

HM reshuffles cabinet

Issues 13 Royal Decrees, including appointment of new governors and advisers, restructuring of organisational and administrative apparatus

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued 13 Royal Decrees on Thursday reading as follows:

Royal Decree No 35/2022 on governing administration of judicial affairs.

Article 1 stipulates that a council to be named 'Supreme Judicial Council' will be established and that it will have a legal identity and enjoy financial and administrative autonomy. The headquarters of the council will be in the Governorate of Muscat. The council will apply the provisions stated in Annex No 1 attached to this decree.

Article 2 approves the general structure of the judiciary as per Annex No 2 attached to this decree.

Article 3 states that all allocations, rights, obligations, assets and holdings of the Administrative Affairs Council for the Judiciary, the Administrative Judicature Court and the Public Prosecution Department will be transferred to the Supreme Judicial Council.

Article 4 states that all members of the Administrative Judicature Court will be transferred along with their financial grade and job status to the equivalent judicial positions stated in the aforementioned Judicial Authority Law. The same law will be applied on all matters related to their job and retirement affairs.

Article 5 states that all employees of the Secretariat General of the Administrative Affairs Council for the Judiciary, the Administrative Judicature Court and the Public Prosecution Department will be transferred to the Supreme Judicial Council along with their financial grades.



Article 6 states that the Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council will issue the regulations and decisions necessary for the implementation of the provisions of this decree. Till such regulations and decisions are issued, the laws and regulations in force will apply without prejudice to provisions of this decree. The deputy chairman of the council will take all legal procedures necessary to amend laws and Royal Decrees of relevance to

the judiciary in accordance with the provisions of this decree during a period not more than one year from the date of enforcement of this decree. This period of time may be renewed for another term with the approval of His Majesty the Sultan.

Article 7 replaces the names 'Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs' and 'Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs' wherever they might occur in the aforementioned Royal Decree No (35/2010)

and its attached system with 'Supreme Judicial Council' and 'Deputy Chairman of Supreme Judicial Council'.

Article 8 replaces the names 'Administrative Judicature Court' and 'Chairman of the Administrative Judicature Court' wherever they might occur in laws and Royal Decrees with 'Primary Administrative Department' or 'Appeal Administrative Department' and 'Head of the Primary Administrative Department' or 'Head of the Ap-

NEW GOVERNORS, ADVISERS APPOINTED

SUPREME JUDICIAL COUNCIL, UMBRELLA BODY FOR JUDICIARY, FORMED

A DECENTRALISED 'SYSTEM OF GOVERNORATES' FORMED

MINISTRY OF INTERIOR'S ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE CHANGED

SECURITIES LAW ISSUED, CMA TO ISSUE EXECUTIVE BYLAW WITHIN ONE YEAR

CHAIRMAN OF STATE AUDIT INSTITUTION APPOINTED



Salim bin Nasser al Aufi
Minister of Energy and Minerals



Dr Mohammed bin Said al Ma'amari
Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs



Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti
Minister of Health

peal Administrative Department' as per the context of the text. Job titles of members of the Administrative Judicature Court will be replaced wherever they might occur in laws and Royal Decrees with the equivalent jobs stated in the Judicial Authority Law. 'Administrative Judicature Court Law' will be replaced wherever it might occur in laws and Royal Decrees with 'Administrative Procedures Law'.

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Oman among most peaceful nations in least peaceful region

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is among the most peaceful countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the least peaceful region in the world for the seventh consecutive year, in the Global Peace Index (GPI).

Oman is placed fifth in MENA and ranked 64th in the world. The region is led by Qatar (world rank 23), followed by Kuwait (39), Jordan (57), UAE (60) and Oman making the top five.

Compiled by the international

think-tank Institute for Economics & Peace, the 16th edition of GPI found that peacefulness has declined to the lowest level in 15 years fuelled by post-COVID economic uncertainty and the Ukraine conflict.

The GPI report, the world's leading measure of peacefulness, reveals that the average level of global peacefulness deteriorated by 0.3 per cent in 2021. This is the 11th deterioration in peacefulness in the last 14 years, with 90 countries improving, and 71 deteriorating, highlighting that countries deteriorate much faster than

MENA TOP 10 PEACEFUL COUNTRIES			
MENA rank	Global rank	MENA rank	Global rank
1 Qatar	23	6 Morocco	85
2 Kuwait	39	7 Tunisia	85
3 Jordan	57	8 Bahrain	99
4 UAE	60	9 Algeria	109
5 Oman	64	10 Saudi Arabia	119

they improve.

Iceland remains the most peaceful country, a position it has held since 2008. It is joined at the top of the Index by New Zealand, Ireland, Denmark and Austria.

For the fifth consecutive year, Afghanistan is the least peaceful country, followed by Yemen, Syria, Russia and South Sudan.

Seven of the ten countries at the top of the GPI are in Europe.

Turkiye is the only country in this region to be ranked outside the top half of the Index.

The report uses 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators to compile the index. These indicators are grouped into three key domains: Ongoing Conflict, Safety and Security, and Militarisation.

In MENA, peacefulness has improved by 0.034 points, or 1.4 per cent, from 2021 to 2022. All three GPI domains improved in the region, with the largest improvement occurring in the Militarisation domain, which

experienced an average decrease of 1.8 per cent in score.

There were improvements in the overall score in 12 of the 20 countries in the region, with an average overall increase in peacefulness of 1.4 per cent, which is the largest MENA has experienced since 2008. Eight countries in the region recorded a deterioration in peacefulness. The primary drivers of the improvement in peacefulness in the region were declines in the impact of terrorism, deaths from conflict and military expenditure as a percentage of GDP.

Muscat airport wins Mideast's Best Airport Staff Award

Muscat - Muscat International Airport has been awarded the 'Best Airport Staff Award' in the Middle East, based on the Skytrax Star Ratings. The 2022 World Airport Awards were held at Passenger Terminal EXPO in Paris, France, on June 16.

Hamad International Airport was named the World's Best Airport for the second year running, while other winners include Singapore Changi Airport, winning awards for the World's Best Airport Staff Service and the World's Best Airport Dining. Istanbul Airport won the awards for World's Best Airport Shopping and Most Family Friendly Airport.

'This latest award reflects the excellent work environment that the company provides to its employees, which in turn ensures Muscat International Airport's status as among the best airports in the world,' Oman Airports said.

Saud al Hubaishi, acting COO of Oman Airports, said, "The company provides its employees with a wide range of training programmes in various fields. Most of these are designed in line with the standards and practices recommended by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). This task is carried out in order to support the aviation sector in Oman, and meet the regulatory, operational and safety and security requirements issued by ICAO and the Civil Aviation Authority."



MoHUP inks usufruct agreements worth RO1mn



Social media abuzz with gratitude for Dr Sa'eedi

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Fake phone chargers are a multi-million dollar industry. The dodgy devices put users at risk of electrocution, burns and house fires.

In order to limit the use of counterfeit phone chargers and reduce risk of bodily and property harm, an Omani startup has launched a nationwide initiative called 'To Support Oman'.

BRQ Advanced Technology, which is licensed by Apple to manufacture mobile phone chargers and cables, took cognizance of the fact that the market is flooded with counterfeit products, and that users should be aware of the risks involved.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, CEO



Saud al Mukhaini, who set up BRQ Advanced Technology in November 2020, said, "Through To Support Oman, we want to combat the spread of counterfeit chargers in the local market. We aim to spread awareness of the importance of using original

chargers among community members."

BRQ Advanced Technology manufactures two types of chargers using 'ThunderGan', which Mukhaini described as the most advanced charging technology in the world. Its product line

includes two cables - BRQ Type-C to Type-C 100w and BRQ iPhone PD Cable (Mfi).

Mukhaini informed that the company also makes BRQ Eco-core 20w chargers, which it sells at no profit. Mukhaini intends to combat the market of counterfeit

chargers with this product.

He is also credited with designing and producing a micro weather station device for use by outdoor workers and adventure enthusiasts. Billed as the smallest weather station in the world, the device is currently in production by BRQ Advanced Technology.

Besides taking his products to the international market, Mukhaini is keen to introduce scientific ideas to children at a young age in order to give them an early start in the tech world.

"We will soon launch a programme to teach electronics engineering to school students in South Sharqiyah. It will help prepare a generation capable of working in the electronics industry."

HM appoints new governors, advisers

Continued from Page 01

Article 9 cancels texts of the aforementioned Administrative Judicature Court Law except articles from No 3 to 23, and articles No 25 and 10 on judicial fees. Provisions of the Civil and Commercial Procedures Law will be applied on administrative disputes and cassation appeals, as well as all matters not stated in these articles. The aforementioned Royal Decrees No 88/2008, 25/2011, 9/2012, 10/2012 and 54/2012 will be cancelled and all that contradicts this decree and the two annexes attached or contravenes their provisions. Article 10 states that the provisions of this decree will exempt the panel of jurisdiction and judgements to continue hearing the cases brought before the panel prior to the issuance of this decree and till issuing their judgements. Article 11 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 36/2022 issues System of the Governorates
Article 1 stipulates that the System of the Governorates attached to this decree will be applied. Article 2 approves organisational structures of the governorates as per the model attached to the System of the Governorates. The same model will be governed by the provisions stated in the aforementioned system of the State Administrative Apparatus on establishing, amending and cancelling administrative divisions within these structures. Article 3 states that all files, documents, archives and assets pertaining to the purviews of the Ministry of Interior from the governorates of Muscat, Dhofar and Musandam will be transferred to the Ministry of Interior. Article 4 states that all allocations, assets, rights, obligations and holdings pertaining to the Wali offices in the governorates will be transferred from the Ministry of Interior to the governorates (each within its purview). Files, documents, archives, weapons, cannons and ammunition will remain property of the Ministry of Interior. Article 5 states that employees of the Ministry of Interior who work at the Wali offices will be transferred to the governorates (each within its purview) along with their financial grades. Article 6 cancels the aforementioned Royal Decree No 101/2020 and all that contradicts this decree and the attached system or contravenes their provisions. Article 7 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 37/2022 determines purviews of the Ministry of Interior and ap-

HM reshuffles cabinet

Royal Decree No 34/2022 on restructuring the Council of Ministers.

Article 1 restructures the Council of Ministers under the chairmanship of His Majesty the Sultan as follows:

- ▶ Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers
- ▶ Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimour al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs
- ▶ Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth
- ▶ Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal bin Saud al Busaidi, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court
- ▶ General Sultan bin Mohammed al Nu'amani, Minister of the Royal Office
- ▶ Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal bin Said al Busaidi, Minister of Interior
- ▶ Sayyid Badr bin Hama bin Hamoud al Busaidi, Foreign Minister
- ▶ Sultan bin Salim bin Said al Habsi, Minister of Finance
- ▶ Dr Madiha bint Ahmed bin Nasser al Shaibani, Minister of Education
- ▶ Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Said al Sa'eedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs
- ▶ Dr Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa al Harasi, Minister of Information
- ▶ Salim bin Mohammed bin Said al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism

Article 2 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

proves its organisational structure
Article 1 determines the purviews of the Ministry of Interior as per Annex No 1 attached to this decree. Article 2 approves the organisational structure of the Ministry of Interior as per Annex No 2 attached to this decree. Article 3 cancels the aforementioned Royal Decree No 102/2020 and all that contradicts this decree or contravenes its provisions. Article 4 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 38/2022 amends some provisions of Municipal Councils Law
Article 1 states that the amendments attached to the aforementioned Municipal Councils Law will be applied. Article 2 cancels all that contradicts this decree and the attached amendments or contravenes their provisions. Article 3 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the day following its date of publishing.

Royal Decree No 39/2022 transfers the purview of property survey and appraisal from the Ministry of Interior to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning
Article 1 states that all purviews, allocations, assets, rights, obligations and holdings pertaining to property survey and appraisal will be transferred from the Ministry of Interior to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning. Article 2 states that employees specialising in property survey and appraisals will be transferred from the Ministry of Interior to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning along with their financial grades. Article 3 cancels all that contradicts this decree or contravenes its provisions. Article 4 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 40/2022 appoints Deputy Chairman for the Supreme Judicial Council
Article 1 appoints Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan bin Hamoud al Busaidi as Deputy Chairman for the Supreme Judicial Council along with his

rank and financial allocations. Article 2 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 41/2022 appoints governors
Article 1 appoints the following as governors:

- ▶ Sayyid Marwan bin Turki bin Mahmoud al Said as Governor of Dhofar with minister's rank.
- ▶ Sayyid Saud bin Hilal bin Hamad al Busaidi as Governor of Muscat along with his rank and financial allocations.
- ▶ Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said bin Ibrahim al Busaidi as Governor of Musandam along with his rank and financial allocations.
- ▶ Sheikh Saif bin Hamyar bin Mohammed al Malik al Shehi as Governor of South Batinah along with his rank and financial allocations.
- ▶ Mohammed bin Sulaiman bin Hamoud al Kindi as Governor of North Batinah along with his grade and financial allocations.

Article 2 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 42/2022 appoints Chairman for State Audit Institution
Article 1 appoints Sheikh Ghusun bin Hilal bin Khalifa al Alawi as Chairman of the State Audit Institution with minister's rank. Article 2 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 43/2022 for appointments in certain positions
Article 1 appoints the following to the positions assigned to each name:

- ▶ Sayyid Nadir bin al Julanda bin Majid al Said as Secretary General at the Diwan of Royal Court with a special grade.
- ▶ Sayyid Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said as Secretary General at the Secretariat General for the Council of Ministers with a special grade.
- ▶ Mohammed bin Hamad bin Mohammed al Sarmi as Head of Royal Protocols at the Diwan of Royal Court with a special grade.
- ▶ Sayyid Khalifa bin al Merdas bin Ahmed al Busaidi as Secretary General in the Ministry of Interior along with his grade and financial allocations.
- ▶ Sheikh Muhanna bin Saif bin Salim al Lamki as Adviser in the Ministry of Interior along with his grade and financial allocations.
- ▶ Dr Saleh bin Salim bin Hamoud al Rahbi as Adviser in the Diwan of Royal Court along with his grade and financial allocations.
- ▶ Jameel bin Ayoob bin Juma al Zedjali as Adviser in Royal Court Affairs with a special

grade. ▶ Pankaj Kanaksi Gokaldas Khimji as Adviser for External Trade and International Cooperation in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion with a special grade. Article 2 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 44/2022 appoints Secretary General for the Supreme Judicial Council
Article 1 appoints Issa bin Hamad bin Mohammed al Azri as Secretary General for the Supreme Judicial Council along with his grade and financial allocations. Article 2 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 45/2022 transfers an employee to the Foreign Ministry
Article 1 transfers Talal bin Sulaiman bin Habib al Rahbi to the Foreign Ministry with his grade and financial allocations. Article 2 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 46/2022 issues Securities Law
After presenting the same before the Council of Oman Article 1 states that the Securities Law attached to this decree will be applied. Article 2 states that the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Capital Market Authority (CMA) will issue the executive bylaw for the law attached to this decree during a period of one year from the date of its enforcement. The CMA Chairman will also issue the decisions necessary for the implementation of the law's provisions. Till such bylaws and decisions are issued, the regulations and decisions in force will continue to be applied without prejudice to the provisions of the law attached to this decree. Article 3 states that those addressed by provisions of the Securities Law will reconcile their conditions during six months from the date of enforcing the same law. This period may be extended as per a decision from the CMA Board of Directors for an additional six months. Article 4 cancels texts of the aforesaid Securities Law except articles from No 46 to 58. It also cancels all that contradicts this decree and the attached law or contravenes their provisions. Article 5 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced the day following its date of publication.

MoHUP inks 13 usufruct agreements, seven worth RO1mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) has signed 13 usufruct agreements for several projects in four sectors in various governorates with private sector firms and individuals. Of these, seven worth RO1mn are in industrial, agricultural and commercial sectors, and for fuel and service stations, located in North Batinah, North Sharqiyah, Dhahirah, Dakhliyah and Al Wusta. H E Hamad bin Ali Al

Nazwani, Undersecretary for Housing in MoHUP, signed the agreements at the ministry's headquarters on Thursday. The agreements are a translation of the ministry's objectives of the Usufruct Right Programme, which allows developers and investors to benefit from government land for projects with economic and social objectives linked to development goals. These objectives centre around supporting stimulus programmes for the economic sector, completing governorate development

programmes, and providing service and commercial activities in line with the policies of the National Urban Development Strategy 2040. These are in addition to achieving sustainability, maximising financial returns from the real estate sector, providing enablers for economic sectors, and creating the appropriate environment for investment.

Industrial sector
The contracts include one for construction of a water desalination plant in the wilayat of Ibr,

Dhahirah at a cost of RO100,000, a factory for filling gas cylinders in Bahla, Dakhliyah, at a cost of RO75,000, and an integrated workshop for maintenance of oil field equipment in Thumrait, Dhofar, at a cost of RO250,000.

Agricultural sector
In the agriculture sector, an agreement was signed for a shou' (*Moringa Paregrina*) plantation project in Mudhaibi, North Sharqiyah, at a cost of RO150,000, and a grapes and figs production

and marketing project in Mudhaibi, worth RO120,000. The wilayat will have another grapes and figs production project worth RO15,000.

Filling station and service station
The agreements include one for construction of a fuel and service station in Mahout, Al Wusta, at a cost of RO100,000.

Commercial sector
Six agreements were signed for plots of land that were offered

two weeks earlier via a digital bidding system in the wilayat of Liwa, North Batinah. Bidding for the land was done through the MoHUP's Tatwir platform, which gives all an equal opportunity to bid.

Integrated service stations
Bids are also invited for usufruct contracts for six plots of land to build integrated service stations in various governorates along the Al Batinah Expressway and the Nizwa-Thumrait-

Salalah road. 'These facilities will provide basic services to road users and activate economic activity between the governorates.' The integrated service stations, spread over 30,000sqm each, will be built in the wilayats of Barka, Saham, Liwa and Haima. These will include an air-conditioned main building, restaurants, a variety of shops, motel, park, prayer halls, ATMs, vehicle service and maintenance centre, and parking for cars, buses and trucks.

GROWTH THROUGH TOURISM

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN Group) would like to invite competent and experienced companies to participate in the following Tender:

Tender No.	31/2022
Tender Title	Construction work to renovate Musandam Restaurant at InterContinental Muscat
Tender Submission Date	1.8.2022
Tender Process Details	Please visit: www.omran.om/tenders/



[omran.om/tenders/](http://www.omran.om/tenders/)

Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN Group)
Tel: +968 23 38 11 33
info@omran.om
en@omran.om



Papa John's opens branches in Barka, Al Khoudh 6

Muscat - Leading pizza franchise Papa John's has announced the opening of two new branches in Barka and Al Murooj Square, Al Khoudh 6. The new branches will ensure safety, quality and customer satisfaction, a press release said.

Papa John's chain has grown to 13 stores with the opening of the two new branches.

The outlets were inaugurated by Nasr Ahmed al Majed, executive director of Al Majed Group, and Joseph Joseph, general manager, Papa John's Pizza Qatar and Oman.

Commenting on the brand's concept, Joseph said, "Better Ingredients, Better Pizza" means we only use the freshest and



(Supplied photo)

finest ingredients to create the best pizza, which will soon prove our popularity all over Oman."

He informed that Papa John's has major expansion plans in the coming months and intends to

open more outlets in Oman, reaching each and every corner of the sultanate.

Social media abuzz with gratitude, praise for retired health minister

Shaddad al Musalmi
Muscat

Oman has made remarkable progress in healthcare in the last decade, including reduction in mortality, especially child mortality, and prevention and control of communicable diseases. The sultanate boasts of state-of-the-art healthcare infrastructure and qualified specialists leading from the front.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, the face of Oman's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, has been instrumental in the progress made over the years in the health sector.

With the announcement of his retirement following appointment of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti as the new Minister of Health by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Thursday, social media was abuzz with appreciation and acknowledgement of Dr Sa'eedi's contribution to the



Dr Sa'eedi is a name we will never forget. You will be fondly remembered for the way COVID-19 was dealt with. For me, you are a hero

IBN ESI

health sector.

Ibn Esi tweeted, "Dr Sa'eedi is a name we will never forget. You will be fondly remembered for the way COVID-19 was dealt with. Thank you very much for all the effort you made. For me, you are a hero. Big salute to you, Sir."

Maithaa al Saidi also thanked Dr Sa'eedi on Twitter. She said, "It's time for this knight to step down. You fulfilled the trust."

For Ahmed al Salmi, Dr Sa'eedi was a reassuring pres-

ence at the helm of affairs. "He gave what he had. He was a source of reassurance when we were anxious during the early days of the pandemic. Thank you Dr Sa'eedi."

Others described Dr Sa'eedi's task as very difficult but accomplished successfully. "We will always remember your composure, your great communication skills and your understanding of human psychology," Dr Amal Ambusaidi said.

Addressing one of many press conferences last year, Dr Sa'eedi said, "If we want the new year to be better, we must all strive to preserve our health sector by adopting precautionary measures."

All paid heed to his advice, which resulted in limiting infection transmission and consequently great relief with the pandemic significantly controlled this year.

@shadadm

Governorates Marathon launched - A race every month in all governorates

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth signed a partnership agreement with Sabco Sports last week to organise Governorates Marathon. The first of its kind in the sultanate, it will be held across governorates every month throughout the year and be open to everyone.

The organisers hope to accomplish several goals through it, including develop a world-class event that drives sports tourism, encourage participation among athletes and the general public across the country, and close cooperation and coordination between government and the private sectors to increase participation and awareness.

It will also provide a competitive platform for participants across the country as well as implement the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 of diversifying the economy through sports, a press release said.

Sabco Sports is a leading sports marketing agencies. Ali



The idea was born out of the keenness of MoCSY to encourage the community to practise sports and to promote a healthy lifestyle

ALI SULEIMAN AL AJMI

Suleiman al Ajmi, acting general manager, said, "The idea of Governorates Marathon was born out of the keenness and interest of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) to encourage the community to practise sports and to promote a healthy

lifestyle."

He added that he is proud of the partnership with the ministry. "We look forward to holding this event which will achieve the goals of the ministry, which are to build an event in Oman for the people of the sultanate and over

time invite runners from outside the country, too. This event will encourage the community to stay healthy, exercise more and maintain a healthy lifestyle."

The Governorates Marathon strives to be a local model to create a sports movement which attracts athletes and fans in all governorates. "This race will be a local competition that Omani runners will look forward to. More information regarding tickets, dates, cities and other details will be revealed in July."

SalamAir announces Bursa as third destination in Turkiye

Muscat - Expanding its network further, Oman's value-for-money airline, SalamAir, has launched flights from Muscat to Bursa starting June 16.

Bursa becomes the third destination SalamAir flies to in Turkiye after the popular destinations of Istanbul and Trabzon.

SalamAir will fly to Bursa thrice weekly on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The flights will take off from Muscat at 10.05am and arrive at Bursa at 2.05pm local time. From Bursa, the flights will take off at 2.50pm and arrive in Muscat at 8.30pm.

Bursa will now be part of SalamAir's popular summer destinations in addition to Phuket, Istanbul, Trabzon, Tehran, Alexandria, Baku and Sarajevo.

Capt Mohamed Ahmed, CEO of SalamAir, said, "We are consistently looking at destinations that pose significant interest to our customers. Our customer feedback and commercial viability are at the forefront of our decisions to offer excellent destination choices. As such, Bursa is the third destination we



are introducing in our operations in Turkiye. We are sure it will appeal to our frequent passengers to Turkiye, mainly Istanbul because of the proximity between Istanbul and Bursa which can be easily accessed with an array of ground travel options."

He added that the airline is committed to expansion plans and achieving its goals of meeting Oman Vision 2040, while continuing to connect the network better and add more direct routes to new destinations.

"We are in the process of

adding more aircraft to the fleet to serve more destinations and increase frequency thereby offering convenience and greater choice, while maintaining affordability."

H E Ayse Sozen Usluer, Ambassador of Turkiye in Muscat, said, "In ten years, the number of Omani tourists visiting Turkiye has increased immensely. It was only around 5,000 in 2010. Despite the pandemic, it was more than 50,000 last year. We hope to reach pre-pandemic levels soon, which was nearly 90,000."

Omani businesses eye global opportunities

Muscat - Established and aspiring exporters from across Oman will come together on Wednesday, June 22, at Civil Aviation Authority Training Centre to discuss accessing new international markets.

Organised by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), in partnership with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Oman Business Forum and supported by HSBC and Sohar Port and Freezone, the next Tejarah Talks session - titled 'Cracking the Export Market' - will be moderated by H H Sayyid Dr Adham al Said, founder of The Firm.

Salem al Bortmany, CEO of Areej Vegetable Oils, Abdullah al Badri, CEO of Voltamp Energy, Ali Taqi Hassan, assistant general manager and head of Global Trade & Receivables Finance at HSBC, Faisal Ahmed Khan, COO of A'Saffa Food Processing, and Shayan Sumar, operations director of Apex Transgulf Manufacturing, will share their experiences and insights in this edition of Tejarah Talks.



Now really is the time for local businesses to focus on the bigger picture and explore opportunities elsewhere

MAYMUNA AL ADAWI

According to Maymuna al Adawi, director in MoCIIP and organiser of Tejarah Talks, "Wednesday's session has been designed specifically to help existing as well as potential Omani exporters network and guide them on how to improve their exports or export for the first time."

Currently, there are several Omani SMEs and startups that

have products and services to export but likely lack the know-how on where and how to start their export venture. 'The June 22 event is an opportunity for these businesses to get advice from market experts as well as hear from successful exporters about their experience and learnings,' a press release said.

"Our aim is to inspire more Omani SMEs to look at the opportunities afforded by exporting," Maymuna emphasised.

Oman has its fair share of international success in exploiting new markets through exports, including car batteries, fibre optic cables, marble and sanitary ware. Companies producing value-added products and services export to over 130 countries. 'Given that two thirds of growth in global trade comes from new entrants, there is constant demand for business advice and support in breaking into high-growth market economies and overcoming barriers.'

Despite the ongoing global pandemic, inflationary pressures and supply chain problems,

Omani exports remain robust. In 2021, Oman's non-oil exports to India rose to US\$1.2bn, a jump of 172 per cent on 2020, while Oman-made exports to the US hit nearly US\$500mn in February 2022, up 141 per cent from the same period last year - positive trade data that indicates increased demand for Omani goods and services in two of the world's most competitive markets.

"These are very encouraging results," Maymuna said. "Exports of goods and services already contribute a significant amount to Oman's economy but it is vital we maintain and capitalise on this momentum in order to meet the challenges we face today and in the future. Now really is the time for local businesses to focus on the bigger picture and explore opportunities elsewhere, and the reality is they do not have to look too far to successfully diversify their export markets."

Those interested to reserve a seat can email their name and contact details to TT@tejarah.gov.om

SULTANATE OF OMAN MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects			
Tender No.	Project Category	Location	Grade In Tender Board Registration
6/2022	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance & Operation Of Electro-Mechanical Services, Civil, Cleaning And Pest Control Services Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex At Bausher From 1/1/2023 To 31/12/2024	Excellent Grade
7/2022	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance And Operating Services To Seeb Sports Stadium (Including Sports Hall At Seeb Sports Club) For The Period 1st January 2023 To 31st December 2024	Excellent Grade
8/2022	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance And Operating Services To Al Ansal Sports Club For The Period 1st January 2023 To 31st December 2024	Excellent Grade
9/2022	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance And Operating Services To Ibra Sports Complex For The Period 1st January 2023 To 31st December 2024	Excellent Grade
10/2022	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance And Operating Services To Ibra Sports Complex For The Period 1st January 2023 To 31st December 2024	Excellent Grade
11/2022	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance And Operating Services To Khush Sports Complex (Including Sports Centre At Lima) For The Period 1st January 2023 To 31st December 2024	Excellent Grade
12/2022	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance And Operating Services To Salalah Sports Complex For The Period 1st January 2023 To 31st December 2022	Excellent Grade
Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om) until 29/06/2022.			
The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site at 09:00am 25/07/2022.			
A Tender Bond equivalent to 1% of the tender sum issued from a registered bank, in the prescribed form, in Sultanate of Oman and valid for 90 days should enclosed with the tender.			
Any tender without the bond will be reject and the tender committee is not bound to accept the lowest or any tender received.			
INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH			
Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone 24402200 or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om			

Sohar International eyes merger with HSBC Oman



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sohar International Bank has shown its intention to explore the possibility of a merger with HSBC Bank Oman.

'The board of directors of Sohar International Bank in its meeting on June 15 resolved to send a letter of intent to the board of directors of HSBC Bank Oman to explore the possibility of a merger between the two entities,' Sohar International Bank said in a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange on Thursday.

As per the disclosure, the merger deal would involve

HSBC Bank Oman shareholders being offered cash and shares – subject to obtaining final approvals from the respective boards, regulators and shareholders.

In November 2021, Sohar International initiated merger talks with Bank Nizwa too. In January, Sohar International and Bank Nizwa both received the approval from the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) to start the due diligence process for a merger between the two entities.

Clarifying on the proposed merger with Bank Nizwa, Sohar International in its disclosure on Thursday confirmed that the proposed merger process with



Bank Nizwa is 'in progress' as announced earlier.

The bank said, 'Sohar International remains committed to pursue the proposed merger (with Bank Nizwa) and envisage finalising the due diligence at the earliest.'

'Each of the proposed merger transactions with Bank Nizwa and HSBC Bank Oman are subject to regulatory and shareholders' approvals,' Sohar International added.

Capital raising plan

The board of directors of Sohar International Bank also resolved to boost the bank's capital to support its strategic growth, ac-

cording to a separate disclosure filed by the bank to the Muscat Stock Exchange on Thursday.

Under the capital planning, Sohar International's board of directors approved to raise the bank's CET 1 capital by offering rights issue worth RO160mn.

To enhance the bank's Tier 1 capital, the board of directors also resolved to issue RO50mn worth of perpetual capital securities with a green-shoe option of RO25mn.

'The proposed transactions and pursuant issuances will be subject to the regulatory and shareholders' approvals,' Sohar International noted in the disclosure.

'Higher oil prices, fiscal efforts to generate surplus for Oman'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Favorable oil prices and continued fiscal consolidation efforts are expected to generate substantial fiscal and external surpluses for Oman, and support higher growth over the medium term, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

A staff team from IMF, led by Daniel Kanda, visited Oman during June 5-12, 2022 to discuss economic developments, the outlook, and the country's policy priorities. At the conclusion of the mission, Kanda issued an official statement.

"Higher oil prices and fiscal consolidation have improved Oman's fiscal and external positions. The fiscal balance is expected to improve to a surplus of 5.5 per cent of GDP in 2022, with surpluses persisting over the medium term owing to higher oil prices and continued consolidation under the authorities' Medium-Term Fiscal Plan," Kanda said in the statement.

He said the sultanate's economy is strengthening and inflation has been contained so far. Real GDP grew by three per cent in 2021, largely driven by the buoyant hydrocarbon sector.



As per the IMF's new estimates, the sultanate's economy is projected to grow by about 4.5 per cent in 2022, benefiting from increased hydrocarbon production and continued recovery of non-hydrocarbon activities.

"Inflation turned positive to 1.5 per cent in 2021 and is projected to increase to 3.7 per cent in 2022, given rebounding economic activity and rising global inflationary pressures. There are limited direct trade or financial links to Russia and Ukraine," Kanda noted.

He said that the Omani authorities undertook substantial vaccination efforts and policy actions to mitigate the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and foster the recovery.

"Nearly all persons 12 years and older had been at least partially vaccinated and about 90 per cent were fully vaccinated as of end-May 2022. With declin-

ing infections, all COVID-19 related restrictions have been removed. Targeted fiscal, monetary, and financial measures provided relief to households, firms, and banks," Kanda noted.

Oman's banking system, he said, has weathered the recent shocks relatively well, supported by substantial capital and liquidity buffers and the Central Bank of Oman's continued efforts in strengthening regulatory and supervisory frameworks.

"However, uncertainties and downside risks continue to cloud the outlook. Downside risks stem particularly from uncertainty about the war in Ukraine and its impact on the global economy, a renewed flare-up of COVID-19 infections, tighter-than-expected global financial conditions, increased inflationary pressures from higher global food and energy prices," Kanda said.

Russia's operation in Ukraine not cause of global inflation: Putin

Moscow, Russia - Russian President Vladimir Putin said Friday that Moscow's military intervention in Ukraine was not the cause of global economic troubles, instead blaming Western countries for using the situation to cover up their own mistakes.

"What is happening is not the result of recent months, much less the result of a special military operation that Russia is conducting in the Donbas," Putin said referring to the predominantly Russia-speaking region of Eastern Ukraine. "The rising prices, inflation, the problem with foods, prices for fuel... are the result of systematic mistakes in the economic policy of the current US administration and European bureaucracy," Putin said in televised remarks at the Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum.

Moscow's military action became a "lifeline" for Western countries "that allows them to



Vladimir Putin

blame their own miscalculations on others, in this case, on Russia," he added.

Driven by a spike in fuel prices, the United States and European countries have faced soaring inflation, with Britain predicting that inflation in the country could surpass 11 percent this year. Gas prices were also on the rise Friday, exacerbated by the decision by Russian energy giant Gazprom to slash deliveries to Europe, citing repair works.

Putin said that high energy prices "have been observed since

the third quarter (of last year), long before the start of our operation in Donbas", adding that the price hikes were also the result of Europe's "failed energy policy".

Moscow's military campaign and unprecedented economic sanctions imposed on Moscow have also disrupted deliveries of grain and other commodities from Russia and Ukraine, resulting in food price rises.

But Putin said that Russia was not preventing ships loaded with grain from leaving Ukraine, instead blaming authorities in Kyiv for mining their ports, downplaying the significance of Ukraine's grain supplies.

Putin said the food and fertiliser shortage "threatens starvation primarily in the poorest countries. And this will be entirely on the conscience of the administration of the United States and Europe".

AFP

Qatar Airways posts record \$1.5bn profit

Doha, Qatar - Qatar Airways posted a record net profit of US\$1.54bn for the 2021-2022 financial year, a result it attributed to a "successful strategy" during the coronavirus pandemic.

The state-owned airline said the profit result was "200 per cent above its highest annual historical profit" and achieved on the back of US\$14.4bn in overall income.

It said that the revenue figure was "a remarkable two per cent higher than the full financial year pre-Covid" in 2019-2020.

Gas-rich Qatar is among several governments that stepped in to support their national carriers through the coronavirus shutdown, which pummeled global travel and the aviation industry.

Qatar Airways, the Middle East's second biggest airline after Emirates, had reported in September last year an overall loss of US\$4.1bn in the 2020-2021 financial year.

The flag carrier said at the



time that it had received US\$3bn in state aid to weather the coronavirus travel downturn and to offset the losses blamed on the cost of grounding aircraft.

Its chief executive, Akbar al Baker, praised the "strength, resilience, and commitment" of Qatar Airways Group in the past year.

"In the most difficult period ever in the global airline industry, the airline credits its positive results to its agility and successful strategy," the airline said in a statement.

Qatar Airways said it "continued to focus on customer needs

and evolving market opportunities, as well as efficiency and the commitment of its worldwide employees".

"This profit is not only a record for Qatar Airways Group, but also a record among all other airlines that have published financial results for this financial year worldwide," the airline said.

New routes

The Qatari airline said it carried 18.5mn passengers in 2021-2022, an increase of 218 per cent over the previous 12-month period.

It said its cargo division re-

mained the "leading player in the world", with growth of 25 per cent in revenues and an identical figure for cargo capacity.

"Against the backdrop of the pandemic disruption, Qatar Airways Cargo transported more than three million tonnes of air freight and securing eight per cent share in the global market," it said. The airline said it had also "transported more than 600mn doses of Covid-19 vaccines over the course of the pandemic to date".

"Despite the challenges of Covid-19, the national carrier of the State of Qatar grew to more than 140 destinations" in 2021-2022, the airline added.

New routes were opened to destinations across Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East, including Abidjan in the Ivory Coast, and Almaty, Kazakhstan.

The carrier has maintained "strong performance and growing profitability," Baker said.

AFP

WTO strikes landmark deals package after marathon talks

Geneva, Switzerland - The World Trade Organization concluded a landmark bundle of deals Friday covering fishing subsidies, food insecurity and Covid-19 vaccines following hectic round-the-clock talks.

WTO director-general Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said trade ministers had struck an "unprecedented" number of agreements that would affect the lives of people everywhere.

The talks in Geneva began Sunday and had been due to wrap up on Wednesday.

But instead the WTO's 164 members went through two straight nights before getting the package over the line at around 5:00 am (0300 GMT) Friday.

"DEAL!" tweeted EU trade commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis after the conference went nearly 36 hours into overtime.

The WTO's 12th ministerial conference (MC12) reeled in a deal to halt harmful fisheries subsidies after more than two

decades of negotiations, and also reached agreements on e-commerce, responding to pandemics and reforming the organisation itself.

"Not in a long while has the WTO seen such a significant number of multilateral outcomes," Okonjo-Iweala said.

"The package of agreements you have reached will make a difference to the lives of people around the world."

But she acknowledged that "there were many moments when I feared we would come out of MC12 with nothing at all".

As negotiations dragged on, delegates at one point had even danced to songs like "I will survive" and "Final Countdown" to blow off steam, US ambassador Maria Pagan told reporters.

Fisheries deal netted

The fisheries deal was the last one to get over the line, with negotiators hammering out the final points into the early hours of Friday.



WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (left) applauds next to conference chair Timur Suleimenov (second right) after a closing session of a Ministerial Conference at the WTO headquarters in Geneva on Friday (AFP)

Talks towards banning subsidies that encourage overfishing and threaten the sustainability of the planet's fish stocks had been going on at the WTO since 2001.

The text was watered down significantly, but Okonjo-Iweala insisted it was better to get an agreement rather than keep negotiating for years to come.

Dombrovskis acknowledged to reporters that the agreement

fell short of what the EU would have wanted, but "we decided that taking this first step... was better than not getting any agreement".

US Trade Representative Katherine Tai also hailed the agreement, as "a positive step forward", highlighting that countries had committed to continue talks towards a more ambitious text. Myron Brilliant, head of in-

ternational affairs at the US Chamber of Commerce, highlighted the importance of moving forward on banning harmful fisheries subsidies.

"This is a rare case where trade rules could make a huge contribution to addressing a major environmental problem," he said.

Consensus

The fisheries agreement marks the first large multilateral deal agreed at the WTO in nearly a decade.

Okonjo-Iweala, who took over in March 2021, hinged her leadership on breathing new life into the sclerotic organisation.

She wanted to prove that the organisation could still make itself relevant in tackling the big global challenges.

The former foreign and finance minister of Nigeria positioned herself as someone who can bang heads together and get business done.

"I prefer to talk less and do

more," she said Friday.

As for why the discussions went on so long, some delegations accused India of being intransigent on every topic under discussion at the WTO - where decisions can only pass with the agreement of every member.

But Indian Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal insisted: "India is not a roadblock on anything... We were the ones who actually helped create the sole consensus."

Patents waiver

The second major issue on the table was the plan for a Covid-19 vaccine patents waiver, aimed at providing more equitable access to the jabs.

After months of wrangling, and talks going down to the wire this week to win over some major players in pharmaceutical manufacturing to a compromise text, the United States and China finally clinched the deal by agreeing on which countries would benefit from the waiver.

China provided a binding commitment not to take advantage of the waiver.

Tai hailed the deal, saying it would "get more safe and effective vaccines to those who need it most". This agreement shows that we can work together to make the WTO more relevant to the needs of regular people.

The pharmaceutical industry organisation IFPMA however voiced "deep disappointment" at the deal, warning that "dismantling" patent protections would strangle innovation.

Public interest groups meanwhile condemned the deal for not going far enough.

"It is a technocratic fudge aimed at saving reputations, not lives," said Max Lawson of the People's Vaccine Alliance, while the Doctors Without Borders charity labelled it a "devastating global failure". WTO members also agreed to help ease supply shortages that some countries faced during the pandemic.

AFP

US Fed may increase rate again in July after biggest hike since 1994

Washington, US – The US Federal Reserve announced the most aggressive interest rate increase in nearly 30 years on Thursday, and said it is prepared to do so again next month in an all-out battle to drive down surging inflation. The super-sized 0.75-percentage-point hike came with the Fed under intense pressure to curb soaring gas and food prices that have left millions of Americans struggling to make ends meet and sent President Joe Biden's approval ratings plunging.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell said it was "essential" to lower inflation, and policymakers "have both the tools we need and the resolve it will take to restore price stability on behalf of American families."

He stressed that the goal is to achieve that without derailing the US economy, but acknowledged there is always a risk of going too far.

The Fed's policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee raised the benchmark borrowing rate to a range of 1.5-1.75 per

cent, up from zero at the start of the year.

It was the first 75-basis-point increase since November 1994.

Powell told reporters the move was "an unusually large one," but he does not expect "moves of this size to be common."

However, "from the perspective of today, either a 50-basis-point or a 75-basis-point increase seems most likely at our next meeting," he said.

"It is essential that we bring inflation down if we are to have a sustained period of strong labor market conditions that benefit all."

Biden has endorsed the Fed's effort and is hoping for success as his Democrats face the possibility of losing control of Congress in key midterm elections in November. He has blamed opposition Republicans for blocking bills meant to help lower costs and ease supply constraints.

White House economic adviser Brian Deese told Fox News "the most constructive steps that Congress and the executive



Jerome Powell delivers remarks at the Conference on the International Roles of the US dollar, on Friday in Washington, DC (AFP)

branch can take to help support what the Fed is trying to do are to lower the cost that families face directly and to lower the federal deficit."

'Brace yourself'

Wall Street loved the aggressive posture, closing sharply higher following Powell's comments.

But Kansas City Federal Reserve Bank President Esther George, a noted inflation hawk, dissented from the committee vote, preferring a smaller, half-point increase.

Until recently, the central bank seemed set to approve a 0.5-percentage-point increase, but economists say the rapid surge in inflation put the Fed behind the curve, meaning it needed to react strongly to prove its resolve to combat scorching price increases.

Committee members now see the federal funds rate ending the year at 3.4 per cent, up from the 1.9 per cent projection in March, according to the median quarterly forecast.

They also expect growth

slowing to 1.7 per cent in 2022 from the previous 2.8 per cent forecast.

However, Powell stressed that "we are not trying to induce a recession now."

But Diane Swonk of Grant Thornton, a long-time Fed watcher, said, "It is not clear the economy will be as resilient as the Fed expects."

She called the central bank's outlook "fanciful" and compared the current situation to the early 1980s when then-Fed chief Paul Volcker drove interest rates up to 20 per cent to choke off inflation, tumbling the economy into recession.

"Brace yourself for what comes next. This is a Volcker-Esque Fed. That means the Fed is willing to take a rise in unemployment and a recession to avert a repeat of mistakes of the 1970s," she said on Twitter.

"Growing up in Detroit, I remember that period well. It was ugly with deep scars."

Caught off guard

US central bankers began raising

interest rates off zero in March as buoyant demand from American consumers for homes, cars and other goods clashed with transportation and supply chain snarls in parts of the world where Covid-19 remained – and remains – a challenge.

That fueled inflation, which got dramatically worse after Russia invaded Ukraine in late February and Western nations imposed steep sanctions on Moscow, sending food and fuel prices up at a blistering rate.

US gasoline prices have topped US\$5.00 a gallon for the first time ever and are setting new records daily.

Economists thought March was the peak for consumer price hikes, but the rate spiked again in May, jumping 8.6 per cent in the latest 12 months.

The Fed was caught off guard with the speed of the price increases, and while policymakers usually prefer to clearly telegraph any policy shift to financial markets, the latest data changed the calculus.

AFP

Elon Musk sued for \$258bn over dogecoin support

New York, US – An investor in dogecoin, originally created as a joke but whose value increased and fell as it was promoted by Elon Musk, filed a US\$258bn lawsuit Thursday against the billionaire and his companies Tesla and SpaceX.

Keith Johnson, who says he lost money after investing in dogecoin, described himself as an "American citizen who was defrauded" by what he called a "Dogecoin Crypto Pyramid Scheme."

He is asking for his motion, filed in a New York court, to be classified as a class action suit on behalf of those who have



Elon Musk suffered losses by investing in dogecoin since 2019.

Since Musk began promoting the virtual currency, investors have lost around US\$86bn, Johnson estimates. He would like Musk to reimburse investors this sum, plus pay double that in damages – an additional US\$172bn.

Founded in 2013, dogecoin's creators say it was intended as an ironic response to two big internet phenomena: cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin, and a meme image of a Shiba Inu dog. The price of dogecoin traded at just fractions of a cent for most of its existence.

But it saw its value leap at the beginning of 2021, rising to

US\$0.73 in May of that year, amid a buying frenzy that surrounded the GameStop saga and after humorous messages about it from Musk.

On Thursday, however, it was worth less than six cents.

Johnson said he believes Musk increased "the price, market cap and trading volume of Dogecoin" through his promotion of it.

He included tweets from Musk, the world's richest man who has more than 98mn followers on Twitter, including one promising that SpaceX would "put a literal Dogecoin on the literal moon."

Johnson named Musk's Tesla electric carmaker in the suit since it accepts dogecoin as payment for certain derivative products. SpaceX was also included for having named one of its satellites after dogecoin.

Johnson likened dogecoin to a pyramid scheme since the virtual currency has no intrinsic value nor is it a product. Additionally, it is not backed by a tangible asset and the number of "coins" is unlimited.

Suits by investors who feel cheated by the promises of virtual currency are on the rise in the United States.

AFP

Tools and Equipment For SALE

The official liquidator announce the sale of some tools and equipment including small JCB, Dumper, Roller and Bobcat located at Halban , interested parties shall submit their quotation in sealed envelop within 7 days from this date , for more details and Information please contact 99424421

Gazprom defends gas cuts as prices in Europe soar

Moscow, Russia - Russian energy giant Gazprom defended gas cuts to Europe as prices soared and tensions raged between Russia and the West over Ukraine.

Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller said that Moscow will play by its own rules after cutting daily gas supplies to Germany and Italy.

"Our product, our rules. We don't play by rules we didn't create," Miller said during a panel discussion at the Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum in Russia's second city.

Earlier this week, Gazprom slashed its natural gas deliveries via the Nord Stream pipeline, after saying Germany's Siemens had delayed the repair work of compressor units at the Portovaya compression station.

"For now, there is no way to solve the problem that arose with the compressor station," Miller said.

"Siemens is still silent, trying to find a solution."

Italian energy giant Eni also reported problems, saying it will receive only 65 percent of the gas requested Thursday from Gazprom.

Gazprom has said exports to countries that did not belong to



the former Soviet Union were down 28.9 per cent between January 1 and June 15 compared to the same period last year.

"Of course, Gazprom is reducing the volume of gas supplies to Europe," Miller said, pointing out that the prices have increased several-fold.

"If I say we are not offended by anyone, then I am not pretending," Miller said.

Gas prices continued to soar on Thursday, galvanized by a sharp cut in supply from Russia. Europe's reference natural gas price, Dutch TTF, reached almost 150 euros (US\$158) per megawatt/hour before falling to

134 euros in the afternoon.

Moscow has lost several European gas clients after it demanded that all "unfriendly" countries pay for Russian natural gas in rubles in response to a barrage of Western sanctions over Russia's military intervention in Ukraine.

Poland, Bulgaria, Finland and the Netherlands have had their natural gas deliveries suspended over refusing to pay in rubles.

The Nord Stream pipeline was commissioned in 2012 and delivers gas from northwestern Russia to Germany via the Baltic Sea.

The launch of the Nord

Stream 2 pipeline that was set to double Russian gas deliveries to Germany was halted in response to Moscow's military campaign in Ukraine.

"Nord Stream 2 is under pressure and gas could be supplied to Germany even today via it. But it has not been put in operation because it is not certified," Miller said.

EU countries have scrambled to reduce their dependency on Russian energy but are divided about imposing a natural gas embargo as several member states are heavily reliant on Moscow's energy supplies.

AFP

Polyclinic For Sale



The official liquidator of Sagar Polyclinic LLC , announce the sale of the polyclinic as a Running Business, interested parties can communicate with Telephone no. 99424421 for more details and Information.

Taageer Finance awarded for excellence in Customer Experience

Taageer Finance, a leading Finance and Leasing company in the sultanate, bagged two awards at the prestigious Oman Banking & Finance Awards 2022 held recently at Al Bustan Palace. Taageer Finance received the coveted trophies from H E Tahir al Amri, executive president, Central Bank of Oman, in the presence of over 250 industry leaders.

Taageer Finance was the only Finance and Leasing company at the event that received two awards for its excellent credentials and performance. The company was felicitated with the 'Excellence in Customer Experience' and 'Excellence in Digital Transformation' Awards in the Finance and Leasing segment, a press release said.

Shahin Mohammed al Balushi, CEO Taageer Finance, stated, "We are delighted with the twin awards, and they are testimony to our relentless pursuit to provide highest standards of cus-



tomers service and embrace the latest in digital technologies to raise the market benchmarks. Over the decades, the company has carved a niche for itself among the Finance and Leasing companies and positioning itself with sustained and stable growth. With a consistent track record of profits and dividends to the shareholders, the brand of

Taageer Finance is well established in the industry."

Talking about the key priorities for Taageer Finance, Balushi said, "Customer is the core strength of Taageer Finance. We are continuously building a customer centric digital platform for enriched customer experience, embracing technological innovation and preparing for futuristic

development, and making continuous efforts to make Taageer future ready".

He further said, "We are embarking on several digital transformation initiatives including a new look website, revamped customer centric app, development of comprehensive MIS to cover all key functional areas, use of Machine Learning tools for

customer communication and on boarding and process automation of key functions. With our primary focus on utmost customer satisfaction and quick service, we have been providing enhanced digital experience by offering a customer friendly mobile application with an array of services to customers at their fingertips."



Winners announced for Shell Oman's 'Fuel & Win Big' campaign

Shell Oman's recent 'Fuel & Win Big' campaign held its draws on June 7 and revealed the winners on June 14, as part of its commitment to enriching its customers' journeys with exciting offers.

The campaign, which was developed in partnership with MG Motors, was well received by the market and attracted a large number of participants. It began on March 20 and ended on May 20, covering the holy month of Ramadan as well as Eid al Fitr.

As per the campaign, customers who fuelled their vehicles with 35 litres or more of Shell V-Power were eligible to enter the grand draw and win one of two brand new MG cars. In addition, customers who opted for Shell Mogas 95 and fueled with 35 litres or above stood a chance to win Shell V-Power Fuel Cards worth RO100 each. With a total of eight winners reserved for the latter category, the campaign ensured it offered customers more chances to win.

Commenting on the campaign, Khalid al Awaisi - Mobility country manager, Shell Oman Marketing Company, said, "For us at Shell Oman, the most rewarding part of our campaign is to see our customers celebrating their wins. We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all the winners and thank them for their continued trust in Shell. As a company that believes in

meaningful partnerships with leading organisations, our collaboration with MG Motors for the 'Fuel & Win Big' campaign was mutually beneficial to both parties."

Furthermore, Awaisi stated, "Innovation forms an intrinsic part of Shell's strategies. That reflects clearly in our range of products which are designed to offer an unparalleled driving experience with every trip. In addition, with our increasing offers in the convenience retail business such as Shell Select, Shell Café, and Shell Helix Oil Change+, we will remain focused on making life's journey better for our customers."

Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE added, "In the last few years, MG Motors has built a strong presence in the Oman market. Our customers have expressed satisfaction across various parameters, fuel efficiency being a common one across segments. As an automobile brand, we understand and believe that fuel efficiency of a car is complemented by the fuel that the customer uses. Our partnership with Shell for such consumer-oriented campaigns is a testimony of this belief. We hope to continue being a part of the customer's journey where MG Motor's strengths are further powered by Shell's technologically advanced fuels."

Minister of Transport visits Thawani Technologies

HE Eng Saeed bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology, visited Thawani Technologies, Oman's pioneering digital payments platform, as part of the ministry's efforts to empower emerging tech companies and boost their role in contributing to the national economy.

The Minister was accompanied by H E Dr Ali bin Amer al Shidhani, undersecretary for Communications and Information Technology at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, a press release said.



Highlighting some of Thawani's significant initiatives, the visit included a tour of the company's innovation lab led by Omani talent. It also included an

introduction to its upcoming projects that align with Oman Vision 2040.

Founded in 2016, Thawani Technologies is an Omani com-

pany specialising in providing smart payment solutions while holding a global certificate in card security. Licensed by the Central Bank of Oman, the com-

pany has been providing innovative payment solutions in financial technology to expedite payments processes, improve user experiences, and make payments safer, faster, and easier.

In addition to the basic payments system, Thawani Technologies provides innovative payment solutions to meet the needs and challenges institutions face. The company also provides services through its platform to pay bills, top-up credit, pay tuition fees, and social insurance. The company recently launched the updated version of its App, offering new products and improvements to its portfolio.

KR Eshraqa to sponsor Oman Science Festival



In continuing its efforts to encourage young people to take up scientific disciplines and work towards creating a knowledge economy, Khimji Ramdas' (KR) Eshraqa has signed an agreement with the Ministry of Education (MoE) to sponsor the 3rd Oman Science Festival.

The agreement was signed by H E Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, undersecretary of the Ministry of Education 'for Education', and Mahmood bin Khalifa al Saqri, manager of Eshraqa, Khimji Ramdas' Social Development arm, a press release said.

Scheduled to be held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) in October 2022, the Science Festival will present science to students in an easy and interactive way that will motivate them to achieve excellence in the fields of science, innovation, and research. Organised under the theme 'With Science, We Meet Again', this festival will encourage students to recognise the importance of science in

everyday life and help them to keep pace with global trends in science and technology.

Announcing their partnership with the MoE, Nailesh Khimji, director of Khimji Ramdas Group, stated, "Under the able and visionary guidance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, our country is steadily working towards achieving Oman's Vision 2040. We, at Eshraqa Stemazone, are delighted to be part of MoE's unique knowledge forum that brings students together with decision-makers, thinkers, academicians, and experts from inside and outside the sultanate. It is a perfect synergy of both creativity and innovation. Our Stemazone programmes promote a scientific temperament among children to build an ecosystem of innovation and technological progress."

Various international organisations, as well as government, private, and military sector institutions in Oman, are expected to

participate in the festival. There will be interactive programmes, hackathons, competitions, scientific shows, and workshops on programming, robotics, and other STEMA (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, Arts) subjects.

HE Dr Ambusaidi, who is also chairman of the Main Committee of the Oman Science Festival 2022, said, "Our partnership with the Khimji Ramdas Group comes in several fields, including the field of science and innovation. It has launched a number of educational initiatives such as Stemazone, and sponsored the Oman Science Festival to contribute to empowering students, raising their awareness of the importance of science, creativity, and innovation, and encouraging them to keep abreast of the latest developments in the fields of digital and scientific development because of their importance and a close and direct connection with the daily lives of students' lives.



ISD holds investiture ceremony for 2022-23

The Indian School Darsait 'Investiture Ceremony' for the academic year 2022-23 was held on June 13 with great solemnity in the Senior School Auditorium.

The ceremony was attended by the proud parents of the elected Student Council Members. It began with a procession,

prayer and lighting of the lamp, followed by a welcome by vice principal Geeta Chauhan.

Ashwini Sawrikar, finance director, Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman, who was the chief guest, awarded badges to the ceremonial heads and general prefects while Sebastian

Chungath, president, School Management Committee, honoured them with sashes. The chief guest, in her keynote address, reinstated the qualities of a leader and inspired the young buds with an energetic speech.

Principal Amar Srivastava introduced the ceremonial heads

and administered the oath. The respective House Counsellors bestowed the House Prefects with badges and sashes.

Later, Chungath, in his address, shared thoughts of wonderful leaders and enlightened the young leaders, highlighting seven virtues of leadership.

Aviation leaders meet in Doha

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) announced that leaders of the global aviation industry are gathering in Doha, Qatar, for the 78th IATA Annual General Meeting (AGM) and World Air Transport Summit (WATS), with Qatar Airways as the host airline.

The event (19-21 June) attracts the industry's most senior leaders from among IATA's 290 member airlines, as well as leading government officials, strategic partners, equipment suppliers, and media, a press

release said.

"In a few days, Doha will become the aviation capital of the world. The last time we met in Doha, in 2014, we were celebrating the 100th anniversary of the first airline flight. This year's AGM is another momentous occasion - Airlines are simultaneously recovering from the COVID-19 crisis, setting the path to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050, working to improve gender diversity, and adapting to a geopolitical environment that is undergoing its greatest shock

in over three decades," said Willie Walsh, IATA's director general.

Qatar Airways group chief executive, Akbar al Baker said, "It is an absolute privilege to be hosting our industry partners in Qatar Airways' home city, particularly during our milestone 25th year of operations. Coming together face-to-face provides us with the opportunity to discuss lessons learnt from our recent years during the pandemic, global issues affecting us all in the here and now, and to plan the best way forward

for the industry."

The WATS opens immediately following the AGM. A highlight will be the third edition of the Diversity and Inclusion Awards sponsored by Qatar Airways. These awards recognise organisations and individuals who are making a difference in helping to drive the industry's 25by2025 initiative to make the aviation industry more gender balanced.

The WATS will also feature the popular CEO Insights Panel moderated by CNN's Richard Quest.

Bank Muscat organises annual media event



Sheikh Waleed K al Hashar

Bank Muscat recently hosted a special annual event for officials from media institutions and agencies in the sultanate.

The event was attended by Sheikh Waleed K al Hashar, CEO, Bank Muscat, chief editors and media officials as well as members of the bank's management team.

The event was an opportunity

to extend Bank Muscat's appreciation for the effort shown by the media in constantly following and covering the bank's events throughout the year as well as its pioneering role in social responsibility.

The bank also unveiled the logo of its 40th anniversary celebrations at the event wherein a documentary about the bank's

journey was screened.

Addressing senior media officials gathered at the function, Sheikh Hashar, expressed his gratitude for the successful partnership between the bank and the media. He stressed on the importance of this cooperation to achieve success that benefits the banking sector and the nation. He extended his sincere ap-

preciation to all media professionals for their efforts in publicising knowledge about various developments, thereby contributing to socio-economic progress in Oman.

The CEO pointed out, in particular, the important role that the media has been playing over the past four decades in enhancing the bank's communications

with society. He thanked the media for effectively conveying to society the bank's stellar achievements in financial inclusion, economic development and social responsibility. He said that the bank would continue to keep pace with new developments in the media sector including social media.

Bank Muscat would continue

its commitment to customer-centricity and sustainable development as part of its efforts to translate the goals of Oman Vision 2040 into reality, he added.

Bank Muscat has been a pioneer and trendsetter in Oman's financial services sector, being the first bank in the country to launch various new products and services, cutting-edge technol-

ogy and extensive social responsibility programmes and initiatives over the past four decades.

Aimed at promoting a partnership in the progress and sustainable development of the nation, Bank Muscat pursues a dynamic communication policy, maintaining strong relations with the media.

The bank frequently interacts with the media to highlight major achievements and developments, which are of interest to the public.

Interacting regularly with media partners contributes greatly to the bank's ability and flexibility to adapt to a rapidly changing environment and enhancing communications and further exchange of knowledge.

Omantel to host fourth webinar on '5G and 4iR'

Omantel will host its fourth webinar under the theme '5G and 4iR' on June 22.

The webinar aims at introducing 5G technology, its potentials, and its impacts on the telecom sector and consumers, a press release said.

Omantel, the first to introduce 5G technology in the sultanate, is hosting a series of 5 webinars to focus on this frontier digital technology and the benefit it will bring to individuals and corporates.

The first webinar, '5G Beyond Speed', was held on November 23, 2021. The second webinar was held on March 9 under the topic '5G...Unlocking new potentials' and the third webinar was held on May 25.

The interaction during the

three webinars has been overwhelming and witnessed the participation of a large number of IT&C officials at public and private organisations, academicians, journalists and digital media influencers.

The fourth webinar will host speakers who will share their ideas, strategies and experience about the latest developments provided by 5G. Dr Yousuf al Hina'i, GM of ICT at Omantel Enterprise BU, will be speaking on the use of 5G and 4iR in the Educational sector, while Dr Haytham al Hajri, expert in Cybersecurity, will focus on how the 5G will enhance the role of Cybersecurity.

Omantel has established itself as a market leader in providing integrated telecom services,

thanks to its efficiency, quality of services and creative solutions. The company provides world-class services and access to the latest digital technologies to individual and corporate subscribers in the sultanate.

Omantel has also sought to enhance its 5G network through essential infrastructure and network coverage.

It is noticeable that the fifth generation's technology has begun to radically change the form of business and corporate performance and has begun to affect the daily lives of customers and consumers through the unlimited opportunities and capabilities it offers to meet their daily needs for high speed and digital solutions in areas such as education, health and entertainment.

Kempinski Hotel Muscat welcomes new executive chef

Kempinski Hotel Muscat is proud to welcome and announce the appointment of Julien el Khal as the new Executive Chef at the hotel.

In his new role, Chef Julien will be spearheading the culinary team, driving food and beverage at the hotel, and uplifting restaurant offerings at the property, a press release said.

Chef Julien joins the Kempinski Hotel Muscat team from Marsa Malaz Kempinski in Doha where he held the position of Cluster Executive Chef from 2018 until present. During his successful career in Doha, he demonstrated successful leadership and helped



Julien el Khal

nurture an award-winning culinary team that has been recognised as a top-rated unit in the region.

Abbas Souki, EAM in

charge of Food and Beverage, said, "We are delighted to welcome Chef Julien to the team. I am certain that with his culinary background and exten-

sive experience, we will greatly strengthen the local culinary scene in Muscat to achieve the world-class standards that we are known for."

Chef Julien is a classically trained executive chef with over 15 years of operational experience in Western, Oriental, continental and Mediterranean cuisines in internationally recognised luxury hotels and restaurant groups in Europe and the Middle East. He has been with Kempinski Hotels since 2014 but has previously held key positions in the culinary team in Beirut between 2009 and 2014, as well as in London, Cyprus, Dubai and Kuwait.



ISC Awadhi Wing holds bowling competition

Indian Social Club Oman - Awadhi Wing recently hosted its third event of the year - Awadh Bowling Competition 2022.

The competition was recently held on June 11 at Pinz Bowling

Centre, Avenues Mall, and was a delightful evening for the participating families, a press release said. The competition was a mix of a bowling and archery competition which was based on a

points structure. Over 50 participants signed up and enjoyed the game which was primarily focused on children in 12 teams.

As a surprise, a 'bonus round' was introduced in the game for-

mat and players took keep advantage of scoring maximum points. The winning and runner's up teams - SDA and Phoenix respectively - were awarded gift hampers.

Vodafone signs agreement with Whisbi for customer care

Vodafone signed an exclusive agreement with Whisbi for the provision of customer care services via video call.

The agreement was signed between Bader al Zaidi, CEO of Vodafone, and Alex Bisbe, CEO of Whisbi, at the Vodafone headquarters in Muscat, a press release said.

The signing of this agreement is aligned with Vodafone's constant endeavour to utilise the latest international technologies to provide an exceptional and comprehensive digital experience to its customers. With Whisbi, Vodafone customers can easily communicate with the Vodafone Customer Care Centre via video calls to answer inquiries related to products and services or provide solutions to any challenges, directly.

Commenting on the signing of the agreement, Bader Al Zaidi said, "Vodafone is one of the leading ICT service providers in the world. Ever since the commencement of our operations in the Sultanate of Oman at the end of last year, we have strived to ensure the provision of multiple channels through which our cus-



tomers can communicate with Our Care team. This includes direct calling facilities, WhatsApp and chats services through a state of the art My Vodafone application.

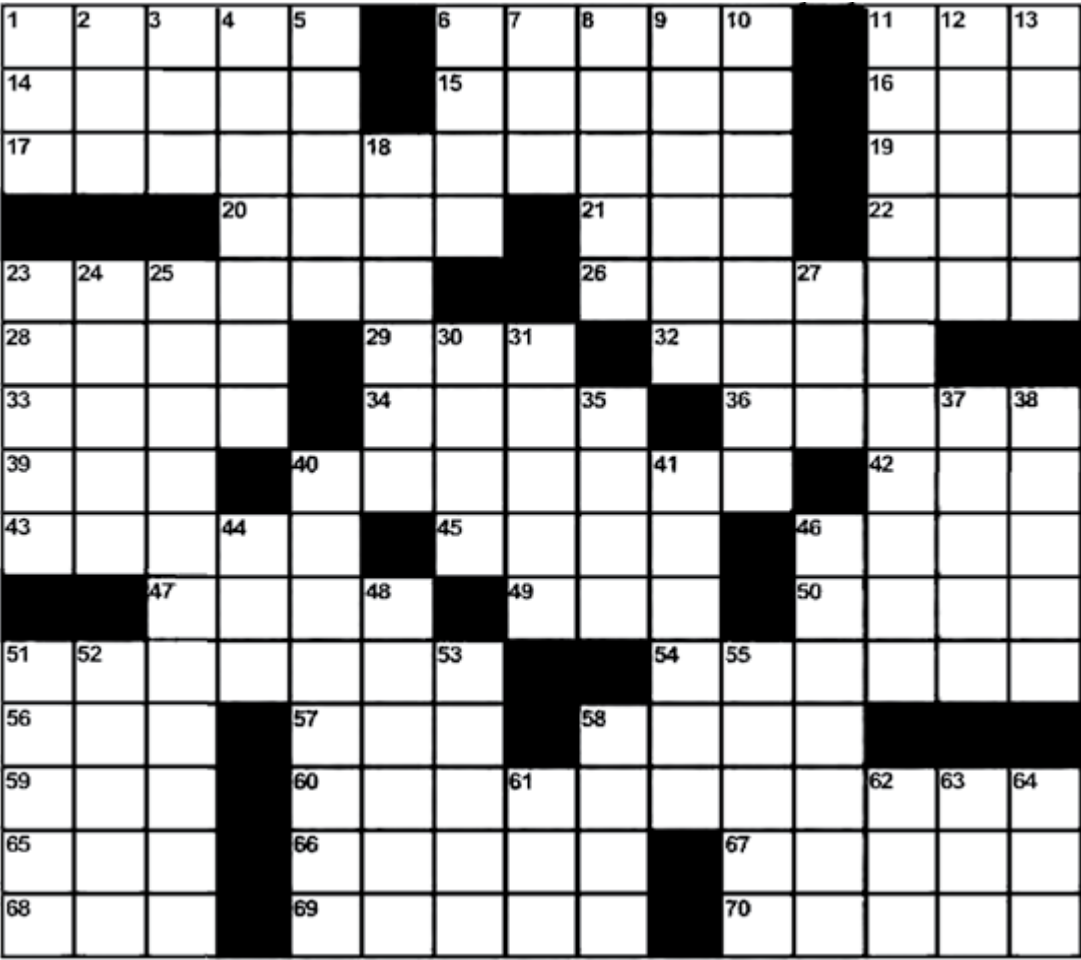
"This is in addition to social media channels, which in turn are among the preferred channels for customers. With Whisbi, we're adding a new and exclusive channel in the sultanate, where we can enable our customers to communicate with us visually and accurately.

This can be described as an integrated virtual store that is time and effort efficient, without the need for our customers to visit us physically, while also en-

suring that the highest level of privacy is maintained. Whisbi technology hosts a one-way communication, allowing the customer to see the call centre expert and not the other way around."

Bisbe stated, "We are pleased to have joined hands with Vodafone Oman. Through this exclusive agreement, we can add them to our portfolio of customers from major brands around the world including Samsung, Hyundai, Mazda, Motorola and many more. We believe that the Whisbi service will provide an added value in terms of customer care service in the sultanate."

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**

 - 1) Address an audience
 - 6) "All in the Family" character
 - 11) Pranks a yard on Halloween (Abbr.)
 - 14) Drink with marshmallows
 - 15)_Lama
 - 16) Three in Roman numerals
 - 17) Like the first overtime points
 - 19) Dispose of leftovers
 - 20) Reunion attendee
 - 21) "Disgusting!"
 - 22) Chromosome component
 - 23) Suburban school sport
 - 26) Computer screen
 - 28) "Black gold" gp.
 - 29) Word with Glory or Testament
 - 32) "Family Guy" creator
 - 33) Move, in Realtor-speak
 - 34) Banana covering
 - 36) Back of a boat
 - 39) Previously used by Shakespeare?
- 40) Social service part?
 - 42) Mauna _ (Hawaiian peak)
 - 43) Cavalry sword
 - 45) Beef order
 - 46) Agitation
 - 47) Clean, as a pipe
 - 49) Wistful wishing
 - 50) _ l'Eveque cheese
 - 51) More apt to complain
 - 54) Bow like a girl
 - 56) Decay
 - 57) "7 Faces of Dr._" (1964 flick)
 - 58) Arboreal monkey
 - 59) It's fit to be tied
 - 60) They cause performance failures
 - 65) Ballerina's prop
 - 66) Hebrew month
 - 67) Viola's big brother
 - 68) Bulky phone-book section
 - 69) Annoy successfully
 - 70) Invite off one's doorstep

DOWN

 - 1) Autumn mo.
 - 2) King of France
 - 3) Expert fighter pilot
 - 4) Cigarette filling
 - 5) Former "College Bowl" host Robert
 - 6) Imported cheese
 - 7) S_ (Neb. neighbor)
 - 8) Widest of the three bones of the hip
 - 9) Does a ballroom dance
 - 10) Part of HRH
 - 11) Got married
 - 12) Key instrument?
 - 13) Eastern lute
 - 18) Second-smallest continent
 - 23) Ointment targets
 - 24) Musical spectacle
 - 25) People fodder?
 - 27) "Addams Family" cousin
 - 30) Jet-set jet
 - 31) Crumble away
 - 35) Angler's decoy
 - 37) They help control a horse
 - 38) Impeccably dressed
 - 40) Behind
 - 41) Writing instrument
 - 44) Early night, to a bard
 - 46) Elves, pixies and such
 - 48) Cruel one
 - 51) Composed, as a letter
 - 52) Freight train hoppers,
- stereotypically

 - 53) Cook with dry heat
 - 55) Central New York city
 - 58) Window shade?
- 61) Sheep's cry
 - 62) Type, derogatory
 - 63) Manning of the NFL
 - 64) Future heir, perhaps
- NOTE PAD**
-

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
Everything happens for a reason. You've got no problem making decisions, but you could be surprised by some of the results today. That's okay. You don't need to control everything all the time, right? That's asking for way too much stress, and it leaves zero room for surprises. A day without surprises can be pretty dull, and you're not wild about boredom. Resolve to be unattached to outcomes. You might find something delightfully expected.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
Your intriguing personality expands even further (there's a little room left) thanks to some strong celestial energy that needs to break down boundaries. Right now, you're all about delving into your intimate past for answers while firming up connections in the present. Let this brave, new you surface in every area of your life. It's time to march to your own drummer, and in your professional life, you suddenly see farther than you ever could before.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21
Mysteries and secrets have captured your full attention right now, and with good reason. Your subconscious is working on untying a few knots that make your own life too restrictive. Don't worry about making them more snarled and confused. Instead, take your conscious mind offline for a while. Work on a jigsaw puzzle, get friends together for word games, or just watch an absorbing movie. The innermost mechanisms of your heart and soul are at work on the problem

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
A partnership is ready to proceed at full speed. The lights are green and there's a clear stretch of road ahead. It may be business or personal, but you're more aware than ever that there's more to it than meets the eye. It deserves your full commitment and a willingness to explore all possibilities. Talk it over with your partner and you should find that they're ready to expand as well.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Now is your time to pull out all the stops. The Universe gives you an all-access pass to the inner workings of your heart and soul, and that should help inspire you in all your work and play. These intangible but still incredibly important resources give you a big advantage, especially when it comes to using your creativity. Make or participate in something bigger than yourself. Dig deeply into your soul and contribute as much as you can.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
Does it feel like you need somebody to lean on? If so, you are in luck, because there are plenty of people who are more than willing to be your rock. The most important part is up to you, however. You've got to step up and ask them for support. Swallow that pride and do what you know is right. Then you can sit back and watch the cavalry ride to your rescue.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
You're usually obsessed with variety, but right now you have the intensity and focus of a laser beam. Your love of change (the quicker the better) has developed into a serious hankering for exploring the depths of your latest favorite topic. It might be a little bit off-putting at first. Constant metamorphosis is more your style. Still, you might end up enjoying this change of pace so much that you incorporate it into your daily life.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
You're reevaluating your relationship with romance. How much of what you need from your intimate relationships has been dictated to you by others? Now you're ready to toss all that aside and focus on your real, personal needs and desires from that special someone in your life. It might seem like a huge task, but finding someone who can keep up with you is ultimately a very rewarding venture.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
You are one of the most socially conscious and concerned people in your gang. You're certainly genuine in your desire to make the world a better place, and you love working with others to come up with new, exciting ways to make that happen. This ever-present impulse gets even stronger today, so get ready for a wild ride! You can dig deeply and come up with even more ideas and innovative ways to implement them.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
If you're feeling overwhelmed, you shouldn't be all that surprised, considering how many different directions are presenting themselves right now. You're not the only one in this situation, but don't let others' reactions influence your behavior. Let everyone else run around freaking out while you go your own way. After you get a sense of what's going on and apply your impeccable logic to the situation, the solution should be obvious.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Apply yourself, your irresistible energy, and your radiant confidence to getting rid of some mildly unfortunate habits that were once comfortable but are now just starting to chafe. The familiar can easily become a prison if you let it stop you from exploring different possibilities. The Universe is pushing you to grow and change, which means letting go of something you think you really need.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
Trust is one of the most important aspects of your life, not only trusting other people but also trusting yourself. Do you listen to your own instincts or override them with logic? Do you pay attention to your feelings or dismiss them as unimportant? Now is the time to examine your attitudes toward yourself. There's no need to make any sudden changes, though. Just sit there and think about patterns you've noticed.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. The oldest surviving almost-complete tablets recording a kingdom's code of laws, formed c. 2100-2050 BCE, applied to what region?
A. Babylon, southern esopotamia
B. Judaea
C. Sumer, southern Mesopotamia
D. Mycenae, Greecech

02. The critically acclaimed, but only 2-season, American TV series "Lot 49" (2018-19), described by one critic as "a fantastic puzzle of a series", references a book by which writer?
A. Eleanor Catton
B. Truman Capote
C. Edgar Rice Burroughs
D. Thomas Pynchon

03. What did Emperor Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, aim to achieve when he called the Diet of Worms together in 1521?
A. To call Martin Luther to defend or recant his views on Indulgences in the Christian Church
B. A review of Church riches
C. To examine the doctrines of Christian redemption through grace or works
D. Stocktake of numbers of adherents

Answers: 1.C 2.D 3.A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

A	G	E	G
E	S	A	N
W	T	O	Y
M	K	A	S

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

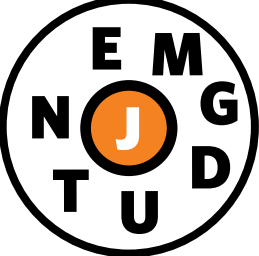
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Warplanes hit Hamas military sites in Gaza after rocket fire, says Israel

Jerusalem - Israeli warplanes hit Hamas military sites in the Gaza Strip on Saturday in retaliation for rocket fire from the Palestinian enclave run by the Islamist movement, the Israeli army said.

"A short while ago, in response to the rocket attack, (Israeli military) aircraft struck a number of Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip," the army said in a statement.

The strikes came after Hamas 'launched a rocket... toward Israeli civilians in southern Israel', it said, adding the projectile was intercepted by Israel's air defences.

The Israeli 'aircraft targeted a weapons manufacturing site located inside a Hamas military post and an additional three military posts belonging to Hamas', the statement said.

After the strikes balls of flame shot into the air, leaving dark smoke drifting over the territory.

Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said the air raids, in the southeast of Gaza City, 'are an extension of the aggression against Palestinian territory in Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank', after the killing of three Palestinians on Friday.

Twelve Palestinians were also wounded in that same incident during an Israeli army raid in



Fire erupts following an Israeli airstrike in south of Gaza City on Saturday (AFP)

Jerin, a stronghold of armed Palestinian factions in the West Bank.

The men were killed when Israeli forces opened fire on their vehicle, the Palestinian news agency Wafa said.

Israel's army said soldiers had come under fire during an operation to search for weapons.

One of the dead was a Hamas commander, the group said, vowing that the killings 'will not go unpunished'.

Qassem made no mention of whether Saturday's air strikes caused any casualties.

Israel's army said hours earlier that air raid sirens sounded in the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon

and in areas near the blockaded Gaza Strip.

In April, Israeli warplanes also hit Gaza after Palestinian armed groups fired rockets from the territory.

That exchange came after nearly a month of deadly violence focused on Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem's flashpoint Al-

Aqsa mosque compound, the third holiest site in Islam.

The impoverished Hamas-controlled Gaza coastal enclave of 2.3 million people has been under an Israeli blockade since 2007.

Last year, Israel and Hamas fought an 11-day war triggered in part by unrest over the Al-Aqsa

mosque compound, the most holy site for Jews, who call it the Temple Mount.

Israel occupied the West Bank and east Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War. It later annexed east Jerusalem in a move never recognised by most of the international community.

AFP

Iran fighter jet crashes, two injured

Tehran, Iran - An F-14 fighter jet crashed on Saturday while on a mission in central Iran, causing injuries to its two crew members, media in the Islamic republic reported.

"The fighter jet suffered a technical fault... and the pilot and co-pilot landed with parachutes," said Rassoul Motamedi, spokesman for the military in Isfahan province where the crash occurred. "The pilot and co-pilot were injured... and were immediately taken to hospital for treatment," he was quoted as saying by Tasnim news agency, adding that the plane was destroyed.

It was the second such incident in Isfahan province in less than a month, after two air force crewmen were killed when their F-7 training aircraft went down.

The air force in sanctions-hit Iran has suffered several crashes in recent years, with officials complaining of difficulties in acquiring spare parts to keep its ageing fleet in the air.

In February, an Iranian F-5 jet crashed in a residential area of the northwestern city of Tabriz, killing three people. Iran has mostly Russian MiG and Sukhoi fighter jets that date back to the Soviet era, as well as some Chinese aircraft, including the F-7, French Mirage jets and American F-4 and F-5 fighter planes.

AFP



A Taliban fighter stands guard in front of a Sikh temple following an attack by gunmen in Kabul on Saturday (AFP)

Gunmen storm Sikh temple in Kabul, one killed

Kabul, Afghanistan - Gunmen stormed a Sikh temple in the Afghan capital on Saturday morning, killing at least one member of the community and wounding seven more, the interior ministry said.

Ministry spokesman Abdul Nafi Takor said the attackers lobbed at least one grenade when they stormed the temple, setting off a blaze in a section of the complex.

Minutes later, a car bomb detonated in the area but caused no casualties, he added.

"One of our Sikh brothers has been killed and seven others (were) wounded in the attack," Takor said in a statement.

Two attackers were killed in an operation to secure the temple following the raid, he said, with one Taliban fighter also killed. While the number of bombings across Afghanistan has dropped since the Taliban seized power in August, several fatal attacks have hit the country in recent months.

"I heard gunshots and blasts," Gurnam Singh, a Sikh community leader, told AFP from close to the scene of Saturday's attack soon after the raid began.

"Generally at that time in the morning we have several Sikh devotees who come to offer prayers at the gurdwara," he said.

Video footage posted on so-

cial media after the attack showed shattered pillars and walls in the temple's main prayer hall, with debris scattered across the floor. A section of a building near the temple also caught fire, an AFP correspondent reported from the area.

The windows of several residential buildings were broken from the impact of the car bomb. Nearby streets were littered with pieces of shattered glass.

Taliban forces cordoned off the neighbourhood, preventing journalists from speaking with residents and witnesses.

Sikh temples closed

A Taliban fighter deployed in the area told AFP that some Sikhs in the temple at the time of the attack managed to flee from a back door.

Some of Kabul's other Sikh temples were closed for security reasons as reports of the attack spread.

No group has so far claimed responsibility for the raid.

The attack came days after an Indian delegation visited Kabul to discuss the distribution of humanitarian aid from India to Afghanistan.

Afghan and Indian media reports said the delegation also discussed with Taliban officials the possibility of reopening the Indian embassy.

AFP

Man aboard plane grounded in Argentina linked to Quds Force: Paraguay

Asuncion, Paraguay - One of the men aboard a plane grounded near Buenos Aires has ties to Iran's Quds Force, Paraguay's intelligence chief said on Friday, despite claims by Argentina that no evidence links the case to Tehran's overseas intelligence.

Intelligence chief Esteban Aquino told AFP that Captain Gholamreza Ghasemi did not merely share a name with a member of the Force - an arm of Iran's Revolutionary Guards which is listed as a terrorist organisation by the United States - but is in fact the same man.

Argentine Minister of Security Anibal Fernandez responded on Friday that while the Paraguayan official 'has his right



A police car is seen outside the hotel where the crew of the Venezuelan Emtrasur Cargo airline is staying, in Canning, in Buenos Aires (AFP)

to say whatever he wants... I'm not going to talk about conjecture'. "We abide by due process. And according to the official

documentation, there is no specific relationship with terrorist organisations, according to all the databases," Fernandez told

AM750 radio.

The Boeing 747 cargo plane, reportedly carrying car parts, has been held at an Argentine airport since Wednesday last week, with its 14 Venezuelan and five Iranian crew members prevented from leaving the country pending an investigation. On Monday, Argentine officials raised suspicions of a link between the flight and the Revolutionary Guards.

The plane arrived in Argentina from Mexico on June 6, before trying to fly to Uruguay two days later, where it was refused entry.

Uruguay's Interior Minister Luis Alberto Heber said on Tuesday the country had been re-

sponding to a 'formal warning from Paraguayan intelligence'.

It then returned to Argentina where it has been grounded ever since.

The plane belongs to Emtrasur, a subsidiary of Venezuela's Conviaa, which is under US sanctions.

Paraguay on Tuesday said it had information that seven crew on the plane, which stopped in the country in May, were Quds Force members.

Iran has said the plane was sold to a Venezuelan company by Tehran's Mahan Air last year.

The United States has accused Mahan Air of links to the Revolutionary Guards.

AFP

In a parched land, Iraqi gazelles dying of hunger

Samawah, Iraq - Gazelles at an Iraqi wildlife reserve are dropping dead from hunger, making them the latest victims in a country where climate change is compounding hardships after years of war.

In little over one month, the slender-horned gazelle population at the Sawa reserve in southern Iraq has plunged from 148 to 87.

Lack of funding along with a shortage of rain has deprived them of food, as the country's drought dries up lakes and leads to declining crop yields.

President Barham Saleh has warned that tackling climate change 'must become a national priority for Iraq as it is an existential threat to the future of our generations to come'.

The elegant animals, also known as rhim gazelles, are recognisable by their gently curved horns and sand-coloured coats. The International Union for Conservation of Nature classes the animals as endangered on its Red List.

Outside Iraq's reserves, they are mostly found in the deserts of Libya, Egypt and Algeria but are unlikely to number 'more than a few hundred' there, according to the Red List.



Rhim gazelles graze at the Sawa wildlife reserve in Samawa desert in Iraq's southern province of Al-Muthanna (AFP)

Turki al-Jayashi, director of the Sawa reserve, said gazelle numbers there plunged by around 40 per cent in just one month to the end of May.

'They no longer have a supply of food because we have not received the necessary funds' which had come from the government, Jayashi said.

Iraq's finances are under pressure after decades of war in a poverty-stricken country needing agricultural and other infra-

structure upgrades.

It is grappling with corruption, a financial crisis and political deadlock which has left Iraq without a new government months after October elections.

'The climate has also strongly affected the gazelles', which lack forage in the desert-like region, Jayashi added.

Barren soil

At three other Iraqi reserves further north, the number of rhim

gazelles has fallen by 25 per cent in the past three years to 224 animals, according to an agriculture ministry official who asked to remain anonymous.

He blamed the drop at the reserves in Al-Madain near Baghdad, and in Diyala and Kirkuk on a 'lack of public financing'.

At the Sawa reserve, established in 2007 near the southern city of Samawah, the animals pant under the scorching sun.

The brown and barren earth is

dry beyond recovery, and meagre shrubs that offer slight nourishment are dry and tough.

Some gazelles, including youngsters still without horns, nibble hay spread out on the flat ground.

Others take shelter under a metal roof, drinking water from a trough.

Summer hasn't even begun but temperatures have already hit 50 degrees Celsius in parts of the country.

The effects of drought have been compounded by dramatic falls in the level of some rivers due to dams upstream and on tributaries in Turkey and Iran.

Desertification affects 39 per cent of Iraqi land, the country's president has warned.

"Water scarcity negatively affects all our regions. It will lead to reduced fertility of our agricultural lands because of salination," Saleh said.

He has sent 100mn dinars (over US\$68,000) in an effort to help save the Sawa reserve's rhim gazelles, Jayashi said.

But the money came too late for some.

Five more have just died, their carcasses lying together on the barren earth.

AFP

British journalist confirmed dead in Brazil, US urges ‘accountability’

Atalaia do Norte, Brazil - Brazilian police on Friday officially identified the remains of British journalist Dom Phillips, who was found buried in the Amazon after going missing on a book research trip.

The grim result comes after the disappearance on June 5 of Phillips and his guide, indigenous expert Bruno Pereira, ignited an international outcry, with the United States calling on Friday for ‘accountability’.

Phillips was identified through ‘forensic dentistry combined with forensic anthropology’, the Federal Police said in a statement. It said it was still working on ‘complete identification’ of the unearthed remains, which may include those of Pereira, who had received multiple death threats. Veteran correspondent Phillips, 57, and Pereira, 41, went missing in a remote part of the rainforest rife with illegal mining, fishing and logging, as well as drug trafficking.

Ten days later, on Wednesday, a suspect named Amarildo da Costa de Oliveira - known as ‘Pelado’ - took police to a place where he said he had buried bodies near the city of Atalaia do Norte, where the pair had been headed by boat.

Human remains unearthed from the site arrived in Brasilia on Thursday evening for identification by forensics experts.

Earlier on Friday, police said investigations pointed to the perpetrators having ‘acted alone, without there being an intellectual author or criminal organisation behind the crime’.

‘The investigations continue and there are indications of the participation of more people’ in the murders, it added.

Activists have blamed the killings on President Jair Bolsonaro for allowing commercial exploitation of the Amazon at the cost of the environment and law and order.

For his part, Bolsonaro sought



One of the coffins containing human remains found during the search for missing British journalist Dom Phillips and indigenous expert Bruno Pereira in the Amazon forest, is carried upon arrival at the Federal Police hangar in Brasilia on Thursday (AFP)

to lay blame at the door of the men themselves for undertaking a ‘reckless’ trip in an area where Phillips was ‘disliked’.

‘A powerful criminal organisation’

Phillips, a longtime contributor to The Guardian and other leading international newspapers, was working on a book on sustainable development in the Amazon with Pereira as his guide.

Pereira, an expert at Brazil’s indigenous affairs agency FUNAI, had received multiple threats from loggers and miners with their eye on isolated Indigenous land. The Univaja association of Indigenous peoples, which had taken part in the search for the men, refuted the police’s conclusion that the killers had acted alone. “These are not just two killers, but an organised group that planned the crime in detail,” Univaja said in a statement. It claimed authorities had ignored numerous complaints about the activities of

criminal gangs in the area.

Univaja said it had filed a report in April that ‘Pelado’ was involved in illegal fishing.

He had previously been accused, it claimed, of ‘being the perpetrator of gun attacks in 2018 and 2019 against a base of FUNAI’, the organisation Pereira had worked for.

Univaja said that ‘a powerful criminal organisation (had) tried at all costs to cover its tracks during the investigation’ of the double murder. Experts say illegal fishing of endangered species in the Javari Valley takes place under the control of drug traffickers who use the sale of fish to launder drug money.

Police said on Friday night they have issued an arrest warrant for a man identified as Jefferson da Silva Lima. It is not known how he is linked to the case.

Heavily armed soldiers who had taken part in the search for the two men started leaving Atalaia do Norte on Friday.

People there who helped in

the search and reported illegal activity are now afraid for their lives, said Paulo Marubo, an Univaja coordinator.

“We are going to keep living here, and the state is not going to give people any kind of protection,” said Marubo, who says he has received threats.

‘Brutal act of violence’

The United States on Friday urged ‘accountability and justice’ for the murders.

State Department spokesman Ned Price offered condolences to the men’s families, saying they were ‘murdered for supporting conservation of the rainforest and native peoples there’.

In neighboring Peru, an estimated 100 Indigenous people in traditional dress marched in Lima on Friday to demand protection for natural resources on native lands and lament the death of Phillips and Pereira.

“The blood that has been spilled will never be forgotten,”

the group chanted as it marched to the Justice Ministry. People at the head of the procession carried a banner reading ‘protect land, water and life’.

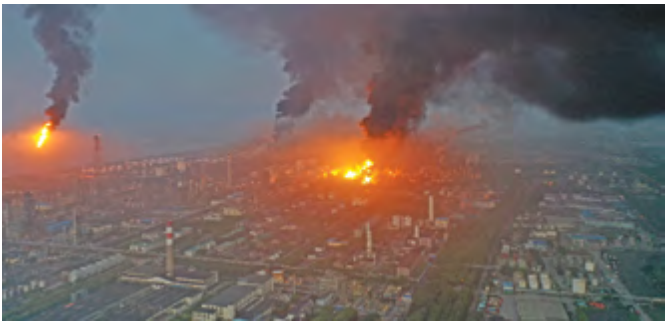
On Thursday, the UN denounced a ‘brutal act of violence’ in Brazil. UN human rights spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani said attacks and threats against activists and Indigenous people in Brazil were ‘persistent’ and urged the government to step up protections.

Investigations continue to look into the motive for the crime. Police have been unable to find the boat in which Phillips and Pereira were traveling when they were last seen.

Blood found in Oliveira’s boat belonged to a man, investigators said, but not to Phillips.

Analysis had also revealed that entrails found in the river during the search, and linked to the men by Bolsonaro, contained ‘no human DNA’, according to police.

AFP



This aerial photo shows a large fire at a Sinopec Shanghai Petrochemical plant in outlying Jinshan district of Shanghai on Saturday (AFP)

Multiple fires at chemical plant in Shanghai, 1 dead

Shanghai, China - Huge clouds of black smoke billowed over Shanghai from multiple fires at a chemical plant on Saturday that left at least one dead, according to state media and eyewitness video obtained by AFP.

The fire at a Sinopec Shanghai Petrochemical Co. plant in outlying Jinshan district broke out around 4am, but was brought under control later that morning, according to state news agency Xinhua. Aerial drone footage shared by a resident shows thick clouds of smoke hanging over a

vast industrial zone as three fires blaze in separate locations, turning the sky black.

“The fire at the scene has been effectively brought under control and protective burning is currently being carried out,” Xinhua reported. “According to our initial understanding, the fire has already caused one death.”

The fire erupted as Shanghai, gingerly resumes business after being sealed off for around two months to counter an Omicron-driven coronavirus outbreak.

AFP

Vietnam jails high-profile environmentalist Khanh

Hanoi, Vietnam - A high-profile environmentalist and anti-coal campaigner in Vietnam has been jailed for two years on tax evasion charges, her NGO said on Saturday.

Nguy Thi Khanh, a globally recognised climate and energy campaigner, was sentenced in Hanoi on Friday, a court official confirmed to AFP without giving any further details.

The 46-year-old - who was arrested in February ‘on a tax evasion accusation’, according to state-owned media - had been among the few in the communist nation challenging the government’s plans to increase coal power to fuel economic development.



Nguy Thi Khanh (AFP)

Khanh, the first Vietnamese winner of the Goldman Environmental Prize, had convinced officials to strip 20,000 megawatts of coal power from the national energy plan by 2030. “From her contribution to Vietnamese society and her works, the verdict given to Khanh was too harsh,” her environmental NGO GreenID said.

AFP



US Ambassador Joseph Yun (centre left) with his team and Marshall Islands FM Kittiang Kabua (centre right) with her team posing for pictures at the US army base at Kwajalein last week (AFP)

US, Marshall Islands eye new security deal by year end

Majuro, Marshall Islands - The United States and the Marshall Islands hope to reach a key economic and security deal before the end of the year, negotiators said on Friday, as Washington tries to counter growing Chinese influence in the region.

A 20-year funding deal for the Pacific island state runs out at the end of 2023, and the first round of talks on a new accord took place this week.

After a first ‘positive’ round of discussions in the Marshall Islands, chief negotiators said they hoped to have an agreement ‘to sign by the end of September 2022’. Although a sovereign country, the Marshall Islands - with a population of just 60,000 - depends on the United States for an estimated 40 per cent of its budget.

In return, the United States has been able to establish a series of strategically vital military facilities - ranging from a missile range to naval facilities.

Similar agreements with the Federated States of Micronesia and Palau are also due to be renewed. The three island nations cover an area of the Pacific larger than the continental US.

Washington sees the extension of funding packages under compacts of free association as a hedge against expanding Chinese diplomatic influence in the Pacific island region.

In addition to extending US funding support, Marshall Islands leaders want Washington to address issues at the Kwajalein missile range and other facilities. Dozens of nuclear weapons tests have left a number of atolls with

extreme radiation levels, and continue to cause health problems for many islanders.

Majuro also wants to bring climate adaptation and mitigation measures into the agreement.

“There is much work to be done, and we are optimistic our talks will be completed in a timely manner with good results for all,” said Joseph Yun, President Joe Biden’s special envoy.

The Marshall Islands were a United Nations Trust Territory of the US from shortly after World War II until 1986 when the first Compact of Free Association came into effect.

Parliament Speaker Kenneth Kedi, who is a member of the Marshall Islands negotiating team, said he is optimistic about reaching a deal.

AFP

Europe braces for June weekend heat

Paris, France - France, Spain and other western European nations braced on Saturday for a sweltering June weekend that is set to break records and sparked concern about forest fires and the effects of climate change.

The weather on Saturday will represent a peak of a June heat-wave that is in line with warnings from scientists that such phenomena will now hit earlier than usual thanks to climate change.

Temperatures already nudged over 40 degrees Celsius in parts of France on Friday.

But they are due to relent slightly from Sunday with thunderstorms forecast in parts of France and elsewhere in Europe.

French state weather forecaster Meteo France said June temperature records had already been beaten in 11 areas on Friday and could reach as high as 42 Celsius in some areas on Saturday. ‘This is the earliest heat-wave ever recorded in France’ since 1947, said Matthieu Sorel, a climatologist at Meteo France.

With ‘many monthly or even all-time temperature records likely to be beaten in several regions’, he called the weather a ‘marker of climate change’.

In Spain, forest fires burned nearly 9,000 hectares of land in the northwest Sierra de la Culebra region on Friday, forcing some 200 people from their homes, regional authorities said.

And more than 3,000 people



People walk in a fountain to cool off in Madrid, last week, as the ‘unusual’ temperatures for the time of year follow the hottest May in at least 100 years in Spain (AFP)

were evacuated from the Puy du Fou theme park in central Spain due to a fierce fire nearby.

Firefighters were battling fires in several other regions, including woodlands in Catalonia where weather conditions complicated the fight.

Temperatures were above 35 Celsius on Friday in most parts of the country.

Hospitals full

More than half of French departments were at the highest or second-highest heat alert level by the afternoon on Friday.

“Hospitals are at capacity, but are keeping up with demand,” Health Minister Brigitte Bourguignon told reporters in Vienne, near Lyon in the southeast.

Schoolchildren were told to stay at home in departments at alert level ‘red’ and the health

ministry activated a special heat-wave hotline.

The Red Cross also organised efforts to distribute water to the homeless community in Toulouse, where temperatures are expected to soar to 38 degrees Celsius on Saturday.

“There are more deaths of people in the streets in the summer than in the winter,” said volunteer Hugues Juglair, 67.

Meanwhile rock and metal fans at the music festival Hellfest in western France were sprayed with water from hoses and enormous vaporisers in front of the stage as they headbanged or bounced to an opening-day lineup including Deftones and The Offspring.

Several towns in northern Italy have announced water rationing and the Lombardy region may declare a state of

emergency as a record drought threatens harvests.

Ibrahim Thiaw, executive secretary of the UN convention charged with reversing land degradation, on Friday warned drought was ‘set to increase in severity and frequency’.

“The consequences of droughts could affect up to three-quarters of humanity by 2050,” he said during a speech in Madrid.

The UK recorded its hottest day of the year on Friday with temperatures reaching over 30 Celsius in the early afternoon, meteorologists said.

It was the third day in a row that temperature records had been broken in the UK, where it was over 28 Celsius on Wednesday and 29.5 Celsius on Thursday.

AFP

Zelensky hails EU backing, Donbas rocked

Fighting raged in villages outside Ukraine’s eastern city of Severodonetsk in the Donbas region

Kyiv, Ukraine - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky hailed Brussels’ support for Kyiv’s European Union bid as a historic achievement, as ‘fierce battles’ raged again in Ukraine’s eastern Donbas region.

The European Commission spearheaded a powerful show of solidarity on Friday by backing Ukraine for EU candidate status, an endorsement that could add it to the list of countries vying for membership as early as next week.

All 27 leaders must back Ukraine’s candidacy at a Brussels summit next week but the heads of the bloc’s biggest members - France, Germany and Italy - gave full-throated support to the idea during a highly symbolic visit to Kyiv this week.

Even though EU membership could still be years away, Zelensky called the decision a ‘historic achievement’ and said it would ‘certainly bring our victory closer’ against Russia.

“Ukrainian institutions maintain resilience even in conditions of war. Ukrainian democratic habits have not lost their power even now,” Zelensky said in a video address.

On Friday, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen made her support of clear by donning a striking outfit in Ukraine’s national colours in blue and yellow.

“We all know that Ukrainians are ready to die for the European perspective. We want them to



Fighters of the territorial defence unit, a support force to the regular Ukrainian army, take part in an exercise for the regular combat tactics classes in Kyiv region on Friday (AFP)

live with us for the European dream,” she said.

‘More destruction’

Zelensky’s comments came as fighting raged in villages outside the eastern city of Severodonetsk in the Donbas region, which Moscow’s forces have been try-

ing to seize for weeks.

“Now the most fierce battles are near Severodonetsk. They (Russia) do not control the city entirely,” the governor of the eastern Lugansk region, Sergiy Gaiday, said on Telegram.

“In nearby villages there are very difficult fights - in

Toshkivska, Zolote. They are trying to break through but failing,” he said, adding that Ukrainian forces were ‘fighting Russians in all directions’.

Gaiday said there was ‘more destruction’ at the besieged Azot chemical plant in Severodonetsk, where he said 568 people were

sheltering, including 38 children.

He also said Lysychansk - a Ukrainian-controlled city across a river from battered Severodonetsk - is being ‘heavily shelled’.

Lysychansk residents were preparing to be evacuated. “We’re abandoning every-

thing and going. No one can survive such a strike,” said history teacher Alla Bor, waiting with her son-in-law Volodymyr and 14-year-old grandson.

“We are abandoning everything, we are leaving our house. We left our dog with food. It’s inhumane but what can you do?”

US veterans on Russian TV

Russian state television meanwhile aired social media videos of two US military veterans who went missing last week while fighting alongside the Ukrainian army, stating they had been captured by Russian forces.

US President Joe Biden had said on Friday he did not know the whereabouts of Alexander Druke and Andy Huynh, after their relatives lost contact with the pair. The missing Americans - including a third identified as a former US Marines captain - are believed to be part of an unknown number of mostly military veterans who have joined other foreigners to volunteer alongside Ukrainian troops.

Ukrainian civilian volunteers however continue to sign up, with a group performing military exercises on Friday in fortified positions left by Russian troops in Bucha, a town synonymous with war crimes blamed on Moscow’s forces.

“Most of those who are here aren’t soldiers. They’re just civilians who want to defend their country - 50 per cent of them have never held a weapon until today,” a sergeant known as ‘Ticha’ told AFP. Moscow has warned Western countries against getting involved in its ex-Soviet neighbour, saying it invaded to ‘de-nazify and de-militarise’ a country that was getting too close to the West. AFP



Britain’s Home Secretary Priti Patel making a statement, in the House of Commons, in London, last week (AFP)

European court ruling on Rwanda ‘politically motivated’, says UK

London, UK - Britain’s interior minister Priti Patel suggested in an interview published on Saturday that a European court’s intervention to stop a deportation flight to Rwanda was politically motivated.

“You’ve got to look at the motivation,” she told the *Daily Telegraph*, after the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) stepped in on Tuesday, just as the flight was due to leave for Kigali.

“How and why did they make that decision? Was it politically motivated? I’m of the view that it is, absolutely. The opaque way this court has operated is absolutely scandalous. That needs to be questioned.” Patel said the government had not been told the identity of the ECHR judges and had not received the full ruling of the order not to remove the migrants until a review of the policy was complete.

“They’ve not used this ruling previously, which does make you question the motivation and the lack of transparency,” she added.

The UK government, which promised to tighten borders after Brexit, is under pressure to deal with record numbers of migrants crossing the Channel in small boats from northern France.

More than 11,000 people have been intercepted and brought

ashore so far this year.

But a controversial deal signed with Rwanda to send some asylum seekers on a one-way ticket for resettlement has caused outrage. Some 130 asylum seekers were originally scheduled to be on Tuesday’s flight but the numbers were whittled down to zero after a series of legal challenges on human rights grounds.

The opaque way this court has operated is absolutely scandalous. That needs to be questioned

PRITI PATEL

The government in London is considering rewriting the UK Human Rights Act, which is based on the European Convention of Human Rights, to make it easier for it to deport migrants.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has criticised lawyers for taking on asylum cases and Patel’s claim of a political dimension to the ECHR decision fits into to a government narrative about threats to UK sovereignty by European bodies. AFP

41 dead, millions stranded as floods hit Bangladesh, India

Sylhet, Bangladesh - Monsoon storms in Bangladesh and India have killed at least 41 people and unleashed devastating floods that left millions of others stranded, officials said on Saturday.

Floods are a regular menace to millions of people in low-lying Bangladesh, but experts say climate change is increasing their frequency, ferocity and unpredictability.

Relentless downpours over the past week have inundated vast stretches of Bangladesh’s northeast, with troops deployed to evacuate households cut off from neighbouring communities.

Schools have been turned into relief shelters to house entire villages inundated in a matter of hours by rivers that suddenly burst their banks.

“The whole village went under water by early on Friday and we all got stranded,” said Lokman, whose family lives in Companiganj village.

“After waiting a whole day on the roof of our home, a neighbour rescued us with a makeshift boat. My mother said she has never seen such floods in her entire



Bangladesh army personnel evacuate affected people from a flooded area in Sylhet on Saturday (AFP)

life,” the 23-year-old added.

Asma Akter, another woman rescued from the rising waters, said her family had not been able to eat for two days. “The water rose so quickly we couldn’t bring any of our things,” she said. “And how can you cook anything when everything is underwater?”

Lightning triggered by the storms has killed at least 21 people around the South Asian nation since Friday afternoon, police officials told AFP.

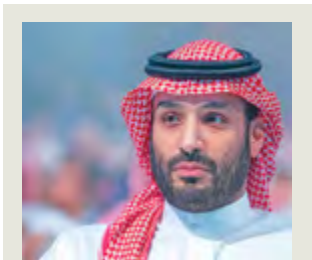
Among them were three children aged between 12 and 14 who were struck by lightning on Friday in the rural town of Nandail, said local police chief Mizanur Rahman. Another four people died when landslides hit their hillside homes in the port city of Chittagong, police inspector Nurul Islam told AFP.

At least 16 people have been killed since Thursday in India’s remote Meghalaya, the state’s chief minister Conrad Sangma

wrote on Twitter, after landslides and surging rivers that submerged roads.

Next door in Assam state, more than 1.8mn people have been affected by floods after five days of incessant downpours.

Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma told reporters he had instructed district officials to provide ‘all necessary help and relief’ to those caught in the flooding. AFP



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (AFP)

Saudi crown prince to visit Egypt, Turkey

Riyadh, KSA - Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman begins a regional tour on Monday in Egypt that will also take him to Turkey to bolster regional ties, a Saudi diplomat said. After Cairo, Prince Mohammed, Saudi Arabia’s de facto leader, will travel to Jordan and then on to Turkey, the diplomat said.

During the tour, he will discuss ‘regional and international files and the future of international cooperation’, he said, adding that investment and energy deals are due to be signed. President Tayyip Recep Erdogan announced on Friday that Prince Mohammed would be visiting Turkey on June 22. AFP

French screen legend Jean-Louis Trintignant is dead

Paris, France - France lost a screen legend on Friday - actor Jean-Louis Trintignant, who died at the age of 91, was hailed by President Emmanuel Macron as ‘a wonderful artistic talent’.

Among the legends that emerged during French cinema’s New Wave in the 1960s, Trintignant had one of the most durable careers, still making groundbreaking films into his eighties.

His quiet authority and sonorous voice left their mark on some 120 films, from the notorious *And God Created Woman* alongside Brigitte Bardot in 1959, through classics like *A Man and a*



French actor Jean-Louis Trintignant (AFP)

Woman and Z, to later powerful dramas such as *Three Colours: Red and Amour*. “He accompanied our lives through French cinema,” said Macron when he was informed of the news during a tech conference in Paris. “It’s a page that turns on a wonderful artistic talent and voice.”

Trintignant’s life was, however, marked by one terrible trauma when his daughter Marie was beaten to death by her rock-star boyfriend Bertrand Cantat in 2003. He was surrounded by his family in the Gard region of southern France when he passed away, his wife said in a state-

ment sent to AFP. No cause of death was given.

‘Beautiful voice in theatre, cinema’

Trintignant announced his retirement from cinema in 2017 but returned two years later for a sequel to the film that made his name - the 1966 classic *A Man and a Woman*. The New Wave love story from director Claude Lelouch starred Trintignant as a racing driver - his real-life passion - and turned him into an international star after it won two Academy Awards and the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival.

He won the best actor award at the festival three years later for political thriller *Z*. “The most beautiful voice that we’ve heard in theatre or cinema,” Lelouch told French radio on Friday.

“He made us a gift of his scars. He was a remarkable man... I owe him everything,” added Lelouch, who worked with Trintignant on seven films. Despite his screen success, Trintignant was known to say that he preferred the theatre. “I could have spent my whole life doing theatre,” he said in 2017, adding: “But cinema paid better!” AFP

Street art is taking over Germany – public walls, bins and building facades are getting converted into canvases for many an artist seeking recognition

STREET ART



WALL OF FAME

Flying horses, pop art bananas and fire hydrants with flower patterns - street art is taking over urban areas in Germany. But it's not all about spraying or tagging. In many places, you will find art that catches the eye, such as yarn-bombed lampposts, bins with monster eyes or placards that employ techniques such as irony or alienation. Here is a creative foray into six exciting street art cities in Germany:

Completely bananas

Cologne

Walls have become canvases on which street artists can express themselves in giant displays. The underground culture is particularly active in Cologne, which has become a haven for urban artists. The highest density of murals can be found in the district of Ehrenfeld. Original, small-format street art, such as stickers, paste-ups and stencils (graffiti with a template) can be admired at trendy local spots on Kornerstrasse, Lichtstrasse and Heliosstrasse.

Thomas Baumgartel - alias Banana Sprayer - is a well-known street artist in Cologne. He sprayed his first banana back in the 1990s. Now thousands of the pop art yellow fruits adorn walls throughout Germany and around the world.



Pink Man and Fraternal Kiss

Berlin

Street art has been elevated to monument status in Germany's trendy capital. The East Side Gallery in Berlin's Friedrichshain district uses a 1.3km section of what was once the Berlin Wall as its canvas. Street artists the world over have transformed the grey wall, a visual symbol of separation, into a brightly coloured monument to freedom and reconciliation.

Its most famous paintings include The Fraternal Kiss by Dmitri Vrubel and a Trabant breaking through the cement by Birgit Kinder. But street art culture in Berlin goes far beyond the creations on the Berlin Wall. Even the big names in street art, including Banksy, Tristan Eaton, BLU, and many others, have let their creativity run free on the walls of Berlin.



Sea dog in XXL

Hamburg

Street art tells the story of a city from a new perspective, one that is worlds apart from the forms of expression of other established artists. Visitors strolling through Altona, the Gängeviertel, St Pauli or Ottensen in Hamburg will find maritime murals that tell tales of life in the Hanseatic city at every turn.

In a back courtyard in the Sternschanze quarter, for example, a larger-than-life 'sea dog' wearing a striped T-shirt and with a big bushy beard looks down at passers-by from the wall. On a building wall near the Reeperbahn, two massive seagulls scrap over a delicious morsel of food. There's even a street art memorial dedicated to Hans Albers, a famous blonde man with an accordion, who sang fervent songs about the sea.



Hall of Fame

Frankfurt

When junction boxes, bridges, concrete piers and fire hydrants are adorned with graffiti, posters, stickers or stencil art, some see it as criminal damage, others view it as art. The authorities used to come down hard on sprayers, but today they are often recognised as artists and the powers that be are more relaxed about their activities.

In some places, it was suddenly decided that urban sprayers should have dedicated spaces for their compositions. The Ratswegkreisel Hall of Fame in Frankfurt is one of them. Countless graffiti, from the funny to the satirical, have ignited a firework of urban art.

The dynamic Bull vs Bear mural was created on Friedberger Landstrasse to pay homage to Frankfurt's status as a financial hub.



Animal Farm

Leipzig

"Is that art or can we get rid of it?" This pronouncement sums up the relationship many have with modern art, including street art. Viewers are increasingly learning to appreciate the lesser-known artworks that embellish the often-grey look of a city. Brushes, paint rollers and spray cans are also being used more and more often in Leipzig, the trendy metropolis in Saxony, and no bin, traffic light or road sign is safe. Connewitz, Sudvorstadt and Plagwitz are the up-and-coming street art districts here.



Scandal surrounding Wholetrain

Munich

Street art is the art form of the 21st century - spontaneous, blunt, and at home in urban areas. Many works of art come out of a can in Munich, too. And passers-by can simply admire the work - without admittance fees or opening hours. Some appear and then disappear, others stay - these are the laws of this new, exciting and constantly changing art form. Munich has even compiled a Street Art City Map, a visitor guide on the most exciting artworks.

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BIRTHDAY WISHES

ANAND
16 June

May all your wishes come true today and every day.
Happy birthday! With love
Bhagwatiba, Daddy, Mom,
Sarla aunty, Yashdidi,
Bhumidid, Vishaljiu,
Tapanjiu, Prahar and Garvit.



JOINT EXHIBITION

Creative Deconstruction

Hubert Vaz

The celebration of 'art at its best' began as soon as H H Sayyida Alia bint Thuwaini al Said, the chief guest, cut the ribbon at the entrance to declare 'Creative Deconstruction', a joint exhibition by 26 international artists at Bait al Zubair, open on the evening of June 14. What followed was a mixed bag of music, dance, chit chat, and a confluence of diverse art with a contemporary message under one roof. "It all started when I thought of curating and conceptualising a virtual exhibition of the Indian artists group 'Rangrez' on the theme of Creative Deconstruction last year," says Shalini, explaining that the idea of having a physical exhibition with Omani, Indian, as well as artists of varied nationalities living in Oman - budding and interna-

guests moved around the gallery while Shalini herself added a silver lining to the evening by performing a Bollywood dance along with her husband to the popular song - Pyar Hua Ikrar Hua - from the old Hindi movie Shree 420 of the black and white era. Some of the participating artists expressed total delight on being part of this exhibition on a theme that was most relevant as well as provided total freedom to artist expression. Shalini herself presented what she called 'Dreamland' depicting the 'dream of a tree' to be happy within and without. This artwork uses Arabic calligraphy as well as sprays of black, silver and gold acrylic colours over a red background. Julia Jean Davies, an artist from UK said, "I have one painting in the exhibition - 'There are 360', so why stick to one'. This is a quote by celebrated British Iraqi Architect, Zaha Hadid, and loosely relates to a deconstructed urban

also the compositional elements, as well as colour choices. "I wanted to deconstruct the relationship between artist and audience - while the artist produces the piece, the viewer perceives the piece, and so both are present in the work." Mohammed al Attar, an Omani artist said it was a privilege and honour to participate in an exhibition at Bait Al

more aware, more connected with your purpose, knowing that there are choices to make, and the final stage, where you realise that all the steps you took brought you to a place of self connection. Now you know where you stand and to whom, where and why you are heading," he explained. Mirna Youssef, another visual artist from Lebanon, said, "My love story with

detached falling palm fibre pieces. It also presents the other side of things - hope and optimism in the ability of people together to sustain life on planet Earth by using the golden threads holding the fallen pieces to have it attached again. "My artwork represents the abstract minimalism art school, I chose to use the natural palm tree fibres to put the



'Creative Deconstruction', an exhibition by 26 international artists, curated by Dr Shalini Gupta Kumar, was inaugurated last week at Bait al Zubair under the auspices of H H Sayyida Alia bint Thuwaini al Said. It will be on June 30

tional artists - on the same theme was born then. When Bait Al Zubair approved of the concept earlier this year, the ball began rolling as this idea of promoting recycling through art seemed to have a message of its own that was so much in sync with the current times. "I started choosing my artists based on their type of art style, so as to fall in line with the abstract theme of creative deconstruction. Each artist was told to present deconstruct art or use any deconstructed material or aspect to create new art," Shalini said, adding that the process of selection continued while she was on vacation in Canada. After selecting 26 artists, through a laborious process, she realised that they represented 11 countries. And the aim was not just to bring in the best but also to make the event memorable, which was well appreciated by the guests of honour - Divya Narang (wife of Indian ambassador, H E Amit Narang) and Al Zubair Mohammed, besides H H Sayyida Alia. There was a live instrumental rendition by a flautist and tabla exponent as

landscape. I wanted to celebrate the infinite perspectives present at such an exhibition, hence the inclusion of mirrored pieces. The viewer's gaze is reflected back from different angles, reminding that the viewer is also present in any artwork, and there are multiple ways of looking at things and appreciating an artwork from a variety of perspectives." Julia added, "Dr Shalini is a joy to work with, very positive and uplifting, so I was inspired to do my best for her and for the group. The creative community of Muscat is very warm and supportive and a hugely positive part of my life here in Oman. I am particularly proud to showcase this piece as I really enjoyed working towards this theme which was quite outside my comfort zone - it's very large and my first truly abstract work." She further explained that deconstruction, in this context, meant analysing the whole process of an artwork - choices and decisions about materials and media (hence the collages within the collage, inclusion of mini canvasses upon the surface of the board);

Zubair with artists of different nationalities. "Deconstruction to me is the fact, that when everything falls down to pieces, it can always be brought back again as a whole beautifully," he said. His presentation, he said, is a collaborative art installation with Zakariya al Esry and it reflects the take on the inner journey a person would go through. The artwork is a collective of three pieces combined together as one. "The work represents three stages - the beginning of the journey which carries fears and worries as you are not aware of the uncertainty ahead, the middle stage when you decide to be

nature started since childhood in the green mountains of Lebanon and continued in the Omani magical landscapes from sea to mountains. Nature is my source of inspiration and through this work I want to create a space of inspiration for people to reconnect with nature and reshape their relationship with the environment." Mirna presents a textile installation that consists of 50 pieces of palm tree fibre and 100 golden fine threads which shows viewers a metaphorical representation about climate change and global warming which are destroying the environment - represented here by

viewers in direct contact with nature and let them contemplate the hidden beauty of the abstract natural pattern, movement and colour. I added golden threads in my composition to reflect a spiritual perspective and flow," Mirna said, adding "I was honoured to be invited to participate along with all the talented artists who are presenting very special artworks using different styles and media. This variety of works makes the exhibition unique and enjoyable to the viewers. I look forward to more creative art ventures in Oman, and I believe in the artists' ability to keep pace with contemporary art scene."



From left: Divya Narang, Zakariya al Esry, Mohammed al Attar, H H Sayyida Alia and Dr Shalini Gupta



Naomi Osaka

‘See you next time’: Injured Osaka withdraws from Wimbledon

Paris, France - Former world number one Naomi Osaka pulled out of Wimbledon for the second successive year on Saturday, blaming an Achilles injury.

“My Achilles still isn’t right so I’ll see you next time,” the four-time Grand Slam title winner posted on Twitter.

Osaka, 24, was already considering not playing over the ATP and WTA tours decision to strip Wimbledon of ranking points after the All England Club banned Russian and Belarusian players in response to the invasion of Ukraine.

Osaka’s tweet, although not mentioning Wimbledon specifically, was accompanied by a photo of herself on a grass court, and an emoji of a blade of grass.

“Wishing you a speedy return to full fitness, @naomiosaka,” tweeted the Wimbledon tournament in response.

The Japanese player first suffered the Achilles problem in her opening match in Madrid in May, the injury forcing her to pull out of the following Italian Open.

This month she posted a video of a training exercise on social media accompanied by the caption: “Here’s me running on an underwater treadmill because my Achilles is being stubborn still I must be aging or something.”

Osaka’s name had appeared on the singles entry list for Wimbledon when it was released last week, but she has not featured in any of the grass-court warm-up events.

Osaka, who has never got beyond the third round at the All England Club, raised the possibility of missing the grass court Grand Slam after her first round loss at last month’s French Open.

AFP



Number 1 seed Ons Jabeur to face Belinda Bencic in Berlin WTA final

Berlin, Germany - Top seed Ons Jabeur will face Olympic champion Belinda Bencic in the final of Berlin’s WTA grass-court tournament after the Tunisian saw off American teenager Coco Gauff in straight sets on Saturday.

Gauff, 18, who reached her first Grand Slam final at the French Open earlier this month, fell in the semi-final as Jabeur earned a 7-6 (7/4), 6-2 victory.

After grinding out a win when

the first set went to a tie breaker, Jabeur kept Gauff under pressure, breaking Gauff three times in the second set before converting her second match point.

“I’m very confident on this surface, so I just tried to play my shots, she (Gauff) plays with a lot of power so coming into the match, I knew I had to play my own game,” said Jabeur.

The Tunisian, ranked fourth in the world, became top seed in Berlin after both world number

I’m very confident on this surface, so I just tried to play my shots, she (Gauff) plays with a lot of power so coming into the match, I knew I had to play my own game

ONS JABEUR

one Iga Swiatek pulled out to rest a shoulder injury ahead of Wimbledon.

“It means a lot to be in the

(Berlin) final,” said Jabeur.

“I had no great expectations, I came here as fourth or fifth seed and then ended up first, but

grass suits me well.” Earlier in the day, Bencic came from behind in her semi-final against Maria Sakkari, a match which lasted over three hours in scorching temperatures.

Bencic rallied from losing the hard-fought first set, which lasted 76 minutes, to secure a 6-7 (6/8), 6-4, 6-4 win in temperatures of around 33 degrees Celsius (91 degrees Fahrenheit) in the shade.

AFP

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Medvedev beats Otte to reach Halle final

Halle Westfalen, Germany - Daniil Medvedev dashed the dreams of Germany’s Oscar Otte of winning a title on home soil as the world number one beat him 7-6 (7/3), 6-3 on Saturday to reach the final of the Halle event.

Medvedev will play the winner of the match between mercurial Australian Nick Kyrgios and fifth seed Hubert Hurkacz of Poland.

The top seed needed 65 minutes to win the opening set, helped as his opponent double-faulted on a set point.

Medvedev sealed victory on his first match point after 96 min-

utes, delivering his eighth ace.

“It was hot (32 Celsius/89.6 Fahrenheit), tough conditions,” said Medvedev.

“After he served for the set, I improved in the tiebreaker and into the second set; I put pressure on him. Reaching the final is not everything, I want to show my best tennis and win the title.”

Medvedev is seeking his first trophy since ending Novak Djokovic’s chances for a calendar-year Grand Slam last September with victory in the US Open final.

AFP



Daniil Medvedev returns the ball to Oscar Otte (AFP)

Berrettini marches into Queen’s final

London, United Kingdom - Reigning champion Matteo Berrettini will fight to defend his title on Sunday after beating Botić van de Zandschulp of the Netherlands in the rain-interrupted semi-finals at the Queen’s Club ATP grass-court tournament.

The 10th-ranked Italian, the champion in Stuttgart last week, won through 6-4, 6-3, to show his form with just over a week before the start of Wimbledon.

Berrettini, 26, left his 29th-ranked opponent no chance, despite struggling to convert his break points, managing just three of 15 obtained.

Delayed by an hour due to the rain after the scorching heat of the last few days, the match had to be interrupted again at 6-4, 3-2 and break point to follow in



Italy’s Matteo Berrettini returns to Netherlands’ Botić van de Zandschulp during their singles semi-final at Queen’s on Saturday (AFP)

favour of Berrettini, to the great displeasure of his rival.

Despite a 28-minute rain delay, the solid serve, heavy strikes and excellent footwork of the Italian made the difference in

one hour thirty minutes.

Berrettini next meets either former Wimbledon runner-up Marin Cilic, winner in 2012 and 2018, or Serbian Filip Krajinovic.

AFP

Axelsen enters Indonesia Open final with win over Lee

Jakarta, Indonesia - Badminton world number one Viktor Axelsen on Saturday secured a place in the Indonesia Open final after toppling Malaysian rising star Lee Zii Jia in a tight, fast-paced encounter in Jakarta.

Both players started the match strongly in front of a near-full Istora Senayan arena but Lee edged out his opponent in the first game with an aggressive volley of quick-fire shots.

Axelsen bounced back to claim the second before the decider went down to the wire as Lee kept up the pressure on the Tokyo gold medallist until the very last point.

AFP

Dominant Bagnaia takes pole position for German MotoGP

Sachsenring, Germany - Francesco Bagnaia continued his domination of the Sachsenring track on Saturday by taking pole position at the German MotoGP.

Italy's Bagnaia will start Sunday's race at the top of the grid with reigning world champion and current overall leader Fabio Quartararo of France in second.

This is the third pole position of the season for Ducati rider Bagnaia, who is fifth overall in the championship standings and 66 points behind Quartararo.

Bagnaia kept his cool as temperatures exceeded 30 degrees Celsius (86 degrees Fahrenheit) in the shade, soaring to 50 degrees on the track.

"We did a great job today in these conditions, it's very hot and tomorrow it will be even hotter," said Bagnaia.

Frenchman Johann Zarco secured the third spot at the front of the grid for the 10th MotoGP race of the season.

Less than a tenth of a second separated the three fastest riders.

"I'm very happy to be on the front row, our pace is pretty good, the only question is which tyre to use, but we are in a good position," said Quartararo.

Spain's Aleix Espargaro, currently second overall, Italian Fabio Di Giannantonio and Australia's Jack Miller make up the grid's second row.

Bagnaia has been in irresistible form all weekend and clocked a fastest time of one minute, 19.931 seconds in qualifying on Saturday.

The Italian set a new track record on Friday, then took turns with Spain's Aleix Espargaro low-



Ducati's Italian rider Francesco Bagnaia waves after winning the qualifying session of the German MotoGP on Saturday (AFP)



Max Verstappen

Leclerc's hopes hit by grid penalty as rival Verstappen shines

Montreal, Canada - Charles Leclerc's hopes of victory at this weekend's Canadian Grand Prix were dented on Friday when it was confirmed he will face a substantial grid penalty for Sunday's race.

Soon after finishing second behind series leader and world champion Max Verstappen of Red Bull in second practice at the Circuit Gilles Villeneuve, Ferrari said they would be fitting new electronic control components to Leclerc's power unit.

The 24-year-old Monegasque has suffered two engine failures this year and the new parts will mean he exceeds the limit and will face a penalty of at least 10 places.

The team may consider giving him a complete new power unit. "For now that is not decided, but it's not the best situation for me," said Leclerc, who has slipped from leading the title race to third behind Verstappen and Sergio Perez, despite taking four consecutive pole positions.

Verstappen set the pace as he completed a double top in Friday's practice.

ering it further on Saturday morning.

"I was surprised to start a weekend like this, but the good feeling grew from session to session and now I feel very comfortable," Bagnaia said.

Before his arrival in Saxony, the Sachsenring track record had been held by Marc Marquez of Honda, who has won the German MotoGP every year it has held since 2013.

With the Spaniard sidelined after surgery on his arm, the absence of the six-time MotoGP world champion opens the door for Bagnaia.

We did a great job today in these conditions, it's hot and tomorrow it will be even hotter

FRANCESCO BAGNAIA

"It's good for us that Marc isn't here this weekend - it's one more podium place to take and maybe make history by taking a win to follow on from him," joked Bagnaia.

Despite taking part in Friday and Saturday's practice sessions, Suzuki rider Alex Rins will sit out the German MotoGP on Sunday due to a fractured wrist he suffered earlier this month at the Catalan MotoGP. Doctors had given Rins the green light to race at Sachsenring, but he opted not to ride in Saturday's final session, his team said in a statement.

AFP

AFP

'Car is getting worse,' admits struggling Hamilton

Montreal, Canada - Lewis Hamilton declared his Mercedes car to be "getting worse" and dismissed any hope it will improve before next year after struggling in Friday's practice for this weekend's Canadian Grand Prix.

The seven-time world champion, who claimed his maiden Formula One victory at the Circuit Gilles Villeneuve in 2007 and has triumphed a record seven times at the track, finished a lowly 13th in second practice.

He admitted that the Mercedes he has struggled with this season is "here for the year" and unlikely to change or be improved sufficiently to bring an upturn in form or results.

Blighted by performance problems, notably with "porpoising" and bouncing, the team had chosen to try some radical set-up ideas in a bid to solve their problems.

"The car is getting worse the more we do to it," said Hamilton.

"It's pretty much like every



Lewis Hamilton of Mercedes takes a turn during practice ahead of the F1 Grand Prix of Canada (AFP)

We keep working on it, but it is what it is and I think this is the car for the year so we just have to tough it out and work hard on building a better car for next year

LEWIS HAMILTON

Friday for us - trying lots of things, including an experimental floor on my side, which didn't work. "Nothing we do to this car seems to work. We were going in different ways but nothing works. For me it was a disaster. "We keep working on it, but it is what it is and I think this is

the car for the year so we just have to tough it out and work hard on building a better car for next year."

Hamilton said that he and team-mate George Russell, who was seventh fastest on Friday, had gone in opposite directions with radical set-up proposals to improve performance, notably the "porpoising" that has left them both with acute back pain this season.

The team's chief technical officer James Allison was at the Circuit Gilles Villeneuve on Friday to help Mercedes find a solution to their problems.

Hamilton laughed as he described the experience of driving his car as it bounced, jumped and moved around on the track.

In the closing minutes, with a new floor fitted, he told the team "this car is now undriveable". Hamilton said also that he felt relieved to have completed the day without more serious physical concerns after suffering acute back problems last Sunday in Baku.

AFP

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IN HOT PURSUIT

World’s top golfers chase Morikawa, Dahmen at US Open

Brookline, United States - Two-time major champion Collin Morikawa and fellow American Joel Dahmen shared the US Open lead as Saturday’s third round began with the top three in the world rankings Rory McIlroy, Jon Rahm and Scottie Scheffler in hot pursuit. The stage was set for high drama in the afternoon at The Country Club with several unheralded contenders also tossed into the mix at a historic 7,254-yard layout where golf has been played since the 1890s.

trying to match Tiger Woods as the only world number ones to win the US Open, was on 137 with US compatriots Nick Hardy, Matthew NeSmith, Patrick Rodgers and Brian Harman. Reigning British Open champion Morikawa, 25, also captured the 2020 PGA Championship and would be the fastest to claim three career major titles if he wins Sunday in his 11th major start. Australian Peter Thomson holds the record, having taken



Collin Morikawa of the United States plays a shot during the second round of the US Open at The Country Club on Friday (AFP)

This is really cool, but it’s really all for naught if you go lay an egg on the weekend. It would be really fun if I was doing this again Saturday and Sunday

JOEL DAHMEN

Morikawa, chasing his third different major crown in as many years, and 130th-ranked Dahmen, whose lone PGA Tour win came last year in the Dominican Republic, were atop the leaderboard on five-under par 135 after 36 holes. Defending champion Rahm, the world number two from Spain, and third-ranked McIlroy, a four-time major winner from Northern Ireland, were one back on 136 alongside Americans Hayden Buckley, Aaron Wise and Beau Hossler. Masters winner Scheffler,

his third major triumph at the 1956 British Open in his 12th major appearance. “Game feels really good,” Morikawa said. “The last few days is a huge confidence booster.” Dahmen, 34, is a cancer survivor who considered withdrawing from his final qualifier to rest for the PGA John Deere Classic. He played anyway and now leads the field by making 28 of 36 greens in regulation. “This is really cool, but it’s really all for naught if you go lay an egg on the weekend,” Dahmen

said. “It would be really fun if I was doing this again Saturday and Sunday.” McIlroy, 33, seeks his first major victory since 2014. He took last week’s US PGA Canadian Open and could become the first player since 1934 to win

the week before and then capture the US Open. Rahm, 27, could become only the second player from outside the United States to win back-to-back US Opens after Scotsman Willie Anderson took three from 1903-1905.

Scheffler, 25, has won four times this year and could become the first man to win two majors in the same year since Brooks Koepka in 2018. He would be the first to manage the US Open-Masters double since Jordan Spieth in 2015

and just the seventh ever after Spieth, Woods, Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer, Ben Hogan and Craig Wood. World number 259 Buckley, 26, has missed the cut 11 times with only one top-60 finish over the past four months.

Hossler, 27, had two PGA runner-up efforts in 2018 at Houston and the Travelers Championship and the world number 162’s best finish since came in February, third at Pebble Beach. AFP



Phil Mickelson of the United States plays a shot on the 18th hole during the second round of the US Open (AFP)

Mickelson’s misery sums up LIV Golf week at US Open

Brookline, United States - Phil Mickelson’s return from a four-month US layoff was a short one after joining many of his fellow Saudi-backed LIV Golf rebels in missing the cut Friday at the US Open. The six-time major winner, who fired an eight-over-par 78 Thursday on his 52nd birthday, struggled to a 73 in the second round and at 11-over 151 would not play the weekend at The Country Club. “I enjoyed the week. Wish I had played better,” Mickelson

said. “I missed competing, but I also enjoyed some time away.” Mickelson skipped the Masters and PGA Championship, which he won last year at age 50, after an exile following comments made public calling LIV Golf’s Saudi financiers “scary” and decrying their record on human rights issues. The US left-hander apologised and said he wanted some time away after comments to author Alan Shipnuck were made public about his willingness to set those issues aside in order to have

leverage against the US PGA Tour. Mickelson was among 17 players given indefinite suspensions last week by the PGA for playing in LIV Golf’s debut event in England. The \$25 million, 54-hole tournament paid out \$7.5 million more in prize money than the US Open will. The US Open became the first venue for a PGA-LIV showdown after it decided to stick with its qualifying rules and not ban LIV players.

Mickelson called the event “spectacular” and the course setup “remarkable” as he exited Friday after supportive comments from spectators over his two rounds. “The fans here have always been terrific,” Mickelson said. “They create a really special atmosphere.” The 15 LIV Golf players in the field were a combined 53-over par on day one and 12 of 15 were in at a total of 25-over for day two. AFP

Fraser-Pryce thinks she can run ‘even faster’, eyes 2024 Olympics

Paris, France - Jamaican sprint legend Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce believes she can run faster than she ever “dreamed possible” and has not given up on appearing at the 2024 Olympics. “What drives me is I believe I can run faster,” the 35-year-old told a press conference in the French capital. “I’ve been hungry in that regard and I’ve been focusing on the things that I know will help me to do that, my technique and the different phases of the races. Once I’m able to cement that I definitely think that I will be able to run faster than I ever dreamed possible.” Despite her age, Fraser-Pryce has been improving her times with a 10.60sec last year, the third fastest time in history, and 10.67sec in her only 100m this season in 2022 in Nairobi last month. “This year my races have been limited. I think about making sure



Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce

I sustain what I have if I’m going to think about going to Paris 2024,” she said. The eight-time Olympic and ten-time world medallist remains the favourite for the world championships in Eugene, Oregon in July where she is the reigning champion over 100m. “For me after running in Kenya I haven’t run a 100 so I want to replicate what I’ve done before and also focus on what I’ve been

doing in practice,” she continued of her hopes for Saturday in the city which hosts the next Olympics. “Before I wasn’t so much thinking about it,” she said of her hopes of competing in the Olympics, “but then I ran 10.6 last year and then this year. It all depends on how I feel. If I’m feeling good you’ll be seeing me until I’m 40. “I don’t want to be lining up and everybody’s like ‘why don’t grandma go home’. So it depends on how I feel. I would definitely love to be here in 2024.” After Paris, Fraser-Pryce heads to the Jamaican qualifiers for the worlds from July 14-24, where she is also hoping to compete in the 200m. “The main goal is the world championship, I’m already automatically in the 100 (as defending champion) and the 200 I’m also contesting that at my national championships.” AFP

Kupcho leads defending champ Korda by two shots at Meijer LPGA Classic

Washington, United States - Jennifer Kupcho warmed up late on the way to a five-under-par 67 that gave her a two-shot lead over defending champion Nelly Korda in Friday’s second round of the Meijer LPGA Classic in Michigan. Kupcho, who torched the Blythefield Country Club course near Grand Rapids on Thursday for a nine-under-par 63, said she didn’t expect things to be so easy on Friday. So she stayed patient through eight opening pars, a run that ended with a birdie at the 18th before she picked up four more birdies in her last nine holes for a 14-under par total of 130. “I started out not hitting it great, was really just trying to stay patient,” Kupcho said. “Couple of holes (I) saved par,



Jennifer Kupcho

so I actually got out of the holes pretty well.” She said an up and down for par at 17 “really boosted my confidence for the rest of the

round.” She followed with birdies at the first, second, fifth and eighth to stay atop the leaderboard as Korda, playing her second tour-

nament since returning from a four-month break because of a blood clot in her left arm, gained ground with a seven-under-par 65. Korda, ranked second in the world behind South Korean Ko Jin-young, also teed off on 10, opening with a birdie. Her shot of the day came at the 14th, where she was in the rough off the tee and laid up, then saw her shot from about 82 yards out hit the green and spin back into the cup for an eagle. “It was fun,” Korda said, her only slight regret the fact that it came on a part of the course with few spectators. Korda added birdies at the 17th and 18th and the third and fifth holes in a bogey-free effort that put her on 12-under 132. AFP