



His Majesty chairs Supreme Judicial Council meeting

His Majesty stresses on integration of judicial system with other govt units to serve public interest

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq chaired a meeting of the Supreme Judicial Council at Al Barakah Palace on Thursday. The meeting came in pursuance of His Majesty the Sultan's attention to promote judicial work after the issuance of Royal Decree No 35/2022 on governing the administration of judicial affairs.

During the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan underlined

the contents of the Royal Decree that are in line with the Basic Law of the State and goals of Oman Vision 2040.

His Majesty also stressed the importance of enhancing integration between all judicial authorities, and between these and other units of the state's administrative apparatus in a manner that serves the public interest.

His Majesty instructed all necessary legal measures to be taken

for the amendment of the laws and Royal Decrees related to judicial work in accordance with the provisions of the aforementioned decree.

His Majesty also underscored the importance of continuing to upgrade the judicial system and the governance of its procedures to cope with the government's approach towards digital transformation and meeting Oman Vision 2040.

His Majesty the Sultan also instructed the Appeals Administrative Departments and the Primary Administrative Departments to continue deliberating on cases brought before them until the beginning of the next judicial year; consideration of cases will resume in accordance with the aforementioned Royal Decree at the beginning of the judicial year.

ONA

PRESIDENT SISI TO VISIT OMAN

Muscat - President Abdel Fattah el Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt will pay an official visit to Oman on Monday. The Diwan of Royal Court stated that President Sisi's visit will 'consolidate the well-established relations between Oman and Egypt, besides supporting the existing bilateral cooperation between the two countries'.



Diba-Lima-Khasab road project tender announced

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Work on one of the most strategic and vital projects in the sultanate has kicked off with the announcement of a tender for designing and construction of the Diba-Lima-Khasab road in the Governorate of Musandam.

The Secretariat General of the Tender Board, in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, announced the 96km road on Thursday. The tender includes paving a 23km road link to the niyabat of Lima.

'The Diba-Lima-Khasab road is one of the most vital projects in Musandam to connect the wilayats and villages of the governorate. Once complete, it will open new areas for urban, economic and commercial development in the governorate and revitalise tourism,' ONA stated.

Considered one of the most complex road projects ever to be undertaken in the Gulf region, the road will run through some of the most difficult terrain in Oman characterised by rising moun-

Once complete, it will open new areas for urban, economic and commercial development in the governorate and revitalise tourism

tains and plunging wadis.

The project was initially planned over the mountains with as many as nine tunnels, aggregating a total distance of 21km, in addition to 14 bridges, nine major junctions and 11 minor junctions, ballooning overall cost of construction.

In February 2021, however, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq directed authorities to proceed with the implementation of the Diba-Lima-Khasab road project 'finding alternative routes'.

In a statement, the Diwan of Royal Court said the road will play a vital role in easing traffic, facilitating movement of people and serving the overall goals of development.

Real risk of multiple famines in 2022: UN

Berlin, Germany - There is a 'real risk' of multiple famines this year, UN chief Antonio Guterres said on Friday and urged ministers meeting on food security in Berlin to take practical steps to stabilise food markets and reduce commodity price volatility.

"We face an unprecedented global hunger crisis," Guterres told a ministerial conference titled 'Response to the Multiple Challenges to Global Food Security' in Berlin via video. "The war in Ukraine has compounded problems that have been brewing for years: climate disruption, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the deeply unequal recovery."

He warned of unprecedented global hunger crisis, with 276mn facing food insecurity, calling for export recovery and debt relief.

"This was already apparent



Antonio Guterres

when I visited the Sahel region of Africa last month. Leaders warned me that unless we act now, a dangerous situation could turn into a catastrophe. The Horn of Africa is also suffering its worst drought in decades."

According to the World Food Programme, in the past two years, the number of severely food-insecure people around the world has more than doubled to 276mn.

Agencies

Karwa Motors to produce electric buses in future

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Karwa Motors celebrated the official opening of its bus factory in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm on Thursday.

The ceremony was held under the patronage of H E Sultan Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, in the presence of Ali Ahmed al Kuwari, Qatari Minister of Finance.

Built on an area of 568,000sqm, the factory is designed to manufacture three different types of buses - city, school and intercity - ranging in size from 8m to 12m. "The factory is equipped to manufacture electric buses in the future. Its facilities have been designed to go with the trends and the changes taking place in this sector," said Ibrahim bin Ali al Balushi, CEO of



(Supplied photo)

Built on an area of 568,000sqm, the factory is designed to manufacture three different types of buses

Karwa Motors.

The production capacity of the factory is 700 buses per year. Capacity can be increased to six buses per day by increasing the

number of working hours and shifts. The factory's workfloors, facilities and service stations are designed to accommodate additional production lines in the fu-

ture, Balushi added.

Dr Saad bin Ahmed al Muhanadi, chairman of Karwa Motors, informed that the company is the product of strategic partnerships between Oman and Qatar which reflect the strength of political, economic and commercial ties between the two countries.

Karwa Motors is an invest-

ment of RO71mn, of which Oman Investment Authority owns 30 per cent and Mowasalat Qatar, the state-owned transport company of Qatar, has a share of 70 per cent.

Balushi added that the company is distinct from other factories in the region owing to its high-tech production lines, quality inspection facilities and tests that ensure high quality of products.

Founded with the aim of transferring bus manufacturing technologies to Oman, making it a manufacturing hub, Karwa Motors aids in enhancing added local value and localisation of industry, contributing to development and economic diversification in the sultanate.

Karwa Motors recently started exporting the first batch of buses to Qatar for World Cup 2022.

Read Muscat Daily
Stay Informed



R024
1 YEAR
(Actual price: R052)
R015
6 MONTHS

SUBSCRIBE NOW

Toll free no: 80076000
E-mail: customer@apexmedia.co.om
Call Shamshad: 99104345

an apex media منشور PUBLICATION للاعلام

www.apexmedia.co.om

WORLD DRUG DAY

Ensuring a world free of drug abuse

Muscat - The sultanate will join the rest of the world on Sunday to mark International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, or World Drug Day, observed on June 26 annually, to strengthen action and cooperation in achieving the goal of a world free of drug abuse.

This year's programme includes holding exhibitions and awareness lectures directed towards the community, implemented by the Directorate General of Combating Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of Royal Oman Police across governorates.

The directorate stressed that the scourge of drugs affects all segments of society, promoting crime and delinquency in most countries. 'It has social, economic, health and security dimensions; the world and international organisations work with all their energy to combat it.'

It added that an international report issued by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) indicates that there are major developments in drug crimes worldwide, whether through the emergence of new types of narcotic substances or advanced methods of manufacturing, concealment and smuggling.



'ROP has begun opening regional and international channels in the field of drug control to strengthen international partnership and cooperation in combating this scourge and confronting it'

gling.

Regarding the efforts of the Narcotics Control Team to monitor and control drug use, the directorate said it conducts operations by analysing local and international situations and 'developing necessary plans to

clamp down on smugglers, dealers and promoters of these toxins'.

Oman has been praised regionally as well as internationally for the efforts of the directorate in going beyond the local scope of combating the

menace. 'ROP has begun opening regional and international channels in the field of drug control to strengthen international partnership and cooperation in combating this scourge and confronting it.'

According to UNODC, the theme for the day in 2022 is 'Addressing drug challenges in health and humanitarian crises'.

'From war zones to refugee camps to communities torn apart by violence, people in all parts of the world are in dire need. This year, UNODC is addressing transnational drug

challenges stemming from situations of crisis,' it stated.

The UN agency continued to advocate protection of the right to health for the most vulnerable, including children and youth, people using drugs, people with drug use disorders, and people who need access to controlled medicines.

'Do your part by sharing real facts on the drugs situation - from health risks and solutions to tackle the world drug problem to evidence-based prevention, treatment, and care resources in times of crises,' it added.



Expat fined RO2,000 for selling tobacco: CPA

Our Correspondent Muscat

An administrative fine of RO2,000 has been imposed on an expatriate for selling chewing tobacco in Barka, according to the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA).

A statement issued by CPA said, 'The Consumer Protection Department in South Batinah Governorate arrested an expat worker who traded in chewing tobacco, which is in violation of the Consumer Protection Law and its Executive Regulations.'

The expat was selling the tobacco in a residential neighbourhood in the wilayat of Barka.

CPA, in cooperation with the Police Command of South Batinah Governorate, arrested the expat and seized a large quantity of tobacco.

'The expatriate confessed to the crime and legal procedures have been completed against him. Accordingly, an administrative fine of RO2,000 was imposed. The seized tobacco will be destroyed in accordance with Consumer Protection Authority controls and procedures in force.'

The authority called on the public to report any violations that come to their notice through the authority's various communication channels.



Environmentalists raise concern over burning trees

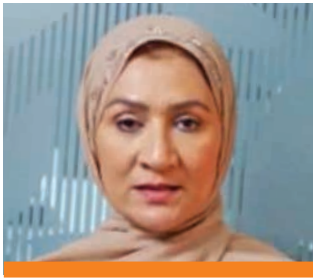
Our correspondent Muscat

There is need to spread awareness in society and adopt stricter measures, such as doubling the fine for violations, to stem the rise in incidents of burning rare trees.

There were three separate incidents of burning rare trees in an eight-day period this month. In the most recent incident on June 23, Environment Authority specialists from the governorates of Dhahirah and Dakhliyah, in cooperation with the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA), put out a fire in an al alan tree (*Juniperus Excelsa*) in Jabal al Sara in the wilayat of Ibbi. Two other al alan trees were damaged in the fire, an Environment Authority official informed.

On June 21, CDAA personnel were able to extinguish a fire that broke out in a cluster of wild trees also in Ibbi. 'Firefighting teams of Dhahirah governorate managed to control a fire that broke out in a group of wild trees in Jabal al Sara in Ibbi,' a CDAA official said. Earlier on June 16, Environment Authority (EA) was alerted about another al alan tree torched in the Daan Busaitteen area of Jabal Akhdar. The EA, in cooperation with CDAA in Dakhliyah, succeeded in putting out the fire.

Speaking to Muscat Daily,



Fires from grilling and cooking pits near trees spread due to mistakes and the lack of sufficient awareness among tourists

SUHAILA NASSER AL KINDI

Suhaila Nasser al Kindi, head of the tender, contracts and procurement department at be'ah, said, 'Unfortunately, fires from grilling and cooking pits near trees spread due to mistakes and the lack of sufficient awareness among tourists.'

She pointed out the need to spread awareness among community members to avoid starting fires near rare trees, allocation of places for barbecue and imposing fines on violators. 'We also need to step up awareness campaigns during khareef in Salalah, completely ban barbecues in areas of wild trees, and increase vegetation cover in places



where trees were burned,' Suhaila said.

According to Ahmed Jabooob, environmental activist from Dhofar, EA is responsible for protecting these trees and it must take strict action against violators.

'It doesn't take much effort as long as EA personnel are given permission to fine violators. Park rangers need to monitor campers to ensure they leave no fires behind,' said Jabooob.

Ali Akak, another environmental activist from Dhofar, suggested volunteer teams coordinate with the concerned authorities to organise awareness campaigns during khareef, particu-

larly in Salalah. 'Authorities must continue to spread environmental awareness among members of society, double penalties for violations, and monitor fires more closely in tourist hubs.'

Burning and cutting wild trees are violations under the Environmental Protection and Pollution Control Law for which perpetrators can be fined and imprisoned.

According to the Environmental Protection and Pollution Control Law No 114/2001, the offence invites imprisonment of up to three months, and a fine of not less than RO500 but not exceeding RO5,000, besides confiscation of tools.

Denso opens first authorised service centre in Oman

Our Correspondent Muscat

Denso Corporation, global manufacturer of automotive components, launched its first authorised common rail fuel injection service centre in Oman in Misfah on Thursday.

Danat al Misfaha Trading will be Denso's authorised common rail fuel injection service centre in the country and distribute Denso diesel components.

The service centre was inaugurated by Naoyuki Okuya, managing director of Denso Middle East and North Africa.

Speaking at the launch ceremony, Okuya said, 'Denso Corporation was born in Japan, spun off from Toyota Motor Corporation in 1949. We are a global manufacturer of automotive components offering advanced automotive technologies, systems and products.'

Denso made its foray into the



Gulf in Dubai followed by Saudi Arabia and Oman.

'Denso Dubai has been dedicated to aftersales and automotive service since 2010, and continues to expand the service network and provide technical training to the Middle East and Africa region to contribute to customer satisfaction as one of its important company missions,' said Okuya.

Parts will be directly sourced

from Japan for the Misfah centre and incorporated by expert technicians trained by Denso at the centre, Okuya informed.

Present at the opening were Hameed S, managing director of Danat al Misfaha Trading, Ali Quran, service senior assistant manager of Denso, Saurav Lam-sal, executive - sales and marketing of Denso, and Mohammed Jadallah, service engineer of Denso, among others.



MoE appoints 354 teachers for new academic year

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Education (MoE) has completed procedures for appointment of 354 teachers in Dakhliyah governorate for the 2022/23 academic year in various disciplines.

Salam bin Salem al Toobi, director, Department of Administrative Affairs, Dakhliyah, said the appointments committee received the appointees at a number of halls in the wilayat of Nizwa.

The committee met the

teachers in groups based on the subjects they would teach to complete the administrative process and conducted interviews over a period of five days.

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) announced that it has raised the number of beneficiaries of the teachers' preparation and qualification programme recently from 1,500 to 1,982, increasing the number of candidates by 482.

MoL is aiming to provide 35,000 job opportunities through recruitment, replacement and training for citizens in 2022.

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	43	28
Doha	45	32
Kuwait City	46	31
Manama	41	31
Muscat	39	31
Riyadh	45	29

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	3.55am
Sunrise	5.22am
Duhr	12.15pm
Asr	3.32pm
Maghrib	7.02pm
Isha	8.25pm

SEND YOUR COMMENTS TO
muscatdaily@
apexmedia.co.om



KHOULA HOSPITAL



THE ROYAL HOSPITAL

Congestion in parking lots of city's hospitals needs urgent attention

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Despite the Ministry of Health's efforts over the years to build new infrastructure and increase the number of parking spaces in hospitals, some hospitals in the city urgently need to enhance public car park facilities within their premises.

"Hospitals such as The Royal hospital and Khoula Hospital continue to witness traffic jams

in the parking area every day even after the ministry increased the parking spaces and built multi-storey parking facilities," Sultan al Rawahi, a resident of Seeb, told *Muscat Daily*.

Pointing out public carelessness, he said, "Some people park their cars in undesignated areas, especially in The Royal Hospital. This is a violation of traffic rules and results in traffic jams. Such people are fined from time to time by the ROP."

Hospitals such as The Royal hospital and Khoula continue to witness traffic jams in the parking area every day even after the ministry increased the parking spaces and built multi-storey parking facilities

SULTAN AL RAWAHI

Rawahi hopes the ministry builds more multi-level car parks in government hospitals, besides a new hospital in the wilayat of

Seeb. "It is, after all, one of the biggest wilayats in the sultanate in terms of population."

Badr al Riyami, a visitor to

Khoula Hospital, noted that the ministry has indeed increased the number of parking spots in the hospital "but the problem is that people prefer to park closest to the hospital, maybe because of the heat or being late for appointments".

He urged the ministry to consider building shaded car parks and providing a facility to transport patients from the parking lots that are far away from the hospital entrance.

According to Marhoon al Saidi, a private sector employee, parking space in public hospitals is insufficient, which forces some visitors to park in undesignated areas. "We need to build modern hospitals that keep pace with needs," said Saidi.

In March this year, Khoula Hospital got 281 more parking spaces. This was provided in co-operation with Muscat Municipality and the Ministry of Health. "With this, the total number of

parking spots in the hospital increased to 899. The project was implemented for the convenience of hospital visitors who struggled to find parking spots, reduce frequent congestion near the hospital and prevent random parking of vehicles," stated the municipality.

In July 2021, The Royal Hospital started a service to transport patients from its car parks to the hospital buildings during working hours.



Rains in several parts of Oman; CDAA cautions against swimming in sea

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The wet spell that started on Wednesday continued on Saturday with areas across several governorates witnessing thunderstorms and scattered rains.

The General Directorate of Meteorology stated on Saturday that there were chances of sporadic rain and occasional thunderstorms accompanied by active winds on Saturday night, especially in the mountainous areas of the governorates of Dakhliyah, North Sharqiyah and South Sharqiyah.

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) warned people against venturing into flooded wadis as rain of varying intensity fell in several wilayats in the governorates of Dhahirah,

Dakhliyah, North Sharqiyah and South Sharqiyah on Friday, leading to overflowing wadis.

In its forecast for Sunday, the Met Office stated that partly cloudy skies were expected along the coastal areas of Dhofar governorate and adjoining mountains with intermittent drizzle. 'Mainly clear skies are forecast over the rest of the governorates with high clouds advection. Chances of convective clouds development and isolated occasional rain and thunder-showers are expected over the Al Hajar Mountains and adjoining areas towards afternoon.'

Additionally, there are chances of dust rising over the desert and open areas, the Met Office added. 'Chances of late night to early morning low level clouds or fog patches are pre-

dicted over parts of the coast of the Arabian Sea and Sea of Oman.'

The Arabian Sea will be rough along the coast with maximum wave height of 3m and moderate along the coast in other parts with maximum wave height of 1.25m.

CDAA warned the public against swimming in the sea due to predicted high waves and strong currents in the Arabian Sea. In an alert, the authority said, 'Due to high seas and accompanying sea currents during this time of the year, in conjunction with the effects of the khareef season, the authority calls on citizens, residents and visitors to Oman to be cautious when picnicking, especially on beaches from Al Ashkarah to Dhofar governorate.'

Part of Al Hafa Waterfront project in Salalah to open in August

Muscat - Visitors to Salalah for khareef will have a new attraction to experience. National Development and Investment (Asaas), which is implementing the Al Hafa Waterfront Development Project in Salalah, has stated that it will open a part of the project on trial basis in August.

According to a statement, Asaas is working to open the walkway and some shops on the waterfront in August that will add 'a wonderful experience' to visitors to the area.

'The trial opening will give visitors to the Governorate of Dhofar during khareef season a glimpse of the project. According to a planned schedule, project completion is expected during the first quarter of 2023,' Asaas stated.



The work carried out is within a usufruct agreement that the company signed with the government, which stipulates the establishment and development of a souq in the Hafa area of Salalah.

'As per the terms of the agreement, the company has developed a framework for the project that was agreed upon with the relevant authorities, including the establishment of a heritage market inspired by the

architectural style of the old neighbourhood and the market area with the aim of highlighting the historical role of this commercial area while preserving the identity, heritage and culture of the area.'

Sea cucumber fishing, trading banned for 3 years

Muscat - H E Dr Saud Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, issued a ministerial decision on Thursday banning fishing, possession and trade of sea cucumbers for three years.

According to the decision, any type of activity involving sea cucumbers - buying, selling, transporting, storing and exporting - is prohibited during the embargo period.

The ministry has continued to ban fishing of sea cucumbers for the last several years. Last year, it had extended the ban for a year on March 26. A decision issued in early 2019 banned fishing sea cucumbers for two years (2019-20), which was an extension of a similar decision in 2018.

According to the ministry,



the ban has been issued to check dwindling numbers. The primary species harvested in Oman is the sandfish (*Holothuria scabra* called 'feik albahar' in Arabic, meaning sea jaw).

According to a study by Khalfan al Rashdi and Dr Michel Claereboudt of Sultan Qaboos University, over 21 Holothurian species have been recently recorded in the shal-

low waters of Oman. Of these, only *Holothuria scabra* is exploited commercially, costing RO1.5 a piece. These are found in the western side of Masirah Island and Mahout Bay, which are characterised by large, shallow beds of sea grass with fine sand in sheltered lagoons.

The first official record of the exploitation of *Holothuria scabra* in Oman was reported over a decade ago.

'Unfortunately, this exploited stock followed the same rapid decline as most exploited populations of sea cucumber elsewhere. Overfishing evidences include a rapid decrease in population density which has been critically reduced to less than one individual per hectare as reported not only in Oman, but in many parts of the world,' the researchers reported.

Oman's oil exports jump 16% amid growing output

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's daily average production of crude oil further increased in May. Oil output continued to remain above 1mn barrels per day (bpd) mark during the first five months of 2022, up by more than nine per cent in comparison to the daily average output recorded in the same period of last year.

Oil production during January – May period of this year increased to 1.042mn bpd compared with 953,400 bpd in the corresponding period of 2021, the data released by National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed.

The sultanate's total oil production in the first five months of 2022 grew by 9.4 per cent to 157.46mn barrels compared with 143.96mn barrels in the same period of 2021.

Of the total production, crude output jumped by 12.9 per cent year-on-year to 124.89mn barrels during January – May period this year from 110.59mn barrels in the same period of last year, while condensates output decreased 2.4 per cent to 32.56mn barrels during these five months.

Oman's total oil exports grew by 16.3 per cent during January – May period of 2022 to 135.82mn barrels compared with 116.74mn barrels exported in the corresponding period of 2021.

The sultanate's total oil exports for the full year 2021 had inched up 0.7 per cent to



288.9mn barrels against 287mn barrels in the previous year.

Exports to China, the biggest buyer of Oman's crude, accounted for 78 per cent of the sultanate's total oil exports during the first five months of this year, lower than its shares in the previous months.

Oil exports to China, the biggest buyer of Oman's crude, accounted for 78 per cent of the sultanate's total oil exports during the first five months of 2022

In absolute terms, however, Oman's oil exports to China rose 7.2 per cent to 105.97mn barrels during first five months of this

year compared to 98.83mn barrels in the same period of the previous year.

On the other hand, crude exports to India jumped by 65 per cent to 21.8mn barrels in the first five months of 2022 compared with 13.21mn barrels in the same period of 2021.

just a million barrels in the same period a year ago.

The average price at which Oman sold its crude during the first five months of 2022 surged to US\$80 per barrel against US\$54.8 per barrel recorded for the same period of 2021.

The highest monthly average price of Oman crude this year was recorded in May at US\$111 per barrel, while the average price for April stood at US\$92 per barrel, the NCSI data showed.

With global oil prices continuing to remain above US\$100 per barrel amid Russia – Ukraine conflict, Oman crude prices in recent months rose to their highest level in more than eight years.



Madayn opens Facility Building in Samail Industrial City

Muscat – The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) inaugurated the Facility Building and Masar Service Centre in Samail Industrial City under the auspices of Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO of Madayn, and in the presence of CEOs and officials representing public and private entities in Oman.

Developed at a cost of nearly RO4.5mn and featuring more than 16,000 sqm of total area, the Facility Building in Samail Industrial City consists of eight floors with a rental area exceeding 12,000 sqm. The building will offer space dedicated to public and private bodies, commercial stores, banks, cafes and restaurants, food court, telecom companies, among other services.

Masar Service Centre was inaugurated on the ground floor of the Facility Building in Samail Industrial City to enhance the level of services offered to investors by accelerating and simplifying procedures, reinforcing ties with partners to provide integrated services to investors, as well as strengthening relations with the investors to ensure a safe and

ideal business environment. Masar features an integrated platform to obtain approvals, permits and licenses necessary for investment projects under one umbrella and within a specific timeframe.

A cooperation agreement was signed on the sidelines of the Facility Building opening ceremony between Madayn, represented by Samail Industrial City, Shumookh Investment and Services, and Industrial Innovation Academy.

Designed for dedicating space in the Facility Building to incubate, support and empower SMEs, the agreement was signed by Eng Dawood bin Salim al Hadabi, director general of Samail Industrial City, Eng Musallam bin Juma'a al Hudaifi, CEO of Shumookh Investment and Services, and Dr Ayman bin Abdullah al Fudhaili, CEO of Industrial Innovation Academy.

The agreement also points to the participation of these SMEs in workshops and events to enable the owners to run their projects efficiently and successfully, as well as organising promo-

tional campaigns for the incubators through various marketing platforms.

This cooperation agreement comes along the lines of Madayn's efforts to support and develop the SMEs in the sultanate's various governorates, and demonstrates the Academy's keenness to support and empower the growth of SMEs throughout their various development phases.

Meanwhile, Madayn is implementing several key projects in Samail Industrial City including the medical fitness examination project, which is expected to be opened in December this year, in addition to the Medical Clinic. Madayn is also implementing the infrastructure complementary project in Samail Industrial City. This includes a dual-lane road linking Samail Industrial City with the expressway, where the completion rate of this project has touched 89 per cent.

This year, Samail Industrial City has received 10 industrial, service and commercial investment applications, of which seven got localised.

MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

MSX closes lower as industrial, services stocks fall

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) last week closed lower amid declines in industrial and services sector stocks.

The MSX30 Index ended the week lower by 0.18 per cent. Among sectoral indices, Financial Index was the only index ending higher by 0.91 per cent. Industrial Index and Services index closed lower by 1.27 per cent and 2.19 per cent, respectively. MSX Shariah Index closed down by 0.82 per cent.

Local news

►Sohar International Bank disclosed on the MSX that it has sent a letter of intent to the board of HSBC Bank Oman on June15, proposing a merger of the two banks. Additionally, Sohar International announced that its due diligence process for merger with Bank Nizwa is progressing (talks that began in November last year and CBO's approval for due diligence received in January this year). If these two mergers go through successfully, then the combined entity is expected to surpass BankDhofar in its asset size (as of the first quarter) at RO8.06bn to become the second-largest bank of Oman in terms of total assets, after Bank Muscat which had total assets of RO12.8bn at end of the first quarter of 2022. If only Sohar International and HSBC combine, then the total assets of the combined entity will be RO6.6bn. If only Sohar International and Bank Nizwa combine,

then the total assets of the combined entity will be RO5.6bn, still larger than BankDhofar.

►Oman National Engineering & Investment Company (ONEIC) last week said that Oman Water & Sewage Water Services Company (member of Nama Group) has extended to ONEIC the contract for collection of water bills in the area of its domain with a maximum cap value of RO2.5mn for the period of 18 months commencing on June 1, 2022. ONEIC also informed its shareholders that an arbitration panel has issued its award on June 21 to the benefit of ONEIC versus one of the electricity companies pertaining to one of the billing contracts. The award ordered to pay the claim value amounted to RO4,021,044 and the interest rate at 6.5 per cent from July 2020 till full payment in addition to the arbitration fees and the expert fees. ONIEC added that the RO4mn of this amount is registered in the books as receivables and not covered by provisions.

►The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) signed a land lease agreement with Hyport Duqm Co for the implementation of the downstream part of the green hydrogen and ammonia production facility backed by a joint venture of OQ's alternative energy unit and DEME Group of Belgium. It follows the signing last September of a similar land lease pact for the up-



stream component of the project, which has since enabled the start of preliminary engineering studies and site data collection linked to the implementation of the mega green energy project at the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

►Oman's economy is projected to grow by about 4.5 per cent in 2022, benefiting from increased hydrocarbon production and continued recovery of non-hydrocarbon activities, according to a new report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF said Oman's economy is strengthening and inflation has been contained so far. Real GDP grew by 3 per cent in 2021, largely driven by the buoyant hydrocarbon sector. A staff

team from the IMF, led by Daniel Kanda, visited Muscat during June 5-12, 2022 to discuss economic developments, the outlook, and the country's policy priorities. In a statement Kanda said the sultanate's inflation turned positive to 1.5 per cent in 2021 and is projected to increase to 3.7 per cent in 2022, given rebounding economic activity and rising global inflationary pressures.

►The volume of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Oman rose by 19 per cent to reach more than RO17bn at the end of the first quarter of 2022 compared to the same period in 2021. The volume of FDI at the end of the first quarter of this year reached RO17.94bn compared to the

same period in 2021, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The United Kingdom came at the forefront in FDI into the Sultanate of Oman, with total investments from the UK amounting to RO8.49bn, followed by the US at RO2.66bn and by the UAE at RO1.23bn. ►Oman's tourism sector is expected to witness a strong recovery in 2022 following normalisation of international travel. The non-Omani hotel guests saw a surge of 137.6 per cent year-on-year in the first four months of 2022. The number of hotel guests recorded an increase by 34.7 per cent to reach 511,429 and the occupancy rate increased to 14.5 per

cent in April alone. The FIFA World Cup in Qatar is a great opportunity for Oman to boost tourism. Oman Air is set to operate shuttle flights between Qatar and Oman, making it more accessible for foreign fans to also visit Oman when the World Cup is hosted.

GCC markets

Bahrain's gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 5.54 per cent at constant prices and 19.67 per cent at current prices during the first quarter of 2022 over last year, according to the Information and E-Government Authority.

It was mainly driven by the growth in the non-oil sector which surged by 7.78 per cent at constant prices supported by the recovery in the activity of hotels and restaurants, said the authority, citing official estimates.

This showed an improvement in its economic performance, recording a growth of 26.57 per cent at constant prices and 35.23 per cent at current prices, stated the report.

Egypt and Saudi Arabia have signed 14 agreements valued at US\$7.7bn during a visit to Cairo by Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Egypt's General Authority for Investment and Free Zones said in a statement on Tuesday. Saudi Arabia has provided billions of dollars in financial support since Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi came to power, and the new round of in-

vestments comes as Cairo struggles with the economic knock-on effects of the Ukraine war. Even before the Ukraine war hiked commodity prices, hit tourism revenues and prompted investors to exit emerging markets, there were concerns over Egypt's current account and budget deficit.

Global news

Global worries is deepening, as China's Covid-19 limits and Russia's invasion of Ukraine disrupt supply chains, manufacturing growth is slowing from Asia to Europe, while the looming possibility of a US recession poses a fresh threat to the world economy.

Demand for manufactured goods decreased in June at the fastest rate since May 2020, when the coronavirus pandemic was spreading, as a result of high prices in the euro zone.

As a result, S&P Global's headline factory Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) dropped to a nearly two-year low of 52.0 from 54.6. A Reuters poll had predicted a more modest drop to 53.9 and the index nudged closer to the 50 mark separating growth from contraction.

Jerome Powell, chair of the US Federal Reserve, said on Wednesday the central bank was not trying to engineer a recession in the United States to stop inflation but was fully committed to bringing prices under control even if doing so risks an economic downturn.

US recession would be 'necessary price' to defeat inflation: IMF

Washington, US - With inflation rising sharply, and the Federal Reserve raising interest rates, the United States is facing an increased risk of a downturn, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said Friday.

But any temporary pain caused by a recession would be "a necessary price to pay" to defeat damaging inflation, she said.

The Washington-based crisis lender again slashed its US growth forecast to 2.9 per cent, from the 3.7 per cent forecast in April, which was cut from the rate predicted at the start of the year.

The world's largest economy rebounded strongly from the pandemic downturn, but that has come with "unwelcome side effects" of rising prices, Georgieva said.

While the IMF is confident the Fed's rate hikes will bring down inflation, "We are conscious that there is a narrowing path to avoiding a recession," she said in a statement.

The Fed last week implemented the biggest increase in its benchmark lending rate in nearly 30 years, as part of its aggressive effort to quell inflation that is at a four-decade high and squeezing American families struggling with rising prices for gasoline, food and housing.



The US economy already was seeing strong demand clashing with supply snarls due to pandemic lockdowns in China and elsewhere, when Russia invaded Ukraine, which has intensified the inflationary pressures.

For 2023, growth is expected to slow to 1.7 per cent, but "narrowly avoid" a recession, according to the annual review of the US economy, known as the Article IV consultation.

The IMF chief said the battle against inflation must be the "top priority" despite the impact a US slowdown might have on the global economy.

"Success over time will be

beneficial for global growth, but some pain to get to that success can be a necessary price to pay," she said in response to a question from AFP.

Georgieva met with US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Fed Chair Jerome Powell and the officials "left no doubt as to their commitment to bring inflation back down."

Nigel Chalk, deputy chief of the IMF's Western Hemisphere division, said any US recession is likely to be short-lived, given the stockpile of savings and strong business and household balance sheets, and the strong labor market.

"All of those things would help support the economy," he said. "So if it was hit by negative shock, it should pass relatively quickly and have a relatively quick recovery afterwards."

Roll back tariffs

The IMF also urged Washington to remove punitive trade duties imposed under former president Donald Trump - something President Joe Biden said he is considering and Yellen appears to favor.

"Especially at a time when inflation is high and supply chains are strained... we can see clear benefits in rolling back the tariffs

that were introduced over the last five years," Georgieva said in a statement.

However, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai has said the steep tariffs on China offer negotiating "leverage" with Beijing which she is reluctant to give up.

The IMF report said removing tariffs on steel, aluminum, and a range of products from China "would support growth and help reduce inflation."

The rapid US recovery, helped by low interest rates and hefty government aid, had domestic benefits, reducing poverty and creating more than 8.5mn jobs since the end of 2020, according to the IMF analysis.

It also offered a boost to the pandemic-ravaged global economy, but fund economists cautioned that it will be "tricky" to avoid recession.

"The stakes are clearly high. Misjudging the policy mix - in either direction - will result in sizable economic costs at home and negative outward spillovers to the global economy."

However, the report pushed back against comparisons to the inflationary era of the 1980s, noting the economy and the central bank actions are "markedly different."

AFP

Pandemic aid not primary driver of US inflation: Fed chief

Washington, US - US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell has downplayed the idea that government pandemic aid was the key factor fueling US inflation, instead blaming a confluence of global issues including the war in Ukraine.

While stimulus spending was a factor, "a great deal of the price increases that you saw were a matter of supply being unable to meet demand" and "when demand hits fixed supply, what happens is prices go up," Powell told lawmakers.

US inflation has surged to a 40-year high, picking up speed in recent months as the fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine has sent fuel and food prices soaring, with gas at more than US\$5 a gallon for the first time - putting strain on American families.

Opposition Republicans have blamed President Joe Biden's US\$1.9tn American Rescue Plan approved last year for the blistering price increases.

But Powell, who was testifying Thursday before a House committee, and others have noted that inflation is a global issue.

The Fed for months said price pressures were expected to be transitory, but Powell admitted that in hindsight, the Fed underestimated rising inflation.

The US central bank last week announced the sharpest interest



Jerome Powell

rate increase in nearly 30 years and promised additional similar moves as part of its aggressive push to douse the inflation fires.

The moves have raised concerns the Fed could trigger a recession in the world's largest economy.

Powell said the commitment to bringing inflation back down to two per cent from 8.6 per cent in May is "unconditional" but he cautioned that the Fed does not have "precision tools" and acknowledged there is a risk of a downturn.

Avoiding that "has become significantly more challenging with the events of the past few months, particularly the war," he said.

But even if unemployment moves above the current historic low of 3.6 per cent, even a jobless rate of 4.3 per cent "is still a very strong labor market," he noted.

AFP

Italy says reduced dependence on Russian gas to 25%

Milan, Italy - Italy has managed to reduce its dependence on gas imported from Russia to 25 per cent from 40 per cent last year as it diversifies suppliers, Prime Minister Mario Draghi said Friday.

"The measures the government has put in place since the beginning of the (Ukraine) war are starting to pay off. In other words, other gas suppliers are beginning to replace Russian gas," Draghi told the Italian media in Brussels following the EU summit.

To reduce its dependence on Russian gas following its invasion of neighbour Ukraine, Italy signed a major agreement with Algeria in April on increased gas supplies.

Discussions have also been held with Qatar, Angola and Mozambique.

In addition, Italy was thinking ahead to the winter season when gas demand is higher, and "storage is going very well", Draghi said.

The measures planned by Italy "guarantee that there will be no (gas) emergency" in winter, he said.

According to Italy's Ecological Transition Minister Roberto Cingolani, Italian stocks are currently at 55 per cent and should reach 90 per cent by the end of the year.



Mario Draghi

"We are almost out of danger," he said Friday in an interview with La Stampa daily.

Italy's tone contrasted with concern expressed by Germany, which is similarly heavily dependent on Russian gas.

Germany is facing a gas shortage and will have to make "very difficult social choices" for households and businesses if Russian supplies fall further, Economy Minister Robert Habeck warned Friday.

AFP

Germany faces 'difficult decisions' in gas shortage

Frankfurt, Germany - Germany would be confronted with "difficult societal decisions" in the event of a gas shortage, its economy minister said Friday, as Russian supplies of the fuel dwindle.

"When there is not enough gas some industries that need gas will have to be turned off," Economy Minister Robert Habeck told magazine Der Spiegel.

On Thursday, Habeck raised the alert level under Germany's emergency gas plan after supplies of gas from Russia were slashed, bringing Europe's economy one step closer to rationing.

Russian energy giant Gazprom last week reduced deliveries via the Nord Stream pipeline to Germany by 60 per cent, attributing the move to a delayed repair.

Germany has dismissed the gas company's technical justification, seeing a "political" motive behind the decision: retaliation for the West's support for Ukraine following Moscow's invasion.



German Minister of Economics Robert Habeck

The reduction in supplies has put Germany in a position it had never been before, Habeck said, with both German industries and households both reliant on energy imports to meet their needs.

Without enough gas, Germany would "have to make difficult societal decisions", Habeck said, adding that there were "no good decisions only less wrong ones".

The consequences for some sectors could be "catastrophic" with the effects felt for "a long

time", the minister said.

Germany has mandated for its gas storage facilities to be 90 per cent full by the beginning of December.

But projections put forward by Habeck's ministry on Thursday showed the target was unlikely to be met if gas flows continued at their new lower level.

In response to the supply squeeze, Germany has reactivated mothballed coal power plants to take the burden off gas.

Habeck, a member of the German Green party, called the coal restart "painful".

The "half step back" meant Germany would need to make "bigger steps" forward in future to wean itself off fossil fuels and onto renewables, he said.

The government has also encouraged energy savings among private households and industry to mitigate the impact of potential shortages.

Germany's 41mn households turning their heating down in winter a little would make a big difference, Habeck said, while warning that not everyone would be able to save more.

Under European rules, a gas rationing plan would see households prioritised over industry, a situation not designed for long-term shortages, he said.

"Our goal is not to let anyone go to the dogs," Habeck said, but warned a "difficult winter" could mean "companies must stop production, workers lose their jobs" and "people become poorer".

AFP

Big Oil meet with US govt cordial but no miracle gas price fix

Washington, US - Biden administration officials and oil industry executives huddled in Washington on Thursday to discuss potential steps to address runaway gasoline prices, and while both sides called the talks constructive, no concrete plans for relief emerged.

High prices at the pump are weighing on American consumers - and damaging President Joe Biden's approval rating.

Heading into the gathering, Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said she hoped the meeting would result in refiners boosting gasoline supplies to lower prices for the summer vacation driving season.

Afterwards, the Energy Department said the talks had had a "productive focus on dissecting the current global problems of supply and refining," and promised "ongoing dialogue" to "alleviate the current supply and price challenges."

Similarly, the American Petroleum Institute and American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers called the meeting a "constructive discussion about ways to address rising energy costs and create more certainty for global energy markets."

Chevron, Phillips 66 and Shell all released upbeat statements, with Shell US President Gretchen Watkins praising Granholm for setting a "collaborative tone" by noting that Shell and others had shifted some refining capacity to produce biofuels.

But no practical steps to immediately boost supply were revealed.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre called the gathering a "first step."

"Clearly we want to come up with solutions," Jean-Pierre



told a press briefing. "There's going to be other steps to get there."

Uneasy ties

Biden and the oil industry have an uneasy relationship, in part over the White House's efforts to restrict drilling in some federal

areas due to environmental concerns, and decisions like canceling the Keystone pipeline project on his first day in office.

The US president has also blasted industry leaders in recent days over skyrocketing profits and their reluctance to boost capital spending.

Industry leaders released a letter to Biden ahead of Thursday's meeting that alluded to his upcoming trip to Saudi Arabia, urging him to visit US refineries and other industry sites to understand the potential for "American-made energy solutions."

But with Biden's approval ratings plunging due to soaring inflation, the president has turned to the industry for relief.

Gasoline prices currently stand at US\$4.94 a gallon, a bit below all-time highs, but up more than 60 per cent from the year-ago level.

In a letter earlier this month to oil giants, Biden said high fuel prices were a key factor in the "intense financial pain the American people and their families are bearing."

He urged ExxonMobil, Chevron and other industry play-

ers to "provide concrete, near-term solutions that address the crisis."

In response, Chevron Chief Executive Mike Wirth pledged to work with the administration, but faulted Biden's comments that "at times vilify" the industry - drawing a Biden quip that Wirth was being "mildly sensitive."

The price surge follows Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which exacerbated an already tight energy supply situation, sending crude oil prices sharply higher.

The rise in prices also reflects the diminished state of refining capacity after the industry mothballed some plants during Covid-19 lockdowns, and did not reopen them amid uncertain long-term growth prospects with the buildup of electric vehicles.

Biden's policy thus far has centered on a huge increase in crude oil from the Strategic Pe-

troleum Reserve.

On Wednesday, the US president proposed a temporary fuel tax break, a measure that received a lukewarm reception on Capitol Hill.

For energy specialist Andrew Lebow of the Commodity Research Group consultancy, "there is very little refiners can do at this point."

"If they could produce more, certainly they would be given that the margins are incredible," he said. On Wednesday, Granholm acknowledged that building new refineries could not be done overnight, but said the administration wanted answers about plants that had been taken offline.

She also wanted to talk about supply chain issues, questioning if the industry could help on that front.

AFP

GHSO executive committee meets to discuss Green Hydrogen Summit

The executive committee, overseeing the delivery of a substantive and impactful edition of the Green Hydrogen Summit Oman (GHSO) later this year, met recently to review and fine-tune the conference agenda of the 3-day event.

Chaired by Mazin al Lamki, CEO - Energy Development Oman (EDO), the executive committee meeting was also attended by Abdulrahman al Yahyai, CEO - Oman Society for Petroleum Services (OPAL), Nasser al Rizeiqi, director of Hydrogen Policies and Strategies - Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Almunther Abdullatif, in charge of Balance Sheet Optimisation and Corporate Strategy at OQ, Mohammed al Mukhaini, Oman LNG, and Abdullah al Harthy, chairman - Birba Energy, a press release said.

In his introductory remarks, Lamki underlined the importance of green hydrogen to Oman's sustainable energy and economic future. He noted in this regard the significance of this year's Green Hydrogen Summit Oman in bringing together industry leaders and technology providers to share ideas that will benefit Oman's energy transition



journey and bring together the necessary elements that would position Oman as an important player in the global Green Hydrogen sector.

Enabling Oman's advantages in this sector will only be possible if all stakeholders are transparently deliberating solutions to current challenges while managing risks and uncertainties. Current preliminary assessment

suggests that Oman has the potential to become one of the most competitive Green Hydrogen producers in the region.

Competitive financing and low-cost green power generation are key factors for success while maintaining an investor-friendly business environment. Other key factors that bode well for strong investment inflows into this sector are the country's ad-

vantageous geographical location and political stability, he further stressed.

A draft agenda prepared for the committee's consideration was deliberated upon by the members. They stressed the need for the conference proceedings to make a strong pitch to attract FDI into the green energy sector and to position Oman as an investment destina-

tion for green industries as well.

A final programme that reflects the broad objectives of Oman's national green energy strategy will be published after obtaining the requisite approvals from the authorities concerned.

GHSO 2022 will be held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) Muscat from December 5 - 7. As Oman's signature platform for green hydro-

Lombard survey shows lack of succession plans in ME

Lombard Odier, a leading global wealth and asset manager with a 50-year legacy in the Middle East providing wealth planning solutions, has revealed results from the second instalment of its Middle East Investment Survey, which focusses on succession planning among high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) in the region.

Key findings reveal that HNWIs are aware of the importance of effective succession planning, but less certainty lies in whether wealthy families have implemented the succession plans required to meet the varied needs of their complex family structures, a press release said.

Given the outsized economic contribution of family-run businesses in the Middle East, strong family governance is critical for the region's continued economic success. However, whilst 87% of the 300 HNWIs surveyed believe their family business is structured to allow for efficient intergenerational wealth transfer, only 24% say they already have an estate plan in place for all of their private assets.

The difference between younger and older business owners is significant. Over half of older respondents (55%) say they have a full estate plan in place, compared to just 9% of younger respondents. Conversely, more than one third of younger respondents (36%) do not have any kind of estate plan in place at all but are interested in it, while a further 26% expressed no interest. The remaining respondents have a partial estate plan in place.

In a region where family is the dominant social institution, the wealth of HNW individuals is often intertwined with their family business, its governance and Islamic values. This topic of family governance reveals a discrepancy between younger and older HNWIs - 66% of older business owners said they had a formal and rigid system of governance in place, compared to 50% of younger respondents. Younger HNWIs also show a greater degree of openness to change.

Abu Dhabi and Dubai to host 16th Najah Fair

The 16th edition of Najah Fair, the leading higher education event, is set to take place in both Abu Dhabi and Dubai, addressing the needs of high school and postgraduate students from across the UAE.

The first round of the fair is to be held at the Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre (ADNEC) from October 16 to 18, followed by the second round at Dubai World Trade Center (DWTC) from October 23 to 25, a press release said.

Launched 15 years ago, Najah attracts the participation of over 150 universities from 20 countries every year and welcomes more than 16,000 students and parents. Powered and supported by the Ministry of Education, the fair is a leading platform for student recruitment in the UAE, with its data affirming that 96% of exhibitors are keen on actively participating in its events, while 85% consider the fair an integral part of their marketing strategy.

Several renowned universities have already confirmed their

participation in Najah 2022, including United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), Khalifa University, Zayed University, Al Ain University, New York University Abu Dhabi, and Canadian University Dubai, along with various international universities from the United States, Canada, Australia, UK, Japan, Malaysia, and Europe.

"All stages of education receive considerable attention, and most prominently higher education, due to its major contribution in preparing the next generation of leaders, in line with the UAE's national agenda. Aiming to promote the last 50-year journey of leadership and achievements, these educational efforts also strive to enhance leadership, excellence, and innovation for the next 50 years, along with improving the education ecosystems as per the highest standards worldwide," said Dr Mohammad Ibrahim al Mualla, undersecretary of Academic Affairs for Higher Education at the UAE Ministry of Education.

Oman Oasis announces winners of 'World Art Day' contest

Committed to fostering opportunities for the budding talents within the nation, Oman Oasis recently concluded an art competition that celebrated World Art Day.

The contest was well received with over 120 digital arts, drawing, and sketches on various social media platforms from children across age groups, which were divided into two categories of 6 to 12 years and 13 to 18 years, a press release said.

The competition, based on World Art Day, allowed participants to create artworks based on their imagination. A total of seven participants emerged victorious, five were selected from the first category and two were picked from the second. The winners were felicitated with various gifts and participation certificates.

Speaking on the competition, N S S Subramaniam, COO, said, "Oman Oasis has always been at the forefront of engaging and encouraging the evolving young community within the country. We are particularly excited to be able to support the promising young minds in this way and to



celebrate a world occasion with elan and pomp. The competition was also a space for children to

express themselves artistically, to flourish and be recognised."

Oman Oasis celebrated the

winners by also showcasing their artwork on its social media platforms.

RR announces a new expression for Phantom Series II

'Phantom occupies an unrivalled position at the very apex of the luxury world. As our pinnacle product, it represents the very best of Rolls-Royce design, engineering and craftsmanship - a perfect blend of vision, creativity, the finest materials, skill, patience and precision. With Phantom Series II, we have retained and carefully protected everything our clients love about this superlative and luxurious item - subtle, yet meaningful enhancements reflect their evolving tastes and requirements," said Torsten Muller-Otvos, CEO, Rolls-Royce Motor Cars.

"Phantom has always been viewed as the 'best car in the world'. Our Bespoke capabilities mean that, for our clients, it can be the best car for their world,



too," he added.

Rolls-Royce products enjoy an expansive lifetime, ultimately becoming timeless expressions of good taste, beauty and luxurious perfection. Phantom occupies a unique, pinnacle position in this regard, being revered for its

timeless elegance, a press release said.

The eighth-generation of Phantom was presented in 2017. In creating the new expression, Rolls-Royce designers and engineers have been guided by the requests of clients, who have im-

plored Rolls-Royce not to make any major changes to an already iconic motor car. In answer to these client demands, only the lightest of design touches, embellishments, and adaptations have been incorporated. Indeed, it is not about what

should be changed, but in fact, what should be preserved and protected.

The most obvious and important feature retained is Phantom's commanding presence. This has been further enhanced by a new polished horizontal line

between the daytime running lights above the Pantheon Grille. This gives Phantom a new and assertive modernity, reflecting its driver-focused character.

A subtle geometric change to the Pantheon Grille makes the 'RR' Badge of Honour and Spirit of Ecstasy mascot more prominent when viewed from the front. The grille itself is now illuminated, a feature debuted and popularised in Ghost. The headlights are graced with intricate laser-cut bezel starlights, creating a visual connection with the Starlight Headliner inside, and adding further surprise and delight to Phantom's night-time presence.

Phantom's side profile retains Rolls-Royce's signature short front and long rear overhang,

long wheelbase and broad c-pillar, the latter giving greater privacy for occupants. The silhouette preserves the elegant key lines running from the Spirit of Ecstasy to the tapering rear tail. The 'split-belt' line begins at the front fender and curves gently towards the rear door, emphasising the car's long dash-to-axle proportions, before falling gently towards the lantern-like rear lamps. The heavily undercut 'waft line' creates a strong shadow, visually signalling the marque's unequalled 'Magic Carpet Ride'.

The side profile is further enhanced with a suite of new wheels. A 3D, milled, stainless steel wheel with triangular facets is available to commission in a fully or part-polished finish.



Al Hashar Travel adopts Amadeus technology

Al Hashar Tourism and Travels has selected Amadeus technology to offer its customers a range of new technology-driven solutions. The multi-year partnership with Amadeus will deliver increased productivity, optimised customer service, and time-saving reporting solutions.

Muslim Mahmood Moham-

mad Ahmed, general manager, said, "Our customers deserve and expect outstanding services from Al Hashar. This new partnership with Amadeus will propel the company firmly into a brighter, technologically advanced future of enhanced productivity and customer service, ensuring we remain the leading

travel provider in the Sultanate, while improving our efficiency and profitability."

Ernesto Sanchez Beaumont, managing director, Amadeus Gulf, added, "Today, the overall travel dynamic has evolved due to the pandemic. We must adapt to the emerging needs of the travel industry as we seek to

renew travel and build it back better than it was before. Sitting at the heart of the travel ecosystem, Amadeus is committed to supporting forward-thinking customers such as Al Hashar Travel to reconnect with travelers and bring back the joy of travel. By working together, we can get the world traveling again."

The solutions being adopted include the cloud-based Amadeus Selling Platform Connect, a customisable online booking and fulfillment platform designed to meet Al Hashar's specific needs. Implementing Selling Platform Connect enables Al Hashar's travel counsellors to service travelers around the clock.

Bank Muscat's Woqar improves financial inclusion

Financial inclusion or the process of ensuring easy access to financial services to all sections of society is a crucial enabler of strong economic growth and development. As the sultanate's leading financial services provider, Bank Muscat attaches great importance to social responsibility initiatives aimed at improving financial inclusion as a means of strengthening the country's progress and development.

The bank launched the Woqar Banking Package in 2020 after studying in great detail and understanding the needs of retirees who were working in both government and private institutions, a press release said.

Earlier, the pensioner segment was not served by any bank in Oman for flexible-term finance or credit cards based on their pension, and Bank Muscat was the first bank to extend a financing solution for retirees in Oman.

With attractive rates of interest starting at just 3.25 per cent and a maximum loan tenure up to 10 years for personal loans and 25 years for home loans, the Woqar package, which also includes credit cards, allows retirees to live their lives with dignity and at their own terms.

Meanwhile, Bank Muscat continues to launch new financial products and services targeting different sections of society in step with the changing needs of its customers and the development of Oman.

Abdullah Tamman al Mashani, general manager - Products, Bank Muscat, said, "Easy access to various financial products and services like digital transactions, savings, credit and insurance, is very important for strengthening the sultanate's



Abdullah Tamman al Mashani

economy. This is all the more important in the case of groups that have traditionally fallen short of the financial inclusion net. By launching the 'first of its kind' Woqar banking package in 2020, Bank Muscat has reiterated its commitment to provide innovative banking services to all members of society in a sustainable manner.

We are delighted with the response to Woqar and thank our customers for their strong confidence and feedback, which reinforces other supportive actions undertaken by the bank to improve financial inclusion in the sultanate."

Bank Muscat is continuously debuting new financial products and services targeting different sections of society in line with the changing needs of its customers and the nation's progress and development.

With its large network of 146 branches and over 800 e-channel devices spread across all governorates as well as Omnichannel mBanking and Internet Banking, a state of the art Contact Centre and an e-payment gateway, the bank reaches out to the maximum members of society in its ongoing efforts to serve the nation better, every day.

Inspire CEO Forum begins on June 29

The 100 Inspire CEO Forum, to be attended by 100 chief executive officers from various sectors in the Sultanate of Oman, will begin at Rozna Restaurant from Wednesday.

The forum has been organised jointly by Oman Arab Bank and Alizz Islamic Bank under the direct supervision of Oman In-

ternational Development and Investment Company (Ominvest). The three organising entities are focused on devising and implementing a common strategy that promotes economic diversification in Oman and target the economic sectors that can potentially create a sustainable value in light of the recent eco-

nomical rebounds and ease of the restrictive COVID pandemic measures by the government, a press release said.

The forum will feature several working papers which will try to draw up a roadmap for a more effective private sector contribution in developing the economy, organisations, com-

munity and individuals. Within the current scenarios, the role of the private sector is hugely indispensable to stand hand in hand with the government in its efforts to materialise the visions and focus on the initiative with the long-term benefit.

Nowadays, CEOs are expected to go beyond their re-

spective organisations and adopt shared visions and opportunities to promote business growth in coming years against the backdrop of the global challenges. This approach can only be attained through innovative insights and by charting new ways that create added value to the local communities.

Muscat Bay launches new lifestyle campaign

Muscat Bay, Oman's only fully integrated resort village, recently launched its new lifestyle campaign to promote various new additions and amenities it is bringing to the market as it moves to full resort operations.

The campaign focus is to celebrate the everyday holiday experiences curated at Muscat Bay with the new slogan 'Live the extraordinary. Everyday, beautifully visualised in the newly developed website www.muscatbay.com, a press release said.

Nestled in between the majestic Al Hajar Mountains and the beaches of the Gulf of Oman, Muscat Bay is a unique offering for discerning individuals and families from across the world.

It features meticulously designed residential enclaves to suit every need along with shops, restaurants, a variety of leisure and sporting activities set amidst lush landscaped gardens and parklands, fronted by the 5 Star Jumeirah Muscat Bay beach resort.

As the region's award-winning global luxury hospitality brand, the about-to-open Jumeirah Muscat Bay will offer residents and visitors 206 spacious ocean-facing rooms and suites, summerhouses, and a Sanctuary Villa with a beautifully curated adventure wellness hospitality experience.

The resort will also offer exceptional dining, spa, fitness,

and leisure experiences entwined amongst breath-taking vistas of Oman's natural beauty. These facilities will also be available to Muscat Bay residents for the first time in Oman through the exclusive Resident's Club and Lifestyle Membership offerings.

Paul Jessup, SVP at Muscat Bay, said, "As a key player in driving quality tourism to the sultanate, Muscat Bay is now realising its promise as Oman's only luxury resort village.

Our special, boutique community is growing because it seems more people want an upgrade of their daily life. We have found that the market, after COVID-19, is making long term choices to invest in improving the quality of their daily lives by deciding to live at an address where everyday, simple luxuries like fresh air, stunning nature and luxury amenities are right on their doorstep."

The campaign will highlight the various residential enclaves on offer such as the Clubhouse Waterfront, Clubhouse Parkland, Island Nameer Villas, Wajd Senses Grand Villas, Bay residences & SkyGarden Penthouse, each built with clever engineering and contemporary Omani timeless designs.

Muscat Bay's resort village is a vibrant, yet serene brand that truly embodies inclusivity and offers a boutique luxury address for the discerning customer in the sultanate..

Tyreplus comes to Jalan Bani Bu Ali

MHD ACERE has announced the launch of Tyreplus' 9th service center in Jalan Bani Bu Ali.

After the success of Tyreplus in Al Wadi Al Kabir, Sohar, Barka, Sur, Azabia, Mabela, Nizwa and Salalah, the new service center is a chance to expand the business recognition, access a new market, and reach a wide cross-section of the local community in Jalan Bani Bu Ali.

The new service center in Jalan Bani Bu Ali is designated to provide customers with a broad array of car services, starting from routine car checkups, battery replacements, nitrogen tyre inflation, balancing tyres, wheel alignments, puncture repairs, car oil changes and many more services.

Car owners can arrange their appointments online at any Tyreplus branch using the website.



KPL Salalah attracts 21 cricket teams

A total of 21 teams are participating in the Konkani Premier League Salalah, which began on June 24.

The tournament, organised by Konkani Riders Team is sponsored by Hamdan Exchange, Sketch International, Galaxy Line Projects, Saham Al Janoob, Abu Malkah Trad, Dhofar Beverage, UGB, Mohammed Riyaz & Partner, and Al Nahdha, a press release said.

The draw for the tournament was held at Topaz Restaurant Salalah on June 22 in the presence of G M Rasdul Islam - business development manager,

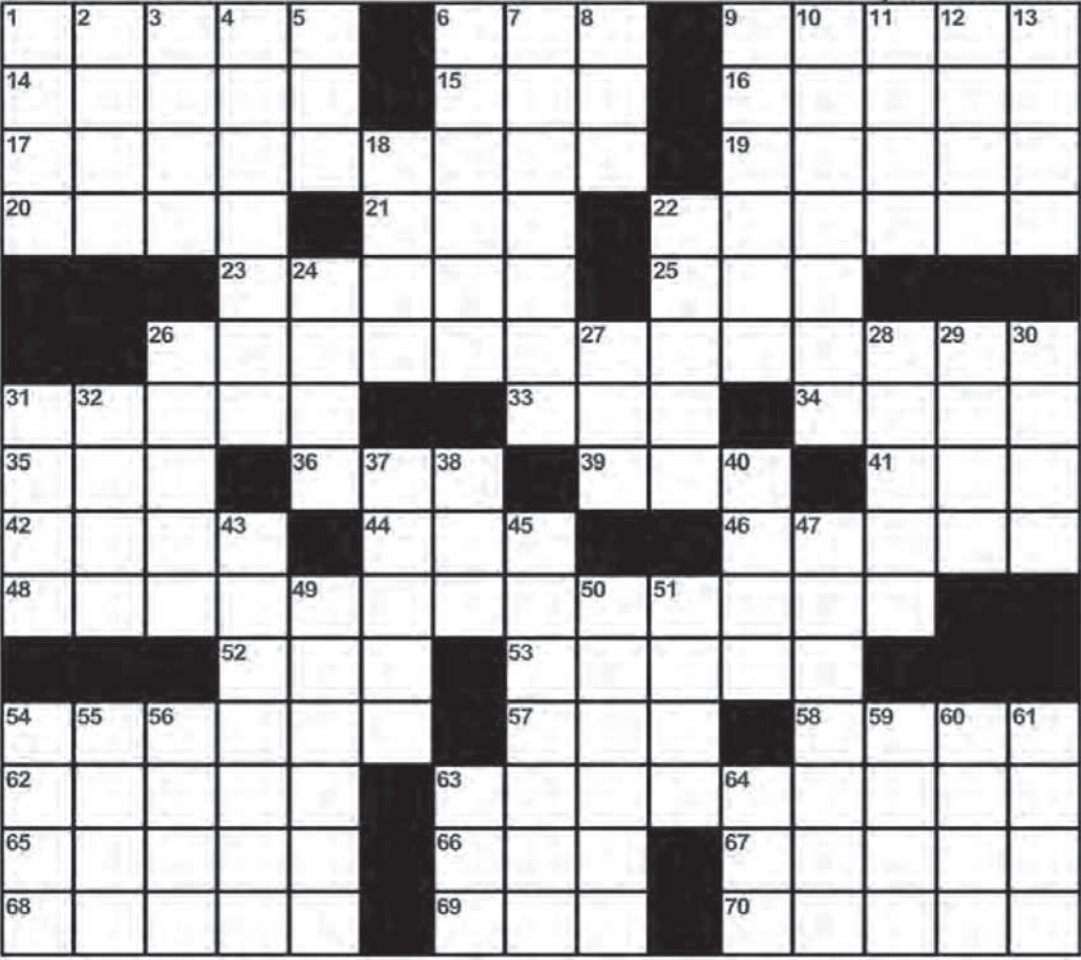


Hamdan Exchange, and Abdul Qayyum, PSM Coach and OC Umpire.

Twenty-one teams grouped under seven groups will be participating in the league, held on a knock out basis.

The groups comprise Group A (Konkani Riders, Telly Boys, Thanal), Group B (Oman Pharma, RCC, Al Seer), Group C (Konkani Riders A, Cheers, Mumbai XI), Group D (Terminator, Bangladesh Tigers, Sparrow), Group E (SKR, Razat XI, SCF), Group F (Royal Stricker's, ICC, MCC) and Group G (BD Star XI, Salalah Diabolos, Blue Star).

DAILY CROSSWORD

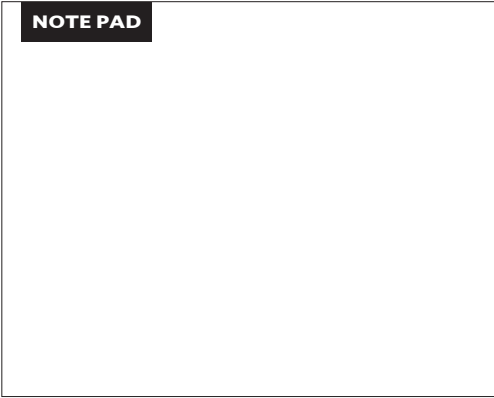


ACROSS
1) Counter in a debate
6) Opponent
9) Involuntary muscle contraction
14) NBA playground
15) One cause of inflation?
16) Sheer fabric
17) Gives in
19) It may be golden on a phonograph
20) "Look over here!"
21) Common Market abbr., once
22) Messy, as a room
23) Cyma_ (molding type)
25) Grazing grounds
26) Yaps foolishly
31) Parkinson's drug
33) Type of horse
34) Egg handler just before Easter
35) When dark comes o'er the land
36) Thumbs-down vote
39) Weight-room unit
41) Hawaiian gift
42) Transmitted
44) Veterinarian's patient

46) Poem of uneven couplets
48) Blabs
52) Be a contestant
53) More than drizzles
54) Locate, as data on a computer
57) Small newt
58) The Three Tenors, for example
62) Necklace trinket
63) Gives a false alarm
65) Author A.A.
66) Greek island
67) Head of a Muslim state (Var.)
68) Dazzling display
69) Fire remains
70) Square footage measures
DOWN
1) Sound hoarse
2) Historians' subjects
3) Ottoman VIPs
4) Remove bindings
5) Greek "T"
6) Diamond features
7) Some auto repair shop containers
8) " ... _ he drove out of sight"

9) Mick Jagger and band-mates, briefly
10) Danced at Oktoberfest
11) Adjutant
12) Fall's prelude
13) Satisfy, as demands
18) Narrowest bottle part
22) Arm bones
24) Enthusiastic liveliness
26) Metric measure of weight
27) Lazy poet's above?
28) Stocking material
29) Acorn, essentially
30) Lake that feeds the Niagara River
31) Subtraction word
32) Low-pitched
37) Church recesses
38) Up to the present
40) Menial worker
43) Greek eatery
45) Bullfighters
47) After peace is declared
49) Destiny
50) Like a clumsy lout
51) Web spot
54) Nadir's opposite
55) Stylish

56) "Safe!" or "out!"
59) Part in a play
60) Pelvic bones
61) Does in, in mob slang
63) Intelligence org.
64) Caribbean music



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
Your relationships could be more emotional today, and that's a good thing. It's time you realized how valuable the people in your life are. Gratitude swells in your heart.. When you see what could have been, you're thankful to be on this path that others have led you down. At this high point of relating, take a chance and ask for what you need. It will be an exhilarating act, full of self-affirmation and truth. You will come away a happier person.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
A "keep it to yourself" mode should be active today. Your opinions are valid and correct, but no one is in any mood to appreciate them. You'll make better use of your time if you channel your emotions into a creative pursuit, whether it's painting, cooking, dancing, or singing, it will benefit from the ideas you're anxious to get out into the world. It's a great day to enjoy friends and fun. Avoid banging your head against the wall with a bunch of folks who just don't get it.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
Imagine not having the technology you use today. How would it change things? One thing's for sure, the pace of your life would slow down considerably. Today, if you ache for that slower pace, seek out more face-to-face communication. Skip the emails, DMs, and texts. They can't accurately convey what you're trying to say, and you need to say something very important to someone special. Wait until you can see their eyes to tell them the news.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Which of these words is not part of the slogan that arose during the French revolution?

- A. Liberty
- B. Equality
- C. Charity
- D. Fraternity

02. Elliot Gould played whose father on the TV series Friends?

- A. Joey
- B. Chandler
- C. Ross & Monica
- D. Rachel

03. In 1456 a trial was held in Rouen in France, to rehabilitate whom?

- A. A sow, condemned of murder
- B. Margaret of Anjou, accused of intrigue
- C. Joan of Arc, accused of heresy and other matters
- D. Marie Quatrelires, condemned of adultery

Answers: 1.C 2.C 3.C

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
Enough is enough. You're in the mood today to stop procrastinating and start doing. This "can do" attitude will give you a lot of immediate energy to achieve a (seemingly) impossible goal. This time, you have everything in place to keep the momentum going, and you won't peter out after a few days. You've had a taste of success, and this will be your inspiration. Get creative about how you handle mundane tasks today.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Due to your special brand of know-how, you are a big part of an exciting development in a friend's love life. Unfortunately, you can't share the great news with the rest of the world just yet. This is one super secret that you simply can't spill or else! Once it's over, you can talk, but until then keep yourself distracted with new travel ideas or fun errands. If necessary, avoid the person who's most capable of squeezing (or charming) this wonderful information out of you.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
Deep inside of you lies all the resolve and ambition you need to make some major headway today. Be on the lookout for coworkers and other people who might be showing you a shortcut. Saving time is on your mind, so you'd be wise to devote time to finding the tricks you need to shave precious seconds and gain a little more breathing room. Any health concerns you've had should be speedily improving as well, all a testament to your discipline and positive thinking.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
There is a strong sense of camaraderie between you and your peer group right now. There is a real "us against them" type of feeling in this group, and it could be a very powerful tool for change. You and your people can make a significant impact because there is real strength in numbers. Just be careful that you don't get too caught up in the power rush. Mob mentality is never a good mentality to have.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Cast your critical eye on all your relationships today at work, in your family, and especially in your romantic life. There's nothing wrong. You just need to check in and make sure you're doing your part to keep the lines of communication open. Watch that you don't get too hard on yourself (as you are sometimes prone to do) if you've been a bit unavailable lately. Remember to treat yourself with the same gentle compassion you show to your friends and family.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
It's good news today. Real signs of progress will finally start to show, and you'll get a dose of confidence that propels you. You definitely deserve a break from the struggle, so plan a dinner or social outing with a few close friends who know what you've been going through. It will be a sweet celebration for all. Your success is something they've been hoping for too.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
Sharpen your vision today. Having a good eye will be invaluable. A dear friend needs your advice on a confusing situation. They're too close to it, and your nonsense detector is more accurate than theirs. Tell them the difference between the good and the bad. At work, there is a steady buildup of cons that are starting to outweigh the pros in a long-term situation. You might need to schedule a chat with a higher-up soon.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Your recent bold behavior wasn't typical, and it took guts to step out of your comfort zone like you did. Next time, temper your boldness with charm to achieve a more comfortable balance. You may not be receiving the positive reinforcement you deserve today, so seek it from the people you know will be your cheerleaders: your friends. Share your story and get a group conversation going.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
While you're deep in the thick of your work, you never notice the fact that it's dominating your life and squeezing out all your playtime. Today, if you get an unexpected cancellation, take it as a sign that you need to slow down. What a welcome relief! Finally, some free time. Whether you want to spend it alone or with your best buddy, schedule the time as soon as you can! Spontaneity has been missing in your life. Today gives you the chance to take it back.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

A	C	D	B
R	S	I	O
D	R	A	N
A	N	I	E

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Iran nuke talks to resume in days: Borrell

Tehran, Iran - Talks on reviving the Iran nuclear deal, which have been stalled for three months, will resume within days, the EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on Saturday during a surprise visit to Tehran.

"We will resume the talks on the JCPOA in the coming days... I mean quickly, immediately," Borrell told a news conference in the Iranian capital, referring to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Borrell made the announcement after a two-hour meeting with Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian on the second day of a previously unannounced visit to the Islamic republic. Amir-Abdollahian confirmed the resumption of the negotiations.

"We have had a long but positive conversation on global co-operation between Iran and the EU," Amir-Abdollahian said. "We will try to solve the problems and differences through the negotiations that will resume soon."

The Iran nuclear deal has been hanging by a thread since 2018, when then US president Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the accord and began imposing crippling economic sanctions on America's arch enemy.

The administration of incumbent US President Joe Biden has sought to return to the agree-



Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian (right) meets with Josep Borrell, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy at the foreign ministry headquarters in Iran's capital Tehran on Saturday (AFP)

ment, saying it would be the best path with the Islamic republic.

The talks began in April last year but stalled in March amid differences between Tehran and Washington, notably over a demand by Iran to remove its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps from a US terror list.

'Meaningful diplomacy'

On the eve of Borrell's trip, the

US pointman on Iran, Robert Malley, had 'reiterated firm US commitment to come back to the deal' over a meal with the EU diplomatic chief, according to the EU's coordinator for the talks, Enrique Mora.

"We remain committed to the path of meaningful diplomacy, in consultation with our European partners," Malley said in a tweet.

France, one of the six world powers that agreed the 2015

deal, had on Friday appealed to Iran to 'seize this diplomatic opportunity to conclude now, while this is still possible'.

Amir-Abdollahian said on Thursday that Iran was 'serious' about reaching an agreement while calling for 'realism from the American side'.

The nuclear deal reached with six major powers - Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the US - gave Iran relief from sanc-

tions in return for guarantees it could not develop an atomic weapon.

Iran has always denied wanting a nuclear arsenal.

Cameras removed

In April, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the United States still believed a return to the accord was 'the best way to address the nuclear challenge posed by Iran'.

Blinken warned at the time that the 'breakout time' for Iran to develop a nuclear bomb if it so chooses was 'down to a matter of weeks' after the deal pushed it beyond a year.

The International Atomic Energy Agency's board of governors adopted a resolution earlier this month censuring Iran for failing to adequately explain the previous discovery of traces of enriched uranium at three sites which Tehran had not declared as having hosted nuclear activities.

On the same day, June 8, Tehran said it had disconnected a number of IAEA cameras that had been monitoring its nuclear sites. IAEA chief Rafael Grossi later confirmed 27 cameras had been disconnected, leaving about 40 still in place.

The move by Iran, he warned, could deal a 'fatal blow' to the negotiations unless the UN nuclear watchdog's inspectors were given access within three to four weeks.

The visit by Borrell, his first to Tehran since February 2020, could be a determining factor in the fate of the deal.

During the talks in Vienna aimed at reviving the accord, Iran has repeatedly called for guarantees from the Biden administration that there will be no repeat of Trump's pullout.

AFP

Palestinian killed by Israeli soldiers

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories - Palestinian teenager died from his wounds hours after being shot by Israeli soldiers in the occupied West Bank, Palestinian sources said on Saturday.

Mohammad Hamad, 16, was shot and wounded on Friday evening near the town of Silwad, close to Ramallah in the northern West Bank, and died hours later, a Silwad councillor told AFP.

The teenager was near a road leading to the neighbouring settlement of Ofra when he was shot by Israeli soldiers, the councillor said.

An Israeli army spokeswoman said dozens of Palestinians had gathered near Silwad and that 'a number of suspects hurled rocks' at passing cars, 'endangering civilians'. "Soldiers at the scene operated to stop the suspects in accordance with standard operating procedures, using live fire as a last resort," she told AFP.

A Palestinian was hit, she added, without giving further details. The death comes amid a spike in Israeli-Palestinian violence. Nineteen people, mostly Israeli civilians have been killed in attacks by Palestinians and Israeli Arabs since late March.

AFP



Police secure the area after a shooting in Oslo on Saturday (AFP)

Two killed in Norway 'terror' shooting

Oslo, Norway - Oslo's Pride march was called off on Saturday after 'terrorist' shootings in the centre of the normally tranquil Norwegian capital killed two people and wounded 21 others.

Police arrested a suspect, a 42-year-old Norwegian man of Iranian descent, shortly after the shooting started around 1am (2300 GMT Friday) in three locations in central Oslo, including a gay bar.

"The police are investigating the events as a terrorist attack," police said in a statement.

Organisers of the Pride march that was due to take place on Saturday afternoon said they were calling it off.

'All events linked to Oslo Pride have been cancelled' following 'clear' recommendations by police, the organisers wrote on Facebook.

"We do not yet know the reasons for this terrible act, but to all the homosexuals who now are afraid and are in mourning, I say we are all with you," Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store said on Facebook.

Police said two people had died and 21 were wounded, including 10 seriously, and said two weapons had been seized.

The man arrested 'is suspected of homicide, attempted homicide and a terrorist act', senior police official Christian Hatlo told a press conference.

The terror charge comes because 'of the number of

wounded and killed, the number of crime scenes... and there is good reason to believe that he had intended to sow terror', Hatlo said.

Police received the first reports at 1:14am and the suspect was arrested five minutes later, police said.

Police said they were able to quickly apprehend the suspect thanks to the 'heroic contribution' of bystanders.

The shootings happened near the London Pub gay club, the Herr Nilsen jazz club and a take-away food outlet.

On Saturday, rainbow flags hung near the scene. Police presence was stepped up throughout the capital.

Norway's anti-terrorist service said on Twitter that it was looking into whether other attacks could be possible but that for the moment 'we have no indication of this'.

'Bleeding man on the ground'

"He looked very determined about where he was aiming. When I realised it was serious, I ran. There was a bleeding man lying on the ground," a woman who saw the incident told the Verdens Gang newspaper.

"There were a lot of injured people on the ground who had head injuries," another witness was quoted by the newspaper as saying.

AFP

US passes first major firearms bill in decades

Washington, US - US lawmakers broke a decades-long stalemate on firearms control on Friday, passing the first major safety regulations in almost 30 years, less than 24 hours after the Supreme Court bolstered the right to bear arms.

Gun regulation is a touchstone issue for both conservatives and liberals in the United States that has consumed national politics amid multiple mass shootings in recent years.

The Democratic-led House of Representatives voted to rubber-stamp a bipartisan Senate gun bill that - while modest - amounts to the first significant piece of legislation to regulate firearms since 1994.

"Let us not judge this legislation for what is not in it, but respect it for what it does. And what it does is save lives. And we are very, very proud of that," the top Democrat Nancy Pelosi said on the House floor.

Fourteen Republicans defied their leader Kevin McCarthy to cross the aisle and approve the 80-page package, which advanced from the evenly-divided upper chamber with cross-party backing late on Thursday.

That vote came hours after the Supreme Court's conserva-



Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi delivers remarks for a rally outside the U.S. Capitol on Friday (AFP)

tive majority had struck down a century-old New York law requiring permits for concealed-carry handguns.

The gun legislation includes enhanced background checks for younger buyers and federal cash for states introducing 'red flag' laws that allow courts to temporarily remove weapons from

those considered a threat.

Billions of dollars have been allocated to crack down on 'straw purchasers' who buy firearms for people who are not allowed them and to curb gun trafficking.

Limited scope of legislation

The deeply-divisive issue of gun control was reignited by two massacres in May that saw 10 Black supermarket shoppers gunned down in upstate New York and 21 people, mostly young children, slain at a school in Texas.

The Supreme court had voted along party lines, with the six Republican appointees in favour of bolstering the constitutional right to bear arms and the three Democratic appointees dissenting.

The ruling was hailed by campaigners for boosted gun rights, but took the shine off what was

expected to be a day of jubilation for weapons control activists.

Liberals had been celebrating the congressional action despite disappointment at the limited scope of the legislation, which doesn't include universal background checks and omits any ban on semi-automatic weapons or high-capacity magazines.

"This decision won't stop our grassroots army from doing what we've done for a decade: fighting to keep our families safe," added Shannon Watts, founder of gun safety group Moms Demand Action, said after the Supreme Court ruling was announced. "Just as we're breaking the logjam in Congress, we're going to work day-in, day-out to mitigate the fallout in New York and any other states impacted by this decision and elect gun-sense lawmakers up and down the ballot."

AFP

Probe sought into death of 18 African migrants

Nador, Morocco - Moroccan rights activists on Saturday demanded an investigation into the deaths of at least 18 African migrants who were among hundreds that tried a mass crossing into the Spanish enclave of Melilla.

The latest deadly drama on the doors of the European Union took place at dawn on Friday when around 2,000 migrants approached the Moroccan border with the tiny territory.

More than 500 managed to enter a border control area after cutting a fence with shears, Melilla authorities said in a statement.

Moroccan officials said late on Friday that 13 migrants had died of injuries sustained in the incursion, in addition to five confirmed dead earlier in the day.

'Some fell from the top of the barrier' separating the two sides, a Moroccan official said.

On Saturday calm returned to the border area, with Moroccan security forces lightly deployed along the frontier, in a forested area where no migrants were to



A member of the Moroccan security forces is seen on the border fence separating Morocco from Spain's North African Melilla enclave, near Nador in Morocco on Saturday (AFP)

be seen.

A local resident said several buses had passed through to take migrants away.

Others 'have probably moved away for fear of being displaced by the Moroccan authorities', Mohamed Amine Abidar of the AMDH rights group told AFP.

The AMDH has demanded a 'comprehensive, quick and serious enquiry to determine responsibilities and

shortcomings', and warned against burying the migrants' bodies until their deaths had been properly investigated.

Images on Spanish media on Friday had showed exhausted migrants lying on the pavement in Melilla, some with bloodied hands and torn clothes.

Speaking in Brussels, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez condemned the 'violent assault', which he blamed on 'mafias who

traffic in human beings'.

Migrant magnet

Melilla and Ceuta, Spain's other tiny North African enclave, have the European Union's only land borders with Africa, making them a magnet for migrants.

Friday's was the first such mass incursion since Spain and Morocco mended diplomatic relations last month.

The AMDH said it was 'a true

catastrophe that shows the consequences of the latest Moroccan-Spanish entente'.

In March, Spain ended a year-long diplomatic crisis by backing Morocco's autonomy plan for Western Sahara going back on its decades-long stance of neutrality. Sanchez then visited Rabat, and the two governments hailed a 'new stage' in relations.

The row began when Madrid allowed Brahim Ghali, leader of Western Sahara's pro-independence Polisario Front, to be treated for COVID-19 in a Spanish hospital in April 2021.

A month later, some 10,000 migrants surged across the Moroccan border into Spain's Ceuta enclave as border guards looked the other way, in what was widely seen as a punitive gesture by Rabat. Rabat calls for the Western Sahara to have an autonomous status under Moroccan sovereignty but the Polisario Front wants a UN-supervised referendum on self-determination as agreed in a 1991 ceasefire agreement.

AFP

Aid trickles in to quake-hit Afghan village

More than 1,000 people were killed in the quake - the country's deadliest in over two decades

Wuchkai, Afghanistan - A ruined village in eastern Afghanistan, just 10km from the epicentre of this week's deadly earthquake, is struggling back to life as aid trickles into the isolated region.

Wuchkai, three hours away from the nearest town of any substance, can only be reached by a narrow, rutted dirt road - with space for just one vehicle in places.

Isolated, without electricity and water, the village sprawls over a large basin surrounded by imposing hills and bisected by an almost-dry river.

Many of the village dwellings, workshops and stores were destroyed by Wednesday's 5.9-magnitude earthquake, whose epicentre was recorded on the other side of the hills that flank it.

More than 1,000 people were killed in the quake - the country's deadliest in over two decades - with Wuchkai alone accounting for at least three dozen.

Now the survivors are trying to find shelter in the ruins of their homes, desperately dependent on the aid convoys that have started to arrive.

"I ask and expect the world and the government to provide us with the basic things we need to live," says Raqim Jan, 23.



A child walks amid the ruins of houses carrying food received as relief material after the earthquake in Gayan district, Paktika province, on Friday (AFP)

Almost every family lost someone

Jan lost 11 members of his extended family when their single-storey dwelling caved in on them as they slept early on Wednesday.

Almost every family lost at least one member - and most lost many more - so they are coming together to share resources. Jan now lives with four other families - including 15 women and about 20 children -

in three large tents set up near their ruined homes.

Help has arrived, but he worries for how long it will last.

"The tents, food and flour that we have received for a few days are not enough," Jan says, as a

communal fire for cooking sends smoke spiralling above the makeshift campsite.

Nearby, children are playing - seemingly oblivious to their plight - while babies wait for attention.

I ask and expect the world and the government to provide us with the basic things we need to live. Almost every family lost at least one member - and most lost many more - so they are coming together to share resources

RAQIM JAN

A cow tied to a pole ruminates as chickens strut around the dusty compound, pecking at nothing in the dust.

The village men make occasional forays into the ruins of their houses, looking to salvage whatever valuables can be found in the debris.

But they tread gingerly, as any walls still standing are cracked - threatening to collapse at any moment - and aftershocks are still being felt.

A violent tremor killed five people in the same district early on Thursday.

Aid vehicles arriving

In the centre of Wuchkai, a steady stream of aid vehicles arrive, kicking up clouds of dust from roads that are finally drying after days of torrential rain.

While the big operators appear organised - such as the World Food Programme and Doctors Without Borders - smaller Afghan-led distribution is more chaotic.

Tempers flared as dozens of villagers scrambled over the back of a truck Thursday, trying to grab bags of beans that had been donated by a businessman from Kabul.

A platoon of armed Taliban grabbed one particularly exuberant young man and roughed him away in their vehicle.

Not far away, bent double under the weight of the bundle, Kawsar Uddin, 20, and his uncle carry a tent that will become the family's temporary home.

Faced with the influx of aid that is now arriving, Uddin is sceptical of the motivation and accuses aid organisations of staging 'photo ops'.

"They have distributed food and tents... but some are doing business on the blood of Afghans," he says.

AFP

Chinese leader Xi Jinping to attend Hong Kong handover celebration

Beijing, China - Chinese President Xi Jinping will attend events to celebrate 25 years since Hong Kong's handover to China, state media reported on Saturday, with the Communist Party looking to showcase its control over the city after crushing a democracy movement.

If Xi attends in person, the trip would be his first outside of the Chinese mainland since the pandemic began. But state media and Hong Kong officials did not explicitly say whether he would travel to the city or attend virtually. A trip would also coincide with the inauguration of Hong Kong's new administration, led by former security chief John Lee. The Chinese Communist Party places great importance on anniversaries, and Hong Kong's handover presents Xi with an opportunity to emphasise China's authority over Hong Kong after three years of political upheaval



China's President Xi Jinping (AFP)

there. Hong Kong is at the halfway point of the 'One Country, Two Systems' political model, which promised that the former British colony's way of life would remain unchanged for 50 years after its handover.

But a national security law imposed after huge and often violent pro-democracy protests in 2019 has seen dissent quashed, with scores of opposition figures arrested in an ongoing political crackdown.

The new Hong Kong government, to be sworn in on July 1, will be led by Lee, who oversaw the controversial police response to the democracy protests.

Lee on Saturday said he was delighted by the news of Xi's attendance and thanked the Chinese leader for his 'caring and support' for Hong Kong.

"Hong Kong is at the crucial stage of advancing from chaos to governance, and gradually towards prosperity," Lee said in a statement.

COVID concerns

Xi last visited Hong Kong in 2017 to swear in city leader Carrie Lam, a three-day trip marked by heavy public police presence.

China's top leaders have attended the swearing-in of every Hong Kong chief executive since the 1997 handover, but Xi has not left the mainland since January 2020, when the coronavirus

first emerged from the central Chinese city of Wuhan.

Ongoing virus outbreaks in both mainland China and Hong Kong have prompted doubts over whether Xi would risk travelling, with Beijing committed to a zero-COVID strategy.

State news agency Xinhua reported on Saturday that Xi 'will attend a meeting celebrating the 25th anniversary of Hong Kong's return to the motherland', but did not specify whether it would be in person. Two top officials in the incoming Hong Kong administration tested positive for the coronavirus on Thursday and had to go into quarantine.

Daily case numbers in Hong Kong have climbed to nearly 2,000, though hospitalisations have remained low, with outgoing city leader Lam earlier reassuring the public that the situation was 'not an alarm bell'.

AFP

Farewell for Amazon expert

Recife, Brazil - Bruno Pereira, the Brazilian Indigenous expert murdered in the Amazon with British journalist Dom Phillips, was given a moving sendoff on Friday by members of one of the tribes he had spent his life and work defending.

Dressed in straw and feather loincloths and headgear, members of the Xukuru Indigenous group chanted funeral hymns and mourned at a solemn ceremony near Recife, where Pereira was born, in the northeastern Pernambuco state.

A photograph of 41-year-old Pereira was perched on his coffin, also draped with the flag of his favorite football team, Sport Recife.

"It is a great loss not only for us but for all of Brazil, for those who fight to defend Mother Nature, which is to defend life," chief Marcos Xukuru told AFP.

Pereira and veteran correspondent Phillips, 57, went missing on June 5 in a remote part of



Brazilian indigenous expert Bruno Pereira's wife Beatriz Matos (centre) mourns during his funeral in Paulista, Brazil, on Friday (AFP)

the rainforest rife with illegal mining, fishing and logging, as well as drug trafficking.

'Shot for exposing illegal fishers'

Phillips was the author of dozens of articles on the Amazon and a long-time contributor to The Guardian newspaper and other major news organisations.

He was traveling to the Javari Valley as part of research for a book with Pereira as his guide,

when they were ambushed.

Police say the men were shot, Indigenous groups claim in retaliation for exposing illegal fishers in the region.

Pereira, an expert at Brazil's indigenous affairs agency FUNAI, had received multiple threats from criminals with their eye on isolated Indigenous resources. The men's bodies were handed over to their families on Thursday.

AFP

Shanghai reports zero COVID cases in months

Beijing, China - China reported zero new COVID-19 infections in Shanghai for the first time since March on Saturday, as the country's latest outbreak subsides after months of lockdowns and other restrictions.

China is the last major economy committed to a zero-COVID strategy, stamping out all infections with a combination of targeted lockdowns, mass testing and long quarantine periods.

The economic hub of Shanghai was forced into a months-long lockdown during a COVID surge this spring driven by the fast-spreading Omicron variant, while the capital Beijing shuttered schools and offices for weeks over a separate outbreak.

But infections have slowed to a trickle in recent days, with Shanghai on Saturday reporting zero locally transmitted cases for the first time since

before the outbreak in early March.

"There were no new domestic COVID-19 confirmed cases and no new domestic asymptomatic infections in Shanghai," the city said in a statement.

The lockdown on Shanghai's 25mn residents was mostly lifted in early June, but the metropolis has struggled to return to normal as individual neighbourhoods have reimposed restrictions over new infections.

Millions of people in the economic hub were temporarily locked down again two weeks ago after the government ordered a fresh mass testing campaign.

In Beijing, restrictions imposed in May were later eased as cases declined, but tightened again this month after a nightlife-linked infection cluster emerged.

AFP

Ecuador's leader warns of coup over protests

Quito, Ecuador - Violent clashes between Indigenous protesters and police broke out for a second straight day in Ecuador's capital on Friday, as the country's president accused demonstrators of attempting a coup.

Nearly two weeks into protests that have left six people dead and dozens injured, thousands of demonstrators angry at rising fuel prices threw rocks and Molotov cocktails and shot off fireworks near the congress building in Quito.

Security forces repelled protesters with tear gas, and clashes eventually stopped late in the evening, according to AFP reporters on the scene.

"The real intention of these violent people is to stage a coup," President Guillermo Lasso said in a speech earlier on Friday in which he again offered dialogue to end the protests.

An estimated 14,000 protesters are taking part in a nationwide show of discontent against rising hardship in an economy dealt a serious blow by the coro-



Demonstrators wave an Ecuadorean flag during clashes with riot police in El Arbolito park in Quito on Friday

navirus pandemic.

Most of the ire is concentrated in the capital Quito, where some 10,000 people, most from other parts of the country, have gathered.

Both sides accused each other of intransigence on Friday, as the protests entered their 12th day.

"They have unmasked themselves. They don't want to nego-

tiate. They don't want to come to an agreement... They don't want peace. Until now, the only thing they have demonstrated is that they want violence," minister of government Francisco Jimenez told broadcaster FM Mundo.

Six of the country's 24 provinces are under a state of emergency and a night-time curfew is in place in Quito.

Protesters are demanding a cut in already subsidised fuel prices, which have risen sharply in recent months, as well as jobs, food price controls, and more public spending on healthcare and education.

'For the sake of dialogue and peace'

But the action has been costly,

with losses of some US\$50mn per day to the economy, and production of fuel - Ecuador's biggest export - halved, according to the energy ministry.

On Thursday, protesters won a limited concession from President Guillermo Lasso who granted them access, 'for the sake of dialogue and peace', to a cultural center emblematic of the Indigenous struggle that had been commandeered by police.

Hours later, however, a group of protesters headed for Congress, where police fired tear gas in response to a barrage of rocks, fireworks and Molotov cocktails.

Three people died in confrontations on Thursday, bringing the toll to six since the movement started on June 13 on the initiative of the powerful Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (Conaie).

Conaie leader Leonidas Iza told AFP the revolt would continue 'until we have results. We can no longer hold back the anger of the people'.

AFP

Hamza Barre is new Somalia prime minister

Mogadishu, Somalia - Somalia's parliament on Saturday unanimously endorsed Hamza Abdi Barre as new prime minister, paving the way for the creation of a new government for the troubled Horn of Africa nation.

All 220 lawmakers present gave their blessing to Barre's appointment, and he was then sworn in to office, the parliament speaker said.

Barre 48, told parliament he would form a 'quality' government that would focus on 'creating inclusive political stability (in line with) the president's motto of a reconciled Somalia that is at peace with the world'.

Somalia's new administration faces a raft of challenges including a looming famine and a grinding insurgency by Al-Shabaab militants.

The MP from the semi-autonomous state of Jubaland was chosen earlier this month by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, who was elected by parliament in May after a long-delayed and stormy voting process.

"Our government has an ambitious policy programme which seeks to improve our security, strengthen our economy and deliver basic services for our people," Mohamud said on Twitter after Barre was approved.

"Let us move forward together."

There are hopes that Mohamud's presidency will draw the line under a seething political crisis that blighted the rule of his predecessor Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed and threatened to plunge the country back into violent chaos.

Mohamud himself did not appear at the parliamentary session after he said on Friday that he had tested positive for COVID-19.

"So far, I have no symptoms but I will continue to self-isolate and serve the people of Somalia from home," he said on Twitter after returning from the United Arab Emirates where he had made his first official trip abroad since his election on May 15.

Hassan Mohamud is a former academic and peace activist who was previously president from 2012 to 2017 but whose first administration was dogged by claims of corruption and infighting.

AFP



Hamza Abdi Barre (AFP)

All 220 lawmakers present gave their blessing to Barre's appointment, and he was then sworn in to office, the parliament speaker said

Ukraine reports 'massive' attack from Belarus, a Russian partner

Belarus has provided logistic support to Moscow since the February 24 invasion

Kyiv, Ukraine - Ukraine said it came under 'massive bombardment' on Saturday from neighbouring Belarus, a Russian ally not officially involved in the conflict, the day after announcing a retreat from the strategic city of Severodonetsk.

Twenty rockets targeted the village of Desna in the northern Chernigiv region, Ukraine's northern military command said in a statement, adding that infrastructure was hit, but no casualties had yet been reported.

Belarus has provided logistic support to Moscow since the February 24 invasion, particularly in the first few weeks, and like Russia has been targeted by Western sanctions - but is officially not involved in the conflict.

"Today's strike is directly linked to Kremlin efforts to pull Belarus as a co-belligerent into the war in Ukraine," the Ukrainian intelligence service said.

The strikes came ahead of a planned meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and meets his Belarussian counterpart and close ally Alexander Lukashenko in Saint Petersburg on Saturday.



Workers stand in front of the destroyed farm of the 62-year-old owner Lyubov Zlobina, in the village of Mala Rohan, near Kharkiv (AFP)

Russia's foreign ministry on Friday condemned the decision by Brussels to grant Ukraine official EU candidate status as a move to 'contain Russia' geopolitically. The decision 'confirms that a geopolitical monopolisation of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) space is continuing actively in order to contain Russia', foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said in a statement.

Ukraine's Western allies meanwhile will gather on Sunday at a summit of G7 leaders in Germany, where President Volodymyr Zelensky is set to speak.

US President Joe Biden will be attending the G7 and a summit of the NATO military alliance in Madrid next week.

Focus on Donbas

In the face-to-face talks, the Western allies will take stock of the effectiveness of sanctions imposed so far against Moscow, consider possible new aid for Ukraine, and begin turning their eye to longer-term reconstruction plans.

The European Union offered a

strong statement of support on Thursday when it granted Ukraine candidate status, although the path to membership is long. Moscow dismissed the EU decision as a move to 'contain Russia' geopolitically.

After four months, the conflict remains focused on the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine, where Kyiv's forces have finally given up a key hold-out, the industrial city of Severodonetsk. Sergiy Gaiday, governor of the Lugansk region that includes the city, said on Friday that the military had received the order to withdraw.

"Remaining in positions that have been relentlessly shelled for months just doesn't make sense," he said on Telegram, adding that 90 per cent of the city had been damaged.

Severodonetsk has been the scene of weeks of street battles as outgunned Ukrainians put up a stubborn defence.

Capturing the city and its twin across the river, Lysychansk, would effectively give the Russians control of Lugansk, and allow them to push further into the wider Donbas.

AFP

No 'transformation' for UK PM Boris Johnson

London, UK - British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Saturday he would not undergo any 'psychological transformation' despite this week's election drubbing and a slew of bad headlines, which included claims he wanted a lavish tree house built for his son.

The beleaguered premier recently survived a confidence vote in his leadership, but was left severely weakened after more than 40 per cent of his MPs called on him to quit. His position became even more perilous on Friday after he lost two key by-elections in highly symbolic seats.

Johnson told BBC Radio's Today programme that if critics 'want me to undergo some sort of psychological transformation, I think that our listeners would



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson (AFP)

know that is not going to happen.

"What you can do, and what the government should do, and what I want to do, is to get on with changing and reforming and improving our systems and our economy," Daisy Cooper, deputy

leader of the Liberal Democrats who delivered one of the crushing by-election defeats, said the comments showed that 'this leopard has no intention of changing his spots'.

Johnson's popularity plunged during the so-called Partygate affair, in which he and scores of his staff were fined by police for lockdown-breaking gatherings in his Downing Street office.

Spiralling inflation and wide-

What you can do, and what the government should do, and what I want to do, is to get on with changing and reforming and improving our systems, economy

BORIS JOHNSON

spread strikes are also piling the pressure on the 58-year-old, who told the BBC he must 'humbly and sincerely' accept the criticism. Adding further fuel to the fire, the Times on Saturday reported that Johnson drew up

plans for a costly tree house, complete with bulletproof glass, for his son Wilf in the grounds of Chequers, the country house of UK prime ministers.

The paper reported he ap-

UK hit by third rail strike

London, UK - Britain's railway system once again came to a virtual standstill on Saturday as union workers staged their third walkout of the week in strike action billed as the biggest in decades.

Tens of thousands of rail workers staged the latest day-long walkout over pay and job security, hampering weekend plans for those already hit by strikes on Tuesday and Thursday. Only around a fifth of services are set to operate on heavily reduced hours, with those still running starting much later in the morning than usual and set to end as early as 6:30pm.

The RMT rail union insists this week's actions are necessary as wages have failed to keep pace with UK inflation, which has hit a 40-year high and is on course to keep rising.

It also wants a threat of compulsory redundancies withdrawn. RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said its members are 'standing up for all working people trying to get a pay rise and some job security'.

"In a modern economy, workers need to be properly rewarded for their work, enjoy good conditions and have the peace of mind that their job will not be taken away from them," he added. With Britain suffering from rocketing inflation, the industrial action has echoes of the 1970s.

AFP

South Africa's Jacob Zuma slams graft report as gossip, irrational

Johannesburg, South Africa - South Africa's former president Jacob Zuma, accused of being a graft enabler, on Saturday rubbished as 'unlawful' and 'full of gossip' a judicial report detailing how rampant corruption gutted state coffers during his nine-year tenure.

He plans to challenge sections of the report, a product of a marathon four-year probe into what is known as state capture.

The web of corruption hollowed out state companies in the continent's most advanced economy to the benefit of a few wealthy individuals and firms.

Zuma's foundation spokesman Mzwanele Manyi told a media conference Zuma regarded the report as 'unlawful and highly irrational'.

"It is predictably full of gossip, innuendo and conjecture. It is

very short on concrete evidence," said Manyi.

"The report is therefore a classical case of the fruits of a poisoned tree."

Zuma set up the special probe panel himself, after a damning report by the national ombudswoman about corruption at state enterprises forced his hand.

The report accuses Zuma of being 'a critical player' in the plan to pillage state firms through the Gupta family of business tycoons. The Guptas allegedly influenced top government cabinet appointments, including those of cabinet ministers, and secured business deals with giant state-owned companies on wildly favourable terms.

Two of the three Indian migrant brothers who fled the country the same year the corruption probe started four years



Empty chairs and microphones are seen at a hotel in Sandton, Johannesburg commercial hub, on Saturday at the site where former South African President Jacob Zuma was supposed to address a press conference (AFP)

ago were arrested earlier this month in Dubai pending extradition to South Africa.

'Toothless inquiry'

Zuma's office said the corruption investigators 'dismally failed to

find evidence beyond innuendo and conjecture to prove' that Zuma had abdicated his execu-

tive authority to the Guptas.

The ex-president briefly appeared before the investigators, but walked out and refused to return to answer questions.

His refusal to testify prompted a showdown at the Constitutional Court, which ordered his imprisonment in July 2021 for contempt.

Zuma's incarceration sparked riots in which more than 350 people lost their lives - the deadliest unrest of the democratic era in South Africa. He was released after two months on medical parole. Zuma had been billed to address the press conference, but his lawyers said they had advised him at the last minute to not attend to avoid violating his parole conditions.

It took the investigation, led by the now Chief Justice Raymond Zondo, nearly four years of hearing testimonies and reading through volumes of documents.

In more than 400 days of testimony, millions of pages of documents, and 300 witnesses, the inquiry incriminated 1,438 individuals and institutions, including Zuma.

According to Zuma's office, the probe was 'a toothless inquiry investigating a phantom thing called 'state capture'."

President Cyril Ramaphosa estimates the corruption cost the country more than US\$30bn.

The media conference was held at a small hotel near Liliesleaf Farm, a historical landmark in northern Johannesburg that served as a secret headquarters and nerve centre of the then banned African National Congress, which led the fight against apartheid.

AFP

MUSIC HARNESS

Turkish singer Melek Mosso performs on stage in Shishane Square in Istanbul on June 1



STRINGS ATTACHED

A tattooed pop star banned for her slinky dresses and support for women's rights. Kurdish artists black-listed and concerts cancelled out of concern for alcohol-fuelled frolicking between youths...

Turkey's summer festival season is off to a politically charged start that fore-shadows the cultural battles brewing in the polarised country in the run-up to next year's election - the toughest of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's two-decade rule.

Artists fear that the fun is being drained out of Turkey to flatter the conservative Islamic core of Erdogan's eroding support.

Guitar-strumming folk singer Abdurrahman Lermi - known as Apolas Lermi on stage - offers a case in point. Lermi saw two of his concerts cancelled and social media light up in anger after he refused to take the stage in solidarity with a Greek violinist banned from performing in the traditionally conservative northern port of Trabzon.

Lermi's decision to back a fellow artist from a country Turkey has spent much of its history fighting appeared too much for organisers in a municipality run by Erdogan's ruling party.

"I was accused of being the enemy of Turkey, the enemy of the Turks, and a separatist," Lermi recalled. Turkey's main mu-

sicians' association is understandably upset.

"These bans are unacceptable," Musical Work Owners' Society of Turkey's president Recep Ergul told AFP.

Frequent targets

Musicians and other performers have often felt unfairly singled out by the government for their socially liberal views.

A sweeping crackdown that followed a failed 2016 coup attempt saw numerous independent theatres closed. Music venues reopened during the coronavirus pandemic long after almost everything else.

Many now worry that their concerts might be sacrificed in the months to come as a show of strength aimed at burnishing Erdogan's image before his nationalist and conservative voters.

Musicians who sing in minority languages such as Kurdish appear to have been affected the most. Popular ethnically-Kurdish singer Aynur Dogan was banned in May from taking the stage in a ruling party-run municipality after organisers deemed her concerts 'inappropriate'.

Dogan had previously been targeted by pro-government circles on social media for defending big protests against Erdogan when he was still prime minister in 2013.

Other minorities banned in the past few months include Niyazi Koyuncu - whose

repertoire includes songs in dialects of Armenian and ancient Black Sea region tongues - as well as the ethnically Kurdish but German-based Metin and Kemal Kahraman brothers.

"These arbitrary and political decisions amount to discrimination against languages, cultures, lifestyles and genders," the bar associations of 57 Turkish cities said in a joint statement.

Immoral attire

The conservatives' resurgent cultural influence under Erdogan is perhaps most vividly visible on the Turkish music scene.

One Islamic group managed to successfully pressure the governor of the north-western city of Eskisehir to ban a festival because youngsters who camp together behave inappropriately due to consumption of beverages at venues.

Another group managed to get pop star Melek Mosso's shows cancelled in the western city of Isparta because of her unaccepted attire. The tattooed star is a strong proponent of the Istanbul Convention combating violence against women that Erdogan - under pressure from the most conservative elements of his ruling coalition - pulled Turkey out of last year.

Turkey's Supreme Court is due to rule in the coming weeks whether Erdogan had the authority to annul the treaty in an overnight decree. The European convention was ratified by parliament and would theoretically need its approval for Turkey to leave.

Mosso pushed back against those who 'question' her morality and vowed to sing in Isparta one day. She then drew a large



Fans gather to watch Turkish singer Melek Mosso perform on stage in Shishane Square, in Istanbul



Apolas Lermi, Turkish Singer, poses with fellow musician Eren Demir (L), in Istanbul

crowd at a public concert in the more liberal Istanbul organised by Turkey's culture ministry.

Blow to women

Culture Minister Mehmet Nuri Ersoy denies the existence of a government policy targeting minorities and embracing conservative values.

"Let's try to look at the wider picture," the minister told a private broadcaster. "We support art and culture. This is our government policy."

The performers do not agree. More than 1,000 artists and composers have published a joint declaration proclaiming that 'music and musicians cannot be silenced'.

Many of the younger women attending Mosso's Istanbul performance said they felt victimised by the government. These bans are a blow to women's presence in social and working life, said concertgoer Ezgi Aslan. "Women's rights are not being defended by the ruling party," added fellow audience member Selin Cenkoglu.

AFP

CLASSIFIEDS

Are you looking for Professional Accounting, Book-Keeping & VAT Services?

We provide:
Accounting, Book-Keeping & VAT Services.
Backlog Accounting
VAT Consultation & Return Filing
Accounting Software / ERP Solutions
Periodic visits to the Clients office

Contact Us Placement 1st Accounting Outsourcing Solutions
Call / WhatsApp – 97971205 / 97971057

Email – accounts@placement1st.com

FREE VAT REGISTRATION

المحاسبين الأول
Placement 1st

SITUATION WANTED

Looking for Driving Job with experience 3 years. Reliable and a well earned reputation for always offering clients exceptional services.
Language: 1.English, 2.Arabic, 3. Hindi.
Please contact me: 99190203.

AUDIT, VAT, TAXATION

Accounting, Auditing, Vat Services, Taxation

Gulf Center Consultancy & Audit Chartered Accountants

Contact: 92469602/93949235

Offices at Muscat, Salalah, Sohar & Sur
Email: kumar@gccaoman.com

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 | Salalah 9429 9325

www.orbit-oman.com

- Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
- Choose from a wide range of brands & models
- PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
- Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

أوربت ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

Send your request for Birthday/Anniversary wishes to wish@apexmedia.co.om with your resident card copy (It's free of cost)



Evenly poised at Headingley

New Zealand’s Tom Latham keeps England at bay after Jonny Bairstow and Jamie Overton’s run-spree

Leeds, United Kingdom - New Zealand’s Tom Latham hit his highest score of the series as the tourists responded after an astonishing England stand featuring Jonny Bairstow’s latest hundred and Jamie Overton’s 97 on debut in the third Test at Headingley.

World Test champions New Zealand were 125-1 in their second innings, a lead of 94 runs, at tea on Saturday’s third day.

Latham was 76 not out, far exceeding his previous best of 26 this series, with New Zealand captain Kane Williamson unbeaten on 37.

England’s erratic catching returned to haunt them when, with Latham on 72, first slip Joe Root dropped a routine chance off Stuart Broad.

But with England previously having chased down 299 inside a day to win the second Test and go 2-0 up in the three-match series, there was still plenty of work left for the Black Caps’ batsmen.

Earlier, Overton fell agonisingly short of a hundred in his first international innings but local hero Bairstow extended his overnight 130 not out to 162.

The pair had come together with the hosts in dire straits at

55-6 but their England record seventh-wicket stand of 241 was the cornerstone of an eventual total of 360 - a first-innings lead of 31.

Overton, selected as a fast bowler in place of the injured James Anderson, was within one shot of getting to three figures in his maiden international innings when he nicked Trent Boult low to first slip Daryl Mitchell.

The 28-year-old, who resumed on 89, never regained the fluency he had on Friday and it was no surprise when Boult, who had removed all of England’s top three with a superb display of new-ball bowling, located Overton’s outside edge.

England’s new leadership duo of captain Ben Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum had urged

World Test champions New Zealand were 125-1 in their second innings, a lead of 94 runs, at tea on Saturday



New Zealand’s Tom Latham celebrates after reaching his 50 during the third day of the third Test against England at Headingley on Saturday (AFP)

the team to play with freedom after taking charge of a side that had won just one out of 17 Tests prior to this series.

Broad, a fast bowler by trade, embraced the new approach by hitting Boult for 14 runs in three balls courtesy of two fours during a quickfire 42.

Spectators had already had plenty to cheer as Yorkshire favourite Bairstow, fresh from his match-winning 136 in Nottingham, went to 150.

But one ball after Broad’s exit, he holed out off spinner Michael Bracewell to end a brilliant 157-ball innings including 23 fours.

Bairstow then resumed his former role of wicketkeeper, with Ben Foakes unable to take the field because of a stiff back.

New Zealand opener Will Young fell cheaply after lunch when he edged Matthew Potts to Ollie Pope at third slip.

With the second-wicket duo holding firm, Stokes brought himself on for his first bowling stint of the match, only for his opening delivery to be cover-driven for four by Williamson.

Latham forced the paceman off the back foot for his sixth boundary before a single took him to a 70-ball fifty.

AFP



India’s stand-in captain Hardik Pandya (L) with Rahul Dravid (AFP)

India squad for Ireland tour shows strength in depth: Pandya

Dublin, Ireland - India’s young squad to Ireland for a two-match Twenty20 international series is a sign of the team’s strength in depth, stand-in captain Hardik Pandya said Saturday.

The all-rounder was appointed skipper for the tour after regular captain Rohit Sharma, star batsman Virat Kohli and other senior players were rested for the white-ball series beginning Sunday in Dublin.

“We are so lucky that we have the bench strength that we can go and allow the players to express and a lot of people will get the opportunity, which generally doesn’t come as many players do not get a chance to show their talent,” Pandya said at an online press conference.

He said that a couple of debuts could be made during the matches, but the team will ensure the strongest side is fielded

in the series.

“There will be a situation where there will be a couple of caps given but more than anything, it’s about making sure that we have the best XI,” he said.

“We have to play every match like it’s a World Cup final. So, it doesn’t matter who we are facing, we have to face every team like it’s the most important one.”

India’s 17-man squad features several new faces following impressive performances in the Indian Premier League, including fast bowler Umran Malik and batsman Rahul Tripathi.

Pandya’s elevation to the captaincy came on the back of his performance in leading IPL newcomers Gujarat Titans to this year’s title.

He has received praise for his leadership skills, and his short

stint as captain in Ireland will further cement his claim for the top job in the future.

But Pandya said he will try to focus on the current series instead of impressing anyone.

“I am not here to show anything to anybody. I have got an opportunity to lead India, that itself is a big thing for me. I don’t play this sport to show anything to anybody,” he said.

AFP



AIR CONDITIONERS



ROTARY SERIES
BSTS18CNE | BSTS24CNE | BSTS36CNE

RECIPROCATING SERIES
BSTS18GPE2 | BSTS24GPE2 | BSTS30GPE2



4 way swing
Better Air Flow



6 in 1 Filter
Healthy Air



quiet
Low Noise
Peaceful Sleep



Gold Fin
Anti Rust





HEAVY DUTY
COMPRESSOR



R-410A
REFRIGERANT



جینتکو
Genetco
GENERAL ELECTRIC & TRADING CO. L.L.C



51
years of excellence

C.R. No. 1009680

MUSCAT
97693496, 96742452
Available at
Major Hypermarkets & Electronics Retailers

SALALAH
79011363

www.genetco.net

@GenetcoOman

@GenetcoOman

Genetco Oman

Bagnaia edges Quartararo for Dutch MotoGP pole



Francesco Bagnaia rides ahead of Maverick Vinales during the MotoGP qualifying at Assen on Saturday (AFP)

Assen, Netherlands - Ducati rider Francesco Bagnaia will start Sunday’s Dutch MotoGP in pole position after the Italian again topped qualifying in Assen ahead of reigning world champion Fabio Quartararo.

The Frenchman, who leads the standings by 34 points after 10 of 20 races this season, sets off second on his Yamaha with Spain’s Jorge Martin (Ducati-Pramac) completing the front row.

It is the fourth time in six races Bagnaia has claimed pole, but he has failed to finish in three of his past four outings.

“Pole position on a track like this, which is for sure not the best

for our bike, is great, so I’m very, very happy,” said Bagnaia.

He has won his last two completed races -- at Jerez and Mugello -- but was visibly angry last weekend after crashing out of the German MotoGP, where Quartararo took the chequered flag.

“This time I would like to have a battle, to have a normal race and finish the race because it will be the main objective,” added Bagnaia.

Ducati bikes have been fastest in eight of the 11 final qualifying sessions this season, but the Italian manufacturer has struggled to get its riders to the line.

Bagnaia, runner-up to Quartararo last year, had looked poised to challenge for the title just a few weeks ago, but has since slipped to 91 points off the pace. He took pole a week ago too but lost the lead to Quartararo at the first corner before suffering his fourth retirement of the campaign.

Quartararo was quickest in Saturday’s final practice session, but Bagnaia pulled back in front in qualifying as he set another new lap record of 1min 31.504.

“Pecco has just been incredible, like usual in qualifying,” said Quartararo.

AFP



Taiwo Awoniyi

Forest sign Nigeria striker Awoniyi from Union Berlin

London, United Kingdom - Nottingham Forest have paid a club record fee of around £17 million (\$20 million) to Nigeria striker Taiwo Awoniyi from Union Berlin.

Awoniyi agreed a five-year contract with Forest, who are preparing for their first season back in the Premier League since 1999. The 24-year-old scored 20 goals in 43 games in all competitions last season in Germany.

He is Forest’s first senior signing since their victory over Huddersfield in the Championship play-off final.

“There’s been a lot of interest in Taiwo from other Premier League clubs and clubs across Europe, so we’re delighted that he’s chosen Nottingham Forest,” Forest boss Steve Cooper said.

“He’s a player who we really believe in and we look forward to him going on to fulfil his potential and become a top Premier League striker with Nottingham Forest.”

'It's golf sometimes, I think'

Rory McIlroy's dramatic meltdown at Travelers allows Xander Schauffele to open up a five-shot lead

New York, United States - Xander Schauffele took advantage of a second-round meltdown by Rory McIlroy to open up a five-shot lead at the halfway stage of the PGA Tour's Travelers Championship on Friday.

Schauffele surged clear of the field after shooting a bogey-free seven-under-par 63 to move to 14 under at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, Connecticut.

But while Schauffele reflected on a round that has set up a golden opportunity to claim a sixth PGA Tour win, overnight co-leader McIlroy was left pondering a dramatic stumble on the back nine that sent him tumbling down the leaderboard.

The Northern Ireland star had

shot into the right rough. His fourth landed in a greenside bunker and he took two more shots from there to reach the green.

McIlroy found more trouble on the 16th, plunking his third shot into the water to pick up a double bogey.

Although he recovered with a birdie on the 16th, the damage had been done. McIlroy eventually carded a level-par 70.

"It's golf sometimes, I think," McIlroy said of his late stumble.

"It sort of came out of the blue. I haven't made a big number like that or couple big numbers like that in a long time.

"I put myself in a great position in the tournament and then



Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland reacts to a putt on the 14th green during the second round of Travelers Championship in Cromwell, Connecticut, on Friday (AFP)

I put myself in a great position and then just three bad swings have sort of cost me six shots. But it's still only two rounds. There are two rounds left and a lot of golf left

RORY MCILROY

tamed the course on Thursday with a spectacular eight-under-par 62 to claim a share of the lead.

The 33-year-old four-time major champion looked poised to tighten his grip on the lead after making six birdies over the first 11 holes of his second round to move to 13 under overall.

But McIlroy's lead evaporated with a catastrophic quadruple-bogey eight on the par-four 12th that sent him back into the chasing pack.

After sending his tee-shot into the treeline down the left of the fairway, McIlroy incurred a penalty and then sent his third

just three bad swings have sort of cost me six shots."

McIlroy maintained there was still plenty of time to resurrect his challenge over the weekend.

"I should be closer to the lead. Feel like I let a lot of guys into the golf tournament because of it," he admitted.

"But it's still only two rounds. There are two rounds left and a lot of golf left," added McIlroy, who reached halfway at eight under for the tournament, six adrift of Schauffele.

Schauffele meanwhile is taking nothing for granted despite building a formidable cushion.

AFP

South Korea's Chun tightens grip at Women's PGA Championship

Bethesda, United States - Chun In-gee extended her lead at the Women's PGA Championship on Friday, firing a three-under-par 69 to open up a six-stroke advantage at the halfway stage as she hunts down a third major title.

The 27-year-old South Korean had demolished Congressional Country Club in Bethesda, Maryland, in Thursday's first round, shooting a course record eight-under-64 that left awed rivals in disbelief - and five shots adrift.

Chun found the going slightly harder on Friday, opening with three early birdies before back-to-back bogeys checked her progress just before the turn.

However, she regained those two strokes with birdies on the 10th and 18th to maintain a vice-like grip on the lead heading into the weekend on 11 under with a 36-hole aggregate 133.

Chun admitted she had felt under pressure after her scintillating opening round.

"I got a little pressure for sure because after I had a great first



Chun In-Ge of South Korea plays her shot from the 15th tee during the second round of the Women's PGA Championship on Friday (AFP)

round, everyone (talked) about how you are, like, five-shot lead."

"Now I'm in a good position. Everyone's expectations are really high. So it was a little tough to make focus, but I believe it's another process in my life ... So I just want to enjoy my next two days."

Chun's nearest rivals are New Zealand's Lydia Ko, who moved up the leaderboard with a five-under-par 67, and in-form Jennifer Kupcho, who shot seven birdies and three bogeys in a four-under-par 68.

AFP



Canelo Alvarez (L) and Gennady Golovkin (R) pose with boxing promoter Eddie Hearn (C) in Hollywood, California, on Friday (AFP)

Alvarez wants to finish rival Golovkin's career in trilogy duel

Los Angeles, United States - Saul "Canelo" Alvarez said Friday he plans to finish Gennady Golovkin's career when the two boxers meet for the third and probably final time later this year.

Five years after their first bout ended in a controversial draw, Mexican icon Alvarez and the heavy-hitting Golovkin face a trilogy bout in Las Vegas on September 17 to settle their rivalry once and for all. The bout will see Golovkin move up a division to super-middleweight, aiming to

snatch Alvarez's World Boxing Council (WBC), International Boxing Federation (IBF), World Boxing Association (WBA) and World Boxing Organization (WBO) belts.

The contest at the T-Mobile Arena will draw a line under a rivalry that has become increasingly acrimonious over the years. Hints of that tension flared on Friday as the two men came face-to-face, going nose-to-nose for nearly two solid minutes before a press conference got under way.

sifr
SODIUM FREE DRINKING WATER

Eid Offer

30 REFILL COUPONS (RO 50 ONLY)
12 REFILL COUPONS (RO 20 ONLY)

- Hot & Cold Dispenser
- 2 Full Bottles
- White Tap Dispenser/ Tap Dispenser/ Manual Water Pump/ Cradle with Tap
- 2 Full Bottles

CALL TOLL-FREE
800 71 222 or GSM: 9275 5522

OASIS WATER COMPANY SAOC
P.O.Box: 87, Rusayl 124, Sultanate of Oman.

Offer valid from 1st April to 30th June 2022

MM No.: 07/302/2022 C.R.No.: 1365452

mai alkaline

Alkaline Ionized Drinking Water

HYDRATE SMARTLY

- ✓ Ultra-hydrating
- ✓ Revitalizing
- ✓ Energizing

Toll-free **800 71 222** or **9275 5522**

oman OASIS

WIMBLEDON ROUND-UP



London, United Kingdom - Serena Williams admits that she didn't know how or when she would return to tennis but insisted retirement had not been on her agenda during her year-long absence.

"I didn't retire. I just needed to heal physically, mentally. I had no plans. I just didn't know when I would come back. I didn't know how I would come back," said the 40-year-old on Saturday.

The American will return to singles action at Wimbledon next week for the first time since her tearful exit from the All England Club in the first round in 2021.

The seven-time Wimbledon champion is chasing a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title.

However, her lengthy absence from the sport has seen her world ranking plummet to 1,204 in the

most of the year. Then I ripped my hamstring.

"I still tried to make New York. I gave everything I could, just every day getting ready or trying to make it. But then it's just like, I'm not going to make it. Hung up my racquets for a little bit until I could just heal."

In a change to tradition, and with a nod to the gravity of Williams's injury last year which was caused by her slipping and falling, organisers have allowed practice sessions on Centre Court. The aim is to bed in the grass so that players can enjoy immediate grip on the world's most famous patch of grass.

"On the one hand it's amazing, but on the other hand it's like, we have to preserve Centre Court," said Williams.

"Obviously I was super happy to be out there and have that opportunity, and it was also good for me to get that out of my system because the last moment I had on Centre Court was probably not my best moment."

Williams said she decided before the French Open to make her comeback at Wimbledon and to warm-up for the big occasion, she played two matches in doubles with Tunisia's Ons Jabeur in Eastbourne.

"Probably could have played singles there. I felt more prepared than I thought I would have a month or two months or three months ago," she added.

Her rivals at Wimbledon, which gets underway on Monday, are delighted to see the American back on court.

"I saw her yesterday, I was pretty overwhelmed," said world number one Iga Swiatek, the French Open champion.

Williams, meanwhile, was not in the mood to discuss her long-term future in the sport and whether or not this is her last Wimbledon.

AFP

Wimbledon was tough last year. I felt like I was injured for most of the year

SERENA WILLIAMS

world. She needed a wildcard to play Wimbledon this year as she seeks a first major since capturing the Australian Open while pregnant in 2017.

Her last appearance at the All England Club ended after just six games when she was forced to quit her Centre Court opener against Aliaksandra Sasnovich.

Having made her debut in 1998, Williams said that she didn't want that heartbreaking exit to be her last memory of Wimbledon.

"It was a lot of motivation, to be honest. It was always something since the match ended that was always on my mind.

"Wimbledon was tough last year. I felt like I was injured for

Kvitova wins Eastbourne title to bolster her Wimbledon prospects

Eastbourne, United Kingdom - Petra Kvitova warmed up for Wimbledon by winning the Eastbourne singles title for the first time with a 6-3, 6-2 rout of Jelena Ostapenko on Saturday.

Kvitova needed just 77 minutes to finish off former French Open champion Ostapenko as the Czech veteran produced the kind of dominant grass-court tennis that earned her two Wimbledon titles.

The 32-year-old, who lost the 2011 Eastbourne final to Marion Bartoli, ended Ostapenko's reign

as the women's champion at Devonshire Park in emphatic fashion, demolishing the Latvian with her booming serve and fierce forehands.

"I had already experienced losing in a final, so I guess I am lucky. Playing on the grass is very special for me, especially when you step onto a beautiful court such as here," Kvitova said.

"It's really nice to play in front of the people again; in the pandemic it was a really tough time, it's such a better feeling."

AFP



Petra Kvitova celebrates with the trophy on Saturday (AFP)



Madison Keys

Keys out of Wimbledon with injury

London, United Kingdom - American 19th seed Madison Keys pulled out of Wimbledon on Saturday after suffering an abdominal injury.

Keys, a quarter-finalist at the All England Club in 2015, has been replaced in the draw by lucky loser Coco Vandeweghe.

"This isn't what I was hoping to say a few days before @Wimbledon, but unfortunately I have to withdraw due to an abdominal injury," tweeted 27-year-old Keys.

"I'm so disappointed, but my health comes first and my body needs time to get back to 100%."

AFP

Rafael Nadal says he is pain-free for first time in 'year and half'

London, United Kingdom - Rafael Nadal said Saturday that for the first time in 18 months he has defeated the crippling foot pain which threatened to push him to the brink of retirement.

Nadal captured his 14th French Open and record-extending 22nd major earlier this month to put himself halfway to the first men's calendar Grand Slam since 1969.

However, in the aftermath of his Paris victory, he revealed that he had needed to have his left foot anaesthetised to keep competing.

He then underwent "pulsed radiofrequency stimulation", a treatment aimed at reducing nerve pain.

"I can walk normal most of the days, almost every single day. That's for me the main issue," said the 36-year-old Spaniard at Wimbledon on Saturday.

"When I wake up, I don't have this pain that I was having for the last year and a half, so quite happy about that.



Rafael Nadal during an exhibition match at the Hurlingham Club, London, on Wednesday

"And second thing, practising. Since the last two weeks, I didn't have one day of these terrible days that I can't move at all. The feeling and overall feelings are positive."

Nadal is a two-time champion at Wimbledon but his last title at the All England Club came 12

years ago.

This year he is seeded two which at least gives him the benefit of avoiding old rival and top seed Novak Djokovic until the final.

The Spaniard hasn't played a grass-court warm-up event, preferring instead to focus on allevi-

ating his foot pain and then practising on the surface in Mallorca.

"In 2003 (his debut year), I never thought that I'd have a chance to win Wimbledon," he said.

"Today it's a different story. I had some success here."

AFP

Home favourite Raducanu under pressure to deliver at All England Club

London, United Kingdom - Emma Raducanu is poised for a return to the grass of Wimbledon next week as a Grand Slam winner - under pressure to end Britain's 45-year-wait for a women's singles champion.

The teenager caught the eye during her run to the last 16 at the All England Club 12 months ago before withdrawing from her match against Australian Ajla Tomljanovic because of

breathing difficulties.

But her Wimbledon debut merely proved the prelude to an astonishing triumph at the US Open in early September, where she beat Leylah Fernandez in the final.

Raducanu, a qualifier, did not drop a set at Flushing Meadows, becoming the first British female player to win a Grand Slam singles crown since Virginia Wade at Wimbledon in

1977.

That victory propelled her to global stardom, with endorsement deals stacking up as she cashed in on her stunning success in New York.

It has not all been plain sailing for the 19-year-old, currently ranked 11th in the world, who has not won more than two matches at a tournament since.

Raducanu has come under scrutiny over her failure to set-



Emma Raducanu

tle on a long-term coach and has also struggled with fitness issues, as well as having a bout of coronavirus.

But despite her early exits at the Australian Open and French Open, the pressure at her home Grand Slam is bound to be intense.

Andy Murray ended Britain's 77-year wait for a Wimbledon men's champion in 2013, repeating the feat three years

later.

But Wade's triumph at Wimbledon in Queen Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee year remains the last time a British woman has won at the All England Club.

Raducanu's Wimbledon preparations suffered a blow when she was forced to retire from her first-round match in Nottingham against Viktorija Golubic earlier this month.

AFP