

40 pacts inked to boost food security

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) signed 40 usufruct contracts in Dhofar on Wednesday to increase wheat production and enhance food security projects as part of programmes to support the agricultural sector.

The agreements were signed by H E Dr Khalfan bin Saeed al Shuali, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, in the presence of H H Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, and H E Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

Of the 40, 37 agreements are for cultivation of wheat in

the Najd area of Dhofar on an area of 28mn sqm with an investment of RO5.5mn. The three remaining agreements are for agro-textile projects and nurseries in Salalah and Barka which will see an investment of RO3.5mn on a total area of 93,000sqm.

This year saw the signing of 30 usufruct contracts involving the Al Najd Agricultural Area Development Office in Dhofar with a number of investors valued at RO1.5mn on a total area on 1.26mn sqm.

Additionally, earlier this year, MHUP signed six land usufruct contracts to establish agricultural projects in four governorates valued at more than RO32mn and an area of more than 3mn sqm.



One agreement valued at RO1.250mn was inked for establishment of a honeybee museum in the wilayat of Barka, South Batinah on an area of 12,000sqm. This will include an exhibition area and a honeybee institute.

Another agreement for Barka will help enhance soil quality in the wilayat in an area of 40,000sqm at a cost of RO180,000.

A agreement worth RO3mn will facilitate the plantation of 50,000 palm trees (al fard, al majdol and al khalas) in an area of 2mn sqm in the wilayat of Sunaina, Buraimi. This project aims to increase local production and enhance food security.

In the wilayat of Jabal Akhdar, Dhakhliah, an agreement valued

at RO294,000 was signed for an organic farming project to grow pomegranates on an area of 121,000sqm.

An RO446,000 agreement inked for North Batinah will see setting up of a banana plantation and marketing project in the wilayat of Suwaiq on an area of 267,000sqm.

This project aims to supply local and foreign markets the finest quality bananas grown using modern agricultural methods.

The signing of these agreements is in line with the government's efforts to diversify food sources, enhance food security, ensure optimal investment in land and the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

► NEWS BRIEF

MUSANDAM, RAS AL KHAIMAH INK PACT FOR BUS SERVICE

Muscat - A landmark transportation agreement was inked between Musandam Governor's Office and Ras al Khaimah Transport Authority on Wednesday.

The deal aims to facilitate seamless passenger transportation between Musandam governorate and Ras al Khaimah in the United Arab Emirates.

The agreement underscores a commitment to strengthen collaboration in the field of international land passenger transport between the two neighbouring nations.

The formalities were overseen by Nasser bin Humaid al Hosani, Director General of Musandam Municipality, and Ismail bin Hassan al Balushi, Director General of Ras al Khaimah Transport Authority.



Onam in Oman - Feast for the senses

Alzheimer's society introduces smartwatch to aid patients

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a pioneering move for the wellbeing of Alzheimer's patients in the sultanate, Oman Alzheimer's Society has introduced a state-of-the-art tracking smartwatch. Designed with the safety of patients in mind, the device will help families locate loved ones who may wander due to the disease.

At a press conference held at Haffa House Hotel, Dr Hamad al Sinawi, Chairman of Oman Alzheimer's Society, said, "Our primary goal is to uplift the lives of those with Alzheimer's and dementia, while easing the associated challenges for their families. This smartwatch, by virtue of its advanced tracking system, will play a crucial role in helping the family of patients - often their parents - find them."

By incorporating a sophisticated tracking mechanism, the smartwatch ensures that if a patient becomes disoriented or is lost, their whereabouts can be easily traced, offering a sense of security and reassurance, Dr Sinawi added.

In addition to its tracking capabilities, the watch can connect to up to five SIM cards, primarily for family members, and even receive calls. If a call isn't answered within a certain timeframe, the



Our primary goal is to uplift the lives of those with Alzheimer's and dementia, while easing the associated challenges for their families

DR HAMAD AL SINAWI

device switches to loudspeaker mode.

The smartwatch is also equipped with an SOS signal for emergencies.

resources, support and a virtual community to enhance their overall quality of life. The official unveiling of Ehtemam is set for September 13 at Sultan Qaboos University.

Shedding light on the larger picture, Dr Sinawi revealed that there are approximately 11,900 individuals diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in the sultanate. Those over 65 are especially susceptible, and within this demographic, women slightly outnumber men.

"As these numbers surge, our commitment to crafting innovative solutions and support systems intensifies. Our initiative, the Purple Club, is testament to this. Here, caregivers come together regularly to discuss challenges and seek potential solutions," Dr Sinawi informed.

September - recognised as Alzheimer's Awareness Month - is of particular significance to the society. It will organise an array of events and programmes throughout the month, aiming not only to spread awareness on Alzheimer's but also deepen the understanding of the hurdles that patients and caregivers face.



Shinas student team develops vision-assistive smart device

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A team of students from University of Technology and Applied Sciences Shinas has developed a smart device aimed at improving the lives of the visually impaired. The innovative tool helps blind individuals with tasks such as recognising people and determining the date and time.

The group, consisting of Maha Abdullah al Dhahliya, Ala Said al Jabriya, Maysa Salim al Breikia and Nora Ali al Shehiya, identified the need for a practical, user-friendly solution to challenges frequently encountered by the visually impaired.

"Our objective was to develop a device that could ease the daily challenges faced by visually impaired individuals, particularly in recognising individuals," team



leader Maha said.

The result is a user-friendly, cost-effective and eco-friendly device. Powering it is a blend of artificial intelligence and Internet of Things technologies. Its advanced facial recognition features utilise AI to identify and store information about individuals.

"By comparing a taken photo with stored images within the system, the user can identify the person with audio cues. Additionally, we've integrated an ultrasonic sensor and a buzzer to

serve as an acoustic alarm for objects," Maha informed.

The team's pioneering efforts have been recognised locally. The compact and lightweight device was awarded 'Best Project' in the graduation projects category at the Oman Internet of Things and Artificial Intelligence Competition.

"Our next step," Maha said, "is to represent Oman at the Arab Challenge competition in Dubai in October. We aim to continue enhancing the device, introducing GPS services for location guidance via Google Maps, incorporating an AI-supported chatbot, ChatGPT to answer users' inquiries, and installing a sixFab communication chip for telecommunication functionalities. These developments will further simplify the lives of visually impaired users."

FORCIBLY DISAPPEARED BUT REMEMBERED



A woman holds a portrait as family members of people forcibly disappeared in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen take part in an event organised by Amnesty International in Beirut on Wednesday, marking the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances (AFP)

Community efforts restore allure of Harat al Shurafa

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In Buraimi governorate, local community efforts are breathing new life into the once-neglected neighbourhood of Harat al Shurafa. The initiative not only enhances its cultural heritage but also elevates its standing as a tourist destination.

Talib Ahmed al Jabri, supervisor of Falaj al Sarrani, articulated the intertwined fates of Harat al Shurafa and Falaj al Sarrani.

"The revival of Harat al Shurafa is closely tied to the ongoing Falaj al Sarrani project. While the latter has already witnessed a considerable transformation, further advancements aim to solidify Buraimi as a standout tourist attraction."

Visitors to Harat al Shurafa are treated to an immersive walk through history. Lining the narrow pathways are ancient structures, some dating back a century, showcasing distinctive architectural designs.

"The mountain slopes adjacent to the village supplied the



stones used for constructing the timeless ceilings in the harat," explained Jabri.

Beyond mere architecture, the cohesive and interconnected designs of the houses in the harat epitomise the traditional sense of community. Remarkably, the residences are so seamlessly integrated that they appear as one continuous dwelling. As part of the restoration, even the traditional mud entrances, or 'sabahat', have been carefully refurbished.

Jabri emphasised the poten-

tial of such sites, surrounded by palm and lemon orchards, to be transformed into tourist hotspots.

The cultural richness extends beyond just buildings. Suleiman bin Ali al Azzani, overseeing the restoration of the Al Shurafa mosque, shared its historical significance. "The harat was a communal hub, where locals would warmly welcome guests from afar."

Detailing the mosque's unique design, Azzani said, "It houses two Mihrabs. One is positioned

in front, catering to winter prayers, while the other ensures a cool environment during summer months, addressing the region's soaring temperatures."

Such restoration projects, breathing life back into the historical harats, underscore Oman's commitment to preserving its rich heritage.

Across the sultanate, various wilayats have successfully transformed old neighbourhoods into thriving tourist accommodations, marrying the past and present seamlessly.

Jabal Akhdar revives traditional skill to infuse 'aromatic' business

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Jabal Akhdar - a prominent tourist destination nestled in the stunning landscape of Dakhiliyah - has set an example by diversifying its tourist centric revenue model. It is fast emerging as a centre for producing aromatic sprays and distilled rose water.

The Business and Incubators Centre of the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) in the wilayat has reported a remarkable production yield - approximately 60,000 bottles of distilled white rose water, spray, and the frankincense, locally known as 'Luban', in the first half of 2023.

Delving into the artistry behind this achievement, Al Azhar Saif al Zakwani, a technician at the ASMED centre in Jabal Akhdar, described the meticulous process.

"Manufacturing aromatics is a journey," he began. "It starts with the harvesting phase, followed by a precise distillation process. After condensing the aromatic essence, the distilled water is set to cool for a day before being



bottled and introduced to the market."

Zakwani revealed future ambitions of the centre, with plans to diversify their aromatic range.

"We are researching the potential of introducing new products, such as the Myrtus communis water, locally christened 'Yas', the Coleus amboinicus water or 'Zamuta', and the Tapiscia water, known locally as 'Alalan'. There's also interest in exploring the realms of clove and cinnamon waters."

Describing the infrastructure, he elaborated: "The multifaceted centre houses a dedicated space for training in the craft of distilling aromatic plants and extracting essential oils.

"We also have an entrepreneur-focused training department, alongside the Omani

Craftsmen House, which showcases a plethora of products, from essential oils to textiles and silverwork. And it's not just about the products; our centre is home to over 2,700 rose trees of diverse breeds."

Underlining the centre's commitment to sustainable practices, Zakwani stated that native plants, primarily roses and frankincense, are prioritised in the distillation process.

"This craft is an intricate blend of tradition and innovation, reaping environmental benefits from nature's generous flora. ASMED continually refines its processes, especially with seasonal crops like roses, while maintaining a consistent quality in distilling frankincense oil and water. This age-old craft is more than a tradition; it's a vital source of livelihood for numerous artisans."

Speaking about the market presence of ASMED's aromatic products, Zakwani emphasised, "Our creations have not only found favour in local souqs but have also marked their presence in international markets. They stand as a testament to our rich heritage, often chosen as cherished souvenirs by many."

Oman hosts meeting to discuss future of conference tourism

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman welcomed industry experts and thought leaders for the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) Middle East Summit, which began in Muscat on Wednesday.

Being organised under the theme 'Forging a Common Path for a Prosperous Future', the summit has gathered over 120 regional and local specialists engaging in comprehensive discussions about the potential of the conference sector.

Throughout the two-day summit, participants will explore the untapped possibilities in emerging event destinations. Emphasis will be placed on broadening entrepreneurial horizons and capitalising on the opportunities these new destinations present, organisers said.

Additionally, the summit will also quantify the economic benefits that can be derived from conference tourism.

Khalid bin Walid al Zadjali, Director of Oman Conferences



Office at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said, "Oman's role as the summit's host underscores our commitment to fostering a world-class event hosting sector. Our collaboration with ICCA is indicative of our dedication to both local and regional advancements in this field."

He further highlighted the ministry's endeavours to attract premier international and regional conferences, reinforcing the Oman Convention Office's mission to elevate the sultanate on the global map of event des-

tinations.

Saeed bin Salem al Shanfari, CEO, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, said, "The sultanate possesses the necessary infrastructure to be a prime destination for event tourism. Our centre stands as a testament to this, offering expansive, well-equipped spaces ideal for diverse gatherings and top-tier events."

The summit opening was held under the patronage of H E Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Tourism in MHT.



Oman specialists conduct complex surgery on child

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A joint team of medical specialists from Al Nahda and the Royal Hospital successfully conducted a complex operation on a child suffering from a tumor and enlargement that led to congenital hypothyroidism.

The team included a number of consultants, specialists, and nursing staff from the departments of obstetrics and gynaecology, and intensive care unit for premature babies from the Royal Hospital, while the ear, nose and throat specialists came from the Al Nahda Hospital.

Dr Shamsa Mohammed al Hinaya, consultant of fetal diseases, pregnancy and childbirth

at the Royal Hospital, said that the child was suffering from congenital hypothyroidism, which is defined as thyroid hormone deficiency since birth.

The child received appropriate treatment for about a month post-surgery, and is in good condition now, she added.

Doctors in Oman conducted similar complex surgeries later.

Dr Alia Youssef al Madhani, consultant of obstetrics and gynecology and director of the obstetrics and gynecology department at the Royal Hospital, said that the medical specialists conducted three more complex surgeries of this nature, one of which was done on an emergency. "All the three operations were successful," she said.



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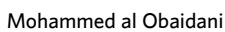
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Our Correspondent

Muscat

Mohammed bin Khalfan al Obaidani, CEO of MGE - the event organiser, said the event will feature a variety of races. "These include a 10km race open to participants of all ages, specific



**ZAINA ABDULLAH
AL YARIYA**

"This village is poised to offer a wide variety of entertainment, sports and cultural activities, ensuring an enjoyable experience for both participants and their families," he said.

Our Correspondent

Muscat

August 25: Dhakhliyah governorate's firefighting teams responded promptly to a fire in a



trol. There were no injuries in this incident. The second fire on the day broke out in a porta cabin in

August 13: A cooking gas explosion in a restaurant in Mabela, wilayat of Seeb, Muscat, not only

Concluding the report, the authority issued a plea to all institutions, companies and individuals, stressing the critical importance of adhering to safety standards to prevent fire outbreaks.

The standards detailed in the decision highlight certain provisions. These include designated office space for staff of registration entities and their equipment, duly certified laboratories for inspecting a wide variety of goods, platforms with the capacity to examine a number of trucks or containers concurrently, and storage facilities tailored to the specific requirements of the stored items.

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has stated that the knowledge that will come from the success of the Chandrayaan-3 mission will be used for the ben-

It is indeed fitting that just a few weeks prior to the launch of

H E Amit Narang

Ambassador of India to Oman



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BRIEFS

Brazil meat giant sells plants to rival in \$1.5bn deal

Brazilian meat processor Marfrig is selling 16 of its beef plants to competitor Minerva for \$1.5bn, in a deal which shook the Sao Paulo stock exchange on Tuesday.

Minerva acquired Marfrig's operations in Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay for \$1.5bn, according to the deal revealed Monday at the close of markets.

The sale must still be analyzed and approved by competition authorities.

Minerva said in a statement it hopes the deal will see it take "a leap forward in its performance in the market" by becoming the second largest beef producer in the region, behind Brazil's JBS.

The company said its bovine slaughter and deboning capacity will increase by 44%, from 29,540 heads per day to 42,439.

Marfrig said in a statement the deal was part of a strategy to "focus on the production of branded meats and products with higher added value."

Oman's non-oil exports drop 12%; re-exports rise 29%

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's non-oil exports saw a nearly 12% year-on-year decline in the first five months of 2023. This drop was mainly due to reduced shipments to the United States compared to the same period last year.

The total value of the sultanate's non-oil exports decreased to RO2.737bn during the January-May period of this year, compared to RO3.102bn worth of shipments recorded in the same period last year, according to statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Oman's non-oil exports to the United States fell by 58.7% to RO172mn during the first five months of this year, compared to RO418mn in the same period in 2022.

However, Omani exports to the Middle Eastern markets recorded significant growth this year.

Saudi Arabia emerged as the top destination for Omani non-oil exports, with the sultanate's exports to the kingdom rising by 5.7% to RO356mn in the first five months of 2023, compared to RO337mn in the same period of 2022. Exports to the UAE increased by 2.4% to RO343mn this year.

Oman's non-oil shipments to India marginally decreased by 0.8% to RO302mn during the first five months of 2023, compared to RO304mn in the corre-



sponding period last year.

In a significant shift in the direction of Omani exports, South Africa emerged as the fourth-largest destination for Omani non-oil products this year. The value of exports to South Africa surged by more than 130% to RO202mn during the January-May period of 2023, compared to RO88mn recorded in the same period in 2022.

The sultanate's exports to other countries combined declined by nearly 16% to RO1.362bn this year, compared with RO1.621bn recorded in the first five months of 2022.

The export of mineral products, which account for a major chunk of Oman's non-oil exports, increased by 8% to RO895mn this year, against RO829mn recorded in the first five months of 2022.

On the other hand, the export of base metals and their related products decreased by 22.3% to RO515mn in the first five months of this year, down from RO662mn worth of shipments in the same period of 2022.

The export of chemical products plunged by 25.7% to RO468mn during the January-May period of 2023, compared to RO629mn recorded for the same period in 2022.

Regional demand boosts re-exports

Growing economic activity and improving demand in the Gulf region significantly contributed to Oman's growth in re-exports this year.

NCSI data showed that total re-exports from Oman grew by 28.7% in the first five months of 2023, reaching RO654mn, compared to RO508mn in the same period of the previous year.

The value of re-exports to the UAE surged by 31% to RO239mn in the first five months of 2023, while re-exports to Qatar jumped by 78% to RO37mn this year, compared to RO21mn recorded in the same period in 2022.

Re-exports to Kuwait more than doubled to RO36mn in the first five months of 2023, compared to RO17mn last year, while re-exports to the Saudi market grew by 34.5% to RO35mn this year, up from RO26mn in the same period a year ago.

Moreover, re-exports to Iran rose by 23.2% to RO95mn in the first five months of 2023.



Ali Al Mani

Alizz Islamic Bank appoints Mani as CEO

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The board of directors of Alizz Islamic Bank on Wednesday announced the appointment of Ali al Mani as the bank's new Chief Executive Officer.

Mani brings with him over 22 years of experience in the finance and banking industry, spanning both Islamic and conventional banking sectors. He possesses expertise across various domains, including corporate banking, retail banking, operations, finance, project management, and technology, according to a press statement.

As per the statement, Mani has held various leadership positions at major local banks. Prior to joining Alizz Islamic Bank, he was the deputy CEO of National Finance Company, overseeing the performance of one of the largest finance companies in Oman.

Mani holds a Master's degree in Innovation, Leadership, and Management from York University, UK. Additionally, he earned a Bachelor of Arts in Computer Applications and Internet from the University of Bedfordshire, UK.



Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman

Saudi fund acquires stake in US mixed martial arts league

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia – Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund has acquired a minority stake in the Professional Fighters League (PFL), the two entities said Wednesday, the latest example of the kingdom's sports investment push.

It is the first deal sealed by SRJ Sports Investments, a new company unveiled earlier this month by the Saudi fund known as the Public Investment Fund (PIF), that aims to draw "major global events" to Saudi Arabia.

Sports have been a major component of the oil-rich Gulf kingdom's effort to rebrand as a global business and tourism destination under the Vision 2030 reform agenda pursued by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the PIF chairman.

"Today marks a new milestone for SRJ as we make our inaugural investment," SRJ chairman Bander Bin Mogren said in a statement.

"This investment aims to nurture the local and regional talent pool in martial arts, promote gender equality in sport, and bring new opportunities directly to Saudi Arabia and the wider

MENA region."

Combining elements of everything from boxing to judo and Muay Thai, mixed martial arts (MMA) had a limited following in Saudi Arabia just a decade ago, but that started to change when the kingdom hosted the popular regional Desert Force competition in 2014.

The sport's popularity has since soared with the rise of fighters from across the Middle East and the establishment of a national MMA foundation to develop Saudi talent.

This month saw Saudi fighters Abdullah al-Qahtani and Mostafa Rashed Neda win high-profile bouts in New York's Madison Square Garden organised by the US-based PFL, an MMA promotion company that has come up in the wake of the Ultimate Fighting Championship's success.

The PFL intends to launch a regional league next year and stage other "mega-events" in Saudi Arabia, Wednesday's announcement said.

The value of the deal was not disclosed, but the Financial Times reported it was \$100mn.

AFP

GCC organisations struggle to implement data privacy programmes, survey finds

Muscat- Only 21% of the organisations in the GCC region have successfully established a data privacy programme, according to a survey conducted by the global consulting firm Protiviti.

The survey report highlights the difficulties GCC organisations face as they transition from the design to implementation stage of a data privacy programme. These challenges include addressing regulatory requirements and potential legal risks associated with non-compliance.

Commenting on the launch of the survey report, Ranjan Sinha, managing director – technology and digital consulting at Protiviti, said, "Data privacy has emerged as a critical concern for organisations worldwide, and the GCC region is no exception. The survey presents the current state of data privacy programmes in the region and provides a roadmap for



organisations to enhance their privacy practices, comply with regulations, and protect their customers' sensitive information."

According to the report, there has been an increase in the implementation of privacy programmes across GCC countries, with 56% of respondents highlighting regulatory requirements as the primary driver, along with the need to maintain consumer

trust and fulfill contractual obligations as other important drivers.

However, the survey findings indicate a lack of coherence in data privacy implementation initiatives, as the responsibility and ownership for the programme are dispersed throughout the organisation. Only 27% of organisations have dedicated data privacy departments, while 40% assign data privacy as the

primary responsibility of the information security department.

The report urges organisational leadership to establish clear privacy-oriented roles, responsibilities, and governance structures and to prioritise budget allocation for data privacy programmes.

Niraj Mathur, managing director – security and privacy practice at Protiviti, said, "Given our experience working with

EU fossil fuel energy output hits record low

Paris, France – The European Union's fossil fuel energy production hit a record low the first half of the year, think tank Ember Climate reported Wednesday, although green sources are struggling to fill the gap.

The decline in coal and gas generation was driven by a drop in electricity consumption across the bloc of 4.6% amid high power prices, which surged after Russia invaded Ukraine, upending gas supplies.

"The decline in fossil fuels is a sign of the times," said Ember analyst Matt Ewen.

Coal generation was down 23%, accounting for less than 10% of the EU's total electricity production for the first time ever in May, Ember reported.

While gas prices have fallen from "crisis highs" last year, they remain double the cost compared with the first half of 2021, the report said.

The drop in electricity consumption resulted from emergency measures implemented by nearly all EU members between November and March to combat rising prices.

Industrial demand, notably in Germany, had also declined over the period, the report said.

Fossil fuels now make up the "lowest share ever of the power mix" at 33 percent, Ember said.

The greatest declines in fossil fuel use year-over-year at more than 30% were seen in Portugal, Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia and Finland.

But reduced demand being the driver for the decline in fossil fuel use is not "sustainable or desirable", Ember warned.

With demand expected to rise in the future, replacing fossil fuels with alternative sources needs to happen faster, Ewen said.

Solar power generation was up 13% in the first half of this year compared to the same period in 2022, while wind was up a more modest 4.8%.

Denmark and Portugal saw renewables account for more than 75% of the electricity mix while in Greece and Romania renewables for the first time exceeded 50% of the share of supply. However the growth in clean energy was still not enough to compensate for the gap left by the fall in fossil fuels, the report found.

"A massive push, especially on solar and wind, is urgently needed to underpin a resilient economy across Europe," Ewen said.

AFP

US says its firms could deem Chinese business environment 'too risky'

Shanghai, China – Business in China could become "too risky" for US firms without changes to the regulatory environment, Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo warned Wednesday as she wrapped up a visit to the world's second-largest economy.

Speaking on her fourth day in China and after several rounds of talks with officials as well as with US firms, Raimondo said she had raised "tough issues" with local counterparts.

The business environment in China "has to be predictable, there has to be a level playing field, there has to be due process, there has to be transparency", she told a press conference near Shanghai.

"US business needs to see some action taken to address these issues, otherwise they will deem it as too risky," she said.

Raimondo is the latest in a series of senior US officials to visit Beijing, as both sides seek to defuse tensions across a range of security and economic issues that have been at their highest levels in years.

"I raised the tough issues like subsidies, like China's non-market practices, like raids on US firms, like intellectual property theft," Raimondo said.

She also said she had raised the alleged hacking of her email by China-based actors with Beijing officials.

"I mentioned that as an example of an action that erodes trust at a time when we are trying to stabilise the relationship," she told a digital press briefing following the media availability in Shanghai.



US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo speaks during a press conference at the Boeing Shanghai Aviation Service Co, in Shanghai on Wednesday (AFP)

But this week's talks were "productive", she added, and an "excellent start".

"Nothing good comes from shutting down communication," she said.

US firms in China have long complained about what they see as an unfair business environment, with limited protection for intellectual property and preferential treatment afforded to domestic competitors.

Those fears have been compounded this year by a broad crackdown on US consulting firms operating in China.

A new anti-espionage law, which came into force on July 1, has also spooked foreign and do-

Business environment in China has to be predictable, there has to be a level playing field, there has to be transparency

GINA RAIMONDO

mestic firms as they try to decipher authorities' intentions and, crucially, pinpoint what is off-limits.

Raimondo has used the trip to

seek more open discussions with the Chinese over trade curbs and the two sides have agreed to set up a working group to iron out the laundry list of trade disputes between them.

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

That group held its first meeting on Tuesday, Raimondo said. "It was an open dialogue," she said. "We were able to clarify in the first meeting that we're not targeting China," she added.

AFP

Global dividends hit record \$568bn in second quarter

Paris, France – Dividends paid by the world's biggest listed companies soared to a record \$568.1bn in the second quarter, with payouts to shareholders expected to grow further despite economic uncertainty, a study showed Wednesday.

Payments by the 1,200 biggest public companies rose more than expected, increasing by 4.9% compared to the same April-to-June period last year, according to the report by asset management firm Janus Henderson.

Banks accounted for half of the world's dividend growth as their margins were boosted by interest rate hikes, the report said. Automakers represented one-seventh of the increase.

Firms in Europe, excluding Britain, led the pack with payouts rising by 9.7% to \$184.5bn. North American companies paid out \$165.3bn, a 4.2% increase.



Banks accounted for half of the world's dividend growth as their margins were boosted by interest rate hikes

Swiss food giant Nestle was the world's biggest dividend payer, followed by British bank HSBC and German automaker Mercedes-Benz.

Ben Lofthouse, head of global equity income at Janus Henderson, said global economic growth is "moderating" as interest rates increase.

"Markets now expect global profits to be flat this year, after soaring to record highs in 2022, and when we speak to companies around the world, they are now more cautious about the outlook," Lofthouse said.

Central banks have hiked rates as they battle high inflation. AFP

US consumer confidence falls in August on fear of rising costs

Washington, US – US consumer confidence unexpectedly declined in August, reversing earlier gains as Americans digested rising gas and grocery costs, according to survey data published Tuesday.

The US Federal Reserve has been tackling rising prices – with some success – through an aggressive campaign of interest rate hikes. However, while these hikes have brought inflation down sharply, they have also raised the cost of borrowing on everything from car loans to mortgages.

Consumer confidence de-

clined in August to 106.1 down from a revised 114.0 in July, the Conference Board announced in a statement. The July figure was below the median expectation of economists surveyed by MarketWatch of 116.0, and is the lowest reading since May this year.

"August's disappointing headline number reflected dips in both the current conditions and expectations indexes," Dana Peterson, chief economist at The Conference Board, said in a statement.

She added that "consumers were once again preoccupied

with rising prices in general, and for groceries and gasoline in particular."

"Job growth remains strong, inflation is gradually receding, and real disposable incomes are now rising, which should be positive for households," High Frequency Economics' chief US economist, Rubeela Farooqi, wrote in a note to clients.

"However, household perceptions about labor market conditions deteriorated in August, which could be a headwind for consumers and spending," she added.

AFP

TENDERS ADVERTISEMENT

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) Announce the following Tenders:

Sr.No	Tender No.	Tender Name	Last date for obtaining the documents	Bid Submission Date	Requirements from participants	Tender Document's Fees (Including VAT) (RO)
1	71/2023	Supply, Installation and Commissioning of 110V DC System at 132kV Jahloot Grid Station in Muscat Governorate.	13/09/2023	10/10/2023	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration	52/500
2	72/2023	Supply, Installation and Configuration of RTU Cyber Security Monitoring System.	13/09/2023	10/10/2023	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration	52/500

Participation:	Interested Companies may obtain Tender Document with the necessity Apply on E-tendering
Buying the Tender:	By E-Tendering System.
Fees:	Against non-refundable payment as mentioned above against each set of document. (Payment Through Bank Transfer) , SMEs are exempted from tender's fees.
The deadline for clarification:	Before (21) Days from bid submission date.
Submission:	The submission of hard copy will be only for Bid Bond & other documents by E-Tendering
Terms and conditions:	- No other writing or any reference thereto should be mentioned on the envelope. - The bid should be valid for not less than (90) days from bid submission date. - The Tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the bid value and should be valid for (90) days from bid submission date, addressed to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC). Small & Medium Enterprises are exempted from the submission of 1% of the bid bond. - Any bid not comply with the required guarantee, will not be accepted. - OETC is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offers.
Offer:	The bid bond should be submitted in Tender Box No. (1) at the company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission of the Tenders.
Company Address:	Muscat - Al Mawaleh Road No: 2153 - Building No. 423 0 Block No: 321 - Contact Details: 93515198
Email	tenders@omangrid.com
Website:	www.omangrid.com / Link of E-Tendering System https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx



Oman Electricity Transmission Company S.A.O.C.
P.O. Box 1389, Al Khoudh, PC 132, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 2428 3000 | Fax: +968 2230 9046
www.omangrid.com



إعلان طرح مناقصات

تعلن الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء عن طرح المناقصات التالية :

م	رقم المناقصة	عنوان المناقصة	آخر موعد للحصول على مستندات المناقصة	آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات	الدرجة	ثمن الوثيقة (شامل ضريبة القيمة المضافة) (ر.ع)
١	٢٠٢٣/٧١	توريد وتركيب وتشغيل شواحن وبطاريات جهد 110 فولت تيار مستمر في محطة جحوت جهد 132 كيلوفولت في محافظة مسقط.	٢٠٢٣/٠٩/١٣	٢٠٢٣/١٠/١٠	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال ولديها سجل جاري ساري المفعول	٥٢/٥٠٠
٢	٢٠٢٣/٧٢	توريد وتركيب وتثبيت نظام امان وحماية أنظمة مراقبة وحدة التحكم الطرفية (RTU)	٢٠٢٣/٠٩/١٣	٢٠٢٣/١٠/١٠	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال ولديها سجل جاري ساري المفعول	٥٢/٥٠٠

الاشتراك	يمكن للشركات والمؤسسات المتخصصة الحصول على مستندات المناقصة بعد تقديم الطلب عن طريق نظام المناقص الإلكتروني.
طريقة الشراء	من خلال نظام المناقص الإلكتروني.
الرسم	مقابل دفع المبلغ المحدد أعلاه للنسخة الواحدة - لا ترد - الدفع عن طريق التحويل البنكي). تعفى المؤسسات الصغيرة والمتوسطة من دفع ثمن الوثيقة.
آخر موعد للاستفسارات	قبل (٢١) يوم من تاريخ آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات
تقديم العروض	يتم تسليم النسخة الأصلية فقط من الضمان البنكي للعطاء في الصندوق. أما العرض فيتم تسليمه من خلال نظام المناقص الإلكتروني.
الشروط والخصائص	- عدم تحديد اسم صاحب العطاء أو ما يشير إليه على المخطوف. - أن تكون العروض سارية المفعول لمدة لا تقل عن (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء. - إرفاق تأميناً في صورة ضمان مصرفي من أحد البنوك العاملة في البلاد قدره (٢٪) من قيمة العطاء ساري لمدة (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء. ومعنوناً باسم الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء. تعفى المؤسسات الصغيرة والمتوسطة من تسليم الضمان المصرفي. - كل عطاء لا يستوفي التأمين المطلوب لن ينظر فيه. - الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء غير مقيدة بقبول أقل العروض أو أي عطاء آخر.
العروض المقدم	يجب وضع الضمان البنكي للعطاء فقط في صندوق المناقصات رقم (١) بمنى الشركة قبل الساعة ١١ صباحاً من التاريخ المحدد لتقديم العطاءات
عنوان الشركة	عنوان الشركة: محافظة مسقط - الموالح رقم السكة ٢١٥٣ - مبنى رقم ٤١٢٠ تفاصيل التواصل: ٩٣٥١٥١٩٨
البريد الإلكتروني	tenders@omangrid.com
الموقع الإلكتروني	www.omangrid.com link of E-Tendering System https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx



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الموقع الإلكتروني: www.omangrid.com



MoE organises training programme for new education supervisors

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Educational Supervision, has implemented an introductory programme to prepare new supervisors to work in the educational supervision sector.

The programme targets 80 supervisors from various educational directorates in the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, said a press release.

The introductory programme aims to prepare new supervisors to work in the educational supervision sector with basic supervisory skills and competencies, and knowledge of the administrative and legal aspects related to supervisory work.

It also aims to identify supportive supervisory models, ways to activate them, and instill reflection on supervisory practices.

The programme started with a speech by Dr Sulaiman al Jamudi, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Educational Supervision. The introductory programme included a number of papers presented over the span of two days.

The first day of the programme began with a paper entitled 'Planning in Supervisory Work', presented by Bader al Akhzami, General Supervisor of School Sports Subject.

The second paper was titled 'Tasks and Roles of the Educational Supervisor', presented by Dr Ali al Shukaili, general supervisor of the Islamic Education subject. The third paper 'Super-



vision: Educational Leadership' was presented by Harith bin Humaid al Tobi, senior supervisor in Second Field Education.

Theyab al Muzaini, Assistant Director of the Department of Administrative Development, presented the fourth paper title: 'Pauses in the Application of the Provisions of the Civil Service Law and its Implementing Regulations' and the fifth paper focused on the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution and Artificial Intelligence Technologies', and was presented by Omar al Abri, Senior Supervisor of Information Technology course.

Mahmoud al Nabhani, senior supervisor of the Chemistry subject, focused on 'Patterns of Educational Supervision', whereas the last paper on the first day was presented by Dr Maryam al Balushi, senior supervisor of the Arabic language subject.

Her paper was on 'The Role of Procedural Research in Developing Supervisory Work'.

The second day of the programme included a paper on 'Teacher Performance Evaluation: Foundations and Tools', by Ali al Ghafri, PhD student at Sultan Qaboos University, head of Support for Supervisory Teams.

The second paper 'Activating Supervisory Practices to Improve the Teaching and Learning Process' was presented by Saif al Mahdhour, senior supervisor of Geography.

Dr Muhammad al Qayoudi, senior supervisor of Physics, presented 'Reading Indicators of Academic Achievement' whereas Dr Khadija al Balushi, Director of

the Supervision Department of Applied Sciences, presented a paper entitled 'Methodology of Supervisory Teams'.

The fifth paper was presented by Darwish al Kiyumi, Director of the Humanities Supervision Department, entitled 'Electronic Supervision'. The second day ended with the paper 'Electronic Preparation: The Lesson Preparation Platform' by Talal al Hussein, Director of the Individual Skills Supervision Department.

Abdullah al Marzuqi, assistant director of the Department of Human Sciences Supervision, who supervises the programme, said, "Educational systems in all countries seek to raise the levels of performance to enhance the educational outputs in light of the rapid developments the world is witnessing in all fields."

The ministry seeks to develop its educational systems in various fields, of which educational supervision is one of the basic components.



Ineos Grenadier Demonstrator debuts at Goodwood Festival

Ineos Automotive's hydrogen-fuelled Grenadier Demonstrator made its global debut at this year's Goodwood Festival of Speed. The 4X4 emits nothing but water vapour and demonstrates Ineos's belief that hydrogen is a key fuel of the future.

The hydrogen Grenadier Demonstrator is identical to the production Grenadier apart from a bonnet power bulge to accommodate the additional height of the fuel cell, but this would not be present in a production model.

Lynn Calder, CEO of Ineos Automotive, says: "The hydrogen-powered Grenadier Demonstrator is an extraordinary vehicle, capable of doing everything a conventionally powered Grenadier can do but with zero emissions. It shows Ineos' determination to make supremely capable cars that will help us reach net zero."

The project to develop a hydrogen-fuelled Grenadier began in June 2022, when the business

partnered with Austrian engineering supplier/powertrain consultancy AVL, to develop the current vehicle with a clear ambition - zero emissions with no compromise to the 4X4 experience.

The 4X4 uses BMW Group's

The project to develop a hydrogen-fuelled Grenadier began in June 2022, when Ineos partnered with Austrian consultancy AVL

latest hydrogen fuel cell, zero-emissions powertrain, considered the most advanced and powerful in the automotive sector.

The flexibility of the Grenadier platform allowed Ineos Automotive engineers to integrate the zero-emissions powertrain by modifying the ladder frame and

rear axle, accommodating the electric drive units to deliver true torque vectoring drive control to each rear wheel.

The capabilities of torque vectoring result in what Ineos calls 'gecko capability' - outstanding control and manoeuvrability in all off-road conditions, as well as a tighter turning circle and enhanced on-road driving dynamics. To get to this point, the hydrogen Grenadier Demonstrator has undergone rigorous testing to ensure there has been no compromise to its on- and off-road capabilities or towing capacities. Like the other versions of the Grenadier, the demonstrator has conquered the notorious trails of the Austrian mountains and the various offroad challenges around Graz.

Lynn Calder, CEO of Ineos Automotive, says: "The hydrogen-powered Grenadier Demonstrator along with our all-electric model due in 2026, shows Ineos commitment to net zero."

Trowers & Hamlin signs MoU with Omani startup Madaar

International law firm Trowers & Hamlin has signed a memorandum of understanding with Oman-based tech start-up incubator Madaar.

The agreement will see Trowers providing essential legal know-how and content across a broad range of legal issues through workshops, mentorship and consultation sessions that Madaar conducts to help support its start-up community.

Founded in 2020, Madaar helps MENA-based entrepreneurs develop through its network of start-ups, capacity building and entrepreneurial programs, and investors to connect people and maximise opportunities for growth, funding, and collaboration. Madaar has so far helped over 400 start-ups in the MENA region develop, grow, and scale their businesses.

The organisation is founded on the objective of helping start-ups de-risk their business and achieve 10x scalability, and is the first recipient of the Virtual Accelerator licence in Oman.

Under the terms of the agreement, Trowers & Hamlin will be providing one-on-one consultation sessions and templates of agreements, and hosting workshops for Madaar's community of start-ups.

"Trowers and Hamlin is a well-established and respected firm in the MENA region. To have access to their brilliant legal understanding and experience will be invaluable to our entrepreneurs," said Murooj al Saadi, founder and CEO of Madaar. "It will certainly give them a huge boost as they strive to grow their innovative businesses. Our vision is to provide MENA-based entrepreneurs with the tools they need to build scalable tech start-ups and businesses - Trowers' input will definitely help us achieve that aim. I look forward to collaborating with Trowers and watching as it impacts positively on the many businesses that we are helping to nurture."



Murooj al Saadi



Raya al Harthy

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Commenting on the deal, Trowers & Hamlin senior associate Raya al Harthy said, "I am delighted to have reached an agreement with Madaar for Trowers to provide this essential legal learning to their entrepreneurs."

ahli Islamic opens digital branch at Mall of Oman

Dedicated to enhance its customers' banking experience, ahli Islamic has established a specialised, cutting-edge Digital Branch at the Mall of Oman.

The new branch will offer top-notch services that are in accordance with current global digital trends in order to provide its customers with a contemporary, efficient, and secure banking experience. The new branch replaces traditional tellers with multi-purpose machine, offering ahli Islamic clients a unique and practical option to carry out different banking activities.

Customers can open accounts, apply for financing requests, and credit cards, pay bills, transfer money, and carry out other banking services using the machine.

Commenting on the launch of the new digital branch, Yousuf Salim al Rawahi, DGM - head of



ahli Islamic, said, "We are happy to launch our first digital branch to enable our customers with a seamless and efficient banking experience by incorporating digital technology across its digitized services, and establishing

higher standards of excellence.

"This demonstrates our commitment to providing modern banking options for our customers. We hope to persist as the top choice for sharia'a compliant banking in the Sultanate

and contribute to the progress of Islamic banking."

"The opening of our new Digital Branch is evidence of our assurance of providing easy banking solutions to our customers. We are confident that

the Multi-Function machine equipped branch will enhance the overall banking experience and will allow customers to make transactions hassle-free, without waiting in lines.

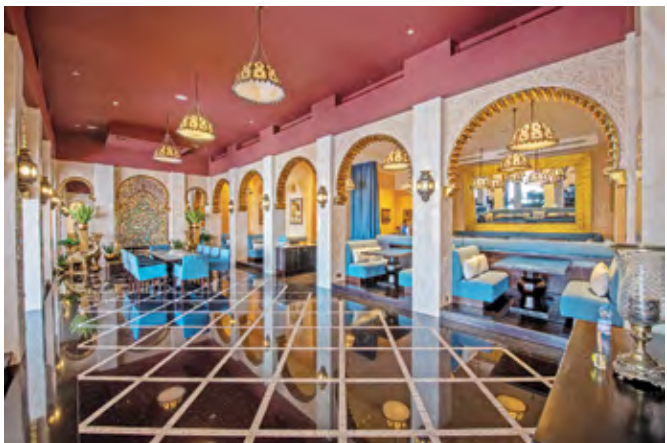
"A sharia'a-compliant digital branch is indeed a major milestone for us, as well as, a significant step in the country's fintech agenda. We are confident of driving this further given our successful track record in implementing digital-first solutions for our customers, thereby putting the industry at par with global benchmarks," he added.

The new digital branch at Mall of Oman is part of ahli Islamic's ongoing endeavors to offer its customers a banking experience that is smooth and efficient. ahli Islamic is consistently investing in new technologies and digital solutions to meet the evolving needs of the customers.

'Taste of Shangri-La' culinary celebration begins

Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah and Shangri-La Al Husn have introduced 'Taste of Shangri-La' - an extraordinary month-long culinary celebration - set to indulge discerning palates from September 1 to 30.

The resort seeks to let prospective diners know that the 13 restaurants at Shangri-La are close at hand, affordable with value-priced menus, as well as offer a variety of vegan delights for discerning diners. Just a 15-minute drive from the city of Muscat, this exceptional event promises an unparalleled journey through an array of expertly crafted set menus, curated across the hotels' five distinct speciality restaurants, a press re-



lease said.

"We are delighted to present the Taste of Shangri-La, an event that truly encapsulates the pinnacle of culinary prowess showcased at our resorts. This annual

celebration not only pays homage to the diverse tapestry of cultures but also provides our esteemed guests with an exceptional dining experience at an incredible value," said Rene D Egle,

Area general manager of Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah and Shangri-La Al Husn, Muscat.

For a limited period, diners are invited to savour daily tasting menus comprising a minimum of six courses at each of the five signature dining venues - Chow Mee, Capri Court, Bait Al Bahr, Aangan by Rohit Ghai, and Sultanah. All this comes at a set price of RO19 in each venue. The selected dining venue's welcome beverage is also extended to all patrons, as accomplished chefs guide them through a delectable culinary odyssey.

Bait Al Bahr, where the art of seafood comes alive, offers a feast comprising live tuna roll preparation to the mastery of

Omani seafood soup. Italian enthusiasts will find their culinary aspirations fulfilled at Capri Court, indulging in highlights like grilled scallops with tomato tartar, ricotta and spinach dumplings enhanced by shaved truffle, and homemade chitarra pasta accompanied by prawn tartare and cheese fondue. At Chow Mee, Chef Ida unfolds an Asian culinary show, treating guests to delights such as Thai deep-fried breaded prawn cake, Indonesian-style Wagyu baby short ribs, and Thai wok-fried seafood rice noodles with peanut. Sultanah beckons with its exceptional offerings, including Omani tuna crudo, braised octopus with beetroot couscous.

Kyiv targeted by powerful aerial attack

The barrage was ‘the most powerful’ to hit the city since the spring, and two people were killed by falling debris

Kyiv, Ukraine - Ukraine said on Wednesday it had downed more than two dozen cruise missiles and a swarm of attack drones across the country in the ‘most powerful’ aerial attack on Kyiv in weeks that left two dead.

The assault came as Russia said an airport near the border with NATO member Estonia had been targeted by drones, and state news agencies reported several transport planes were damaged.

An AFP reporter in Kyiv heard at least three loud explosions over the capital at around 5am (0200 GMT) as part of the nationwide barrage of 28 cruise missiles and 16 attack drones.

The Kyiv City Military Administration described the barrage as ‘the most powerful’ to hit the city since the spring, and two people were killed by falling debris, Sergiy Popko, a military official in Kyiv announced.

Emergency services said the victims were employees of an infrastructure facility in the Shevchenkivskyi district, without elaborating.

Russian forces launched groups of Iranian-made Shahed attack drones at the capital from different directions, and launched missiles from aircraft, the Kyiv city military administration said.



Firefighters take a break while trying to extinguish a fire in a building that was damaged following a missile attack in a village outside Kyiv on Wednesday (AFP)

The assault came as Russia said an airport near the border with NATO member Estonia had been targeted by drones, and state news agencies reported several transport planes were damaged

tion said. AFP reporters saw municipal workers assessing damage to the roof of a housing block where residents were clearing debris from flats with blown-out windows.

Drone wave
And law enforcement cordoned

off forested territory where tangled pieces of metal had landed following the overnight attack.

Russia systematically targeted Ukrainian cities early in the invasion launched last year but massive strikes have lessened as Moscow’s stockpiles depleted and Ukraine bolstered its air de-

fences. Ukraine has meanwhile stepped up drone attacks inside Russia.

It launched a wave of strikes overnight, targeting an airport near the Estonian border and the Crimean peninsula on the Black Sea, Russian authorities said. The governor of the Pskov re-

gion bordering Estonia said air defence systems had repelled drones targeting the airfield roughly 800km (nearly 500 miles) from Ukraine’s border.

Governor Mikhail Vedernikov, who said he was at the scene of the attack, posted a video online of a massive fire, with the sounds of explosions and sirens in the background.

Authorities were assessing the damage but there were no casualties, he said.

The RIA Novosti agency cited the emergency situations ministry as saying two Ilyushin Il-76 heavy transport planes had caught fire. TASS reported four were implicated in the attack.

There was no immediate comment from the defence ministry. All flights scheduled on Wednesday at the airport were cancelled, Vedernikov announced, ‘until the nature of the possible damage to the runway is clarified’.

The Pskov region was previously targeted by drones in May.

Authorities in Bryansk region near the Ukraine border, southern Oryol region and Kaluga and Ryazan regions, southwest and southeast of Moscow, all reported drones had been destroyed or downed. AFP

Gabon hit by military coup, president under house arrest

Libreville, Gabon - Rebel officers in the oil-rich central African state of Gabon announced on Wednesday they had seized power following disputed elections in which President Ali Bongo Ondimba, in power since 2009, had been declared victor.

Bongo, 64, whose family has ruled Gabon for over 55 years, was placed under house arrest and one of his sons arrested for treason, the coup leaders said.

In a dramatic pre-dawn address, a group of officers declared ‘all the institutions of the republic’ had been dissolved, the election results cancelled and the borders closed.

“Today, the country is going through a serious institutional, political, economic and social crisis,” according to the statement read on state TV.

It was read by an officer flanked by a group of a dozen army colonels, members of the elite Republican Guard, regular soldiers and others.

The elections ‘did not meet the conditions for a transparent, credible and inclusive ballot so much hoped for by the people of Gabon’, the statement said.



This video grab taken from Gabon 24 on Wednesday shows Gabonese soldiers carrying General Brice Oligui Nguema (AFP)

Bongo, 64, whose family has ruled Gabon for over 55 years, was placed under house arrest and one of his sons arrested for treason, the coup leaders said

“Added to this is irresponsible and unpredictable governance, resulting in a continuing deterioration in social cohesion, with the risk of leading the country in chaos.”

“We - the Committee for the Transition and Restoration of Institutions (CTRI) on behalf of the people of Gabon and as guarantors of the institutions’ protection - have decided to defend

peace by putting an end to the current regime,” it said.

TV images later showed the head of the Republican Guard, General Brice Oligui Nguema, being carried in triumph by hundreds of soldiers, to cries of ‘Oligui president’.

Bongo’s son and close adviser Nouredin Bongo Valentin, his chief of staff Ian Ghislain Ngoulou as well as his deputy, two other presidential advisers and the two top officials in the ruling Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG) ‘have been arrested’, a military leader said.

They are accused of treason, embezzlement, corruption and falsifying the president’s signature, among other allegations, he said.

Bongo was first elected in 2009 following the death of his father Omar, who had ruled the country for 41 years, reputedly amassing a fortune en route.

The announcement came just moments after the national election authority declared Bongo had won a third term in Saturday’s election with 64.27 per cent of the vote. AFP



Vehicles sit in a flooded street caused by the hurricane passing offshore on Wednesday in St. Petersburg, Florida (AFP)

Hurricane Idalia strengthens to Category 4 storm as it nears Florida

St. Petersburg, US - Hurricane Idalia strengthened to a Category 4 storm early on Wednesday as it barreled towards Florida, threatening ‘catastrophic’ impacts, with officials forecasting it will slam into the coast within hours.

Authorities in the southern US state described Idalia and its potentially deadly storm surge as a once-in-a-lifetime event for Florida’s northwest coast, as they ordered mass evacuations and issued flood alerts ahead of a projected landfall on Wednesday morning.

The US National Hurricane Center (NHC) said Idalia, which earlier raked western Cuba, had strengthened to a Category 4 storm as of 5am EST (0900

GMT), with maximum sustained winds of 130 miles (215km) per hour.

“Idalia is a category 4 hurricane... Idalia could continue to strengthen before it reaches the Big Bend coast of Florida in a few hours,” the NHC said in an advisory. “While Idalia should weaken after landfall, it is likely to still be a hurricane while moving across southern Georgia, and near the coast of Georgia or southern South Carolina late today.”

Warm waters in the Gulf of Mexico are expected to further turbocharge Idalia, with wind speeds topping 150 mph, the NHC said.

It warned of a potentially disastrous storm surge inundation

of 12 to 16 feet (3.5-5 metres) in some coastal areas.

“Very few people can survive being in the path of a major storm surge, and this storm will be deadly if we don’t get out of harm’s way and take it seriously,” said Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) chief Deanne Criswell.

In the small coastal town of Steinhatchee, resident Robert Bryant was making final preparations on Tuesday to evacuate inland with his two cats and a dog.

“We are out on the water, so we are going to be the worst ones to get hit,” said the 18-year-old student, whose home built on stilts is close to the mouth of a river. AFP

‘Animals are thirsty’: Dust and bones on Turkey’s shrinking lake

Van, Turkey - Shepherd Ibrahim Koc recalls his youth with fondness as he grazes cattle on a barren field that was once lush with vegetation on the edge of Turkey’s largest lake.

An occasional shrub marks the spots from where Lake Van has retreated over years of global heating and drought.

“The animals are thirsty,” the 65-year-old lamented.

“There is no water,” Koc said, echoing sentiments expressed by a growing number of Turks who have watched their mountains lose ice caps and their water reservoirs dry up.

A weather map of Turkey - an agricultural superpower stretching from Bulgaria in the west to

Iran in the east - shows much of the country suffering from a prolonged drought.

Shrinking shorelines are exposing lakebeds that pollute the air with a salty dust. Scientists fear the problems could grow only worse.

“I think these are our good days,” Faruk Alaeddinoglu, a professor at Van Yuzuncu Yil University, told AFP. “We will witness the lake continuing to shrink in the coming years.”

Lake Van covers approximately 3,700sqkm (1,400 square miles), reaching a maximum depth of 450 metres (1,475 feet).

Its surface area has shrunk by around 1.5 per cent in recent



A herd grazing in a field that was once rich in vegetation on the shores of Lake Van on August 17 (AFP)

years, according to measurements Alaeddinoglu carried out last autumn. “That is a terribly large amount of water for a 3,700sqkm area,” he said.

‘Barren land’

In the Celebibagi neighbourhood on the lake’s northern shore, the waters have receded by around four kilometres.

A long walk along the exposed lakebed is littered with bird bones, craggy bushes and dried dirt covered with sodium and other minerals.

“We are walking in an area which was once covered with the lake’s waters,” said Ali Kalcik, a local environmentalist. “Now, it’s a barren land with-

out a living thing.”

The sight of dazzling flamingos dancing in the air against the backdrop of mountains signals the spot where the lake finally begins.

Alaeddinoglu said the lake’s size had changed in the past because of rifts in tectonic plates that make Turkey into one of the most active earthquake zones in the world.

But he blamed the ongoing water loss on rising temperatures that result in ‘less precipitation and excessive evaporation’.

Almost three times as much of the lake’s water evaporates than comes back down in the form of rain, Alaeddinoglu said. AFP



A Delta airlines Airbus 320 approaches Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (AFP)

11 hospitalised as flight to Atlanta hits turbulence

Washington, US - Eleven airline passengers and crew were hospitalised on Tuesday following severe turbulence on a Delta flight from Milan to Atlanta, the US-based airline said.

"Delta Care Team members are mobilising to connect with customers on Delta Flight 175 that experienced severe turbulence before landing safely in Atlanta on Tuesday," a spokesman said. "Our priority is taking care of our customers and crew who sustained injuries."

It is unclear how many total people out of the 151 passengers and 14-member crew were injured beyond the 11 taken to hospital, or what the extent of the injuries are for those hospitalised. Major Hurricane Idalia is currently whipping up fierce winds off the US Gulf Coast and forecast to make landfall in Florida early on Wednesday.

AFP

Australia set to hold indigenous rights referendum on October 14

Sydney, Australia - Australia will hold a historic indigenous rights referendum on October 14, the prime minister said on Wednesday, setting up a defining moment for the nation's relationship with Aboriginal minorities.

"On that day, every Australian will have a once-in-a-generation chance to bring our country together," Anthony Albanese said as he announced the date for the compulsory and binding vote.

"October 14 is our time. It's our chance. It's a moment calling out to the best of our Australian character."

If passed, Indigenous Australians - whose ancestors have lived on the continent for at least 60,000 years - would be recognised in the constitution for the first time. They would also gain a constitutionally enshrined right to be consulted on laws that impact their communities, the so-called 'Voice to Parliament'.

"It permits our people to have a seat at the table," said Indigenous academic and constitutional lawyer Megan Davis.

The 'yes' campaign is currently trailing in the polls, sparking fears a failed referendum could tarnish Australia's global reputation and squander a rare



A woman walks past posters advocating for an Aboriginal voice, in Melbourne on Wednesday (AFP)

chance to reduce pervasive inequality. "Voting 'no' closes the door on this opportunity to move forward," Albanese said from South Australia, a crucial swing state.

"Don't close the door on the

next generation of Indigenous Australians."

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

But more than two centuries after the first British settlers

dropped anchor in Sydney Harbour, they are still far more likely to die young, live in poverty, and wind up in prison.

The leader of Australia's conservative opposition party Peter Dutton has spearheaded the 'no'

Voting 'no' closes the door on this opportunity to move forward. Don't close the door on next generation of Indigenous Australians

ANTHONY ALBANESE

campaign, has argued it is not 'in our country's best interests' and claimed it would create red tape.

Indigenous activist Georgia Corrie, 30, has been drumming up support in the Northern Territory, which has the highest proportional Aboriginal population in the country.

"The feeling on the ground is great, there is a lot of support for the upcoming referendum," she told AFP. "Australians have recognised it's time to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people."

Divisive proposal

Albanese points to polls which showed about 80 per cent of Indigenous Australians support the Voice. But it is by no means universally popular.

Some fear it would taint the constitution or strain race relations, while some Indigenous Australians believe it does not go far enough.

Conservative Senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price, an Indigenous Australian who opposes the Voice, said it would sow division and discontent. "We will not allow the prime minister and this referendum to divide our country along the lines of race within our constitution," she said following Albanese's announcement.

Initial surveys hinted at broad support for the proposal, but approval has 'been on a downward arc' in recent months, pollster William Bowe told AFP.

Bowe said the 'no' campaign's adept use of Indigenous spokespeople had 'persuaded a lot of Australians that it's not racist for them to do what they are naturally inclined to do in referendums, which is to cautiously favour the status quo'.

Since Australia became a federation in 1901, 44 constitutional referendums have been held. Only eight have passed.

AFP

Several sea lions die from bird flu in Argentina: Officials

Buenos Aires, Argentina - Scores of sea lions have died from bird flu in Argentina, officials said on Tuesday, as an unprecedented global outbreak continues to infect mammals, raising fears it could spread more easily among humans.

Animal health authorities have recently reported dead sea lions in several locations along Argentina's extensive Atlantic coast, from just south of the capital Buenos Aires to Santa Cruz near the southern tip of the continent. Another 50 dead specimens have been counted... with symptoms compatible with avian influenza', read a statement from a Patagonian environmental authority.

"The number of dead is rising. There is no veterinary treatment



Members of the National Food Health and Quality Service taking samples from a dead sea lion in the Atlantic coast near Viedma on Tuesday (AFP)

for these cases," a local official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Authorities have asked the

population to avoid beaches along Argentina's roughly 5,000km (3,100-mile) coastline where cases have been reported.

Sea lions are marine mammals, like seals and walruses. Adult males can weigh about 300kg (660 pounds).

The H5N1 bird flu has typically been confined to seasonal outbreaks, but since 2021 cases have emerged year-round, and across the globe, leading to what experts say is the largest outbreak ever seen.

Hundreds of sea lions were reported dead in Peru earlier this year, as the virus has ravaged bird populations across South America. There is no treatment for bird flu, which spreads naturally between wild birds and can also infect domestic poultry.

Avian influenza viruses do not typically infect humans, although there have been rare cases.

AFP

CALL FOR WIND POWER



Greenpeace activists climb up flagpoles to fix mockups of wind turbines in front of the Bavarian State Chancellery in Munich, southern Germany, on Wednesday, as they call for more wind power (AFP)

Japan's one hundred years of efforts to tame earthquakes

Tokyo, Japan - Takashi Hosoda was in a Tokyo skyscraper when the 9.0 magnitude quake struck on March 11, 2011, but the trained architect was 'not particularly worried' as modern Japanese buildings are designed to protect their occupants.

A century after Tokyo was destroyed in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, the Japanese capital today bears no resemblance to the city levelled by that 7.9 tremor, which killed 105,000 people. The low-rise, largely wooden city that was destroyed a second time by US fire-bombing during World War II has been replaced by a soaring megalopolis where reinforced concrete is king.

The September 1, 1923, disaster marked 'the dawn of seismic design of structures in Japan', said Yoshiaki Nakano, an earthquake engineering expert from the National Research Institute for Earth Sciences and Disaster Resilience (NIED).



This file photo shows an alley in an area with dense wooden houses in Arakawa Ward, Tokyo on August 23 (AFP)

The following year Japan introduced its first building code for earthquake-resistant construction. These standards have been constantly expanded since then, drawing on lessons from other major tremors in the archipelago, which accounts for around 10 per cent of the world's earthquakes.

Japan's seismic building code is one of the most stringent in the world, Nakano told AFP.

'Basically, the Japanese building requires a relatively higher strength' than elsewhere, he said, stressing the importance of meticulous monitoring of compliance. "The system to supervise and check the design and

the construction on-site is a very key factor to ensure the quality of the structure, the performance of the building during earthquakes," he said.

The 2011 earthquake triggered a deadly tsunami along the northeast coast but in Tokyo the damage was limited: high-rise towers oscillated

A century after Tokyo was destroyed in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, the Japanese capital today bears no resemblance to the city levelled by that 7.9 tremor

alarmingly for several minutes but did not topple.

Skyscraper shock absorbers

Early basic reinforced structures have been adapted with more sophisticated seismic safety measures found in modern towers. Massive soft rubber cushions are installed under the foundations to isolate them from

ground vibrations; shock absorbers are distributed throughout the floors; and some even have pendulums weighing several hundred tonnes installed at the top to counteract the movement of the building during a quake.

Built in 2014 and rising 247 metres (810 feet) above the city, the Toranomon Hills Mori Tower is fitted with such seismic anti-vibration systems, including 516 oil dampers, each comprising a thick cylinder 1.7 metres long.

"It stretches and shrinks repeatedly in case of an earthquake. It then starts getting warm, which means the energy of the quake transforms into heat and gets released," Kai Toyama, a structural engineering official at real estate giant Mori Building, told AFP. "As a result, the tremor of the whole building can be controlled."

After the Kobe earthquake in 1995 left more than 6,000 dead, emphasis was also placed on

strengthening earthquake resistance standards for new wooden houses and upgrading older buildings dating from before the last major overhaul of the building code in 1981.

The Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 was also 'a wake-up call to Japan', Nakano noted. 'Not only the engineers but also for people'. Since 1960, Japan has marked September 1 as national Disaster Prevention Day.

Every year on that day, countless schoolchildren, employees and civil servants - including the entire government - carry out simulation exercises in preparation for a major earthquake. In Japan, many people stock emergency supplies at home, as do businesses and local governments. As of April 1, 2023, local authorities in Tokyo have stockpiled 9.5 million instant meals (comprising rice, noodles and biscuits) in about 400 warehouses.

AFP

Indian rover confirms sulphur on Moon’s south pole

New Delhi, India - India’s Moon rover has confirmed the presence of sulphur on the lunar south pole, the country’s space agency said.

Last week, India became the first country to land a craft near the largely unexplored south pole, and just the fourth nation to land on the Moon.

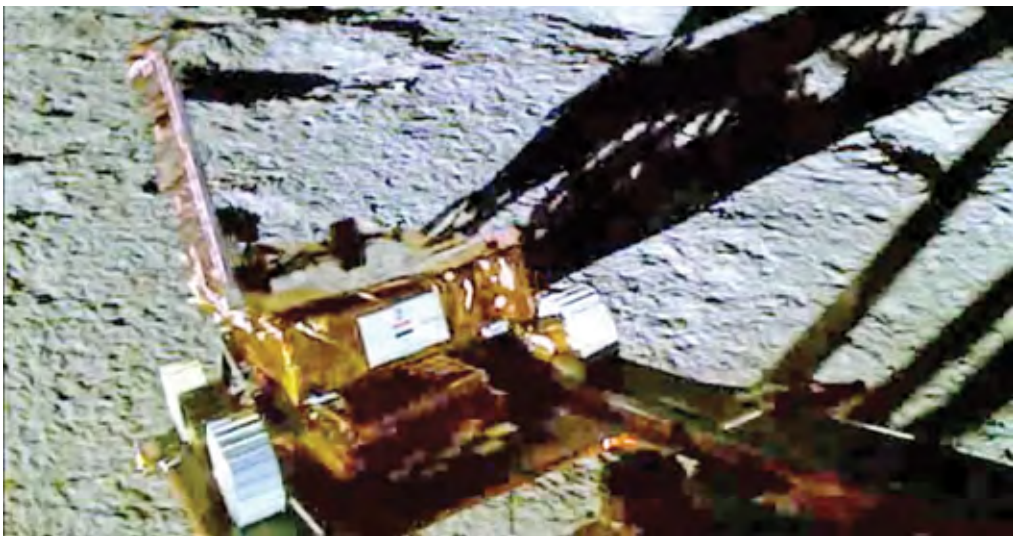
“The Laser-Induced Breakdown Spectroscopy (LIBS) instrument onboard Chandrayaan-3 Rover has made the first-ever in-situ measurements on the elemental composition of the lunar surface near the south pole,” the Indian Space Research Organi-

sation (ISRO) said in a statement dated Monday.

“These in-situ measurements confirm the presence of sulphur in the region unambiguously, something that was not feasible by the instruments onboard the orbiters,” it said.

The spectrographic analysis also confirmed the presence of aluminium, calcium, iron, chromium and titanium on the lunar surface, ISRO added, with additional measurements showing the presence of manganese, silicon and oxygen.

The six-wheeled solar-powered rover Pragyan - ‘Wisdom’ in Sanskrit - will amble around



This handout screen grab taken and released by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on August 25 shows the Chandrayaan-3 rover as it manoeuvred from the lunar lander to the surface of the Moon (AFP)

the relatively unmapped south pole and transmit images and scientific data over its two-week lifespan.

India has been steadily matching the achievements of other space programmes at a fraction of their cost, despite suffering some setbacks.

Four years ago, the previous Indian lunar mission failed during its final descent, in what was seen at the time as a huge setback for the programme.

Chandrayaan-3 has captivated public attention since launching nearly six weeks ago in front of thousands of cheering spectators, and its successful

touchdown on the Moon last week came just days after a Russian lander crashed in the same region.

In 2014, India became the first Asian nation to put a craft into orbit around Mars and plans to send a probe towards the sun in September.

ISRO is slated to launch a three-day crewed mission into Earth’s orbit by next year.

It also plans a joint mission with Japan to send another probe to the Moon by the year 2025 and an orbital mission to Venus within the next two years.

AFP

Pakistan ex-PM Khan’s detention extended over leaked documents

Attock, Pakistan - A Pakistan court on Wednesday ordered that former prime minister Imran Khan be kept in jail over allegations he leaked classified documents, a day after a judge granted his release in a separate graft case.

Since being ousted from power last year, Khan - Pakistan’s most popular politician - has been tangled in a slew of legal cases he says are designed to stop him from contesting upcoming elections.

Following a brief hearing inside the jail on Wednesday, Khan’s lawyer Salman Safdar told AFP his detention was extended for two weeks under the colonial-era Official Secrets Act.

Khan’s three-year prison term for graft was suspended on Tuesday, but authorities kept him in custody at Attock prison, around 60km (37 miles) west of Islamabad, over the leaked documents case.

The case relates to a cable that Khan had touted as proof that he was ousted as part of a US conspiracy backed by the establishment, according to a report by the government’s Federal Investigation Agency.

The United States and the Pakistan military have denied the claim.

Safdar said the legislation was generally used to prosecute mili-



Security personnel stand guard outside the Attock prison, where former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan is sentenced, in Attock on Wednesday (AFP)

itary cases, and the decision to try Khan in a closed courtroom was ‘condemnable and concerning’.

“It is a brazen and blatant violation of the fundamental rights,” he said. “He has not been given a right to free trial.”

The vice chairman of Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, a former foreign minister, has also been arrested over the case.

Khan’s lawyers allege he was arrested in the case two weeks ago, without his or their knowl-

Following a brief hearing inside the jail on Wednesday, Khan’s detention was extended for two weeks under the colonial-era Official Secrets Act

Shoaib Shaheen, another of Khan’s lawyers, said on Tuesday.

Khan’s three-year sentence was handed down early in August by a judge who found him guilty of failing to properly declare gifts he received while in office. The election commission subsequently banned him for five years from contesting elections.

The court on Tuesday said the sentence was short enough to be set aside, after Khan’s team argued there were ‘serious jurisdictional defects’ in the conviction made in ‘undue haste’ without allowing them to present witnesses. An appeal against the conviction is pending.

A former international cricket star, Khan has been embroiled in more than 200 cases that he argues are politically motivated.

Khan was also briefly detained on graft charges in May, sparking days of civil unrest.

AFP

G20 summit: India deploys ‘monkey-men’ to scare away primates

New Delhi, India - Indian officials preparing for the G20 summit next week have hired teams of ‘monkey-men’ and erected primate cutouts to deter marauding monkeys from munching on the floral displays laid out for global leaders.

New Delhi’s city council has hired more than 30 ‘monkey wallahs’, or ‘monkey-men’, who mimic the hoots and screams of the aggressive langur monkey - the natural enemy of the smaller rhesus macaque primates who wreak havoc in the capital’s leafy government areas.

“We can’t remove the monkeys from their natural habitat, so we have deployed a team of 30-40 men who are trained to scare away monkeys,” Satish Upadhyay, the vice-chairman of the New Delhi Municipal Council, told AFP on Wednesday.

“We will deploy one man each at the hotels where the delegates would be staying, as well as in places where monkey sightings have been reported.”

Police have readied a near-shutdown of the centre of the capital for the September 9-10 summit.

AFP

Few Catholics in Mongolia, but Pope’s visit eyes geopolitics

Vatican City, Holy See - Pope Francis heads to Mongolia this week, an unlikely choice given the isolated nation’s small Catholic community, but a strategic one due to the young democracy’s geographical position between two superpowers.

In venturing to the sparsely populated, vast Buddhist-majority nation, the pope may eye Mongolia as a way to help build bridges with its neighbours China and Russia, given its strategic location and neutrality in the volatile region.

The trip, which involves a nine-hour flight from Rome on Thursday to the capital of Ulaanbaatar, will also be closely watched as a stamina test for the 86-year-old pope, who underwent hernia surgery in June and suffers pain when walking.

A former Soviet satellite state that has been a democracy since 1992, Mongolia has one of the world’s youngest and smallest Catholic communities, estimated at approximately 1,400 people among its population of 3.3mn.



Pope Francis is greeted by nuns during his weekly general audience in Paul VI hall at the Vatican on Wednesday (AFP)

It has just 25 Catholic priests - only two of them Mongolian - and 33 nuns, according to the Vatican, although its ranks include the global Church’s youngest cardinal.

Pope Francis’s trip to rapidly urbanising Ulaanbaatar represents the Jesuit’s desire to bring the Church’s message to remote, largely ignored areas far from

Rome while championing inter-faith dialogue. It will be ‘the opportunity to embrace a Church small in numbers but vibrant in faith and great in charity’, the pope said on Sunday. But the trip, lasting until September 4, also has undeniably geopolitical aims.

The Vatican’s long-term thinking is ‘to retain a presence and openness in countries where

that’s not an inevitability’, Paul Elie, a senior fellow at Georgetown University’s Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs in Washington, told AFP.

“If going to Mongolia keeps the door open to that whole region, it’s an effective visit with relatively few downsides,” he said.

AFP

Guatemala: Arevalo’s party seeks to annul its suspension

Guatemala City, Guatemala - The political party of Guatemalan president-elect Bernardo Arevalo on Tuesday asked the country’s election court to overturn its decision to suspend the party’s registration.

The day before, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal suspended the Semilla (Seed) Movement at a prosecutor’s request - a move described by Arevalo as political persecution and criticised by Washington and the European Union.

On Tuesday, party lawyer Juan Gerardo Guerrero told reporters Semilla was filing a motion to the tribunal to annul the decision, which he said was based on an ‘illegal’ resolution.

Arevalo, a 64-year-old sociologist and former diplomat, claimed a surprise runaway victory in Guatemala’s August 20 presidential runoff.

He had campaigned against government corruption, and his message appeared to resonate with voters seeking fresh faces in power.

Ahead of the vote, prosecu-



Guatemala’s president-elect Bernardo Arevalo and vice president-elect Karin Herrera chat in Guatemala City on Monday (AFP)

tors tried to suspend Semilla and ordered raids against party offices.

After the first round of voting on June 25, Guatemalan judge Fredy Orellana, at the request of prosecutor Rafael Curruchiche, ordered the electoral tribunal to suspend Semilla pending an investigation into alleged anomalies in its registration as a party.

Orellana and Curruchiche are both on a US list of ‘corrupt actors’. At the time, the court said a party could not be suspended

in the middle of an election campaign. But with voting over, the suspension was confirmed.

Analysts told AFP the move would not prevent Arevalo taking up the presidential reins in January, but would impede his Semilla party’s work in Congress.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Washington ‘remains concerned with continued actions by those who seek to undermine Guatemala’s democracy’.

AFP



India's chess grandmaster and World Cup silver medallist R Pragganandhaa talks to the media in Chennai Wednesday (AFP)

Indian teen chess wizard Pragg given hero's welcome

Chennai, India - India's teen chess prodigy Rameshbabu Pragganandhaa arrived home to celebration Wednesday, with media jostling to catch a glimpse of the newly minted star who faced international No.1 Magnus Carlsen in the World Cup final.

Popularly known as "Pragg", the 18-year-old is the youngest player to reach a chess World Cup final, held last week in the Azerbaijani capital Baku.

Pragg finished with the silver after losing to Carlsen in a nail-biting tiebreak at the International Chess Federation (FIDE) final.

He earned praise from chess legend Garry Kasparov who said Pragg was "very tenacious in difficult positions".

On Wednesday, Pragg was greeted by hordes of supporters who handed him bouquets of flowers and sweets as he emerged from the airport in his home city of Chennai in southern India.

"I am very happy to see so many people have come to receive me... it feels really great,"

he said, as he stood shyly waving from the sunroof of a car, with a purple and gold scarf draped around his neck.

Such adulation is usually reserved in India for cricket stars, who enjoy celebrity status.

The son of a bank employee and a housewife, the grand-

I am very happy to see so many people have come to receive me... it feels really great

R PRAGGANANDHAA

master has been playing the sport since he was four.

Pragg's success has been fuelled by the cooking of his mother Nagalakshmi, who accompanies him on chess tournaments with pots and southern Indian seasonings to make his favourite meal of rice and spicy rasam or sambhar soup.

Oman Sail's Optimist team to compete in Turkey

Muscat - Oman Sail has selected eleven Optimist sailors from three sailing schools to represent the nation in Tekirdag, on the northern coast of Turkey Sea of Marmara, for the five-day International Suleymanpasa Optimist Cup. The competition at Tekirdag Sailing Club features over 400 sailors, from Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Kuwait, Thailand and Malaysia, as well as hosts Turkey and Oman.

Oman will be led by Ghalib al Mamari, Centre Manager of Mussanah Sailing School at Oman Sail, with coach Sultan al Zadjali and assistants Jasim Al Harbi and Hajir Al Amrani supporting the young sailors.

Representing Oman will be Hassan al Wahaibi, Abdul Rahman al Hadi, Habib al Hassani and Harib al Busaidi from the Al Mouj Muscat Sailing School, Tameem al Balushi, Soud al Shaqsi, Feras al Nabhani, Tarteel al Hassani and Hadeel al Mushafri from Mussanah, and Khamis al Mushaikh and Hassan al Orami from Sur.

All of the sailors have earned their place in the team through a series of strong performances at the recent Oman National Sailing Championship.

Al Mamari said, "This is another excellent opportunity for our young sailors to gain experience, test themselves and understand the demands of performing at an international regatta.

We are looking forward to seeing their progress, especially after the Oman National Sailing Championship and training camp in Ras Al Hadd where the entire team showed promising signs of



Ghalib al Mamari

This is another excellent opportunity for our young sailors to gain experience, test themselves and understand the demands of performing at an international regatta

GHALIB AL MAMARI



Sultan al Zadjali

improvement both physically and technically."

Head coach Al Zadjali said, "Sailing is a global sport and the chance to interact with, compete against and learn from sailors of a similar age but different backgrounds is a great experience for our team. We need to learn how

to manage a variety of conditions and prepare for races, and we are very confident that the team will perform at its best in Turkey."

Racing gets underway with a practice session on Friday 1 September, and following the opening ceremony the main series of races begins on Saturday.

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AZAM, AHMED HIT HUNDREDS

Pakistan crush Nepal by 238 runs in Asia Cup

Multan, Pakistan - World number one batter Babar Azam and Iftikhar Ahmed scored punishing hundreds as Pakistan annihilated Nepal by 238 runs in the opening game of the Asia Cup in Multan on Wednesday.

Skipper Azam smashed a 131-ball 151 for his 19th ODI hundred while Ahmed scored an unbeaten 109 in 71 balls for his first as Pakistan piled up 342-6 in 50 overs.

The home team then bundled out Nepal for a mere 104 in 23.4 overs with leg-spinner Shadab Khan taking 4-27 while the pace duo of Haris Rauf took 2-16 and Shaheen Shah Afridi 2-27.

Only Sompal Kami (28), Aarif Sheikh (26) and Gulsan Jha (13) made it into double figures as they struggled against Pakistan's much-vaunted bowling attack.

The win gives Pakistan, who rose to world number one in the ODI rankings last week, an ideal start and tune up for the high profile clash against arch-rivals India in Palkekele on Saturday.

The Asia Cup is being played on a hybrid model this year with Pakistan hosting four matches and Sri Lanka nine after India refused to tour Pakistan because of



Pakistan captain Babar Azam celebrates his century as Iftikhar Ahmed looks on during their Asia Cup match against Nepal on Wednesday (AFP)

Nepal, playing in the Asia Cup for the first time, had bowled well to keep the home team down to 124-4 in the 28th over but were clueless in the final overs against the onslaught from Azam and Ahmed

political tensions.

Pakistan, India and Nepal are in Group A while title-holders Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan are in Group B.

Sri Lanka and Bangladesh meet in Palkekele on Thursday.

Nepal, playing in the Asia Cup for the first time, had bowled well

to keep the home team down to 124-4 in the 28th over but were clueless in the final overs against the onslaught from Azam and Ahmed.

The pair added a robust 214 off 131 balls for the fifth wicket, which took Pakistan to a formidable total.



Sri Lanka captain Dasun Shanaka (R) speaks with coach Chris Silverwood during a practice session on the eve of their match against Bangladesh

Asia Cup defending champs Sri Lanka unfazed by injuries

Kandy, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka skipper Dasun Shanaka said on Wednesday the defending champions will challenge every team in the Asia Cup despite injuries to several key players.

Sri Lanka, co-hosting the tournament with Pakistan, face Bangladesh on Thursday after injuries forced them to drop two key players at the last minute.

They won the tournament in the T20 format last year but it reverts to the ODI format as a prelude to the 50-over World Cup in India, which starts on October 5.

"We are playing in our backyard, so have the home advantage," Shanaka told reporters in Palkekele.

"There are a few players not participating due to injury but still I think we have got a pretty good side who can challenge all the teams."

Leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga and fast-bowler Dushmantha Chameera will sit out the tournament after being

named in the original 15-member squad but Shanaka said his team remained confident.

"There is no pressure at all," he said.

Sri Lanka were underdogs at the previous Asia Cup in Dubai and were expected to bow out after losing their opening match to Afghanistan.

Interest this year remains focused on the rivalry between India and Pakistan, with potential for Asian cricket's two giants to face each other three times before the World Cup.

Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan was unfazed by the India-Pakistan hype.

"They are the favourites, so people will talk about them more," Shakib said. "But having said that, Sri Lanka have won the Asia Cup plenty of times, so they are one of the favourites."

Bangladesh have made the Asia Cup final three times but are still searching for their first trophy.



Erling Haaland

Story Haaland wins PFA Player of the Year award

London, United Kingdom - Manchester City striker Erling Haaland scooped the PFA Players' Player of the Year award on Tuesday after his stellar first season with the treble winners.

England and Aston Villa star Rachel Daly won the women's prize, voted for by fellow players.

Organised by the Professional Footballers' Association, the awards salute the best male and female players in English football in 2023.

Haaland enjoyed a stunning debut season for City, hitting 52 goals in all competitions as Pep Guardiola's men won the Premier League, FA Cup and Champions League.

The 23-year-old saw off competition from team-mates John Stones and Kevin De Bruyne, as well as Arsenal pair Bukayo Saka and Martin Odegaard and former Tottenham striker Harry Kane, now at Bayern Munich.

"It's an honour to win this prestigious award. To be

recognised by your competitors is a great feeling and I would like to thank everyone who voted for me," Haaland said.

"It was an unforgettable season for the team and for me personally. Winning the treble was something I never imagined, so to achieve that with such a special group of players was an amazing feeling.

"We created some incredible memories last season, but now we want to do the same again this year. We have started the season well and we need to keep going."

Saka was voted the men's Young Player of the Year while Chelsea's Lauren James picked up the women's award.

Daly and James were key performers for England in their run to the Women's World Cup final, which ended in defeat against Spain earlier this month.

Villa's Daly scored 22 goals in the Women's Super League last season.

Bangladesh call up Anamul as Liton out of Asia Cup

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Bangladesh suffered an Asia Cup setback Wednesday as batsman Liton Das was ruled out of the tournament with viral fever.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board said Liton had been unable to travel and named Anamul Haque as his replacement.

Anamul, whose last ODI appearance for Bangladesh was in December against India, was due to join the Bangladesh squad later Wednesday ahead of their opening match against the co-hosts Sri Lanka in Kandy on Thursday.

The 30-year-old right-hander has played 44 one-day internationals and scored 1,254 runs, in-



Liton Das

we needed a top-order batter who could keep wicket, and Anamul got the nod

MINHAJUL ABEDIN

cluding three centuries.

"(Anamul) has been in the runs in domestic cricket," chairman of the national selection panel Minhajul Abedin said.

"Due to Liton's unavailability, we needed a top-order batter who could keep wicket, and Anamul got the nod."

The Asia Cup provides a final chance for teams from the region to size each other up before the World Cup in India starting in October.

Pakistan and Sri Lanka are co-hosting the six-nation tournament, a hybrid model agreed after India refused to tour Pakistan, with the final on September 17 in Colombo.

Bangladesh are in Group B with Sri Lanka and Afghanistan in Group B.

In Group A, Pakistan opened with a match against Nepal in Multan on Wednesday before a blockbuster clash with India in Kandy on Saturday.

AFP

Man City 'reach agreement' to sign Nunes

London, United Kingdom - Manchester City have reached a verbal agreement with Wolves on a fee for Portugal midfielder Matheus Nunes, according to reports on Wednesday.

It is understood the Premier League champions have agreed to pay Wolves £47 million (\$60 million) without add-ons but the deal has not yet been finalised.

In a separate deal, City's 21-year-old midfielder Tommy Doyle will join Wolves on loan with an option to buy. City had a previous bid for Nunes rejected, with the 25-year-old subsequently choosing not to train with Wolves in a bid to force through a move in the final days of the transfer window.

Speaking after Tuesday's 5-0 League Cup win over Blackpool, Wolves boss Gary O'Neil said he was unaware of any improved bid from City and expected the player to remain at the club beyond Friday's deadline, but that situation has quickly changed.

Postecoglou defends selection after Tottenham crash out of League Cup

London, United Kingdom - Ange Postecoglou defended his team selection after suffering his first defeat as Tottenham boss after Fulham won 5-3 on penalties following a 1-1 draw in the League Cup second round on Tuesday.

Postecoglou had masterminded an encouraging start to his first season in charge of Tottenham, with successive Premier League wins against Manchester United and Bournemouth following a draw against Brentford.

But the former Celtic boss paid the price for making nine changes to his starting line-up at Craven Cottage.

Postecoglou handed a full debut to Manor Solomon, while Giovanni Lo Celso and Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg started despite speculation over their futures.

Fulham boss Marco Silva made six changes himself, but it was Tottenham's understudies who struggled.



Ange Postecoglou

Micky van de Ven's 19th-minute own goal gave Fulham the lead as the defender turned Tom Cairney's cross past keeper Fraser Forster.

Tottenham took advantage of a curious incident that left Fulham down to 10 men to equalise in the 56th minute.

A problem with Kenny Tete's boot meant the Fulham defender

had to sprint down the tunnel to find a replacement in the dressing room.

Moments later, Ivan Perisic whipped in a cross from the position Tete would have been defending and Richarlison headed home from an acute angle.

But Tottenham were unable to find a winner and in the shoot-out Davinson Sanchez's effort

was saved by Marek Rodak before Tete, now with boots on both feet, fired the decisive kick.

Currently enduring a trophy drought that stretches back to 2008, Tottenham already have one less competition in which to end that barren run this term.

Postecoglou had introduced stars James Maddison and Son Heung-min in the second half, but defended his decision to select his fringe players.

"How am I going to find out about my players? It doesn't mean the cup, or any game, isn't a priority for us," the Australian said. "We are very much at the discovery stage and we need to give the players the opportunity.

Fourth-tier Salford, co-owned by former Manchester United stars David Beckham, Gary Neville, Ryan Giggs and Paul Scholes, beat Leeds 9-8 on penalties after a 1-1 draw with the Championship club.

THE WAW FACTOR!

Wawrinka oldest man to win US Open match in 31 years

New York, United States - Former US Open champion Stan Wawrinka on Tuesday became the oldest man to win a match at the tournament since 40-year-old Jimmy Connors in 1992.

Wawrinka, 38, earned his first win in New York in four years as he beat Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka 7-6 (7/5), 6-2, 6-4 in the opening round.

"I think I'm playing well. I'm not trying to compare from the past because it's never good idea to compare a few years ago what I was doing," said Wawrinka, who lifted the US Open trophy in 2016. "But I'm happy with my level. I know where I am right now. I know I can beat some really good players. I can be really competitive. I'm moving well."

The Swiss goes on to play Argentine 30th seed Tomas Martin Etcheverry, who outlasted Finnish qualifier Otto Virtanen in a fifth-set tie-break.

Wawrinka has reached the quarter-finals or better on six occasions at Flushing Meadows, but his win over Nishioka was his first at the event since he lost to Daniil Medvedev in the last eight in 2019.

"Last few months have been almost better every week with more win, with more confidence, with what I'm doing," he said.



Stan Wawrinka of Switzerland celebrates his victory against Yoshihito Nishioka of Japan (AFP)

There's many kind of emotions. It's part of the beauty of the sport, I will say. That's also one of the main reason I keep going, is to get those emotions. Hopefully positive ones

STAN WAWRINKA

"Hopefully I can keep pushing myself and get some big results before the end of the year."

Wawrinka, a former world number three, saw his ranking drop as low as 361 last year after a lengthy battle with injuries.

He returned to the top 100 in February and arrived at the US Open ranked 49th, nearing the final act of his career but unwilling to call time just yet.

"You also want to push yourself for the maximum, be the better player, best as possible. Of course you're going to have up and downs in the career, with some positive emotions when you win, with some tough ones when you lose," said Wawrinka.

"There's many kind of emotions. It's part of the beauty of the sport, I will say. That's also one of the main reason I keep going, is to get those emotions. Hopefully positive ones



Maryna Zanevska

Retiring Zanevska snubs handshake after defeat to Sabalenka

New York, United States - Ukraine-born Belgian player Maryna Zanevska brought the curtain down on her tennis career by snubbing a post-match handshake after losing to Belarus's Aryna Sabalenka at the US Open on Tuesday.

Zanevska, who said before the tournament she would retire after her campaign in New York due to injury, bowed out after losing 6-3, 6-2 to second seed Sabalenka.

Afterwards the Odessa-born 30-year-old declined to shake Sabalenka's hand in a gesture of solidarity with the country of her birth.

Several Ukrainian players have snubbed post-game handshakes with opponents from Russia or Belarus since

It's my personal decision about not shaking the hand to someone who couldn't step up

MARYNA ZANEVSKA

Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year. Belarus is a key military ally of Russia.

Zanevska said she had opted not to shake Sabalenka's hand after accusing the Australian Open champion of not "stepping up" since the conflict began.

"I know I'm representing Belgium but all my family are in Ukraine," Zanevska told AFP.

"I respect Aryna as a tennis player. She's a great champion, hard worker, and I mean what she's doing in tennis is amazing.

"But it's my personal decision about not shaking the hand to someone who couldn't step up. I don't judge her. She's protecting her family, but I'm protecting my family.

"I have family fighting on the frontline. And I think if I shake her hand it would be the same as spitting in the face of them."

Zanevska's snub was greeted with scattered booing as she left the court. AFP



Ons Jabeur of Tunisia celebrates after defeating Camila Osorio of Colombia in their first round match on Tuesday

Jabeur advances

New York, United States - Tunisia's Ons Jabeur overcame a medical scare to battle into the second round of the US Open on Tuesday with a straight sets defeat of Colombia's Camila Osorio.

Jabeur, chasing a first Grand Slam crown after three agonising defeats in finals since 2022, opened her US Open campaign with a 7-5, 7-6 (7/4) victory.

The 29-year-old looked to be struggling during a tense first set, complaining to the chair umpire that she was having difficulty breathing after Osorio fought back from

4-1 down to level at 4-4.

Jabeur needed treatment from medical staff after going 5-4 down in the first set, and appeared to have her blood pressure taken during a timeout. She then rallied to take the first set and appeared to be poised to clinch victory after holding two match points in the second set while 5-3 up.

However Osorio rallied to stave off defeat, and went on to level at 5-5 after breaking Jabeur. Jabeur broke back immediately to take a 6-5 lead but was then broken once again to send the second set to a tie break.

Alcaraz keen to deflect pressure of title defence

New York, United States - Carlos Alcaraz said retaining the US Open title was not on his mind as he began the defence of his crown Tuesday with a swift win over injured German opponent Dominik Koepfer.

The world number one moved into the second round when the 75th-ranked Koepfer retired because of an ankle injury with the Spaniard leading 6-2, 3-2 under the lights on Arthur Ashe Stadium.

"That's not the best way to get through into another round," said Alcaraz, "but I have to say on my side I was playing great."

"I started pretty well. Really focused. Honestly, I didn't expect to play such a great level the beginning, the first round, here in the US Open. I am very, very happy with the level, even if Domi had to retire. Have to see myself and hopefully to keep that level into the next round."

Alcaraz entered a Grand Slam as the defending champion for the first time, but the 20-year-old tried to downplay the significance of being the player to beat in New



Carlos Alcaraz returns a shot to Dominik Koepfer during their first-round match at the US Open on Tuesday

York.

"I was excited to play my first round here in US Open. I mean, it was great to step on court again in the Arthur Ashe after such a great run last year. I was excited to come back," he said.

"I'm not thinking about the defending the title. I was not thinking about I was the champion last year. I just focus on playing my best level, to recover the level that I played last year, try to do some things that I did last year.

"That's the only thing that I'm thinking right now. I try to be apart about all the pressure people put of me about the defending

champion."

Koepfer's night was effectively cut short when he rolled his left ankle in the opening game of the match, and required a medical timeout. He gamely fought on for an hour before eventually accepting his fate, not wanting to further aggravate the injury.

Botched VAR no problem as Murray advances

New York, United States - Andy Murray shrugged off a bungled attempt to use video review technology for the first time at the US Open before advancing to the second round with a straight sets defeat of France's Corentin Moutet on Tuesday.

The 36-year-old 2012 US Open champion delivered a composed performance to outlast Moutet 6-2, 7-5, 6-3 on the Grandstand Court.

The Scottish veteran will now

face Bulgaria's 19th seed Grigor Dimitrov in the second round on Thursday.

Tuesday's first-round tussle was notable for a bizarre incident in the final set, when Moutet requested a video review after chair umpire Azemar Engzell awarded Murray a point for a double-bounce.

Although replay footage displayed on stadium screens appeared to show the point had been correctly awarded, Engzell

We watched it about 10 times. It clearly is not the umpire that's making that decision

ANDY MURRAY

said officials were unable to review the incident properly and so

attempts to use the video review system - being deployed at the US Open for the first time this year - were abandoned.

"I don't know exactly how it's supposed to work and who's supposed to make the decision on it because it was quite clear from the second video that the ball had bounced twice," Murray said afterwards.

"We watched it about 10 times. It clearly is not the umpire that's making that decision. I

don't know how the technology works." But it obviously didn't go to plan in a pretty important moment of the match. So, yeah, it would be good if they could get that fixed."

Murray went on to serve out for the match, completing an encouraging win.

The Scot has battled a litany of injury problems in recent years, but believes he is playing at his highest level since 2017. AFP



Andy Murray returns a shot against Corentin Moutet



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ONAM IN OMAN



Celebrations surrounding Onam, the harvest festival of Keralites, takes on gigantic proportions in the Arabian Gulf and in Oman

FEAST for the senses

Hubert Vaz

When you see pouches of banana chips, mixed vegetable hampers, and 'Payasam' ingredients adorning large sections of some popular supermarkets in town, you know that Onam is round the corner. And when you see people hailing from the south Indian state of Kerala dressed in traditional attire criss-crossing the city thoroughfares, you realise - It's Onam!

Festivities surrounding the annual harvest festival go on for ten days, though the main celebration is on 'Thiruvonam', August 29 this year when people enjoy traditional fanfare in homes as well as in the community - Onasadhya, the festive lunch being the hallmark of the celebrations.

The best part of this festival is that, religious affiliations apart, people of all faiths in Kerala participate in the cultural traditions associated with this festival. And since a large section of the Indian diaspora in Oman comprise the Malayalees from Kerala, this festival is widely celebrated.

Elizabeth Davis, a Keralite from Kochi, said, "Onam is synonymous with Kerala. It never struck me for a long time that it was actually a Hindu festival for the very reason that it was enthusiastically celebrated by Malayalees all over the world as their har-

vest festival. It also appeals to us as it is paradoxically the demon King Mahabali, who was so popular, that the Gods felt jealous of him."

She further said, "I would also like to add that this universality in celebrations is the case with most festivals in Kerala - be it Christmas or Eid or Vishu. Malayalees are more patriotic when they are away from Kerala, and most Onam festivities outside Kerala are held with greater fervour. We put the 'pookalam' (colourful designs made with flowers), dress in our 'kasavu' (cream coloured drape with a golden border) sarees/mundus and prepare the lavish onasadhya on banana leaves. In fact, I often feel that Onam celebration in the Middle East goes on till Christmas!"

Alex Joseph, another expatriate hailing from Kottayam, reiterated, "Onam celebrations go beyond religious barriers; in fact, it is a festival that unites people. Being a harvest festival, it is the privilege of everyone to celebrate Onam. Let me speak in the context of Onam celebrations by other religions in Kerala - people mostly wear the dress unique to the occasion and actively participate in the various fun games organised as part of Onam celebrations. The message of peace, love, unity and humanity is something common to all religions;



'Onasadhya' comprises a purely vegetarian fare with multiple dishes and varieties of 'payasam' the traditional dessert

therefore, Onam finds a commendable place with every individual irrespective of their faith."

The highlights of this festival are Onakkodi (new clothes) pookkalam (flower designs at home or in the front yard), Onasadhya (traditional lunch), kaikottikkali (folk dances), said Rema Sivakumar, an expatriate from Kerala and long time resident in Oman, adding "Nothing beats celebrating Onam in Kerala - waking up at 6am to pick flowers for the pookalam. One

of the biggest differences in celebrating Onam in Oman is that celebrations here are restricted to the boundaries of the household, offices or restaurants. In Kerala, the festivities mostly take place outdoors."

She further recalled childhood celebrations in Kerala which were marked by much fanfare, especially the boat races, tug-o-war, pulikali (tiger dance), etc which everyone looks forward to. These are absent in the Gulf but the huge Malayalee presence in Oman or the Gulf region does call for celebrating Onam with grandeur.

Rema also pointed out, for the younger generation residing all over the world, celebrating this festival helps in creating a beautiful bond with the culture of Kerala. Onam festival plays a crucial role in preserving Kerala's traditions and passing them on to future generations. It fosters an appreciation for the state's cultural heritage and installs a sense of pride among the youth."

"Onam isn't just a festival, it's a journey through the heart and soul of Kerala. It's an invitation to embrace and celebrate Kerala's art, culture, and traditions," she asserted.



Onam isn't just a festival, it's a journey through the heart and soul of Kerala. It's an invitation to embrace and celebrate Kerala's art, culture, and traditions

REMA SIVAKUMAR

cook-up

PAYASAM

SWEET FINALE

Payasam is considered the sweet finale of a sumptuous Onasadhya. If you've reserved your Onam festivities for the weekend or just want to try your hands at this popular dessert from Kerala, here's your opener to a sweet weekend

Ada Payasam

Ingredients

- ½ cup ada (flat rice noodles)
- 1 cup jaggery
- ½ cup thin coconut milk
- 1 cup thick coconut milk
- 1tbsp ghee
- 8-10 cashewnuts
- 1tbsp grated coconut
- ¼tsp cardamom powder

Method

Soak ½ cup ada in hot water for 15 minutes,

then rinse it well. Boil water and then add the ada and cook until soft. It should only be slightly soft as it will again get cooked with the jaggery syrup and coconut milk. Drain water and set aside. Add 1 cup jaggery with ½ cup water and heat it up until jaggery completely dissolves. Switch off.

Strain through a metal strainer to remove impurities if any. Now add jaggery syrup back to the pan. Let it boil until it is slightly thick. Then add soaked ada. Cook till soft and jaggery syrup is absorbed well. It will become thick.

Now add ½ cup thin coconut milk. Cook for few minutes in low flame - Payasam thickens after few minutes. Now add 1 cup thick coconut milk little by little. Mix it well.

Let it simmer for 2 minutes, then add ½tsp ghee and cardamom powder. Heat 1 teaspoon ghee – fry 1tbsp coconut pieces till golden brown, remove and set aside. Fry the cashews, too and set aside. Before serving, add fried coconut, cashews and switch off heat.

(This recipe can also be made with bulgar - broken wheat - instead of ada.)



Moong Dal Payasam

Ingredients

- ½ cup split moong dal
- 2 cups water
- ½-3 /4 cup jaggery
- 1 cup coconut milk
- ¼ teaspoon cardamom powder
- 3tsp ghee (or coconut oil)
- 2tbsp coconut chips
- ¼ cup cashewnuts and raisins

Method

Heat 1tsp ghee in a pan. Add cashews, raisins, and coconut pieces, and stir fry till they are light golden brown. Remove and keep aside.

In a pressure cooker, heat 2tsp ghee. Add the moong dal and roast until you get a nice aroma in about 2 minutes, also you should not let it brown too much. Next, add water into the pan and pressure cook for 2-3 whistles, or you can cook the moong dal in the open pot method as well.

After done, mix well in a mashing way and add powdered jaggery to this and turn on the gas again. Boil for 2 minutes until the jaggery has been melted and then pour in the coconut milk, cardamom powder and cook for 2-3 minutes or until it thickens a bit. Serve moong dal payasam warm or cold, garnished with roasted cashews, raisins, and coconut pieces.



Semiyam Payasam

Ingredients

- ½ cup semiyam or vermicelli
- ½ cup sugar
- 2½ cups whole milk - boiled and cooled
- 3 cardamoms – powdered
- 2 pinch nutmeg – grated
- 10 to 12 cashew nuts – halved
- 8-10 raisins, 2tsp ghee
- 1 pinch salt
- ¾ cup water
- 1 pinch of saffron strands

Method

Heat a pan with 1tsp ghee. Let it melt, add cashew nuts, and roast till the nuts are golden brown, and set aside. Add the raisins and roast till they puff up – set aside.

Add semiyam to the pan, 1tsp ghee and roast the semiyam by tossing frequently over low flame till it turns golden brown. Transfer to a separate bowl and set it aside. Add water to the pan and let it come to a boil. Add roasted semiyam, mix and let it cook over low flame till it is cooked soft. Add sugar and stir till it gets dissolved in the heat itself. Now add milk, cardamom powder, nutmeg, a pinch of salt, mix well and let it come to a boil.

Cook for 2 to 3 minutes over low flame and switch off the stove. Add roasted cashew nuts, raisins, saffron strands and mix well. Serve this semiyam payasam in individual bowls either hot or warm. If you wish to serve this cold, after it cools down to room temperature, refrigerate for 1 to 2 hours prior to serving.

take a break

IN TOWN

BACK TO SCHOOL



Students participated in morning assemblies in most Omani schools on Tuesday, marking the beginning of a new term 2023-24



Photos: V K Shafeer

Book launch



A book launch for the Malayalam book – Omanile Nadodi Kadhakal (Fairy Tales of Oman) – written by Haroon Rasheed, an Indian expatriate, was held at Indian Social Club, Kerala Wing, office.



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Today, avoid people who are hostile to authority, because their message definitely isn't going to be worth hearing. They'll feed into your insecurities and fears, which isn't going to help you get where you want to go. Instead, pay attention to the quieter emotional business going on under the surface. Listen to what leaders are saying.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

It's odd, but the compliments a stranger gives you will mean much more than what friends or loved ones say about you today. Perhaps there's a tendency for people who know you to be jealous about how fabulous you look or how popular you are, which prevents them from genuinely meaning what they say, and you'll pick up on it.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Big personalities are arriving on the scene today, and they might try to crowd you out of the action. The best approach for these kinds of people is to just let them have the stage. If you fight them for the limelight, they'll only push back at you harder. To get things started on the right foot, you should step back and give up some of the attention.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You can make a fresh start with someone you've been arguing with today. All you have to do is put in all the work required. You also have to humble yourself and admit where you went wrong. Start this conversation as early in the day as possible, and try to ensure that it takes place in person. Meeting for coffee in the morning would be perfect. You have the energy for this task.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Try as they might, no one will be able to get anything over on you today! You're in a very strong intuitive phase right now, which means you can smell baloney a mile away. This puts you in an extremely powerful position if you're doing any negotiating and will help you get further in a romantic conquest. It's almost as if you can read minds. There's a ton of good energy in your life right now.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You can choose the path to take today. Even if it feels like you need to follow instructions or just go along with the crowd, remember that you always have a voice, and you can use it. If you're feeling under pressure from someone you're romantically interested in, follow your heart. Don't delve deep into any type of emotional entanglement right now unless you're completely ready.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

A close friend is getting caught up in hopes and wishes and missing out on how the world is changing. It might be time to step in and give them a reality check. Find out what your mutual friends think about the situation, and together you can decide what the right approach should be (and who needs to take it).



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Your social circle suddenly has more of a magnetic pull for you, but you should be wary of spending all of your time with others no matter how much you adore them. You've got to keep your priorities straight, and unfortunately hanging out with your friends doesn't rate above getting your work finished right now! Don't put off the necessary stuff just because it's boring.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Safety should be your main concern today, so shy away from anything that's emotionally or physically dangerous. A new relationship could be riskier than you initially realized. This person might not be completely honest with you, so avoid making any big commitments right now. If you're feeling a bit fragile, let your people know about it.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

It's all well and good to talk about your hopes for the future, but is talking about them going to help them come to fruition? You've done a good job of figuring out what you want, but now you have to focus all your energy on making it come into being. You're the only person who can take yourself where you want to go in life. Set aside some time.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

The already thin line between your family and your career is getting even thinner right now, but you don't have to stress out about it. This might not be such a bad thing, at least for the time being. Mixing these two worlds together enables you to operate more smoothly and efficiently in both of them! Try to embrace this time in your life.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

A friend or coworker can't stop talking about a trendy new project or hobby they've discovered. They talk a good game, and your interest has been stirred up. You want to hop on board this bandwagon as soon as possible! Slow down. You don't want to get involved in something you're unsure of too quickly.

BOGGLER

U	N	S	E
I	W	H	E
M	L	I	T
S	C	L	N

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

TRIVIA QUIZ - FOR TEENS

1. Which 'Friends' character is best known for the catchphrase, "How you doin'?"

- A Chandler
B Ross
C Joey
D Gunther



2. Who is the founder of Tesla?

- A Elon Musk
B Jeff Bezos
C Zhang Yiming
D Mark Zuckerberg

3. Which of these plays was not written by William Shakespeare?

- A Hamlet
B Long Day's Journey Into Night
C Midsummer Night's Dream
D Romeo and Juliet

3. B
2. A
1. C

Answer:

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

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

entertainment



Aamir Khan to return with 2024 Christmas release

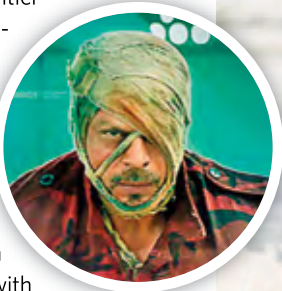
Actor Aamir Khan is all set to return to big screen after his recent setback. His last outing *Laal Singh Chaddha* failed to fulfil the expectations of the audience and since then, the actor has not announced any project. However, he has now confirmed an upcoming film under his production house, Aamir Khan Productions.

Aamir's next film as an actor, which is currently untitled, will be a Christmas release of next year. Reportedly, the film will start filming in January 2024. The film is said to be in its pre-production stage right now.

'Jawan' trailer to play on Burj Khalifa

Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan will be launching the trailer of his highly-anticipated film *Jawan* at Dubai's Burj Khalifa. Shortly after word spread about the trailer launch, the superstar confirmed the same on his handle and revealed that he would not only release the trailer, but also meet his fans at Dubai's Burj Khalifa.

'Aa raha hoon main Burj Khalifa on August 31 at 9pm. Celebrate Jawan with me,' he said.



WHAT'S ON



Genre: Action
Starring: Denzel Washington, Dakota Fanning, David Denman
Language: English

THE EQUALIZER 3

Robert McCall finds himself at home in Southern Italy but he discovers his friends are under the control of local crime bosses. As events turn deadly, McCall knows what he has to do: become his friends' protector by taking on the mafia.



HOLLYWOOD STRIKE SAPS GLAMOUR FROM 80TH VENICE FILM FESTIVAL

Italian actress Caterina Murino, patroness of the 80th Venice International Film Festival, poses for photographers on August 29, 2023 during a photo call on the beach of the Excelsior Hotel at Lido di Venezia in Venice, Italy.

A historic Hollywood strike robbed the festival of some of its usual glitz as it launched its 80th edition on Wednesday, but a raft of big-name - and controversial - directors are keeping the film world buzzing.

The world's longest-running film fest was due to start with *Challengers*, a tennis romance with one of the biggest stars of her generation, Zendaya. But it was replaced at the last minute by an Italian war drama, *Comandante*, due to the ongoing strike by Hollywood actors and writers - primarily over pay and the threat of AI - that has barred them from publicity work. The rest of the line-up was largely unaffected and a string of Oscar hopefuls have pressed ahead with Venice premieres, albeit in the absence of acting talent to light up the red carpet.



RAHMAN FELT PIGEONHOLED IN HOLLYWOOD

A R Rahman, one of the most revered music composers in the world, in an interview with Forbes, said how he got pigeonholed despite his international work in *127 Hours*, *Million Dollar Arm* and *Pele* among others. Rahman talked about his directorial debut, *Le Musk* and how he wanted to experiment with his creative process and new technology.

"As an Indian composer, winning an Oscar and all that stuff, there is a pigeonhole you are put into. 'Oh Indian stuff, let's go to ARI!' Even though I have done *127 Hours*, *Pele* and other stuff but still the urge... I love doing Indian movies. But I also love to do something that is completely unrelated to India, as a creative expression. To get those is very difficult in Hollywood, all the places are already taken."



Adele wants to expand family

Adele is keen to expand her family 'soon'. The 35-year-old singer - who has 10-year-old son Angelo with ex-husband Simon Konecki - has revealed she wants another child and is already thinking about potential baby names. During her Las Vegas residency over the weekend, she told fans, "I really want to be a mom again soon."

ARMS OF ACTION



HOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW: BLUE BEETLE

Genre: Action, adventure
Starring: Xolo Mariduena, Bruna Marquezine, Becky G

Blue Beetle is a 2023 American superhero film based on the DC Comics character Jaime Reyes/Blue Beetle. produced by Warner Bros Pictures, DC Studios, and The Safran Company. The film, directed by Angel Manuel Soto and written

by Gareth Dunnet-Alcocer, opens up in the remote tundra of Antarctica where members of Kord Industries, led by the company's co-founder and CEO Victoria Kord, locate an ancient alien artifact known as the Scarab. It revolves around Jaime Reyes who returns to his home-

town of Palmera City after graduating from Gotham Law University, only to learn that his family is facing eviction from their home due to financial difficulties. Jaime's sister Milagro manages to get him a job at Victoria's mansion. However, both are fired after Jaime stops a feud between Victoria and her niece Jenn.

The next day, Jenny finds that Victoria is using the Scarab for her One Man Army Corps (OMAC) projects. She steals the Scarab and avoids security by

giving it to Jaime, hidden inside a Big Belly Burger to-go box. At home, Jaime's family convinces him to open the Scarab box. When Jaime touches it, the Scarab activates and fuses with him, encasing him in an armoured exoskeleton.

Blue Beetle might seem just like DC's version of Marvel's Miles Morales *Spiderman* meeting *Venom*. But what makes it different is the treatment. Here, the superhero-getting-his-super-power scene unfolds at a dining table in front of his family? You see concern from Jaime's parents, curiosity from Milagro, Uncle Rudy and Nana add some



scene-stealing comedy. The Scarab activates when Jaime is attacked by bullies before a suit-up at the family dinner table.

At the heart of the film is a struggling Latino family, two of whom have no legal documents, and this theme is woven centrally into the narrative. Whether it's a tone-deaf racist Vicky referring to someone with a stereotypical name based on their race, or the way Carapax's character arc is fleshed out, the film highlights the vulnerability of immigrants. Good for those who enjoy Sci Fi flicks.

Rating ★★☆☆☆