her first Grand Slam appearance in over three years on Monday, beating Russian qualifier Tatiana Prozorova 6-3, 6-2 at the US Open.

The former world number one from Denmark returned to tennis earlier this month, having retired after the 2020 Australian Open to start a family, and giving birth to two children.

Wozniacki broke three times in the first set against her 227th-ranked opponent who was making her Grand Slam main draw debut and playing just her third tour-level event.

Prozorova required treatment for a leg injury between sets before Wozniacki, the US Open runner-up in 2009 and 2014, wrapped up victory and set up a meeting with another former Grand Slam champion, Petra Kvitova.



Denmark's Caroline Wozniacki celebrates her victory against Russia's Tatiana Prozorova (AFP)

"It feels amazing to be back," said the 33-year-old Wozniacki, who was handed a wild card entry for the tournament.

"Obviously I was very nervous to be out here having not been out here since 2019."

"It's amazing to get another chance. To get a win under my belt, it feels so special," she added. "I love playing out here. It's just so electric, there's such a buzz coming out here in New York to play."

Thiem savours 'pretty special' US Open win after injury nightmare

New York, United States - Former champion Dominic Thiem secured his first Grand Slam win in almost three years on Monday after beating 25th seed Alexander Bublik in the first round of the US Open.

The Austrian defeated Bublik 6-3, 6-2, 6-4 to snap a seven-match losing streak at majors, which included a run of six consecutive first round exits following his run to the last 16 of the 2021 Australian Open.

"It was a very good match basically from the first moment on. It's a pretty special victory, because it's the first since two-and-a-half years at Grand Slams," said Thiem.

The 29-year-old's career has nose-dived since his crowning moment in 2020, when Thiem came from two sets behind to beat Alexander Zverev in that year's pandemic-affected US Open final held behind closed doors.

Once the world number three, Thiem's ranking plummeted to 352 in June 2022 after a wrist injury sidelined him for nine months and prevented him from defending his US Open title.

He is now back inside the top 100, earlier this month reaching the final in Kitzbuehel - his first championship match since the season-ending ATP Finals in



Dominic Thiem of Austria returns a shot against Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan (AFP)

Especially personally I was learning a lot, so I don't want to miss anything in this road, but obviously tennis-wise or sports-wise was not easy all the time.

DOMINIC THIEM

2020.

"It was a very good road for me," Thiem said of his journey over the past three years.

"Especially personally I was learning a lot, so I don't want to miss anything in this road, but obviously tennis-wise or sports-wise was not easy all the time."

"So that's why I'm even happier that I got the win today."

First win on Grand Slam since a while. I had some good previous weeks as well with the first finals after the injury.

"So it's feeling good, and I'm really looking forward to the next one."

The world number 81 was helped by an erratic Bublik, who committed 17 double fault and 44 unforced errors

Thiem, who turns 30 on Sunday, saw his section of the draw open up further Monday as fourth seed Holger Rune crashed out to journeyman Spaniard Roberto Carballes Baena.

Next up for Thiem is US youngster Ben Shelton - one of 19 Americans who started in the men's field. "With every success, with every match, especially with bigger successes or better weeks like I had in Austria when I played my first finals or also here, back on winning ways in Grand Slams, it helps a lot on the mental side and to get the full trust again in the wrist," said Thiem.



Atletico Madrid’s Antoine Griezmann celebrates with Memphis Depay after scoring against Rayo Vallecano on Monday (AFP)

EMPHATIC SHOW

Griezmann, Depay on target as Atletico crush Rayo in seven-goal rout

Barcelona, Spain - Atletico Madrid dismantled city rivals Rayo Vallecano 7-0 in Monday night with a ruthless display and their largest ever away win in La Liga.

Antoine Griezmann opened the scoring early on, before his strike partner Memphis Depay

netted the second from close range from Saul Niguez’s cross. Atletico lost the Dutch forward to injury in the first half, but Nahuel Molina slid home the third to kill the game before half-time.

Substitute Alvaro Morata netted in the 73rd minute and then

again after Angel Correa grabbed the fifth, with Marcos Llorente finishing the rout late on.

“We had a great game from the start, with a lot of intensity,” Antoine Griezmann told Movistar. “They’re three important points and I’m very happy with the team’s work today.”

Atletico’s emphatic victory took them second in the table, two points behind leaders Real Madrid.

Rayo had started the season well, with two wins in their first two matches, but were brought crashing back down to earth by Diego Simeone’s side.

“They were better in every way,” said Rayo midfielder Oscar Valentin.

“We are not this bad - we just have to continue and forget about what happened today.”

Earlier Getafe snatched a 1-0 home win over Alaves, their first triumph of the season.



Lautaro Martinez

Inter Milan ease past Cagliari to continue winning start

Paris, France - Inter Milan stayed perfect in Serie A as they won 2-0 at Cagliari in the last match of the second round on Monday.

Inter dominated the first 30 minutes and scored the goals they needed for the win.

Right wing back Denzel Dumfries ran onto a cunning through ball by Marcus Thuram after 21 minutes and placed a low cross-shot past goalie Boris Radunovic.

After 30 minutes, Lautaro Martinez, who had earlier hit a post, leapt to control a pass from Federico Dimarco with his toe, sidestepped two defenders and left Radunovic flat-footed with a low shot inside near the post.

With three goals in two matches, the Argentina striker

joined Olivier Giroud of AC Milan and Victor Osimhen of Napoli at the top of the scorers’ charts.

In the second half, Inter successfully slowed the game down until the final minutes when Claudio Ranieri’s Cagliari took more risks.

Yann Sommer made a spectacular save from Cagliari substitute Paulo Azzi and Hakan Calhanoglu hit the Cagliari post on a counter-attack.

It was a second straight 2-0 victory for Inter and leaves them third in the standings. AC Milan lead on goal difference. Champions Napoli are second, ahead of Inter on goals scored. Verona lie fourth also on six points.

AFP



Romelu Lukaku

Chelsea striker Lukaku set for Roma loan: Italian press

Rome, Italy - Chelsea have agreed to loan of Belgian international striker Romelu Lukaku to Serie A side Roma, Gazzetta dello Sport reported on Monday.

According to the Italian sports daily, Roma will pay the London club 5.8 million euros (\$6.2 million) and the player will receive an annual salary of 7.5 million euros.

Gazzetta said Lukaku is due to arrive in Rome on Tuesday to undergo a medical.

At Roma, the Belgian will be reunited with Jose Mourinho, who previously coached the striker at Chelsea and Manchester United.

Lukaku returned to Chelsea

in 2021 for 115 million euros from Inter Milan. He first joined Chelsea in 2011 and left for Everton in 2014 before moving on to Manchester United and Inter.

Lukaku, 30, spent last season on loan in Italy, back at Inter, scoring 14 goals.

Roma have already signed Iranian international Sardar Azmoun on loan from Bayer Leverkusen and the Paris Saint-Germain midfielder pair of Leandro Paredes and Renato Sanches, the latter also on loan.

Houssem Aouar joined on a five-year deal from Lyon in June.

AFP

FIFA lifts ban on Sri Lanka

Colombo, Sri Lanka - FIFA has lifted the suspension on Sri Lankan football following assurances that there will be no political interference in the sport in the country, the local federation said Tuesday.

The Football Federation of Sri Lanka (FFSL) said it received a letter from FIFA removing the ban that was imposed in January.

In its letter, football’s global governing body said it took note of moves to hold fresh elections at the FFSL next month and assurances from the sports ministry to allow the FFSL to function without government interference.

“FIFA and the AFC (Asian Football Confederation) will continue to monitor the situation until the elections on September 29, 2023,” the local board was told. Sri Lanka’s men’s team are ranked 204th in the world and the women 153rd.

The world governing body of rugby also suspended Sri Lanka in May after alleging political interference in the administration of the game.

Spain starts probe over Rubiales’ kiss as federation asks him to quit

Barcelona, Spain - Prosecutors at Spain’s top criminal court opened a preliminary investigation Monday into Spanish football chief Luis Rubiales’ forcible kiss on the lips of World Cup player Jenni Hermoso on grounds it could constitute a crime of “sexual assault”.

The Spanish football federation (RFEF) regional presidents then asked the 46-year-old to resign because of his “unacceptable behaviour” and called for “profound and imminent” restructuring of the organisation.

The RFEF statement leaves Rubiales shorn of allies - some of the regional presidents had been among those who applauded his speech last Friday, in which he insisted he would not resign, and his kiss was “consensual”, contested by Hermoso.

Spain’s National Court said they had opened a preliminary probe into Rubiales’ kiss on Hermoso at the World Cup final in Sydney on August 20, “which could constitute an offence of sexual assault”.

They would also contact Hermoso to offer her a chance to file a lawsuit within 15 days, the court statement said.

After Spain won the Women’s



Luis Rubiales

In order to proceed with a case for sexual assault, harassment or sexual abuse, it will be necessary for the injured party or their legal representative to file suit

COURT STATEMENT

World Cup Rubiales sparked a massive backlash with his unsolicited kiss during the medal ceremony.

Hermoso later said the incident left her feeling “vulnerable and like the victim of an assault”, with a statement on social media

describing it as “an impulsive, macho act, out of place and with no type of consent on my part”.

The National Court said it was opening the investigation in light of the “unequivocal nature” of her statements, saying it was necessary “to determine their

legal significance”.

“Given the public statements made by Jennifer Hermoso, the sexual act she was subjected to by (Luis) Rubiales was not consensual,” the court statement said.

“In order to proceed with a case for sexual assault, harassment or sexual abuse, it will be necessary for the injured party or their legal representative to file suit.”

If Hermoso decides not to file a complaint, it will make it “difficult” for prosecutors to press ahead with the case, legal sources told AFP.

World football governing body FIFA provisionally suspended Rubiales for 90 days last week while they open disciplinary proceedings against him - but the president may have resigned before that if he heeds the request from the RFEF’s 19 regional presidents.

“After recent events and the unacceptable behaviour that has seriously damaged the image of Spanish football, the presidents request that Luis Rubiales resign immediately as president of the RFEF,” the federation said following a meeting Monday.

AFP

Madrid’s Vinicius out for over a month with hamstring injury

Barcelona, Spain - Real Madrid winger Vinicius Junior is out for up to six weeks with a hamstring injury, Spanish media reports said Monday.

Los Blancos confirmed the Brazilian’s injury in a statement but did not specify his expected absence time.

“Following tests carried out on Vini. Jr by the Real Madrid medical services, the player has been diagnosed with an injury to the



Vinicius Junior

right biceps femoris muscle. His progress will be monitored,” the club said on Monday.

Vinicius limped off injured against Celta Vigo on Friday early in Madrid’s 1-0 win at Balaidos, which kept the team top of La Liga with a 100 percent record after three games.

The 23-year-old may not be fit by the time the Champions League starts on September 19, and is set to miss important La

Liga matches against Real Sociedad and city rivals Atletico Madrid before then.

“(Vinicius) wanted to continue, so I don’t think it was that serious, he tried, then it hurt a bit,” said Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti on Friday, with the injury turning out to be more serious than first thought.

Spanish reports said the forward would miss between a month and six weeks.



Dewald Brevis

Time for ‘Baby AB’ Brevis to live up to the hype

Durban, South Africa - Dewald Brevis will take a step onto cricket's big stage during Australia's white-ball tour of South Africa, which starts with the first of three Twenty20 internationals at Kingsmead on Wednesday.

Brevis, 20, was nicknamed ‘Baby AB’ for the way he modelled his game on that of retired South African star AB de Villiers. He wears the same number 17 on his shirt and has the ability to hit big sixes, particularly in the area between midwicket and long-on.

He slammed a South African T20 record score of 162 off 57 balls in a domestic match last October but has yet to have consistent success for franchise teams in four countries.

Brevis is expected to make his international debut in the T20 series and will need to live up to the early hype about his career to secure a ticket to the 50-overs Cricket World Cup in India in October and November.

Brevis is part of an 18-man squad for a five-match one-day international series which follows

the T20s. Only 15 players will go to the World Cup. “I know there will always be expectations,” he said. “Pressure is always there; I feel the pressure, but I like it. I just want people to get to know me as Dewald Brevis and just see how I go about my things.”

I know there will always be expectations- Pressure is always there; I feel it, but I like it.

DEWALD BREVIS

Several other players from both sides will also be keen to press their World Cup claims.

Australia's leading fast bowlers will miss the T20 series, providing an opportunity for new-comer Spencer Johnson as well as Sean Abbott and Nathan Ellis to make a mark in the shorter games before being part of the one-day series.

CURTAIN RAISER

Asia's cricket giants square up ahead of World Cup

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Asia's cricket giants India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka will get a final chance to size each other up before October's 50-over World Cup when the Asia Cup begins on Wednesday.

Fiery rivals India and Pakistan could clash as many as three times if they go all the way in the six-nation continental championship.

Pakistan and Sri Lanka are co-hosts, a hybrid model agreed after World Cup hosts India refused to tour Pakistan, with the final on September 17 in Colombo.

Babar Azam's Pakistan, who became the world's top-ranked ODI team after last week's 3-0 series sweep against Afghanistan, open their campaign at home on Wednesday against Asia Cup debutants Nepal in Multan.

Azam, who scored 113 runs in the Afghanistan series, leads a side containing a triple-pronged fast bowling attack in Shaheen Shah Afridi, Naseem Shah and Haris Rauf.

World Cup hosts India, led by Rohit Sharma, will open their campaign against Pakistan in a hotly anticipated clash on Saturday in Pallekele.

India and Pakistan, who only play against each other in international tournaments due to the countries' long-standing political tensions, are expected to meet



World Cup hosts India will open their campaign against Pakistan in a hotly anticipated clash in Pallekele on Saturday

It's not just Pakistan, there are other teams. Sri Lanka won the Asia Cup last year. So there are other teams who are playing good cricket and will challenge us

ROHIT SHARMA

again in the Super Four stage and could face off for a third time in the final.

“It's not just Pakistan, there are other teams,” Rohit said of the hype surrounding the Pakistan clashes, with the rivals also scheduled to meet in the 50-over World Cup in Ahmedabad on

October 14.

“Sri Lanka won the Asia Cup last year. So there are other teams who are playing good cricket and will challenge us.”

‘Test ourselves’

Rohit said the Asia Cup was the perfect place to “test ourselves,

try and put ourselves under pressure and respond to that pressure.”

India's batting has been boosted by the return of KL Rahul and Shreyas Iyer alongside Virat Kohli, Shubman Gill and Rohit.

The 50-over World Cup begins on October 5 in India.

Sri Lanka, who won the Asia Cup last year in Dubai when it was played as a Twenty20 tournament, have been hit by injuries ahead of their opener against Bangladesh in Kandy on Thursday. Fast bowler Dushmantha Chameera is all but out of the tournament with a shoulder injury and leg-spinner Wanindu

Hasaranga is doubtful for at least the group matches having missed the Lanka Premier League final eight days ago with a thigh strain.

Bangladesh have had a difficult build-up with Tamim Iqbal stepping down as captain and missing the tournament with a back injury as he tries to get fit for the World Cup.

Veteran all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan has been reappointed captain through to the end of the World Cup. He previously led Bangladesh for 50 one-day internationals between 2009 and 2017.

AFP

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HK TATTOO ARTISTS

INK TANK

Tattoo artists make their mark at Hong Kong fair where perceptions are changing regarding this body art

Sousyu Hayashi peers at the intricate pattern of sakura blossoms before him, born from 30 hours of deft prodding by his traditional Japanese tattoo needle - and he is not even halfway done. Surrounded by admiring on-lookers, the 47-year-old is among the 130 tattoo artists who have set up stalls at a Hong Kong convention running until Sunday, where attendees can pick out designs from an eclectic lineup and get inked on the spot.

Hayashi is a master of tebori, Japanese for 'handcrafted', where the skin is pierced by a steel-tipped bamboo rod with no mechanical help. Only a handful of practitioners are left, he said.

"I'm never satisfied," he said. "I've done this for 24 years, and at home, I'm always practising."

Heavyweights like Hayashi brought a much-needed jolt to Hong Kong's tattoo community, which has grown rapidly over the years, according to Gabe Shum, organiser of the Hong Kong China International Tattoo Exhibition.

Tattoos in the Chinese city used to be associated with organised crime, but Shum, 60, said, over time he has witnessed a 'growing acceptance' among the public.

The Malaysian-born tattoo artist started decorating skin at 19 and went on to enjoy a storied career that has included inking sports legends David Beckham and LeBron James.

"When I returned to Hong Kong to start my business, there were only four tattoo parlours," Shum said. "Today, there are 300 to 400 tattoo artists. People had misunderstandings and biases... We did a lot to explain and destigmatise."

The convention, which began a decade ago, also draws fans from mainland China, where tattoos have spiked in popularity even though the ruling communist party has discouraged them.

A man from the Chinese city Chongqing, who gave his surname as Xiang, said he brought along his five-year-old daughter to the event as a family outing.

"She's a kid, she thinks (tattoos) are no different from painting, and she loves to play around with a



A man shows off his tattoos at the 7th Hong Kong China International Tattoo Convention in Hong Kong on August 27

paintbrush," he said.

Xiang's favourite tattoo, a brightly coloured rooster on his chest, was picked to match his daughter's Chinese zodiac sign, he added. "I got that as a way to make myself happy, to express joy."

Bumpy path

Tattoo artists from Hong Kong make up around one-third of this year's lineup, which organiser Shum said, shows the 'rapid development' of the industry locally.

They were dealt a heavy blow during the pandemic, as the government forced beauty salons - a category that includes tattoo parlours - to close for months at a time to reduce virus transmission.

Mini Lau began her tattoo business in 2018, bringing techniques she learned in South Korea back to her home city, where her designs featuring fine lines and pastel colours have become a hit with younger women.

She recalled how, in school, her friends would ask her to draw on their arms for fun.

"It gave me a sense of accomplishment, the way it made my classmates happy... I thought, if the pictures were real tattoos, that would be cool," said Lau, 28.

She eventually decided to quit high school and apprentice with a tattoo artist. For a period, she could only practice drawing around midnight as she held down a day job in sales.

"I didn't tell my parents... Until one day my brother saw an interview of me in the newspaper and showed it to my dad," Lau said with a laugh.

Learning to be a tattoo artist had been a 'bumpy path' for her, and Lau said she hoped the industry would be more accessible to newcomers, adding the convention was a step in the right direction.

For those without any ink, the event proved to be a chance to experiment. A woman who gave her name as Jennifer said she decided to get her first tattoo after being wowed by a calligraphy design.

"I had been thinking about it for a while... I know it's an impulsive decision, but it felt right."

AFP

It gave me a sense of accomplishment, the way it made my classmates happy... I thought, if the pictures were real tattoos, that would be cool

MINI LAU



عالي البروتين
و قليل السكر



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Redefining mobility

Mobility Auto introduces Lynk & Co's first showroom in Oman, a conscious step towards redefining mobility forever

Lynk & Co - the premium global automotive brand jointly owned by Volvo & Geely - has announced the grand opening of its First Lynk & Co Showroom in Muscat.

Under the exceptional new line of auto business called 'Mobility Auto,' Lynk & Co, in partnership with Oman's esteemed M/S Towell Group, wholeheartedly commits to providing clients with unparalleled attention, guaranteeing an extraordinary experience.

"Prepare to be amazed as our state-of-the-art showroom showcases our extensive range of vehicles, including the highly anticipated Lynk & Co 09, making its debut in Oman for the very first time," a statement says.

Founded in 2016, Lynk & Co seamlessly blends innovative design, advanced technology, new experiences, and dynamic new energy. With an impressive presence of five design centres across various continents and a cutting-edge research and development center, the company has achieved an outstanding milestone of close to a million units sold by July 2023.

Lynk & Co has been steadily solidifying its footprint in Oman, having already introduced the acclaimed 01 and 05 models through both online and offline channels. The opening of the new Lynk & Co Centre on August 22 reaffirms its unwavering commitment to delivering exceptional experiences to esteemed customers in Oman.

STATE-OF-THE-ART FACILITIES

Situated in the prestigious Ghala Heights, Lynk & Co showroom promises a fully integrated experience encompassing sales, after-sales service, and spare parts. Towell Auto group, will offer top-notch after-sales services tailored specifically to Lynk & Co customers.

With their state-of-the-art facilities and skilled technicians, Towell Auto Group ensures that Lynk & Co owners receive unparalleled customer service and support throughout their ownership journey. This unwavering dedication reinforces its commitment to delivering unmatched quality and customer satisfaction in the Omani market.

Riyadh Ali Sultan, general manager of Towell Auto Group, highlighted the brand's unique ability to seamlessly integrate technology into the lifestyles of modern customers. He added, "Lynk & Co is a brand that comprehends and meets the evolving demands of today's consumers. It caters to the desires of today's connected generation for vehicles that effortlessly align with their tech-driven lives, thus setting it apart from traditional brands."

PERSONAL, OPEN, CONNECTED

Derek Peng, marketing head of Lynk & Co Asia Pacific, highlighted that the new store in Muscat marks a progressive stride in Oman. "Driven by the brand's core values of 'Personal,' 'Open,' and 'Connected,' Lynk & Co is introducing high-value products targeted at engaging potential Omani consumers aspiring to enrich their lifestyles. Nestled in Ghala Heights, the strategically located Lynk & Co Center emanates a serene ambience with its gentle gray and white tones, open-layout design, and ample space ensuring a comfortable and delightful car-shopping experience for its customers," he said.

The Lynk & Co Centre in Muscat allows customers to embark on a seamless jour-



Lynk & Co is a brand that caters to the desires of today's connected generation

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