



HIS MAJESTY RECEIVES ENVOYS' CREDENTIALS

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received credentials of ambassadors of several countries appointed to the Sultanate of Oman separately at Al Barakah Palace on Wednesday.

His Majesty the Sultan received credentials of -

- **Yahaya Lawal**, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to the Sultanate of Oman
- **Robert Rostek**, Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to the Sultanate of Oman
- **Archbishop Nicolas Henry Marie Denis Thevenin**, Ambassador of the Vatican to the Sultanate of Oman
- **Bulgan Enkhtuvshin**, Ambassador of Mongolia to the Sultanate of Oman
- **David Velasquez Caraballo**, Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the Sultanate of Oman
- **Mogobo David Magabe**, Ambassador of the Republic of South Africa to the Sultanate of Oman
- **Liselotte Plesner**, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Denmark to the Sultanate of Oman

During meetings on the sidelines of the credentials presentation ceremony with His Majesty, the ambassadors conveyed greetings of their countries' leaders



Archbishop Nicolas Henry Marie Denis Thevenin, Ambassador of the Vatican



Bulgan Enkhtuvshin, Ambassador of Mongolia

and their best wishes of good health, happiness and a long life to His Majesty the Sultan. They also wished the Omani people further progress and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Majesty.

They expressed their great honour and delight at presenting their credentials to His Majesty the Sultan. They affirmed their sincere efforts to promote relations of their respective countries with Oman in various spheres in a manner that serves the joint interests of the Omani people and their countries' citizens.

His Majesty the Sultan welcomed the ambassadors, expressing his gratitude for their leaders' greetings and best wishes. His Majesty affirmed that they would receive all support from him, the government and the Omani people to facilitate carrying out their duties.

The credentials presentation ceremony was attended by the Minister of Diwan of Royal Court, the Foreign Minister, the Commander of Royal Guard of Oman, the Head of Royal Protocols, and the Military Aides to His Majesty the Sultan.

ONA

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GCC expresses concern over Palestinian, Sudanese crisis

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Gulf Cooperation Council states have called on the international community to intervene to stop Israel's unilateral actions against Palestinians and expressed their deep concern over the recent violence in Sudan, which has led to a deteriorating human rights situation.

The six-member bloc stated that it is disturbed by Israel's actions in the city of Jerusalem and attempts to change its legal character, population structure and arrangements at holy Islamic sites.

The bloc also condemned the construction of settlements in Occupied Palestinian territories and rejected any move by Israel to annex these or impose Israeli sovereignty on them, as such actions constitute a clear violation of international legitimacy.

This condemnation came in a statement delivered by H E Idris Abdul Rahman al Khanjari, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Oman to the United Nations in Geneva, on behalf of the GCC states during an interactive dialogue on Palestine and



H E Idris Abdul Rahman al Khanjari

Sudan at the 53rd Regular Session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

H E Khanjari added that the GCC states commend all efforts exerted within the framework of reviving the Arab Peace Initiative, the Arab efforts to reach a truce and ceasefire between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, and that they support all requests for the state of Palestine to obtain full membership in the United Nations.

Sudan violence

Emphasising the importance of maintaining Sudan's security, safety and stability, the GCC states stressed the need for calm, dialogue and unity, and alleviation of the suffering of the Sudanese people.

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► NEWS BRIEF

MESSAGE OF PEACE EXHIBITION HELD AT UN ANTI-TERRORISM WEEK

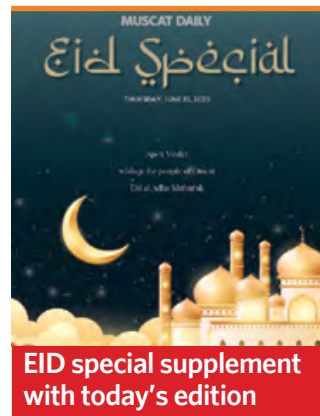
New York, USA - The Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs held an exhibition titled 'Message of Peace from the Sultanate of Oman' as part of Oman's participation in the 3rd United Nations Counter-Terrorism Week.

The two-day exhibition showcases Oman's experience in promoting the culture of tolerance, peaceful coexistence and mutual respect as measures to combat extremism and terrorism.

In an opening speech, H E Dr Mohammed Said al Maamari, Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs, outlined Oman's vision of consolidating human ties as a means of paving the way for sustainable peace.



Gearing up for Eid al Adha festivities



Oman, Iran FMs forge stronger ties for peace and progress

Following FMs' meeting, further agreements and MoUs expected between the two neighbours

Muscat - Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, welcomed Hossein Amir Abdollahian, Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, at a significant diplomatic meeting held on Wednesday.

The purpose of Abdollahian's visit was to expedite ongoing consultations and collaboration in various bilateral spheres, with a focus on implementing the objectives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's historic visit to Iran in May.

In a statement to ONA, Sayyid Badr affirmed the remarkable consensus in the visions of the two countries on several issues and latest regional and international developments. He said these issues were discussed at the meeting which would contribute in realising security, stability



There is remarkable consensus in the visions of the two countries on several issues and the latest developments

SAYYID BADR AL BUSAIDI



Relations between the neighbours have transcended to a phase of active bilateral cooperation in all spheres

HOSSEIN AMIR ABDOLLAHIAN

ity and peace in the region.

Following the meeting, further agreements, memoranda of understanding and executive programmes are expected to be reached, benefiting the interests of both neighbouring countries and their friendly peoples.

Abdollahian appreciated His Majesty the Sultan's constructive

initiatives in promoting peace and stability at regional and international levels.

He described the bilateral consultations on Wednesday as "constructive and positive", highlighting the growing active cooperation between Oman and Iran across various sectors. The ministers agreed to hold meetings of

the Joint Committee soon, renewing their commitment to further strengthen bilateral ties.

He added that relations between the neighbours have transcended the stage of dialogue and discussion to a phase of active bilateral cooperation in all spheres.

The remarkable progress in Oman-Iran relations was emphasised, particularly in areas of economic and trade cooperation, transportation, energy, science and tourism.

Abdollahian also highlighted the United Nations Secretary General's initiative to convene a meeting of foreign ministers from eight Gulf countries in New York, an initiative strongly supported by Oman and Qatar.

The two ministers actively explored opportunities to enhance joint cooperation in cultural, trade, economic and investment fields. They reaffirmed full support for endeavors that promote global peace and stability.

This meeting marks a significant step forward in deepening friendship and cooperation between Oman and Iran.

MTCIT instals 90 EV charging stations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has installed 90 charging stations across the sultanate in an effort to encourage adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) and reduce carbon emissions.

Announcing the installation of the charging stations, an official from the ministry stated, "Our aim is to offer a range of sustainable transportation solutions and contribute to the development of electric vehicle infrastructure in Oman, aligning with the national programme to achieve zero carbon neutrality by 2050."

Of the 90 charging stations, 48 are strategically located in Muscat governorate, including highways and public areas. Of these, 18 stations in Bausher, two in Muscat, six in Muttrah and 22 in Seeb.

North Batinah has ten charging stations - one each in Sohar and Shinas, two each in Liwa and Saham, and four in Suwaiq.

Dakhliyah is equipped with eight charging stations - seven in



Nizwa and one in Manah - while Al Wusta has four - three in Haima and one in Duqm.

Dhofar has 12 charging stations - four in Thumrait, three in Muqshin and five in Salalah.

Musandam, Buraimi, Dhahirah and South Sharqiyah have one charging station each, while the border areas currently have four.

MTCIT is actively collaborating with the private sector to enhance infrastructure and make it EV-ready. With installation of these charging stations, Oman has taken a significant step towards promoting sustainable transportation and encouraging the use of EVs throughout the country.

MTCIT is currently working on installing more than 140 EV chargers by the end of 2023 and 350 by the end of 2026.

1mn expected at Khareef Dhofar culture, art and culinary extravaganza

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dhofar Municipality has made elaborate arrangements for 'Khareef Dhofar 2023' to offer an array of events during the one-and-a-half month celebration beginning on July 15.

This year, over 1mn khareef visitors are expected who are likely to spend of over RO100mn.

In 2022, 813,000 visitors flocked to Dhofar and spent

over RO86mn during the three-month khareef season.

Addressing a press conference on Wednesday, Dr Ahmed Mohsen al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality and the main committee for Khareef Dhofar 2023, highlighted the key events planned at several new locations during the festival.

As per plans, the Al Hafa area will host a range of events representing five defining areas of Dhofar governorate - urban,

Visitors are expected to spend over RO100mn this khareef season. In 2022, 813,000 visitors flocked to Dhofar and spent over RO86mn during the three-month season

rural, marine, bedouin and agriculture.

Additionally, Al Hafa will feature an 'art and event' square, besides having multiple Omani food stalls and heritage markets showcasing products

of local artisans.

Other attractions at Al Hafa will include live art shows and performances highlighting Omani culture.

Aten Square will host a shopping site, an arena dedicated to

electronic games, lighting and laser shows, drone shows, Teslenko Jugglers shows, and numerous restaurants and cafes.

According to Ghassani, several events for children have also been planned. A 'Children's City' will be created at Awqad Park with attractions like a Smurfs village, a Masha and the Bear village and a Panda village themed on these cartoon characters.

A candy museum, an ice-

skating rink, an Alice in Wonderland show and interactive VR games will be among the major children's attractions at the festival.

Offering great dining options, the festival will host several specialised exhibitions, including Salalah International Chocolate Exhibition.

Jewellery, perfumes and fashion will take centre stage at other exhibitions planned during the festival.

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Mogobo David Magabe, Ambassador of South Africa

HIS MAJESTY RECEIVES AMBASSADORS' CREDENTIALS



Liselotte Plesner, Ambassador of Denmark



Robert Rostek, Ambassador of Poland



Yahaya Lawal, Ambassador of Nigeria



David Velasquez Caraballo, Ambassador of Venezuela

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Agriculture Ministry to buy wheat from farmers for RO400/tonne



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has started accepting requests to sell wheat produce of 2023-2024 season to Oman Flour Mills Company. The price has been set at RO400 per tonne and the deadline for applications is August 31.

Those (including non-Omanis) who want to sell their wheat produce to the company should submit a request by filling out the form available in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in all

wilayats,' a ministry announcement said.

As per set conditions, farmers who want to sell their wheat produce must have a valid agricultural property, and the wheat must be of an Omani variety registered with the ministry and produced this year.

Additionally, the wheat should be pure, not mixed with any impurities or other seeds. The farmer is required to personally deliver the wheat to the company's mill in the Muttrah.

Those interested can also apply before the deadline of August 31 through omanibur.com

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MHUP signs pacts for first phase of Sultan Haitham City

Ariane Real Estate to build District 9 & 6 for RO327mn

National Centre for Women and Children's Health for RO90mn

Abrar Real Estate to build District 10 for RO208mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP), along with several government and private entities, signed multiple agreements for the development of the first phase of Sultan Haitham City during a ceremony held at the Royal Opera House Muscat on Tuesday evening.

MHUP partnered with the Ministry of Health to establish RO90mn National Centre for Women and Children's Health, equipped with 500 beds.

With the Ministry of Social Development, MHUP signed an agreement worth RO6mn to create a rehabilitation complex for people with disabilities.

Additionally, an Advanced Technical College worth RO5mn will be established in collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation and the National University, catering to 1,500 students.

Furthering its collaboration efforts, MHUP joined forces with



the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs to allocate RO2mn for the development of various facilities in the city, including funding from a housing programme for zakat recipients, construction of five mosques, and public councils.

An agreement was also reached to enable the implementation of smart city technologies in collaboration with the Ministry

of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology, at a total cost of RO10mn.

Real estate development

Real estate development within Sultan Haitham City witnessed substantial progress through agreements with Ariane Real Estate and Al Abrar Real Estate. The former signed a RO327mn

agreement for the development of District 9 and District 6, covering an expansive area of over 1.2mn sqm. The latter, Al Abrar Real Estate, entered into an agreement worth RO208mn to develop District 10, spanning 910,000 sqm.

To facilitate financing for the first phase of the city, an agreement was reached to provide housing loans amounting to

RO240mn, supporting 3,000 applicants with a loan ceiling raised to RO80,000 in collaboration with the Housing Bank of Oman.

Additional agreements were secured with prominent banks including Bank Muscat, Ahli Bank, Oman Arab Bank, National Bank of Oman, Sohar International Bank, Sohar Islamic Bank, Bank Dhofar, and Alizz Islamic Bank.

These agreements provide discounted housing loans, at a 3.4% interest rate, benefitting at least 150 loan recipients from Bank Muscat and 100 each from the rest.

An agreement with Nama Group, valued at RO112mn, was signed to implement essential infrastructure services such as electricity, water, sewage, and irrigation in the first phase of the city.

The Oman Broadband Company, ITHCA Group, and the Oman Towers Company inked agreements worth RO5mn to finance and establish the broadband network infrastructure in the city.



Quarantine facility for shrimps opens

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources (MAFWR) on Wednesday inaugurated a shrimp quarantine facility in Barka, under the patronage of H E Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The project is a collaboration between the ministry and the Fisheries Development Oman.

The National Shrimp Quarantine Facility, developed at a cost exceeding RO600,000, spans an area of 6,000sqm and has an estimated annual capacity of 16,000 pairs of shrimp, specifically white-legged ones, supporting aquaculture projects throughout the sultanate.

The facility's primary objective is to receive imported shipments of shrimp broodstock, subject them to monitoring and inspection to ensure they are free from potential diseases, and maintain product quality before transferring them to farms.

Quarantines serve as the frontline defence against transboundary and common diseases by inspecting imported consign-

ments, ensuring compliance with international and local health requirements, and preventing the spread of diseases to farms in Oman.

Eng Yaqoub Khalfan al-Busaidi, Undersecretary for Fish Resources in MAFWR, highlighted the rapid growth of the aquaculture sector globally, projecting a substantial demand supply gap of approximately 40mn tonnes over the next two decades.

The ministry plays a vital role in developing and stimulating the aquaculture sector, as evidenced by the production of 3,500 tonnes of shrimp valued at RO7mn last year, he informed.

Mohammed al Wahibi, the project manager, outlined the facility's infrastructure, which comprises three buildings, each capable of accommodating around 700 fully grown shrimps.

"Each batch undergoes a quarantine period of 40 days to two months before being dispatched to fish farming projects across various governorates."

The quarantine facility includes dedicated laboratories for sample testing and is designed to expand its facilities in the future to meet the growing demand in the industry.

55,000 camels tagged under e-numbering project

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has announced the registration of 55,205 camels under its Camel Numbering Programme.

The programme assigns a unique number to each camel, enabling accurate identification, performance tracking and effective management.

Ahmed Ibrahim al Na'ebi, Director of MAFWR's Livestock Guidance Department, informed that the programme's objectives include enhancing camel population management, ensuring their health, and improving the quality of meat and milk production.

Camels are tagged with electronic chips inserted under the skin on the left side of their necks. However, tagging is pro-



hibited in camels younger than one month. The electronic camel number-

ing service is available at 26 licensed veterinary clinics across the sultanate.

The programme aims to issue identification cards for tagged camels, containing essential information including the owner's name, breed, sex, age, colour, identification marks, and the assigned electronic number.

Authorised veterinary clinics must adhere to the technical specifications outlined by Ministerial Resolution 198/2017, which regulates the use of electronic chips. Additionally, the agricultural development departments in respective wilayats must approve camels' inclusion in the programme, Na'ebi informed.

Since its launch in 2017, the programme has provided accurate information for the development of camel breeding.

It assists in verifying the actual number of camels in Oman, estimated to be around 290,230 according to the ministry's 2022 statistics.

Agreement inked for Downtown Buraimi project

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dr Hamad bin Ahmed al Busaidi, Governor of Buraimi, signed an agreement on Wednesday for the first phase of the Buraimi Oasis or Downtown Buraimi project.

The governor also signed an agreement on supervision of an artificial lake construction.

Sulaiman Mohammed al Balushi, head of Projects Department in Buraimi Governor's office, described the Downtown Buraimi project over an area of 68,000sqm as the first of its kind in the sultanate. Set between Khandaq Fort and Al Hilah Fort, Downtown Buraimi will be the venue of most events and celebrations in the governorate.

GCC expresses concern over situation in Palestine, Sudan

Continued from Page 01

H E Idris al Khanjari highlighted the significant efforts exerted by the GCC states in building humanitarian bridges, evacuating civilians and addressing urgent humanitarian needs.

"The GCC bloc is fully committed to restoring Sudan's security, safety and stability," he said. The bloc also lauded the relentless efforts of Saudi Arabia and the US to facilitate a peaceful resolution among Sudanese political forces and parties.

"The aim is to foster dialogue, bridge differences and reach an agreement that prevents the scourge of wars and conflicts, fulfils aspirations and contributes to Sudan's security, stability and prosperity across all sectors. It is crucial to ensure respect for Sudan's sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence throughout this process."

The GCC states called upon the international community to provide urgent humanitarian and medical assistance to Sudan.

Khareef festival to be an extravaganza

Continued from Page 01

A 'Lights Park' will be developed in Salalah Park, featuring illuminated gardens, a bird corner and an open-air theatre, besides a wide variety of cafés, restaurants and arenas for Al games.

Ghassani informed that Saada

Park will be the venue for Salalah Eat featuring restaurants of internationally renowned chefs. Salalah Eat will also include a cooking competition called 'Salalah Chef'.

Al Murooj Theatre will host concerts by artistes from various

countries and performances by Omani entertainers.

For sports and adventure enthusiasts, there will be supervised sailing, kayaking and rowing at Dhahariz beach. The Dhofar International Cycling Race will be held at Damar Beach in Mirbat.

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.	27/2023
Tender Title	Oracle Cloud ERP System Implementation Project
Tender Submission Closing Date	20.7.2023
Tender Process Details	Please visit: www.omran.om/tenders/

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Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Global stocks dip on US Fed's rate warning

Stock markets fell Wednesday as investors fretted about stubbornly high inflation in Britain and warnings from US Federal Reserve chief Jerome Powell that further interest rate hikes were likely.

Investors are equally eager to hear his take on the near global banking crisis in March triggered in the aftermath of the collapse of a number of regional lenders.

Wall Street was lower in morning deals while London and eurozone markets dipped after data showed UK inflation remained unchanged at 8.7% in May.

Markets had expected consumer prices to cool but now fear the Bank of England could go for a bigger rate hike than previously thought at a meeting on Thursday to tame inflation.

"The impact of further monetary tightening on the British economy is likely to hinder economic activity and ultimately cause a contraction," Ricardo Evangelista, senior analyst at ActivTrades told AFP.

The anxiety in the United States and Europe follows disappointment across market floors this week with Beijing's moves to try and revive the Chinese economy.

Oman's oil output slightly down in May as exports fall

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's daily average production of crude oil slightly decreased in May to 1.04mn barrels per day (bpd) after consistently remaining above 1.06mn bpd in the previous few months.

However, daily average oil output during the first five months of 2023 increased to 1.06mn bpd compared with 1.04mn bpd in the same period of 2022, the data released by National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed.

The sultanate's total oil production in the first five months of 2023 also grew by 1.7% to 160.1mn barrels compared to 157.4mn barrels in the same period of last year.

Of the total production, crude output increased 0.7% year-on-year to 125.7mn barrels during the January-May period, while condensates output grew 5.6% to 34.3mn barrels during the first five months of 2023.

The sultanate's total oil production for the full year 2022 had increased by nearly 10% to 388.4mn barrels compared to 354.5mn barrels recorded in 2021.

Exports drop 5.7%

Oman's oil exports declined by 5.7% during January-May this year to 128.1mn barrels compared with 135.8mn barrels recorded in the corresponding period of 2022.

In contrast, total oil exports for the full year 2022 had in-



creased by 10.6% to 319.5mn barrels in comparison with 288.9mn barrels in 2021, the NCSI data showed.

Sultanate's oil exports declined by 5.7% during January-May period of 2023 to 128.1mn barrels compared with 135.8mn barrels recorded in the corresponding period of last year

Exports to China, the largest buyer of Oman's crude, accounted for nearly 92% of the total oil exports in the first five months of this year. Total exports to China rose by 10.5% to 117.1mn barrels during January-May this year compared to 105.9mn barrels in the same period of 2022.

and South Korea also decreased in the first five months of this year.

Average crude price drops at \$81

The average price at which Oman sold its crude during the first five months of 2023 dropped by 7.9% to US\$81 per barrel against US\$88 per barrel recorded in the same period of 2022.

Average oil price for May decreased to US\$78.5 per barrel compared with the April price at US\$82.2, the NCSI data showed.

Oman crude price (for August delivery) on Wednesday inched down to close at US\$77.1 per barrel at the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME).

Oil prices have softened in recent months from their above US\$100 per barrel levels recorded during last year. The average price of Oman crude during 2022 had surged to US\$95.4 per barrel from US\$64.3 per barrel recorded in the previous year.

As a precaution against oil price volatility, Oman's 2023 state budget is based on an average oil price estimate of US\$55 per barrel and average oil production of 1.175mn barrels per day.

Oman's budget surplus increased to RO520mn during the first four months of 2023, compared to a surplus of RO468mn during the same period of last year.



MSX unveils 6 initiatives to develop stock market

Muscat – Acting in cooperation with the National Programme for Fiscal Sustainability and Financial Sector Development, the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on Wednesday announced six initiatives aimed at enhancing the position of the Omani stock market and encouraging investment.

The initiatives were unveiled on Wednesday during a press conference organised by MSX.

The initiatives seek to bolster market industry and the process of lending, borrowing of securities and pooled trading accounts. They also aim to establish a special market for companies and establishments, tripartite governance and a liquidity fund.

Nasser Khamis al Jashmi, Secretary General of the Ministry of Finance, said that most of the initiatives will be completed before the end of this year. MSX is furnishing appropriate grounds for companies in terms of legal enablers, he added.

The initiatives will have a positive impact on the performance of MSX in the forthcoming stage, he affirmed.

ONA

CMA urges parties in Ahli Bank acquisition to ensure transparency

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has urged the parties involved in the Ahli Bank acquisition process to exercise the highest standards of transparency and integrity and provide fair treatment for all shareholders.

"The Capital Market Authority closely monitored the disclosures published on the Muscat Stock Exchange website by BankDhofar and Omininvest regarding the offers for the acquisition of Ahli Bank shares, as well as the inquiries that reached the CMA and social media platforms from shareholders and stakeholders regarding the details of the takeover and acquisition offer," the CMA said in a state-



ment issued on Wednesday.

The CMA confirmed to all shareholders that the potential acquisition of Ahli Bank is regulated by the provisions of the Takeover and Acquisition Regulations issued by the CMA in 2019.

'All parties participating in the takeover and acquisition process must comply with the regulations, specifically the provisions of Article 5 of the Takeover and Acquisition Regulation, which re-

quire the observation of the highest standards of integrity, transparency, and fair treatment for all shareholders,' the capital market regulator said.

It added that all parties involved in the acquisition process must ensure that they 'do not provide information to shareholders on a selective basis in the takeover offer and guarantee not to mislead consumers in the market.'

The CMA also emphasized the importance of the investor relations sections in the entities participating in the acquisition process, urging them to establish communication channels with the public in accordance with the directives for interaction between public joint-stock companies, analysts, investors, and reporters.

CCED continues to unlock potential of youth with Outward Bound Oman

Muscat – Focusing on education, training and capacity-building in its corporate social responsibility strategy, CC Energy Development (CCED), and its partners in Oman's Blocks 3 & 4, Mitsui E&P Middle East and Tethys Oil Block 3 & 4 Limited, renewed their support to the Musta'ed Programme in partnership with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Outward Bound Oman.

The programme focuses on unlocking the potential of local young people through outdoor experiential learning and problem-solving activities.

CCED's commitment to giving back locally includes providing young people with valuable training opportunities. As part of this effort, CCED sponsored 500 out of more than 1,000 partici-



pants joining the Musta'ad Programme in partnership with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Outward Bound Oman.

Provided with a non-classroom-based learning environment, participants are challenged to step out of their comfort zones.

Thanks to the Musta'ad Programme, they will develop es-

sential life skills, gain a sense of accomplishment, and are empowered to thrive in diverse environments.

In a press release, Walter Simpson, managing director of CC Energy Development, said, "We are a diverse, ethical and responsible organisation that believes people are key to our success. We aim to give back to the communities we work with

and our purpose-built CSR strategy covers a variety of themes including education, health and the environment. We focus on supporting initiatives that are aligned with our core values and we are committed to achieving sustainable socio-economic development for Oman and its people."

Mohammed al Zadjali, chief operations officer at Outward Bound Oman, commented, "The impact of Outward Bound Oman's courses in developing the nation's talent in line with Vision 2040 is a result of the sustained hard work and commitment of many people, and of a genuinely productive and positive partnership between government, the private sector and the not-for-profit community."

Climate goals need clean energy surge in Global South: IEA

Paris, France – Financing for clean energy in developing and emerging economies excluding China must increase seven-fold within a decade if global warming is to be capped at tolerable levels, the International Energy Agency said Wednesday.

To keep Paris climate temperature goals in play, annual investment for non-fossil fuel energy in these countries will need to jump from \$260bn to nearly \$2tn, the intergovernmental agency said in a report.

"Financing clean energy in the emerging and developing world is the fault line of reaching international climate goals," IEA executive director Fatih Birol told journalists in a briefing

Tuesday.

The report comes on the eve of the two-day Summit for a New Global Financing Pact in Paris, which seeks to galvanise support for revamping the mid-20th century architecture governing financial flows from rich to developing nations.

Speeding the transition from dirty to clean energy, and helping the Global South cope with and prepare for devastating climate impacts are high on the summit agenda.

Virtually all of the nearly 800mn people lacking electricity and the 2.4bn without access to clean cooking fuels are in poor and emerging countries.

Under current policy trends,



one third of the rise in energy use in these nations over the next decade will be met by burning fossil fuels, the main driver of global warming, the IEA warned.

"Clean energy investments are increasing gradually – this is a

good news," said Birol.

"The bad news is that more than 90% of that increase in clean energy since the Paris Agreement in 2015 comes from advanced economies and China."

"Only 10% comes from the

emerging and developing countries," he added. "We need to change this trend."

Solar is cheapest

With China included in the calculation, private and public money pouring into renewables and other forms of carbon neutral energy will need to more than triple from \$770bn in 2022 to about \$2.5tn per year by the early 2030s.

Investment must remain at those levels until mid-century to help keep Earth's average surface temperature "well below" two degrees Celsius, and 1.5C if possible, the Paris climate treaty's binding and aspirational targets, respectively.

The potential for rapidly ramping up renewable energy is there, according to the report.

At least 40% of the global solar radiation reaching the planet lands on sub-Saharan Africa, and solar energy is now the cheapest source of electricity generation across almost the entire world.

And yet, nearly ten times more solar PV capacity was installed last year in China – some 100 GW – than across the entire African continent.

Sunny sub-Saharan Africa generates less solar electricity than the Netherlands, Birol noted. According to the report, two-thirds of the finance for clean energy projects in emerg-

ing and developing economies excluding China will need to come from the private sector.

Today's \$135bn in annual private financing for clean energy in these economies must rise to about a trillion a year within the next decade.

To meet both climate and sustainability goals, clean energy investment in emerging and developing economies should be concentrated in four areas, according to the IEA.

Just over a third should go into low-emissions generation, mainly solar and wind. Another third is needed to improve efficiency in end-use sectors, such as cooling and electric transport.

AFP

US Fed chief says more rate hikes likely by end of year

Washington, US – The US Federal Reserve expects to continue raising interest rates but to slow down the pace of hikes, Fed chair Jerome Powell told a Congressional hearing Wednesday.

"Given how far we've come, it may make sense to move rates higher but to do so at a more moderate pace," he told the House Committee on Financial Services.

"Nearly all FOMC participants expect that it will be appropriate to raise interest rates somewhat further by the end of the year," he said in remarks prepared for the House of Representatives' Committee on Financial Services.

Powell's comments come a week after the rate-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) voted to hold interest rates steady following 10 consecutive hikes in little more than a year.

"Nearly all FOMC participants expect that it will be appropriate to raise interest rates somewhat further by the end of the year," he said Wednesday.

"We judged it prudent to hold the target range steady to allow the Committee to assess additional information and its implications for monetary policy," he added.

The Fed has already raised its



US Fed chief Jerome Powell testifies before a House Financial Services Committee hearing at Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, on Wednesday (AFP)

benchmark lending rate by five percentage points since March 2022, from close to zero to a range between 5.0% and 5.25%.

But despite these aggressive moves, inflation remains "well above" the Fed's long-run target of two percent, Powell said Wednesday.

His scheduled appearance

before Congress to discuss the Fed's semiannual report on monetary policy gives policymakers a chance to question the bank's most senior official at a time of high interest rates and slowing economic growth.

Alongside its interest rate decision on June 14, the Fed also published updated economic forecasts which suggested that

Nearly all Federal Open Market Committee participants expect that it will be appropriate to raise interest rates somewhat further by the end of the year

JEROME POWELL



another half percentage-point of increases may be needed this year.

The Fed also lifted its 2023 GDP growth projections to 1.0% from 0.4% in March.

Fed officials' median inflation expectations for the year nudged down slightly to 3.2%, while core inflation expectations, which excludes volatile food and energy prices, rose to an annual rate of 3.9%.

Futures traders are assigning a close-to-80% probability that the FOMC will vote to raise rates by a quarter percentage-point at its next meeting on July 25-26, according to data from CME Group.

AFP



Elon Musk meets Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the United States on Wednesday

Elon Musk meets Modi to discuss investments in India

New Delhi, India – Twitter owner and Tesla CEO Elon Musk said Wednesday he discussed potential "significant investments" in India after meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the United States.

Musk, one of the world's richest men, said that Modi was "pushing us to make significant investments in India, which is something that we intend to do, and are trying to figure out the right timing".

New Delhi has rolled out the red carpet for top global investors and companies – including tech giants like Google and Apple – in the last few years.

Since the coronavirus pandemic, many companies have expanded their presence in India as a way to cut their supply-chain dependence on China and tap into the South Asian nation's

huge domestic market.

Modi, who saw the tech billionaire shortly after arriving from India on a state visit, said it had been "great meeting" Musk in New York.

"We had multifaceted conversations on issues ranging from energy to spirituality," Modi tweeted on Wednesday, a day before he is due to be hosted by US President Joe Biden for a state dinner.

Musk said he was a "fan" of Modi.

"I am actually incredibly excited about the future of India. India has more promise than any large country in the world," he added. Musk has faced questions from free speech activists over Twitter reportedly caving into the Indian government's demands for takedowns of critical posts.

Critics accuse India's government of democratically backsliding, including by curtailing free speech and not doing enough to check attacks on journalists and minorities.

Last week, former Twitter chief executive Jack Dorsey said the platform he founded had come under sustained pressure from Indian officials during his tenure.

Indian information technology minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar responded that Dorsey's claim was an "outright lie", while also accusing Twitter of repeated violations of local laws.

Twitter said last year that India ranked fourth globally in the number of requests made by a government to remove content – behind Japan, Russia and Turkey.

AFP

High inflation hinders UK cost-of-living fight



UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak speaks to the press at Wembley Police Station in northwest London on June 15 (AFP)

London, UK – Britain's annual inflation rate unexpectedly remained at 8.7% in May, official data showed Wednesday, piling pressure on the Bank of England and government to act over a cost-of-living crisis.

Markets had forecast a drop from April's level, while the BoE was already widely expected to raise interest rates again Thursday to combat an inflation rate which is the highest among G7 nations.

The latest data is a blow also for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who has made cutting inflation a priority for his Conservative government heading into a general election next year.

Britain has endured months of strikes by workers demanding higher wages to help with the cost-of-living crisis.

"We know how much high inflation hurts families and businesses across the country," finance minister Jeremy Hunt said following the latest consumer prices index data.

UK inflation had been expected to cool to 8.4% last month while core inflation, which

strips out food and energy costs, unexpectedly jumped to 7.1% in May, said the Office for National Statistics.

"Core inflation rose again, to its highest rate in over 30 years," noted Sarah Coles, head of personal finance at Hargreaves Lansdown.

"Lower energy costs will eventually feed into prices across the board, and we should see the pain at the supermarket subside a little in the coming months.

"However, in an awful lot of cases this isn't going to bring prices down, they'll just get more expensive more slowly," she added.

Higher rates

Ipek Ozkardeska, senior analyst at Swissquote Bank, said the latest figures "warn that inflationary pressures in the UK are not under control and call for further rate hikes which will further squeeze the British households".

The BoE has already lifted borrowing costs to a 15-year high at 4.5% in a bid to cool inflation.

This is set to rise further Thursday following a regular pol-

icy meeting in what would be the central bank's 13th rate increase in a row.

"We will not hesitate in our resolve to support the Bank of England as it seeks to squeeze inflation out of our economy," Hunt said.

The government wants to see inflation reduced to five percent by the end of the year, which would be around half the level at the start of 2023.

"Despite a modest easing in food price inflation, headline inflation remains at high levels," noted Yael Selfin, chief economist at KPMG UK.

"More worryingly for the Bank of England, strong core inflation suggests that firms may now be passing on the rising costs from higher wage bills to consumers."

Despite easing to 18.4% in May, annual food price inflation remains close to an all-time high.

At the same time, mortgage rates and rents are soaring, biting hard into disposable income for millions of Britons, as pay rises fail to keep pace with the annual inflation rate.

AFP

Climate-vulnerable countries lead the way on finance reform

Paris, France – When Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley laid out a plan to fix the international financial architecture at climate talks last year, she galvanised world leaders on reforms that had languished for years.

Along with leadership from other developing countries, Barbados has "definitely woken up a lot more political will" including spurring French President Emmanuel Macron to host a Summit for a New Global Financial Pact this week, said Alex Scott, an analyst at think tank E3G.

"We've got a huge new groundswell," she told AFP.

The foundations for the global economic order were laid at the end of World War II, when priorities were centred around rebuilding in Europe and many countries were still under colonial rule.

Today there are increasing concerns that the World Bank and International Monetary Fund are not equipped to meet 21st century challenges, particularly climate change.

"There needs to be a new deal," Mottley told world leaders at the COP27 climate summit in Egypt in November, laying out the Barbados "Bridgetown Initia-



Prime Minister of Barbados Mia Mottley arrives for an MDB Evolution Roundtable at the IMF headquarters in Washington, DC, on April 12 (AFP)

tive" plan.

The current financial architecture is "not fit for climate purpose", said Sara Jane Ahmed, finance adviser to the V20 group of more than 50 climate-vulnerable countries, which has drawn up its own vision for reforms.

"The most vulnerable have the least access (to financing) and are actually being punished for trying to have climate action because of high interest rates, and credit ratings on the floor," she told AFP.

Developing countries have long pushed for changes to the global lending system, but this

time seems different.

Ahmed said proliferating climate disasters -- which can wipe out chunks of a country's economy overnight and take years to recover from -- are focusing minds.

"I think it's hitting home how urgent this is," she said, adding that countries were also speaking with a more "coordinated voice".

Countries are increasingly being lashed by costly extreme weather on top of a range of other challenges, from inflation to collapsing ecosystems.

In 2022 alone, Pakistan was

hit by crop-withering heat followed only weeks later by cataclysmic floods that affected more than 30 million people and caused an estimated \$30bn in damages.

Scott said there has also been a shift in the geopolitical centre of gravity.

She said US dominance has given way to a more fragmented landscape with the rise of China as an alternative source of funding for developing nations, "creating more space" for ideas from smaller countries.

"We really think there's a chance to make these changes happen over this year or the next couple of years," she added.

Last year's climate conference in Egypt set the tone.

After three decades of calling for wealthy polluters to pay for the destruction caused by climate disasters, vulnerable countries successfully pushed through an agreement to create a global "loss and damage" fund.

Now comes the hard part: agreeing on where the money will come from.

More broadly, there is growing recognition of the scale of the financial challenge ahead.

AFP

VW eyes sales growth from US, China

Frankfurt, Germany – German car giant Volkswagen said Wednesday it was targeting sales growth of five to seven percent annually until 2027, as the group bets heavily on electric cars and growth in China and the United States.

"While most revenues are still generated in Europe, the growth engines of the future will be China and North America," CEO Oliver Blume told reporters in a call ahead of an investor meeting.

"We want to grow our sales by in average five to seven percent per year until 2027," Blume

said.

Last year, the 10-brand group – which includes Porsche, Audi and Skoda – reported revenues of nearly 280bn euros (\$306bn).

VW is also aiming for a higher return on sales of between nine and 11% by 2030, compared with a profit margin of 8.1% in 2022. A wide-ranging cost-cutting plan as well as a new strategy handing the group's individual brands more autonomy are expected to help achieve the new goals.

But a key focus will be on the electric transition, as the global

battle for dominance in the EV market heats up.

VW announced in March that it planned to invest more than 120bn euros in electrification and digitisation projects.

In China, VW has already fallen behind local manufacturers of electric cars like BYD.

Blume acknowledged the "dramatic speed and change of technology and innovations" in China where "a lot of new competitors" have sprung up.

But he said VW was determined to remain "the most successful international car manufacturer in China".

China is VW's most important market, accounting for around 40% of the group's overall sales.

Blume said VW currently had a market share of 14-15% in China, and intended to hold onto it – partly by developing products "in China, for China".

The company's "very, very strong" internal combustion engine business in China would help generate the cash flow for "new investments for the intelligent, smart car approach and the technologies of battery electric cars", Blume said.

AFP

All-new Mazda CX-60 officially arrives

Japanese luxury takes driving to the next level with innovative design, state-of-the-art features

The all-new Mazda CX-60 Japanese Luxury has officially arrived in the Sultanate of Oman, Towell Auto Centre has informed.

‘We are excited to give you a sneak peek and are confident that the launch of the Mazda CX-60 will satisfy your expectations. It is a stylish and luxurious SUV that is equipped with a powerful engine, comfortable seats, and a spacious interior to make your driving experience enjoyable,’ the company stated in a press release.

The new CX-60 takes driving to the next level with its innovative design and state-of-the-art features. The car is built on a scalable platform that provides a smooth and adaptable ride, making it perfect for long journeys or quick errands. The longitudinally mounted engine optimises the balance of the car, providing a seamless and thrilling driving experience.

The front-engine rear-wheel-drive layout of the CX-60 has been purposefully designed to achieve the better weight distribution, while its 8-speed Activematic SkyActiv transmission with a clutch instead of torque converters ensures faster, smoother, and more responsive gear shifting, making it feel more like driving a manual gearbox.

The Mazda CX-60 is a practical and stylish SUV option for drivers who want performance and looks. Its exterior has impressive features, such as shiny



silver alloy wheels and a commanding signature grill.

The front wipers are timing adjustable, and rain sensors make driving in bad weather comfortable and safe.

The LED headlamps and rear fog lamp increase safety at night, while keyless entry and a power back door add to convenience and security. The CX-60 is available in a variety of colours, including Soul Red Crystal, and Rhodium White Metallic, amongst others.

The Mazda CX-60’s interior is packed with features that enhance the driving experience.

The car’s steering wheel is wrapped in luxurious leather and equipped with audio controls, sport mode controls, and paddle shifters for optimal performance.

In addition, the stylish shift knob is also wrapped with leather, adding to the luxurious feel of the vehicle. You can stay connected to your smartphone with ease using the Apple CarPlay and Android Auto which is seamlessly integrated with the 12-inch multimedia display & eight dynamic speakers.

Not only this, but also you can navigate across various features using the commander switch,

which adds to the effortless and enjoyable experience of driving. Other handy features include Cargo net, USB ports, and a power outlet socket at the rear providing practicality. The auto-dimming rearview mirror and cloth door trims lend an air of luxury.

Mazda Proactive Safety is a suite of safety features designed to help drivers anticipate and avoid danger. The system uses a variety of sensors to monitor the car’s surroundings and alerts the driver to potential hazards. If necessary, the system can also take corrective action to help the

driver avoid a collision.

Smart Brake Support Front (SBSF): This system uses a forward-facing camera to detect potential collisions and automatically apply the brakes if necessary.

Mazda Radar Cruise Control (MRCC): This system automatically maintains a set distance between the car and the vehicle in front, even in stop-and-go traffic. **Blind Spot Monitoring (BSM):** This system uses radar sensors to detect vehicles that are in the car’s blind spots and alerts the driver with a visual and audible warning.

Lane Keep Assist (LKA): This system uses a camera to detect the car’s lane markings and automatically steer the car back into the lane if it starts to drift.

With its stunning design, advanced technology, and impressive safety features, the all-new Mazda CX-60 Japanese Luxury is definitely going to be a game changer in Oman.

‘So, what are you waiting for? Visit your nearest Mazda showroom today and get ready for hands-on experience on the all-new Mazda CX-60,’ TAC added.

Towell Auto Centre (TAC) is a trusted name in customer service in Oman. It has been in the automobile business since 1972 and is a group company of the W J Towell Group. TAC ensures the easy availability of high-quality motor products and the highest standard of service to its customers.

Mazda has brought quality to the roads of Oman, and TAC has made owning a Mazda an absolute joy. TAC offers excellent after-sales service, genuine parts for all Mazda models, efficient staff, and innovative solutions for a better customer experience.

To find out more about TAC’s showrooms and servicing centers, one can visit <https://mazdaoman.com/en> or walk into any one of TAC’s Mazda showrooms situated in Oman.

One can also download the revamped Mazda Oman mobile app to get easy access to everything related to Mazda in Oman.

Deadline for Visa’s She’s Next contest approaching

Visa, the world’s leader in digital payments, is calling women-owned businesses in Oman to apply to the ‘She’s Next’ Grant Program, launched in partnership with Bank Muscat.

The programme offers women entrepreneurs the opportunity to apply for a grant worth US\$20,000, access to a tailored training program, and membership in the exclusive She’s Next Club, providing valuable networking and mentoring opportunities.

To further support women in business, Visa also teamed up with SheTrades, a global initiative of the International Trade Centre (joint agency of the United Nations and World Trade Organization).

Additionally, Amazon Web Services (AWS) Connected Community has also joined the program, offering free membership to all She’s Next applicants.

Through AWS Connected Community, participants can access on-demand content and trainings, schedule free 1:1 consultation, and redeem discounts on software, Amazon Payment Services and AWS free credits.

With the application deadline approaching on Friday, the total number of Oman-based applications received so far for the grant program is 43. This year, Visa received 705 applications across the GCC region, a fivefold increase compared to last year.

Bank Muscat honours government institutions, corporates at PiP event

Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman celebrated the 16th edition of its annual Partners in Progress (PiP) awards ceremony at the Kempinski Hotel Al Mouj, Muscat to honour top merchant partners from government institutions and private sector companies.

The event was held in the presence of Sheikh Waleed K al Hashar, Chief Executive Officer, Bank Muscat and members of the bank’s Management Team. The gala event was attended by representatives from the Top 40 institutions, who have implemented various payment acceptance solutions using POS terminals.

Nine ministries and government institutions won awards for implementing the bank’s payment acceptance solutions using POS terminals at the awards ceremony including the Royal Oman Police, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Housing and Urban Plan-



ning, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health, Oman Development Bank, Supreme Judiciary Council and Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

Corporate merchant partner winners included: Omantel, Landmark Group, OIFC, Otaxi, Awasr, Carrefour, Extra, NMC Healthcare, Ikea, Al Ahlia Insurance, Talabat, Lulu Hypermarket, Ooredoo, Al Shaya International, Shell Oman Marketing, Malabar

Gold Jewellery, Pizza Hut, Muscat Pharmacy, ONEIC, Oman International Container Terminal, Apparel International, Salam Air, The International School of Choueifat, Global Exchange, Makkah Hypermarket, Thawani, Abdul Samad Al Qurashi, Tageer Finance, Six Senses Ziggy Bay, Saud Bahwan Automotive and Al Fair.

On this occasion, Abdulnaser al Raisi, General Manager - Personal Banking, Bank Muscat congratulated all the winners and

thanked them for their efforts in promoting various merchant solutions. He reiterated the importance with which Bank Muscat values its partnerships and added that the bank is very proud of this partnership with all its institutional customers and would strive to provide the best and latest services for its customers. He added that Bank Muscat would work to further enhance and strengthen its partnership and wished everyone even greater success in the future.

Abdullah Hamood al Jufaili, assistant general manager - Digital Banking, Bank Muscat, said that the bank was keen to maintain its market leadership and thanked all partners for their contribution in the growth of payment transactions. Customers are increasingly taking advantage of the ease and speed of such modern options. It is indeed a matter of pride that the bank’s partner network has now grown to more than 20,000.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds bags Bank Muscat Award for 6th time

Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with a strong retail network of over 320 outlets spread across 11 countries received Bank Muscat Award for the sixth consecutive year.

The company got the award in the category ‘Jewellery for the year 2022’. The company has received Bank Muscat Award in the year 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2021 as well.

Najeeb K, Regional Head - Malabar Gold & Diamonds, received the award from Sheikh Waleed al Hashar, Chief Executive Officer- Bank Muscat in the presence of Udesh P T, Branch Manager - Malabar Gold & Diamonds and other officials from Bank Muscat during a ceremony at Kempinski Hotel on Tuesday.

Bank Muscat hosts the event to honour, recognise and celebrate the success of their top merchants.

“We are extremely happy to receive the ‘Bank Muscat Award’ for the 6th time in a row. At Mal-



abar Gold & Diamonds, we have prioritised exquisitely crafted jewellery and unparalleled service to provide our customers with an immersive and enjoyable jewellery shopping experience, said Najeeb K, adding that the award “is a humble recognition from our loyal customers”.

“We dedicate this inspiring triumph to our millions of satisfied customers, team members and investors, for their unwavering and continued support over the years.”

Since its inception in 1993,

Malabar Gold & Diamonds has developed a strong retail presence in India, Middle East, Far East, the US and the UK, with a network of 320 outlets across eleven countries. With an annual turnover of US\$5.2bn, the company today ranks as the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds currently operates 16 showrooms across Oman, including those at Ruwi, Baushar, Seeb, Barka, Salalah, Sohar, Muttrah Souk, Nizwa, Ibbi, Al Bandar and Al Khoud.

Alizz Islamic, MHUP sign deal for house finance in Sultan Haitham City

Alizz Islamic Bank and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) signed a joint agreement to provide sharia’a compliant financing options for those wishing to purchase housing units in Sultan Haitham City.

The agreement was signed by H E Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shuali, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, and by Ali bin Saif al Mani, General Manager of Alizz Islamic Bank on behalf of Alizz Islamic Bank.

The signing ceremony was held at the Royal Opera House in the presence of CEOs of several banks, financing companies and real estate development companies in the Sultanate.

This agreement showcases the synergy between the govern-



ment sector and the private sector and the advanced progress of the real estate development sector in Oman by providing the necessary services and facilities to individuals and investors to enable them to contribute to

serving these sectors.

Alizz Islamic Bank will provide the option to avail home finance for residential units with a competitive profit rate starting from 3.5% for those who meet the terms and conditions. All finance

options provided by Alizz Islamic Bank are sharia’a compliant and compatible with the provisions and principles of sharia’a.

Alizz Islamic Bank buys the property from the developer/seller and leases it out to the cus-

tomer with a promise to sell at the end of the lease term.

Commenting on the signing of the agreement, Ali bin Saif al Mani, General Manager of Alizz Islamic Bank, said, “We are very pleased to partner with the Min-

istry of Housing and Urban Planning in providing financing facilities for those wishing to purchase housing units in this iconic sustainable project that is an architectural masterpiece.

“The design of the new city’s

external areas is inspired by the natural surroundings, with options for utilising the natural shade of trees during the daytime, which will be in harmony with the urban structures.”

Mani added, “In the banking sector we work side by side with the Government sector through providing innovative financial solutions that meet the needs of different segments of society. And we, in Alizz Islamic Bank, identified the need to facilitate those wishing to buy housing units in this project and came up with a proposition that meets their needs.”

The new Sultan Haitham City will come up on an area of 15mn square metres, with 2.9mn square metres of green cover.

Kyiv's allies promise to make Russia pay for Ukraine invasion

London, UK - Western allies on Wednesday promised to make Russia pay for its invasion of Ukraine, as governments and private investors met to fund the country's reconstruction from the ravages of war.

The World Bank has put an estimate of US\$14bn on Ukraine's immediate needs for repairing the damage caused by the bitter fighting.

But a recent study by the World Bank, the UN, the European Union and the Ukrainian government said the wider recovery of the economy would cost US\$441bn. "Let's be clear: Russia is causing Ukraine's destruction," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told delegates at the London conference.

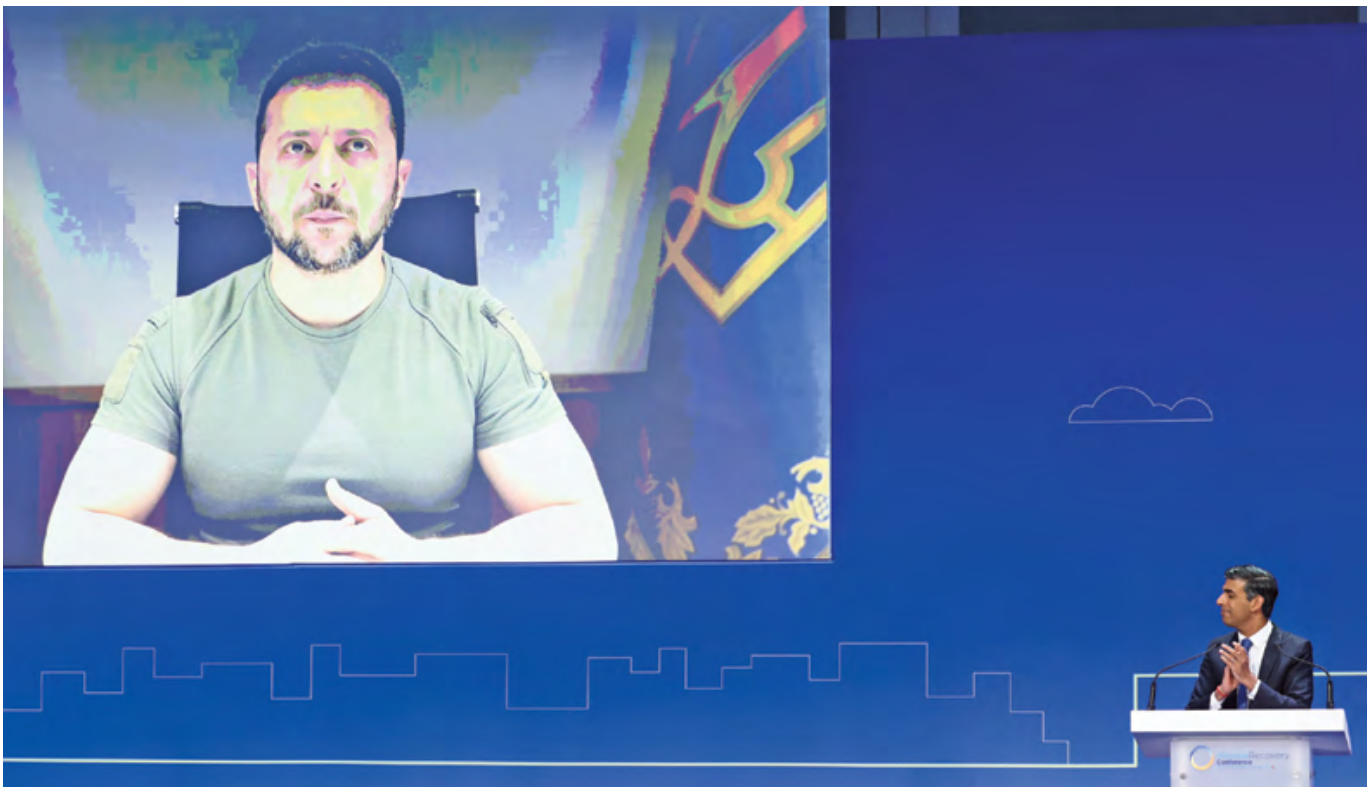
"And Russia will eventually bear the cost of Ukraine's reconstruction," he added.

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak voiced a similar message, promising to keep tough sanctions in place 'until Russia pays up', and use seized assets to get Ukraine back on its feet.

In the conflict overnight, Russia said it had downed three Ukrainian drones in the Moscow region, while Ukraine said its air defence systems had shot down six Iranian-designed attack drones in the west.

The conference comes as President Volodymyr Zelensky oversees a military fight-back by his troops using Western-supplied heavy weaponry to regain territory lost to Russian forces since last year.

"Every day of Russian aggression brings new ruins, thousands and thousands of destroyed houses, devastated industries, burnt lives," Zelensky told the



Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak applauds as Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky appears on the screen at the opening session on the first day of the Ukraine Recovery Conference in London on Wednesday (AFP)

London delegates by videolink. But he set out his stall for future investment in Ukraine, saying that despite the devastation, the country was ripe for development in sectors from technology and green agriculture to clean

see if we will restore normal life in such a way that our transformation will land an ideological defeat on the aggressor. We protect Ukraine, and thus protect freedom. When we build Ukraine, we'll build freedom."

Ukraine Recovery Conference 2023 - the second to be held since the Russian invasion in February last year.

The first, in Lugano, Switzerland, in July last year saw Kyiv's allies commit to supporting Ukraine through what is expected to be an eye-wateringly expensive and decades-long recovery. African countries, though, have voiced concern that by pumping aid to Ukraine, the West is backing off from its pledges to help the continent with development and fight climate change.

Sunak told delegates that Kyiv's allies would support Ukraine 'on the battlefield and beyond' for as long as it takes. He has announced UK back-

ing for Ukraine to the tune of US\$3bn so it can unlock vital World Bank loans to help bolster its public services, including schools and hospitals.

The guarantee will run over the next three years, he said. He also announced an extra £240mn (US\$306mn) in development aid funding for humanitarian projects.

European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen recapped the EU executive's support package for Ukraine of €50bn (US\$55bn) over the next four years. The European Union would soon outline how it intends to use proceeds from seized Russian assets, she added. AFP

The world is watching to see if we will restore normal life in such a way that our transformation will land an ideological defeat on the aggressor

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY



energy. International help for Ukraine would send a strong message to the world for generations to come, he said.

"Also, the world is watching to

Seized assets

Leaders and representatives from more than 60 countries are attending the International

Lab-grown embryo models spark calls for regulation

Paris, France - Scientists have used stem cells to create structures that resemble human embryos in the lab, in a first that has prompted calls for stricter regulation in the rapidly advancing field.

Several different labs around the world have released pre-print studies in the past seven days describing their research, which experts said should be treated with caution as the research has not yet been peer-reviewed.

The labs used different techniques to encourage human embryonic stem cells, which can become any type of

cell, to self-assemble into a structure that resembles an embryo - without needing sperm, an egg or fertilisation.

The aim is to give scientists a model with which to study human embryos in ways never before possible because of ethical concerns, in the hopes of gaining new insight into the causes of birth defects, genetic disorders, infertility and other problems during pregnancy.

Researchers have said the clumps of cells were 'synthetic embryos', saying that they are not to be considered embryos. AFP

Diatribes against media group: Kenya minister under fire

Nairobi, Kenya - Kenya's trade minister is at the centre of a firestorm over a series of derogatory remarks against a leading media outlet, including calling its journalists 'prostitutes'.

The opposition and journalist associations have called for Moses Kuria to be censured over his outbursts, saying he was unfit to hold public office.

The furore erupted when Kuria went on the attack against Nation Media Group (NMG), a major media house in East Africa owned by the Aga Khan.

At a public event on Sunday, Kuria threatened government officials who advertised with NMG with dismissal and asked the outlet if it was a media house 'or an opposition party'.

"Any government department that I see is has advertised on Nation Media (platforms), consider yourself fired," he said.

In a tweet published in Swahili, he referred to the 'prostitutes' at Aga Khan'. He also claimed that NMG journalists had 'confessed to being coerced to write anti-government stories by their editors and management in a scheme sponsored by a former president'.

NMG said the tirade followed an investigation aired on Sunday by its NTV station into an alleged scandal over an import scheme operated by a state body in Kuria's ministry. Kuria's 'unprovoked verbal attack... was not only undignified for a state officer of his calibre, but an assault on



Moses Kuria

press freedom, a cornerstone of democracy', the *Daily Nation* said in an editorial published on its website on Tuesday.

Opposition senator Edwin Sifuna filed a censure motion against Kuria this week, warning that an attack on one media

house 'often leads to attacks on press freedom as a whole'.

Members of opposition leader Raila Odinga's alliance walked out of the Senate on Wednesday in protest at Kuria's appearance in the chamber and the speaker's refusal to allow them to grill him.

He told reporters on Wednesday: "I am not apologising."

'National shame'

Media associations have reacted with fury to the comments by the minister, who had taken centre stage on Monday at the signing of a major trade deal with the European Union.

The Kenya Union of Journalists (KUJ) said he was 'becoming a symbol of national shame' while industry regulator the

Media Council of Kenya said his remarks were a 'threat to press freedom and soil Kenya's global image'.

Kenya's Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission also entered the fray, saying no public bodies would be 'victimised' for engaging in lawful dealings with any organisation. The Media Owners Association of Kenya said his tirade 'disqualifies him from holding public office'.

Ruto has in the past accused the Kenyan media of being biased against him, and during the campaign for the August 2022 election he threatened to pull out of a presidential debate saying he had been subject to unfavourable coverage. AFP



Palestinian school girls mourn during the funeral of their classmate Sadil Nagnhaghiya, in Jenin in the occupied West Bank on Wednesday (AFP)

Violence in West Bank: Israelis, Palestinians hold teen funerals

Shilo, Palestinian Territories - Israelis and Palestinians held funerals on Wednesday for teenagers killed in a shooting targeting Israelis and an army raid on a Palestinian city, as violence rages in the occupied West Bank.

Mourners gathered in the Israeli settlement of Shilo around the shrouded body of 17-year-old Nahman Mordof.

The teenager was one of four Israelis killed on Tuesday when gunmen attacked a petrol station adjacent to nearby Eli settlement before being shot dead. Israeli forces later arrested three 'wanted people' in the West Bank village of Orif, which the military said was home to the gunmen.

In Jenin, Palestine TV aired footage of girls in school uniform carrying the body of their classmate killed in an Israeli army raid on the city on Monday. Sadil Nagnhaghiya, 15, died from gunshot wounds sustained during the hours-long Israeli incursion, the Palestinian health ministry announced on Wednesday.

Six other Palestinians, includ-

ing a 15-year-old boy and a fighter, were killed in the raid.

A spokesman for the Palestinian fighter group Hamas, Hazem Qassem, described Tuesday's attack against Israelis as a 'response to the crimes of the (Israeli) occupation' in Jenin and elsewhere. The European Union condemned the shooting as a 'terror attack'.

"The EU is deeply worried about the ongoing escalation of violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory and continued settlement expansion," the bloc said in a statement Wednesday. Israel has occupied the West Bank since the Six-Day War of 1967 and, excluding annexed east Jerusalem, the territory is now home to around 490,000 Israelis who live in settlements considered illegal under international law.

The deadly shooting sparked reprisal attacks by Jewish settlers against residents of the nearby Palestinian town of Huwara, its mayor and a resident told AFP.

Fighting in Sudan resumes minutes after latest truce expires

Khartoum, Sudan - Renewed artillery exchanges rocked greater Khartoum early on Wednesday as Sudan's warring generals resumed fighting just minutes after the latest US and Saudi-brokered ceasefire expired.

Already on Tuesday evening, an immense fire had engulfed the intelligence service's headquarters in the capital Khartoum with each side accusing the other of attacking it in violation of the 72-hour truce.

A source within the regular army, led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, accused rival paramilitaries loyal to his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo of shelling the building.

A source within the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces said an 'army drone bombed the building where RSF fighters had

gathered, sparking a fire and the partial destruction of the intelligence headquarters'.

On Wednesday morning, residents of Omdurman, just across the Nile from Khartoum, reported heavy artillery exchanges within minutes of the ceasefire expiring at 6am (0400 GMT).

Army warplanes flew low over several adjacent districts, the residents said.

The ceasefire, which coincided with an international donors' conference in Geneva on Monday, brought a brief respite to the millions of civilians who have been trapped by the fighting in greater Khartoum but an exodus of refugees continued to pour of the war's other main battleground Darfur.

Nationwide, more than 2,000 people have been killed since the



A child carries bags with bread as he walks in a street in Khartoum on Tuesday (AFP)

power struggle between Burhan and Daglo erupted into fighting on April 15, the Armed Conflict

Location and Event Data Project said. More than 2.5mn people

have fled their homes, of whom around 550,000 have sought refuge in neighbouring coun-

tries, fled abroad, according to the International Organization for Migration.

Bodies on city streets

According to the US State Department, up to 1,100 people have been killed in the West Darfur state capital El Geneina alone.

Bodies have remained on the streets of the city, where months of unrest have left shops either vacant or gutted by looters.

One lay covered on the asphalt, in front of an armoured vehicle. A dead man was partially curled up outside a house. Several others appeared to be lying face down together on a dirt road.

Residents have fled en masse, grabbing whatever they could to escape to the border with Chad. At least 150,000 people have fled Darfur into

Chad since the start of fighting, according to the UN. Some described being shot at by fighters and subject to searches during the perilous journey.

The United Nations has spoken of possible 'crimes against humanity' in Darfur as the conflict has 'taken an ethnic dimension' in a region still reeling from a 2003 rebellion among non-Arab minorities that prompted then-strongman Omar al-Bashir to recruit the Arab Janjaweed militia, whose actions led to charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Washington has said the RSF, which traces its origins to the Janjaweed, is 'primarily' responsible for recent 'atrocities' in Darfur, which is home to a quarter of Sudan's population. AFP

IN BRIEF

Tunisia train derailment kills two, injures 34

Tunis, Tunisia - Two people were killed and 34 injured when an overnight passenger train careered off the tracks and overturned in eastern Tunisia on Wednesday, the state-owned SNCFT rail company said. The accident occurred shortly after midnight (2300 GMT) when a train operating between Tunis and the southern city of Gabes derailed near Msaken, a town about 150km (95 miles) from the capital. The driver and a passenger were killed while 34 other passengers were injured, the SNCFT said. "An investigation has been opened to clarify the circumstances and causes of the accident and to determine who was responsible," it added.

MJ's moonwalk fedora up for auction in Paris

Paris, France - The black fedora worn by Michael Jackson just before he dazzled the world with his moonwalk dance for the first time will be up for grabs in September during a Paris auction of music memorabilia. The King of Pop whipped off the hat while breaking into his hit Billie Jean' during a televised Motown concert in 1983. A few minutes later Jackson showed off what would become his trademark move - a seemingly effortless glide backwards while appearing to move forward. The hat, with an estimated value of 60,000 to  100,000 (US\$65,000-US\$110,000), will be the star attraction at an auction of rock-and-roll items by Drouot on September 26.

Four dead after latest New York e-bike fire

New York, US - Four people have died after lithium batteries for e-bikes sparked a fire in a New York building, officials said on Tuesday, sounding the alarm over the skyrocketing number of such incidents. The fire broke out overnight in a maintenance shop for electric bicycles and scooters, on the ground floor of a building in Chinatown.

AFP

China slams Biden's 'dictator' remark

The US president equated Xi Jinping with dictators as an open political provocation

Beijing, China - China's foreign ministry on Wednesday slammed comments by US President Joe Biden equating Chinese leader Xi Jinping with 'dictators' as an 'open political provocation'.

Speaking at a fundraiser in California on Tuesday, Biden said Xi had been angered over an incident in February when a Chinese balloon - which Washington says was used for spying - flew over the United States before being shot down by American military jets.

His comments come just days after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken concluded a visit to Beijing aimed at re-establishing lines of communication in order to avoid conflict between the two global powers.

"The reason why Xi Jinping got very upset in terms of when I shot that balloon down with two box cars full of spy equipment is he didn't know it was there," Biden said.

"I'm serious. That was the great embarrassment for dictators, when they didn't know what happened." Beijing's foreign ministry termed Biden's comments as 'ridiculous'.

"The relevant remarks by the US side are extremely ridiculous and irresponsible, they seriously violate basic facts, diplomatic protocol and China's political dignity," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said at a Wednesday briefing.



This file photo shows US President Joe Biden (right) and China's President Xi Jinping meeting on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Nusa Dua on the Indonesian resort island of Bali on November 14, 2022 (AFP)

The relevant remarks by the US side are extremely ridiculous and irresponsible, they seriously violate basic facts, diplomatic protocol and China's political dignity

MAO NING

"China is strongly dissatisfied with and firmly opposed to this," she added.

'Distortion of facts'
The multi-faceted rivalry between China and the United

States turned into a full-blown diplomatic crisis with February's balloon incident.

Beijing on Wednesday reiterated its protest against Washington's decision to shoot it down.

"The United States should have dealt with it calmly, rationally and professionally, but its distortion of facts, abuse of force, and escalation of hype

have fully exposed its hegemonic and bullying nature," Mao said.

Russia also criticised Biden's comments, with the Kremlin on Wednesday saying the comment reflected Washington's 'unpredictable' foreign policy.

"This is a very contradictory manifestation of US foreign policy, which points to a significant element of unpredictability,"

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

'Going to take time'

Biden, who at 80 is running for re-election, on Tuesday told donors that 'we're in a situation now where (Xi) wants to have a relationship again'.

Blinken 'did a good job' on his Beijing trip, but 'it's going to take time', Biden added.

The US president also brought up another prickly point regarding China: a recent summit in which leaders of Australia, India, Japan and the United States - known as the Quad group - sought to boost peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific maritime region.

The four countries are 'working hand in glove in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean', Biden said.

"What he (Xi) was really upset about was that I insisted that we unite the... so-called Quad," Biden said.

Tuesday was not the first time Biden has made significant, even provocative, statements at fund-raising receptions - usually small-scale events at which cameras and recordings are forbidden but where journalists may listen to and transcribe the president's opening remarks.

At one such event last October Biden spoke of the threat of nuclear 'Armageddon' from Russia.

AFP

Over 40 dead in violence at Honduras women's prison

Tegucigalpa, Honduras - At least 41 people were killed on Tuesday at a women's prison in Honduras, where violent clashes between rival gangs sparked a fire that tore through part of the facility, police said.

The deadly violence occurred at a prison about 25km (15 miles) north of the capital Tegucigalpa, according to police spokesman Edgardo Barahona, who put the 'preliminary' death toll at 41 women. It was unclear if they were all inmates.

Five other women were injured and taken to hospital, Barahona added.

Hundreds of relatives of incarcerated women gathered outside the detention facility awaiting information about their loved ones.

"We don't know who the victims are," said one visibly distraught man.

Heavily armed soldiers and police were seen entering and



The mother of one of the inmates of the prison mourns the death of her daughter, outside the detention centre in Tamara on Tuesday (AFP)

guarding the prison, while teams of firefighters were also present.

According to Delma Ordonez, who represents inmates' relatives, members of a gang had entered the cell of a rival group and set it on fire.

That part of the prison was 'completely destroyed' in the blaze, she told media.

The CEFAS correctional facility in Tamara held about 900 inmates, said Ordonez.

Most of the victims died in the fire, while some bodies were riddled with bullets, a spokesperson for the prosecutor's office, Yuri Mora, told AFP. An investigation was underway to determine which gang launched the initial

attack, he added.

Honduran President Xiomara Castro said on Twitter she was 'shocked' by the 'monstrous murder of women in CEFAS by gangs in full view and tolerance of security authorities', and expressed solidarity with grieving family members.

A state of emergency was announced, and Castro said she would 'take drastic measures' to hold security leaders to account.

On Tuesday night, she dismissed security minister Ramon Sabillon, replacing him with Gustavo Sanchez, who was serving as the director of the national police. Sabillon was reassigned to the Honduran foreign ministry.

'Narco-state'

Honduras is a country wracked by corruption and gangs that have infiltrated even the top levels of government.

Along with neighbours El Sal-

vador and Guatemala, Honduras forms Central America's so-called 'triangle of death' plagued by the murderous gangs called 'maras' that control drug trafficking and organised crime.

Drug trafficking groups and gang members are largely responsible for the soaring rate of homicides in Honduras, which at 40 murders per 100,000 inhabitants last year was four times higher than the world average.

Many young people have given up hope of a better future and think only of migrating to the United States.

Honduras is a major transit country for Colombian cocaine and other narcotics headed mainly to the United States.

Former Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernandez was extradited to the United States on drug charges in April 2022 - just over a year after his brother Tony was sentenced in New

York to life in prison. US prosecutors say Hernandez turned Honduras into a 'narco-state' involving the military, police and civilians in drug trafficking.

In May last year, former national police chief Juan Carlos Bonilla was also sent to the United States to stand trial for allegedly supervising drug trafficking operations on behalf of his boss, Hernandez.

Castro, the country's new leftist president, has vowed to tackle criminal gangs, last year temporarily lifting certain constitutional guarantees to allow police to make arrests without warrants. One objective of the crackdown, Castro said, was to rein in rampant extortion by gangs, which she described as 'one of the main reasons for migration and the shuttering of small and medium enterprises' in Honduras.

AFP

Spain's crops thrive on recycled wastewater

Murcia, Spain - With rainfall increasingly scarce, irrigating crops can be a major challenge, but farmers in southeastern Spain have long relied on recycled wastewater in a model that is winning attention abroad.

"Here the water is still dirty... but by the end, it will be crystal clear and bacteria-free," said Carlos Lardin, operations manager at Esamur, the public body overseeing wastewater management in the Murcia region.

At his feet, brownish water bubbled in a de-silting tank, the first step before being sifted, filtered and then biologically treated to give it 'a second life', explained the 45-year-old engineer. Some 23 years ago, Murcia - an arid region with chronic water shortages that claims to be the EU's leading producer of fruit and vegetables - set itself a huge challenge of reusing wastewater to irrigate its crops.

To that end, the region built a



Lagoon that stores water to irrigate cultivated fields in the area of Campos del Rio, near Murcia, southern Spain (AFP)

network of 100 treatment plants that process and disinfect water from the sewage system so it can be reused on the fields. This treatment, which involves sand filters and ultraviolet rays, ensures that the water 'is not contaminated' and doesn't transfer

bacteria 'such as E.coli' to the fruit and vegetables, Lardin said.

'An important resource'

As a result, some 98 per cent of the region's wastewater is reused today, compared with an average

of nine per cent across Spain and five per cent across the EU, government figures show.

It is an important contribution given that the central government has recently restricted Murcia's huge water transfers from the Tagus River, whose lev-

els have been dropping dangerously. According to Esamur, 15 per cent of the region's irrigation needs are met by recycled wastewater. It's not enough to cover the need, but it's still important, said Feliciano Guillen, head of the Ceuti irrigation organisation which allocates water resources among farmers in northeastern Murcia.

Farmer Jose Penalver, who owns 10 hectares (25 acres) of land in the hills above Campos del Rio, agreed.

"Whatever (water) can be collected is good wherever it comes from as long as it's put to good use," said the 52-year-old apricot grower.

In his fields, an automated drip-irrigation system lets him limit water use to what is strictly necessary, in this case, two hours per day. "Without this (recycled) water, everything here would dry up," he said.

AFP

GO SKATEBOARDING



A child carries his skateboard during a gathering to celebrate Go Skateboarding Day in Manila, The Philippines, on Wednesday (AFP)

‘Yoga is free of copyrights, patents’: India’s Narendra Modi at UN

New York, US - Yoga is a very old tradition from India, which is absolutely free of copyrights, patents and royalty payments, said Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi before leading a special Yoga session at the United Nations headquarters in New York on Wednesday.

He also urged people to join hands together to realise the goal of ‘One Earth, One Family, One Future’.

Addressing the special event, Modi said: “On this fine morning, we are gathered here at the UN at the meeting point of entire humanity. In this wonderful city of New York. I know many people have come from very far. I thank them.

“I am told that almost every nationality is represented here today. Yoga means to unite, so your coming together is an expression of another form of Yoga,” he said.

“I remember nine years ago, exactly here I had the honour to propose celebrating International Yoga Day on June 21,” he added.

Modi said last year, ‘the entire world came together to support India’s proposal to celebrate 2023 as the International Year of Millets and it was wonderful to see the people across nationalities coming together for Yoga’.



People attend a yoga session on International Yoga Day, at UN Headquarters in New York on Wednesday (ANI)

“I have just paid respect to UN peacekeepers. In 2015, I called for a new memorial to be built in their memory. Last week, the world came together to make this reality. As the largest troop-contributing nation, we are grateful to all nations for their support of the noble cause,” he said.

“Yoga comes from India, it is a very old tradition. Yoga is free of copyrights, patents and royalty payments. Yoga is adaptable to your age, gender and fitness level. Yoga is portable and is truly universal,” Modi added.

He said Yoga is ‘portable’ as it could be practised at home, at work or in transit. “It is also flexible as it can be practised alone. Do it in a group or learn from the teacher,” Modi said.

“Yoga is a way of life. It is a way to mindfulness in thought and action, a way to live in harmony with self, with others and with nature. I am delighted that many of you are working on scientifically validating the values of yoga.

“Let us use the power of Yoga not only to be healthy, and happy but also to be kind to ourselves and to each other. Let us use the power of Yoga to build bridges of friendship, a peaceful world and a cleaner, greener and sustainable future,” he added.

ANI

TRADITIONAL TOWER



Balinese people carry a cremation tower during a traditional royal cremation ceremony in Denpasar on Indonesia’s resort island of Bali on Wednesday (AFP)

Lost *Titanic* sub: Rescuers detect underwater noises

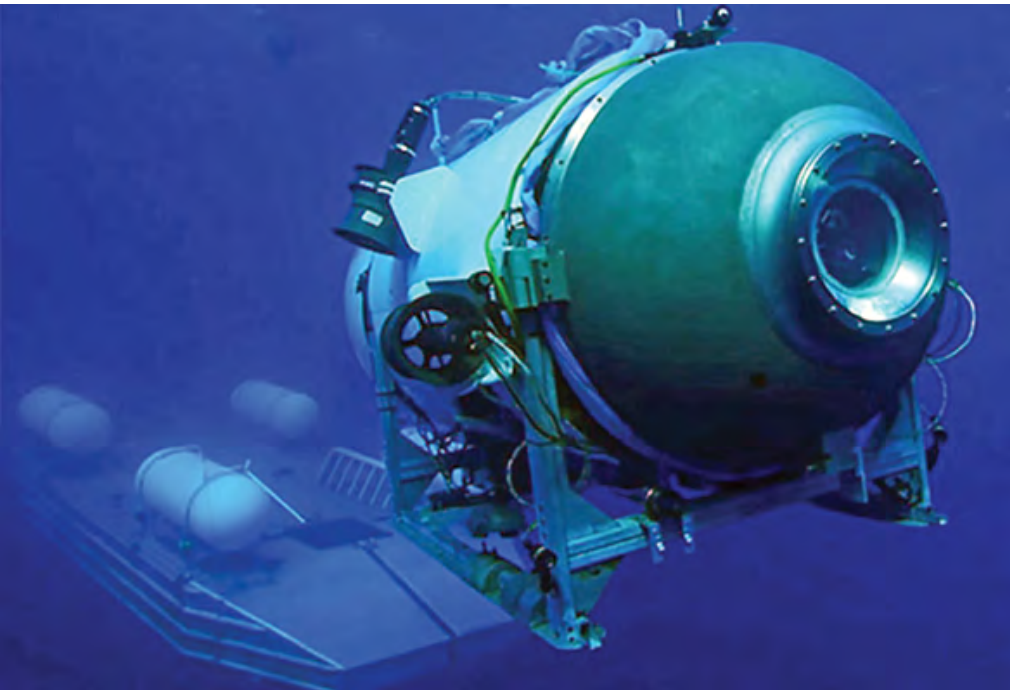
Boston, US - Rescuers searching for a missing tourist submersible near the wreck of the *Titanic* have detected ‘underwater noises’ in the search area, the US Coast Guard said on Wednesday, with the five on board estimated to have less than 24 hours of oxygen left.

All communication was lost with the 21-foot (6.5-metre) craft during its descent on Sunday to see the remains of the British passenger liner, which sits more than two miles (nearly four kilometres) below the surface of the North Atlantic.

US and Canadian coast guard ships and planes are scouring 7,600 square miles (around 20,000sqkm) of ocean - larger than the US state of Connecticut - for the vessel, which was attempting to dive about 400 miles off the coast of Newfoundland, Canada. “Canadian P-3 aircraft detected underwater noises in the search area. As a result, ROV (remotely operated vehicle) operations were relocated in an attempt to explore the origin of the noises,” the US Coast Guard’s First District said on its official Twitter page.

The ROV searches had so far not yielded results, but would continue, the military branch said, adding that data from the Canadian aircraft had been shared with US Navy experts to inform future search plans.

The submersible, named *Titan*, was carrying three fee-paying passengers, including a British billionaire and a Pakistani



This image, courtesy of OceanGate Expeditions, shows their *Titan* submersible launching from a platform (AFP)

tycoon and his son. OceanGate Expeditions charges US\$250,000 for a seat on the sub, which is about the size of an average truck.

The US Coast Guard announcement is the most encouraging sign yet that those on board may still be alive.

Rescue aid has been pouring in from around the world, with a specialised winch system for lifting heavy objects from extreme depths, other equipment and personnel due to join the rescue effort on Tuesday night, according to the US Navy.

The Pentagon said it was deploying a third C-130 aircraft and three C-17s, while France’s oceanographic institute announced a deep-sea underwater robot and its experts would arrive in the area on Wednesday.

“This is a very complex search and the unified team is working around the clock to bring all available assets and expertise to bear as quickly as possible,” US Coast Guard Captain Jamie Frederick told reporters.

‘Untested design’

“Logistically speaking, it’s hard to bring assets to bear. It takes time, it takes coordination,” he added.

Rescuers estimate that passengers now have less a day of oxygen left, based on the sub’s capacity to hold up to 96 hours of emergency air.

Efforts to find the sub ramped up as a 2018 lawsuit came to light that alleged that OceanGate Expeditions’ former director of marine operations was fired after he raised safety concerns about *Titan*. David Lochridge cited the company’s ‘experimental and untested design of the *Titan*’ in a court filing.

The *Titan* lost contact with the surface less than two hours into its descent, authorities say.

On board are Briton Hamish Harding, Pakistani businessman Shahzada Dawood, his son Suleman, OceanGate Expeditions CEO Stockton Rush and French submarine operator Paul-Henri Nargeolet, nicknamed ‘Mr *Titanic*’ for his dives at the site.

AFP

Swiss president makes surprise decision to quit

Geneva, Switzerland - Swiss President Alain Berset announced on Wednesday that he will quit the government at the end of 2023, in a surprise move after more than a decade of ministerial service.

Berset, 51, said he would step down from Switzerland’s Federal Council government at the end of year, telling a hastily arranged press conference in the capital Bern that it was ‘the right time to leave’.

The wealthy Alpine country’s presidency rotates annually among the council’s seven members.

Berset is the youngest and also the longest-serving minister, having joined the government in 2012. He is in his second spell as president, having previously taken a turn in 2018.

“I have the feeling that I’ve accomplished what is possible. I have given everything,” he said.

He told the Federal Council that he planned to leave the government ‘at the end of the year’.



Swiss President Alain Berset (AFP)

Berset was a critical player in arranging the emergency takeover of the stricken bank Credit Suisse by its larger rival UBS over a weekend in March this year.

He feared Switzerland’s second-biggest bank would otherwise have imploded within days, triggering domestic chaos and potentially a global banking crisis.

Berset is Switzerland’s interior minister and as the minister in charge of health, he played a key role in the country’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

AFP

Greek migrant tragedy shrouds Pakistan village

Bandli, Pakistan - Death hangs over the Pakistan village of Bandli like a shroud, as residents absorb news that as many as 24 young local men may be among hundreds feared drowned in last week’s Greek migrant boat tragedy.

The village, home to around 15,000, was in mourning as relatives offered up DNA samples to identify bodies among the 82 recovered from last Wednesday’s shipwreck in the Ionian Sea.

A procession of visitors came and went from the homes of families in distress, 95km (60 miles) southeast of Islamabad in Pakistan administered Kashmir.

Parents sat listlessly in the street and funeral prayers were not yet held, as the faintest hope still lingered.

Shahnaz Bibi said she spoke to her son Inaam Shafaat, 20, by phone a day before the overcrowded and rusty trawler set sail from Libya into Mediterranean waters on the world’s deadliest migrant route.

“At night he told me that the weather was not clear. I told him



Relatives of migrants, who went missing after a trawler sank in Ionian Sea, wait to provide DNA samples at a hospital in Bandli village, on Tuesday (AFP)

There are families who had sent one brother to Italy and after a failed attempt with the second brother, want to send the third one

SARFRAZ KHAN VIRK

not to go on the boat, but he wouldn’t listen to me,” said Bibi, in her 50s, having her DNA sampled at a local hospital.

“He said, ‘Mother I leave you in the protection of Allah. Pray for me,’” she told AFP, her voice

hoarse from weeping as she dabbed tears away with her shawl.

Send another son

Authorities in Europe still have no clear idea how many people

were aboard the boat when it sank - estimates range from 400 to over 700 - but likely hundreds came from Pakistan, largely from the most populous Punjab province and Pakistan administered Kashmir.

The country’s Federal Investigation Agency said on Wednesday they have collected DNA samples from families of 108 missing youths.

Sarfraz Khan Virk, another senior official from the FIA in Lahore, told reporters that following previous such disasters, many families have refused to speak to authorities.

“They said that we want to send a second son and we will suffer if you file a case,” he said.

“There are families who had sent one brother to Italy and after a failed attempt with the second brother, want to send the third one. So we have many issues and the people are not cooperating with us.”

The country is in the grip of a staggering economic downturn with runaway inflation, industry and imports hobbled, and a tumbling rupee sapping families’ abilities to pay their way.

Pakistan administered Kashmir - where Bandli nestles among lush rolling hills - has historically been a springboard for migrants, increasingly driven to make desperate odysseys escaping hardship.

The eastern region hosts a thriving black market of human smugglers and Islamabad so far says 16 have been arrested for alleged links to the tragedy.

“What happened to our brother shouldn’t happen to anyone else. Human trafficking has been on the rise, it will not stop,” said Waheed Wazir, 38, whose younger brother Imran, 32, is missing.

“The human trafficking agents who are arrested should not be released. They should be publicly punished so nobody dares to do such a thing in the future.”

The assistant commissioner of the local district Sardar Mush-taq Ahmad confirmed 24 people had been reported missing from the area.

AFP

PAT WITH THE BAT!

Cummins sees Australia to thrilling win in Ashes opener

Birmingham, United Kingdom - Australia captain Pat Cummins led his side to a dramatic two-wicket win over England in the first Test at Edgbaston on Tuesday.

The Ashes holders were 209-7, still 72 runs shy of a victory target of 281, when fast bowler Cummins came in to bat after first-innings century-maker Usman Khawaja fell for a painstaking 65. And after Alex Carey was out to leave Australia 227-8, the tourists still required another 54 more runs.

But Cummins and Nathan Lyon's unbroken stand of 55 saw Australia home in a match to rival the tension of England's two-run

One of the beauties of this series is the totally contrasting styles. We both played to our strengths. You don't necessarily know which style is better but it makes for good entertainment

PAT CUMMINS

win in a celebrated 2005 Ashes clash at Edgbaston.

Cummins, who finished on 44 not out, hit the winning boundary when he edged Ollie Robinson to third man where a diving Harry Brook knocked the ball over the rope.

Lyon, whose missed run out contributed to England's stunning

one-wicket win at Headingley in the drawn 2019 Ashes series in England, was 16 not out.

Victory left World Test champions Australia 1-0 up in the five-match series as they bid for a first Ashes campaign win in England in 22 years.

Cummins had promised Australia would stick with their tradi-

tional game rather than get caught up in the hype surrounding England's aggressive 'Bazball' approach.

"One of the beauties of this series is the totally contrasting styles," Cummins said after the nail-biting win.

"We both played to our strengths. You don't necessarily know which style is better but it makes for good entertainment."

Australia's method was exemplified by player of the match Khawaja, with Cummins saying:

"He showed composure in both innings, playing at his own pace, playing his own method and didn't get caught up in anything else." This was just England's



Pat Cummins celebrates after steering Australia to victory in the first Ashes Test against England (AFP)

third defeat in 14 Tests under captain Ben Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum.

England were left to rue a se-

ries of missed chances throughout the match, none more so than when Lyon was dropped on just two by Stokes at square leg, after

the skipper failed to hold a one-handed diving chance from a pull off Stuart Broad as he hit the turf. AFP

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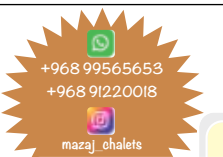
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BRING IT ON!

Nadeem, Khan, Ilyas star as Oman ease past UAE for their second straight victory

Bulawayo, Zimbabwe - Oman continued from where they left off in the first game against Scotland and registered another impressive victory, against the UAE in their second match at the World Cup Qualifier in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, on Wednesday.

Oman proved to be the overall better side in their encounter against regional rivals.

Aayan Afzal Khan smashed an unbeaten 58 to drag the UAE up to 227-8 batting first. But fifties from Aqib Ilyas, Shoaib Khan and Mohammad Nadeem helped Oman ease to their target with four overs to spare.

Oman's chase started badly as Junaid Siddique's twin strikes in the fifth over provided the perfect start to UAE. The dangerous duo of Kashyap Prajapati and Jatinder Singh was sent back into the hut. Chasing a modest target of 228, Oman needed batters who could hold the innings.

Aqib Ilyas and Shoaib Khan came together to deliver. They batted carefully over the next 10 overs, getting Oman to 42/2 in the first 15 before going for their shots. They went about six an over between overs 16-25 and got Oman to 101.

However, Oman lost the duo as soon as they had added 100 runs for the third wicket. Aqib (53) was bowled by Rohan Mustafa in the 27th over, and Shoaib Khan retired hurt at the end of that very over.

But Oman chose the attacking route. Mohammad Nadeem and Ayaan Khan brought up their fifty run stand off merely 47 balls. As the required rate came closer to four, the UAE side began to lose their spirit in the field.



Shoaib Khan plays a shot en route to his unbeaten 52 against UAE on Wednesday (ICC/ Getty Images)

Qatar, Kuwait deny racism claims in friendly matches

Paris, France - Qatar and Kuwait's football federations on Tuesday denied allegations of racial abuse of rival players a day after their matches against New Zealand and Ireland were abandoned.

New Zealand did not return for the second half of Monday's international in Austria while leading 1-0, claiming Michael Boxall was racially abused by a Qatari opponent.

"No official action was taken so the team have agreed not to come out for the second half of the match," the New Zealand football federation tweeted.

On Tuesday, both the Qatari federation and forward Yusuf Abdurisag denied he had made any racist comments, insisting he himself had been the victim of discriminatory remarks.

Abdurisag "confirmed an exchange of words with an opponent in the heat of the moment" but maintained he uttered "no insulting or discriminatory remarks", the Qatari federation said in a statement.

"During last night's game, I was the target of racist abuse from a member of the opposing team," Abdurisag said in a separate statement.

"To my complete shock, that same player accused me of using offensive language and the game was abandoned.

"During my travels around the world as a footballer I have experienced racist abuse, but never have I been both a victim and the accused in the same incident.

"It's true that players often say things to each other in the heat of the moment, but there is a clear line that I have never crossed."

Qatar's Portuguese coach Carlos Queiroz said he was "surprised" by the New Zealanders' decision, saying there had been no witnesses and that it was "just an argument between two players".

'Excessive roughness'

Kuwait also rejected claims the match between their Olympic team and Ireland's under-21s had been abandoned because of alleged racist abuse by one of their players. The match, in Bad Radkersburg, Austria, was abandoned in the second half.

During last night's game, I was the target of racist abuse from a member of the opposing team

YUSUF ABDURISAG

The Kuwait Football Association condemns the announcement made by the Irish Football Association through its official Twitter account, regarding the alleged racism directed towards one of their players during the friendly match between Kuwait Olympic Team and the Irish team," said a statement.

Oman skipper Maqsood ranked World No 3 ODI all-rounder

Muscat - Oman veteran and skipper Zeeshan Maqsood, who in May had entered the top-five rankings of ICC ODI all-rounders, moved into the exclusive top-three club on Wednesday.

According to the latest rankings from the world cricket body (ICC), Maqsood achieved a career-best No.3 ranking for ODI all-rounders following his half-century and a wicket in the opening match of the ongoing ICC Cricket World Cup Qualifier in Zimbabwe.

Oman had stunned Test-playing Ireland in their opening Group B match in Bulawayo on June 19 with the skipper playing a key role to win the player of the

match award.

He moved one place up and is behind only Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hasan and Afghanistan's Mohammad Nabi.

Joe Root's 30th Test century and a second-innings 46 in the first Ashes Test has given him the crown of the world's No. 1 Test batter in the latest ICC rankings update

Al Hasan has 367 rating points while Nabi has 305. Maqsood has garnered 262 and is followed by Afghanistan's captain Rashid Khan with 261. Papua New Guinea's Assad Vala and Zimbabwe's Sikandar Raza are

joint fifth with 248 points each.

The 35-year-old Maqsood is Oman's long-serving skipper and is a left-handed batter and left-arm orthodox bowler. This is the

first time that an Omani cricketer has scaled such heights. He also made progress in ODI batters rankings as he rose six places from 65th to 59th and also gained five places to reach 40th in the bowlers' rankings.



Zeeshan Maqsood

Root top batter

Joe Root's 30th Test century and a second-innings 46 in the first Ashes Test has given him the crown of the world's No. 1 Test batter in the latest ICC rankings update on Wednesday. Marnus Labuschagne, who was the top-ranked batter before the Ashes began, dropped two places to the third position following scores of 0 and 13 in Edgbaston.

Labuschagne wasn't the only Australian who dropped places. Travis Head slipped from third to fourth despite a fifty in the first innings, while Steven Smith slid from second to sixth after ordinary scores in both innings of the opening Test.

Mourinho given four-match ban for insulting referee

Lausanne, Switzerland- Jose Mourinho has been suspended for four European matches for insulting referee Anthony Taylor after Roma's Europa League final defeat by Sevilla, UEFA announced on Wednesday.

The Portuguese confronted Taylor in a car park following Roma's penalty shoot-out loss after a 1-1 draw in Budapest.

Mourinho has been banned from "the next four UEFA club competition matches in which he would otherwise participate, for directing abusive language at a match official", European football's governing body said.

His team will play in the Europa League group stage next season.

Roma have also been fined 50,000 euros (\$54,744) and banned from taking away fans to their next European match "for

the lighting of fireworks, throwing of objects, acts of damage and crowd disturbances".

The Italian club were also fined 5,000 euros over the "improper conduct of their team" and ordered to "contact the Hungarian Football Federation within 30 days" to agree a settlement regarding damages caused by their supporters in the stadium.

Taylor was harassed by Roma fans at Budapest airport with his family the day after the controversial final.

An Italian man was charged with affray after the ugly clash.

Referees' body PGMOL said: "We are appalled at the unjustified and abhorrent abuse directed at Anthony and his family as he tries to make his way home from refereeing the UEFA Europa League final."

AFP

French World Cup winner Kante joins Saudi Arabian champions Al Ittihad

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - France's World Cup-winning midfielder N'Golo Kante has joined Saudi Arabian champions Al Ittihad, the club said in a statement on Wednesday, joining up with compatriot Karim Benzema.

"Kante is an Ittihad player now!" the club said on Twitter, while chairman Anmar al Hailee tweeted: "Welcome to our new tiger Kante," a reference to the team's nickname.

The 32-year-old becomes the latest in a line of European stars choosing to ply their trade in the desert kingdom, which is making big-money moves across elite sport.

A dynamic and industrious midfielder, Kante won the World Cup with France in 2018.

His club career also glitters. He won the Champions League



N'Golo Kante

and World Club Cup with Chelsea, as well as back-to-back Premier League titles with Leicester City and Chelsea.

Kante's contract with the London club was set to expire this

month and they paid him a handsome tribute in bidding him farewell.

"N'Golo's impact and influence during his time at Chelsea cannot be overstated," said

Chelsea's co-sporting directors Laurence Stewart and Paul Winstanley in a club statement.

"His tireless performances in midfield contributed to several trophy wins and has guaranteed him a place in the club's history."

He has signed a three-year deal with Al Ittihad, the Jeddah-based team said in a statement, though it gave no details of how much Kante will earn.

The Saudi club said: "Kante's addition to Al Ittihad is considered one of the most high-profile and impactful signings in the club's history."

"It is part of the club's efforts to establish itself as a top choice for world-class players in the Saudi Professional League."

He will wear the number seven shirt, which he also donned at Chelsea.

Kroos extends Real Madrid contract for extra season

Madrid, Spain- Toni Kroos has agreed an extension to his contract and will stay at Real Madrid next season, the Spanish giants announced on Wednesday.

The 33-year-old midfielder's previous deal was due to run out at the end of June but he will now stay for a 10th campaign at Madrid.

Kroos has won four Champions Leagues and three La Liga titles since joining Real from Bayern Munich in 2014, when he also won the World Cup with Germany.

Coach Carlo Ancelotti had previously said he expected Kroos and fellow veteran midfielder Luka Modric, 37, to stay at the Santiago Bernabeu for another season.

AFP

WINNER ALL THE WAY

Ronaldo marks 200th Portugal cap with goal, Haaland fires Norway

Paris, France - Cristiano Ronaldo marked his 200th international appearance with the winner as Portugal beat Iceland 1-0 in Euro 2024 qualifying on Tuesday, while Erling Haaland netted twice for Norway.

Elsewhere, Belgium brushed aside the Thibaut Courtois captaincy row by seeing off Estonia thanks to a Romelu Lukaku double in Tallinn and Moldova came from two goals down to stun Poland.

Portugal appeared to be heading towards a drab goalless draw in Reykjavik until Willum Thor Willumsson was sent off late on.

Ronaldo struggled for much of the match but repaid coach Roberto Martinez's faith by slotting home from Goncalo Inacio's knock-down in the 89th minute.

"It was a nice script (for Ronaldo). There was incredible celebration, the first men's player ever in world football to get 200 international games," Martinez told uefa.com.

The former Real Madrid and Manchester United star's record-extending 123rd international goal was initially ruled out for offside before being awarded by VAR.

"For me it's an unbelievable achievement, it's amazing," said the 38-year-old Ronaldo. "And of course to score the winning goal,



Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo scores past Iceland goalkeeper Runar Runarsson during their Euro 2024 qualifier in Reykjavik on Tuesday (AFP)

it's even more special."

Portugal remain two points clear of Slovakia at the top of Group J after a fourth straight win.

Slovakia, who are Portugal's next opponents in September, won 1-0 away to Liechtenstein to stay unbeaten.

Luxembourg gave their unlikely bid to reach a maiden major tournament a boost with a

brilliant 2-0 away victory over Bosnia and Herzegovina to move third, just three points behind Slovakia.

The top two from each group qualify automatically for next year's finals in Germany.

Captain Lukaku stars

Belgium goalkeeper Courtois had said he was "surprised" that coach Domenico Tedesco told a

press conference he had refused to travel to Estonia after being overlooked for the stand-in captaincy last week.

Tedesco had wanted to hand Lukaku the armband for Saturday's 1-1 draw with Austria and give Courtois the honour in Tallinn, with regular captain Kevin De Bruyne absent.

But with Courtois instead back home, Lukaku was named

skipper again and responded by scoring two goals in a 3-0 success which helped Belgium stay second in Group F.

Austria remained three points clear in first place, albeit having played a game more than Belgium, as Christoph Baumgartner scored twice in the last 10 minutes to clinch a 2-0 win over Sweden.

The Scandinavians are in dan-

ger of failing to reach a Euro tournament for the first time since 1996, sitting four points behind Belgium.

Haaland's brace helped Norway bounce back from their dramatic defeat by Scotland at the weekend with a 3-1 victory against Cyprus.

That kept their slim hopes of reaching a first major tournament since 2000 alive, although

they only sit third in Group A and just one point ahead of Spain having played two games more than the three-time champions.

There was chaos in Glasgow, as second-placed Georgia refused to come back from the dressing room for a scheduled restart after their game against Scotland was halted due to heavy rain.

The match was supposed to begin again, with Scotland leading 1-0, at 9:15 pm local time (1915 GMT) but the Georgian players initially failed to come out before the game eventually got back underway 20 minutes later.

Poland in trouble

Poland fell to fourth place in Group E after blowing a two-goal lead to lose 3-2 to Moldova in Chisinau.

Moldova, who had won only one of their last 43 Euro and World Cup qualifying matches, appeared to have been safely dispatched by first-half goals from Arkadiusz Milik and Robert Lewandowski.

But Ion Nicolaescu's double left Poland reeling and Vladyslav Baboglo, who plays his club football for Ukrainian team Oleksandriya, headed past Wojciech Szczesny to score a dramatic 85th-minute winner.

Moldova, 171st in the FIFA rankings, are now third in the group standings, a point behind second-placed Albania who saw off the Faroe Islands 3-1.

Hungary moved top of Group G by cruising past Lithuania 2-0, level on points with Serbia after their 1-1 draw with Bulgaria.

AFP

Luis Diaz goal helps Colombia past Germany and deepen Flick's woes

Gelsenkirchen, Germany - Second-half goals from Luis Diaz and Juan Cuadrado took Colombia to a 2-0 friendly win over Germany on Tuesday, deepening home coach Hansi Flick's woes a year out from Euro 2024.

Liverpool forward Diaz leapt high to head in a looping Cuadrado cross before the Juventus wing-back scored a late penalty after Germany captain Joshua Kimmich handballed in the box a minute after coming off the bench.

It was Colombia's first win over Germany and means the four-time world champions have won just one of five games since their disastrous group-stage exit at the Qatar World Cup in December.

Germany, who qualify for next year's Euro as hosts, lacked fluidity in Gelsenkirchen, ramping up the pressure on under-fire boss Flick, with the side not playing again until September.

"I'm very disappointed for the fans," said Flick. "We wanted to try something but it went belly up." Flick was bullish on his side's long-term chances, saying his side would "show a different will-



Colombia's Luis Diaz (R) scores past Germany goalkeeper Marc-Andre Ter Stegen during their international friendly in Gelsenkirchen, western Germany on Tuesday (AFP)

ingness, a difference performance" in the next round of friendlies.

"From September, we'll settle in and then the results will come."

With isolated boos and whistles ringing out across his hometown stadium in Gelsenkirchen, local boy turned captain Ilkay Gundogan said he could "understand" the crowd's response.

"We know it was not good and we know what needs to get better."

Asked if he was worried by the team's latest display, midfielder Leon Goretzka said: "I don't know if that's the right word."

"It's dramatic, you have to say that clearly... We're missing things across all levels. All in all it was far too little."

After making nine changes for the 1-0 loss to Poland in Warsaw on Friday, Flick again switched things up with five alterations in the starting XI. The coach handed the armband to Gundogan after the treble-winning Manchester City captain's recent successes, with Kimmich starting from the bench.

AFP

Scotland shrug off rain delay to close in on Euro 2024

Glasgow, United Kingdom - Scotland were not blown off course by a near two-hour interruption caused by heavy rain as they maintained their 100 percent record in Euro 2024 qualifying with a 2-0 win over Georgia on Tuesday.

Callum McGregor and Scott McTominay scored the goals to put Scotland on the brink of booking their place in Germany next year after winning the first four qualifiers. Steve Clarke's men move eight points clear of Georgia and Norway in Group A and nine above Spain.

The game started in farcical conditions after a downpour in the hour before kick-off.

Scotland took a sixth-minute lead when McGregor fired home a loose ball from a corner after both managers had pleaded with Hungarian referee Istvan Vad to stop proceedings.

Before the match could restart after the goal, the referee consulted the teams and took the players off the pitch. A number of pitch inspections then took place amid reports that Georgia wanted the game postponed.



Sadio Mane celebrates with teammates after scoring against Brazil in their international friendly in Lisbon on Tuesday (AFP)

Sadio Mane hits double as Senegal rally to beat Brazil

Lisbon, Portugal - Sadio Mane scored two goals as African champions Senegal came from behind to defeat Brazil 4-2 in an international friendly in Lisbon on Tuesday.

Five-time World Cup winners Brazil are still without a coach after the departure of Tite last year, while Neymar remains sidelined by an ankle injury suffered in February.

Lucas Paqueta headed the South Americans ahead from Vinicius Junior's cross 10 minutes in, but Senegal equalised through a thumping left-foot volley by Strasbourg forward Habib Diallo.

Marquinhos put Senegal ahead early in the second half when the Paris Saint-Germain defender inadvertently turned the ball into his own net.

Mane added a third minutes later with a superb curling shot into the top corner.

Brazil halved the deficit when Marquinhos this time scored at the right end, looping a mishit effort over Senegal goalkeeper Mory Diaw. But Mane wrapped up Senegal's victory deep into stoppage time as he grabbed his second goal of the game from the penalty spot.

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EID FESTIVITIES AFOOT



By Anirban Ray

Eid al Adha festivities are round the corner and there is much excitement in Oman in view of the upcoming long holiday, beginning July 27, which gives people a chance to plan mid-year outings and celebrations.

While celebrations among family and friends will be the order of the day, as some head to the interiors to their ancestral homes for celebrating the festival with the entire family, people of other faiths take this opportunity to visit nearby destinations for a much-needed respite from the sweltering summer heat.

Prayers and religious observances go hand-in-hand with Eid al Adha festivities, with great focus on rituals of sacrificing lamb and family meals. And while some hold on to tradition and rituals that strengthen familial bonds, there are others who use the festive season to unwind and rejuvenate themselves.

Salim al Abri, a taxi driver said, "This year it is special for me because I just became a father of a baby boy. We will celebrate and pray to God. I also have guests from all around Sharqiyah coming to visit us to see the baby - so, both families shall have a get-together. I

have already started shopping; me and my brother-in-law go out every evening to make preparations for the Eid days. It is a very joyous moment for us and we hope to make it memorable."

The festival also brings families and communities closer. Omanis eagerly anticipate the reunion with their loved ones, near and far, to celebrate Eid. Many plan to visit their parents or grandparents while many plan to bring relatives from the interior to the city.

Homes are filled with warmth, laughter, and the aroma of delicious traditional dishes. Families exchange heartfelt greetings, attend community prayers, prepare and share meals together as well as extend their hospitality to neighbours and friends from other faiths.

Khalid al Balushi, working as a PRO in Al Khuwair, said, "Food is a major part of the festival. After the traditional sacrifice, we prepare the food ourselves - the women folk help us with cleaning and grinding spices. Culinary

“I have a relative in Salalah and we plan to spend good three days away from the heat. A few old friends will also join us and we hope to have a nice time together**”**

ASLAM KHAN

delights play a central role in the Eid al Adha celebrations and we have an extravagant feast on the main day. Normally, we make traditional food but there are various dishes that are added these days, to suit all tastes.

Mandi and Shuwa are a must, and we also

take pride in showcasing our culinary skills."

Beauty parlours see a rush of customers during this time of the year as ladies wish to rev up their appearance with beauty treatments, henna designs on hands, etc. Dressing up and looking good are part of the festivities.

Afnan Ahmed al Adawi, owner of Al Bahira Beauty Centre, said they always face a surge in customers in the final three days prior to Eid when ladies book for elaborate treatments.

"We offer a wide range of services, including henna application. The most popular services before Eid are facials, nail art, manicures, pedicures, and henna. On the day just prior to Eid, we remain open until midnight for all services, but for henna, we stay open until our last customer leaves. Usually, our engagements go on till 5am in the morning."

Among those who use the holidays to unwind, Aslam Khan and his family (of Pakistani nationality) plans to visit Salalah with his family after the first day. Khan said, "I have a relative in Salalah and we plan to spend good three days away from the heat. A few old friends will also join us and we hope to have a nice time together."

There are many who have also planned staycations and getaways and travel and tour operators are having a field day catering to this annual surge in business.

Sunil D'Souza, chairman of Travel Point, said, "One of the best destinations for this season is the Far East, including Thailand, as well as Nepal and Turkey. We also have several inbound tourism options and most people are opting for Salalah and other hill resorts."

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cook-up

EID dinner

GOAT RECIPES



Old Delhi Nihari Gosht

- Ingredients**
- 600g goat shanks
 - 2tbsp ghee
 - 2 onions - finely sliced
 - ½ cup chicken/mutton stock
 - 3-4tsp Nihari masala powder
 - 3cm piece ginger – julienned
 - 2tbsp coriander leaves – chopped
 - Salt to taste

Method

In a pressure cooker, heat the ghee and fry the onions till

they are well browned. Add the lamb shanks and fry along with the Nihari masala power till the meat becomes nice and brown. Add the stock, adjust salt, and pressure cook for 30 minutes. Turn off the heat and let the cooker cool down till the whistle (weight) comes off easily.

Sprinkle lemon juice and garnish with ginger and coriander leaves and serve hot with paranthas or rice

Jamaican Goat Curry

- Ingredients**
- 1kg goat meat - cut to pieces
 - 1tsp salt
 - 2tsp bouillon powder
 - ½tsp black pepper
 - 2tbsp curry powder
 - 1tbsp all spice
 - 1 medium onion - diced
 - 1tsp grated ginger
 - 2 bell peppers – diced
 - 4 stalks thyme
 - 1 habanero pepper
 - 5 cloves garlic
 - 2 spring onions
 - 4tbsp oil - divided
 - 2 large potatoes
 - 2 cups chicken stock or water

Method

Wash the goat meat in water and vinegar or lime and drain the excess water – this helps remove unpleasant odours. Season the meat with salt, bouillon powder, black pepper, allspice, and 1tbsp curry powder in a large bowl. Mix well. Throw in the diced onion, grated ginger, bell pepper, thyme, habanero, minced garlic, spring onion, and 2tbsp oil. Mix well and leave to marinate overnight or for at least 2 hours.

Add 2tbsp oil into a pan on medium heat. Add 1tbsp curry powder and cook until fragrant – about a minute. Be sure not to burn the curry powder. Carefully remove the goat meat from the marinade (keep the marinade). Drop into the oil, one at a time, and let it sear on all sides. You can do this in batches. Stir in the stock and marinade, cover, and leave to cook for 45 minutes to 1 hour or until the meat is tender. Add the potatoes and cook for another 20 minutes or till the potatoes become tender. Adjust the seasoning if necessary. Serve over rice.



HERE ARE A FEW INTERESTING GOAT MEAT RECIPES TO SPICE UP YOUR EID AL ADHA DINNER. MAKE IT DELECTABLE, MAKE IT MEMORABLE

Spicy Goat Chops

- Ingredients**
- 4-8 lamb chops
 - 2-3tbsp olive oil
 - 2tsp ground cumin
 - 1tbsp ground coriander
 - ½tsp nutmeg
 - 2tsp turmeric
 - 1-2tsp chilli powder
 - ½tsp ground cardamom
 - 1tsp ginger - finely grated
 - 1tsp ground cinnamon
 - 3 garlic cloves - finely grated
 - 2tsp salt
 - 1tsp black pepper
 - Lemon wedges - to serve
 - Cucumber salad – to serve

Method

To make the cucumber salad, slice 1 cucumber and 1 onion thinly and add to a medium bowl. Drizzle with a mixture of lemon juice/vinegar with a pinch of salt and pepper and ½tsp sugar.

For the spicy chops, combine all the spices, garlic, ginger and olive oil in a small bowl and set aside. Rub the spice mixture into the lamb chops and repeat on the other side. Pan-fry/grill the lamb chops in a pre-heated pan/grill. You can also cook the lamb in the oven or on an outdoor grill. Cook your lamb chops for 3-4 minutes per side and allow to rest for 5 minutes before serving.



Kerala Goat Stew

- Ingredients**
- 1 cinnamon stick
 - 2 cloves
 - 2 cardamom pods
 - 3-4 black peppercorns
 - 1 bay leaf
 - 1 star anise
- For the Stew**
- ½ kg goat curry cuts
 - 1 medium sized onion - sliced
 - 2cm sized ginger - crushed
 - 3 cloves of garlic - crushed
 - 3-4 green chilies slit
 - ¼tsp turmeric powder
 - ¼tsp coriander powder
 - 1tsp pepper powder

- 1 sprig of curry leaves
- 1 cup water
- 1 carrot (cubed)
- 10-12 beans (sliced)
- 2 potatoes (cubed)
- 1 cup thin coconut milk
- ½ cup thick coconut milk
- 1tsp crushed peppercorns
- 2-3tbsp oil
- Salt, to taste

- For Tempering**
- 1 tbsp ghee/butter
 - 5-6 shallots - sliced
 - 1 sprig of curry leaves
 - 5-6 cashews



Method

In a pressure cooker, heat some oil and add the spices; cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, peppercorn, bay leaf, and star anise. Saute until fragrant. Add 1 sprig of curry leaves, crushed ginger, garlic and slit green chilies. Once the raw smell of ginger and garlic subsides, add sliced onions along with a pinch of salt, saute until translucent. Add turmeric powder, coriander powder, pepper powder, sauté and mix well.

Add mutton pieces along with water and salt, close the lid and cook for 20-25 minutes. Turn off the flame and allow the cooker to sit until all the pressure is released. Open the lid and you may continue the rest of the cooking either in the pres-

sure cooker itself or after transferring it to a separate pan.

Add potato, carrot and beans, along with thin coconut milk to the cooked mutton. Close the lid and allow it to cook on a low flame. Check to see if veggies are tender and reduce the flame to a low. Add the thick coconut milk. Do not allow the stew to boil after this stage. Top the stew with freshly crushed peppercorns and salt.

Prepare the tempering - Heat ghee/butter in a separate pan, saute shallots until they are lightly brown, then add cashews and curry leaves and fry. Add this tempering to the prepared mutton stew, mix well. Close the lid and allow it to rest for 15 minutes. Serve hot with appam, bread, naan or rice.

take a break

IN TOWN

FELICITATION OF VATICAN REP



The Apostolic Nuncio to Oman, Archbishop Nicholas Thevenin was accorded a felicitation by Crowe Oman on Tuesday evening



(Photos: VK Shafeer)

Hajj departures



A section of pilgrims from Oman departed for the Hajj pilgrimage



(Photos: VK Shafeer)

BOGGLER

N	C	L	S
P	S	U	S
K	E	P	A
O	G	H	A

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY:

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

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

Weird but True...or False?

Can you spot the difference between a fun fact and a made-up tidbit? Take this 'Weird But True...or False' quiz to find out, based on facts from National Geographic Kids magazine.

Astronauts lose their sense of smell in space - True or False?

True - Your sense of smell is part of what makes certain foods taste so good. Many astronauts in space begin to crave fiery sauces, such as Tabasco sauce, to make up for the lack of flavour in their food.

Interesting facts



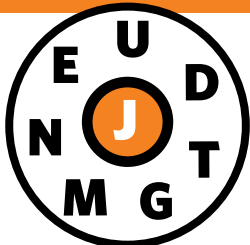
Desert animals are tough - they have to be in order to survive in this extreme habitat. Discover some interesting facts about desert animals.

How often does a gerenuk, a long-necked antelope that lives in deserts throughout East Africa, need to drink water?

- a. Every hour
b. Never
c. Once a month
d. Everyday

Answer - Gerenuks never need to drink water. In-
stead, they get the moisture they need from the
plants they eat.

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

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

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

It might feel like you've been through the emotional ringer lately, but don't worry. You're due for a break today. Everything is going to go much more smoothly than it has been, and you will benefit from the ambition of others. Let them do all the work while you supervise. Take advantage of this downtime by following up on a travel opportunity.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

When you feel like you're in too much of a hurry today, slow down! It sounds simple, but lately you've been letting yourself get caught up in the momentum of the day's activities. Like a leaf in a windstorm, you're getting tossed about and starting to feel a bit powerless over your situation. This is nonsense. If you want things to slow down, you can slow them down.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Why not let other people take the wheel today while you just follow along behind them? Not only is it easier to just go with the flow, but it can be a lot more interesting too! The Universe will still give you the chance to initiate new ideas, plan new social outings, or work on personal projects. You don't have to be the one in charge to get a green light on new endeavors.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Think about a person who really taught you something valuable in your life, and bring that good memory to the present for a while. Remembering the person whose encouragement helped you in the past will help you keep a positive attitude today. You need to keep hanging in there when times get tough! Honor this person by being a positive and encouraging presence in someone else's life.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Today, you could think that you're too busy for a long debate over issues, but you're wrong. There is always time to learn more about things that are important to you! When you meet someone who challenges your opinions, don't just smile and pretend you agree. Ask them why they feel the way they feel. Their answer will surprise and intrigue you.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

The problems you had with some feisty coworkers are gone for now, and there is a much lighter mood at work. It's finally time to exhale. Your emotions have been caught up in a battle that wasn't yours to fight, although the people whose defence you came to really appreciated you sticking your neck out like that.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Reflecting on your own life isn't selfish. In a way, it's selfless. By understanding why you do the things you do, you're able to learn the right kind of lessons you need to become a better friend, a better partner, and a better employee. Though other people are getting together and having fun your energy is much better suited to introspection. It's a good thing.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Something big could happen today that forces you to take a controversial stand, but sticking to your principles will cause your friends to admire you even more than they already to. By being so principled, you're becoming a respected member of your social group, and you have power. You can even stop a silly spat between two of your friends from growing into a fiery argument today.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Mixing your business with pleasure isn't always a bad move. It just requires very delicate footwork. Are you up for it? Make sure you are, because juggling romance with your workload takes a lot more energy than you might think. Make sure you review your company's policy on the matter too. Is this person worth losing your job for?



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

No one will be able to find fault with the points you're making today no matter how hard they look! Your mind is sharp, and you know the subject you're talking about inside and out. It's time to toss out any insecurity or hesitation you may have felt before. There's no room for anything but confidence and pride today.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You are feeling more experimental today. You'll be drawn to avant-garde ideas and expressions that used to make you suspicious or even fearful. Suddenly they're making more sense and you're more comfortable with the idea of exploring them. Do it today. Do some research about the wilder, wackier things you've been hearing about.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Are you in the mood to hide from the world? Good, because today the Universe is sending you the right amount of energy and a great opportunity to do just that. The high-maintenance people who are usually clamouring for your attention are all occupied with other things right now. so you're free to do whatever you want, however you want.

entertainment

Music world honours songwriters at gala



At last week's gala inducting new members into the Songwriters Hall of Fame, Cuban-American Gloria Estefan became the first Latina artist to enter the prestigious pantheon. Seen here, Gloria Estefan performs onstage alongside her grandson Sasha Estefan Coppola during the 52nd Songwriters Hall of Fame Induction and Awards Gala in New York City. A who's who of music, the institution foregoes a televised event in favour of a festive dinner and intimate concert in a Manhattan hotel ballroom. Two of the slated inductees - Nigerian-British singer Sade Adu and Calvin Broadus, aka rapper Snoop Dogg - deferred their honors to future years, opting out of the 52nd annual ceremony.



KIM KARDASHIAN HAS 'IMPOSTER SYNDROME'

Kim Kardashian, 42, may be one of the most popular and successful women in the world, but she doesn't always feel great about it. The Kardashians star's company, SKIMS, was named in Time's 100 Most Influential Companies issue, but she admitted she suffers from Imposter Syndrome, which is the condition of feeling anxious and not experiencing success internally, despite being high-performing in external ways. "Obviously you have big hopes, but this definitely exceeded everything that I ever imagined," she said when discussing her her shapewear company, which started in 2019 and was valued at \$3.2 billion last year. "I still have, like, imposter syndrome or whatever, but I think that's part of what keeps me going."

NEENA GUPTA SAYS 'HINDI-VINDI' WILL ENTREAT NRIS

Bollywood actress Neena Gupta, who has a slew of releases lined up, has shared that her upcoming film *Hindi Vindi* will bring Hindi to the forefront of the NRI audience. The film is set around the NRIs who have left an indelible mark on the global stage. This musical film gives a sneak peek into the intergenerational language barriers and love between a visiting grandmother and her Australian-Indian grandchild, Kabir. The film follows Kabir's transformative journey as he learns Hindi through the fusion of Western and Indian music. It stars Neena Gupta as the grandmother, Mihir Ahuja as Kabir, and Shannon K as Rihanna.



BOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW ADIPURUSH Genre: Fiction, fantasy Starring: Prabhas, Kriti Sanon

Epic flop



What happens when every childhood memories, sights, impressions are challenged sans logic or reasoning? Disorientation, anger and confusion. That's what *Adipurush* successfully managed to bring out in every millennial who grew up in the late 1980s. Everything that veteran filmmaker Ramanand Sagar made us see and hear in 1987 of the images of India's most popular epic - *Ramayana* - in his extremely popular teleserial was

met with strange interpretations in *Adipurush*. Even in cinematic terms, it is tough to call as 'creative' as the basic movie grammar, including characterisation, has been brutally altered. We can have creative freedom and fictionalise Hitler's life but it will be unfair to have a bald Hitler. In the same way, it becomes more sensitive when the mythological characters are distorted under the garb of creative license. *Adipurush* has flopped on many counts. With a low stan-

dard of VFX, the film doesn't touch the basic theme of the epic - Victory of good over evil. The Om Raut film looks like a cheap version of a DC Marvel. One can find traces of *Aquaman*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter* and even *Temple Run* in the film. The film does not follow or regard the various versions of *Ramayan*. It is funny (and not funny) to see a poorly made bat and Pushpak Biman for Ravana and have a dark Gotham City instead of Ravana's Golden Sri Lanka. Prabhas, as Rama, who had not come out from his Bahubali machismo does not fit the role at all. He resembles more of an angry WWF fighter rather than a compassionate man. Saif Ali Khan, with his meagre height and weird hair cut, tried best to carry the role of the demon king Ravana to perfection. His methodical acting went for a toss, thanks to the poor direction and screenplay. Kriti as Sita didn't even serve as eye candy, as in Bollywood masalas. The most annoying character was that of Hanuman who looked straight from an animation game with an ugly VFX face. The makers have defended this version of *Ramayan* as inspired from the 'generation of social media' where language is not a deterrent. The current breed of filmmakers seem to be living in delusion, and *Adipurush* exemplifies just that. Worth skipping. Rating ★★☆☆☆

'IRON MAN' SHARES TRAUMATIC TIME IN PRISON

Robert Downey Jr, one of the most revered actors in Hollywood, has now detailed his time in the prison when he had spend a year in a place he calls the worst one he has ever been to. In 1999, RDJ was sentenced three years in the California Substance Abuse Treatment Facility and State Prison for the 1996 case, according to which he was found with cocaine in possession. The actor who was imprisoned in 1999 was released in 2000 on the condition of posting bail. But now if Robert Downey Jr's words are anything to go by, he has seen hell in that one year and one cannot even imagine an actor of this stature has gone through hardships that also include being mocked for getting into shower with underwear on backwards.



'WONDER WOMAN' GAL GIVES HOPES TO FANS

Gal Gadot, as the *Wonder Woman* in the former DCU, won hearts with her charming portrayal of the superhero role, but it all came crashing down when James Gunn and Peter Safran took over the studio as the new co-heads. Amongst others, they decided not to proceed with Patty Jenkins and Gadot's *Wonder Woman 3*. After that, she was seen in cameos in the other DCU films, and now she has reignited hopes in fans with her latest comment. Gal told said at a fan event that there is still a chance of revival of her character and franchise in the DCU. She said, "Things are being worked behind the scenes, and once the right moment arrives, you'll know about it."

DON'T STEAL OUR VOICES: DUBBING ARTISTS



Voice actors around the globe are mobilising against the unregulated use of artificial intelligence (AI) to generate and clone human voices that they fear poses a threat to their livelihoods. "We're fighting a very big monster," said Mario Filio, a Mexican artist who has done voiceovers for Hollywood star Will Smith, the Obi-Wan Kenobi character in *Star Wars* and the party-loving Lemur King Julien in the animated movie *Madagascar*. Under the slogan 'Don't steal our voices', more than 20 voice acting guilds from Europe and US have created the United Voice Artists coalition.

COMING SOON

KATAK The Brave Beluga

KATAK: THE BRAVE BELUGA While his peers have all turned white, Katak is still small and grey. To prove that he has grown up and to grant the last wish of his adored grandma, Katak departs on a perilous journey to the Great North. Genre: Animation Starring: Robert Naylor, Skylar Clark, Eleanor Noble Language: English

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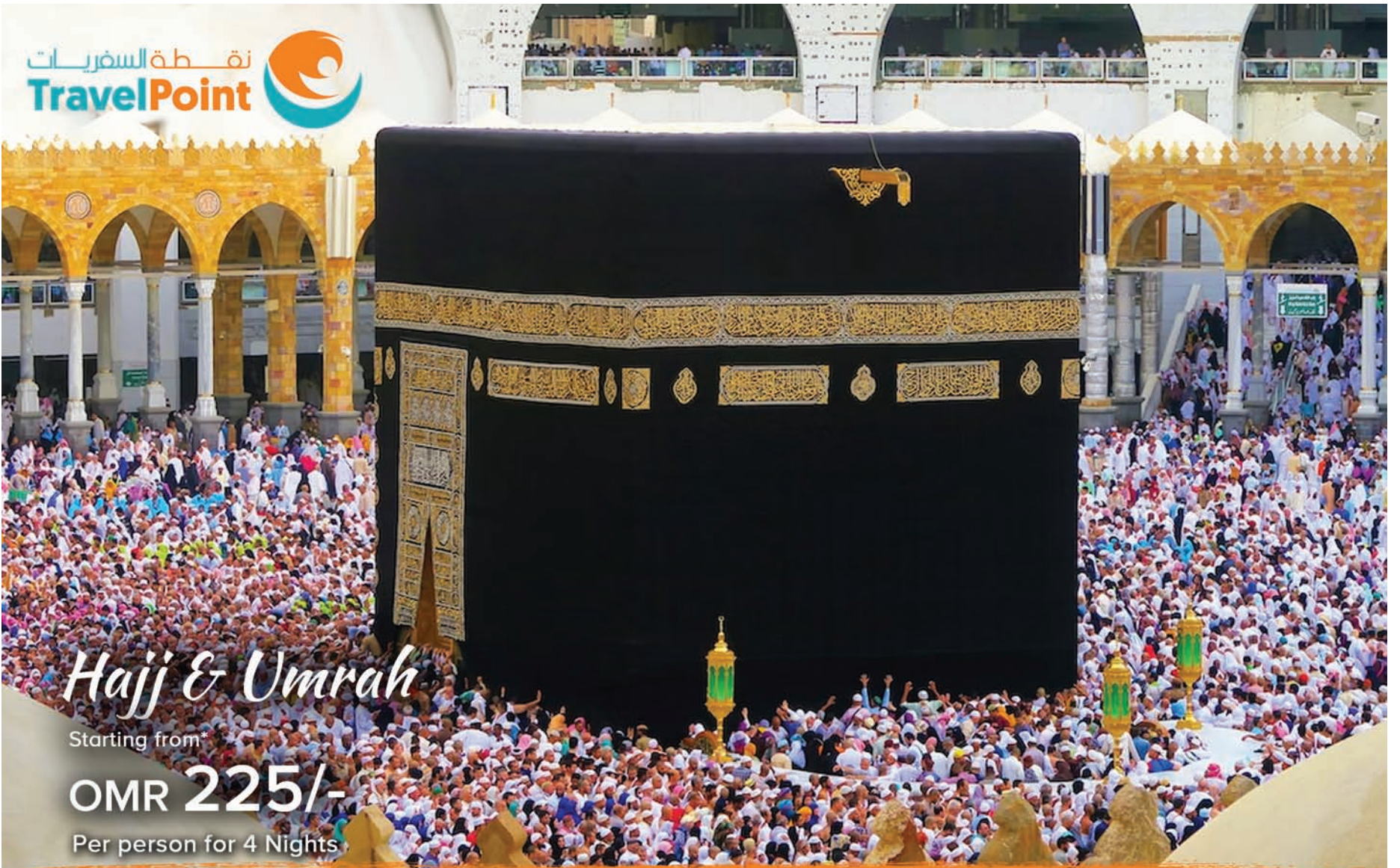
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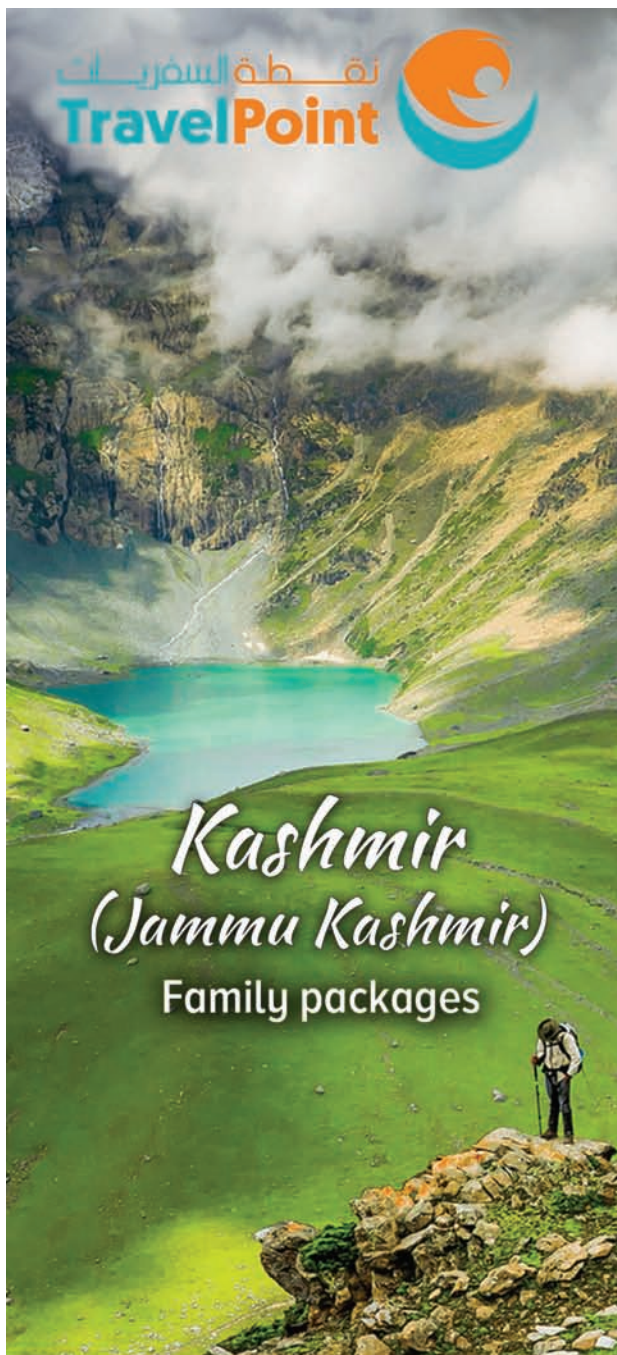


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