

OMAN AMONG SAFEST NATIONS FOR EXPATS

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is among the safest countries in the world for expatriates with the sultanate ranked fourth for personal safety and ranked ninth for political stability, according to the Expat Insider 2023 survey.

Oman ranks 12th out of 53 destinations in the survey with the country ranking best in the Expat Essentials Index (third), where expats are especially happy with the housing situation.

About three in four (74%) say that housing is easy to find (vs 49% globally) and 61% find it affordable, compared to only 38% globally. They also find it easy to live in Oman without speaking the local language(s) (fourth).

The Ease of Settling In Index (ranked tenth) is another highlight: 83% say that the locals are friendly towards foreign residents (vs 65% globally), and about two in three (66%) find it easy to make local friends (vs 43% globally).

"I like the polite people and neat and clean roads best," the report quoted a South African expat. An expat from Pakistan said, "Oman is a very beautiful country with very beautiful people."

In the Quality of Life Index (24th), expats struggle with both



RANKING OF GCC STATES	
Bahrain	9
UAE	11
Oman	12
Saudi Arabia	28
Qatar	31
Kuwait	53
*Global ranking	

the affordability (47th) and availability (47th) of public transportation, though there is good infrastructure for cars (fourth).

Expats rate Working Abroad (23rd) midfield: while they feel that moving to Oman has improved their career prospects (seventh), they find that the local business culture does not support flexibility (47th). Overall, 69% of expats are happy with

their life in Oman, compared to 72% globally.

However, the country ranks second-to-last for unrestricted access to online services, such as social media (52nd).

In the GCC, Bahrain is ranked the highest (ninth globally), followed by UAE (11th), Oman (12th), Saudi Arabia (28th), Qatar (31st) and Kuwait (53rd).

Mexico (first), Spain, Panama, Malaysia, Taiwan, Thailand, Costa Rica, the Philippines, Bahrain, and Portugal (tenth) are the best places for expats in 2023. On the other hand, expats consider Kuwait (53rd), Norway,

Turkey, South Korea, Germany, South Africa, Italy, Malta, New Zealand and Japan (44th) as the worst destinations for expats.

This is the tenth edition of the Expat Insider survey published by InterNations, the world's largest expat community with more than 4.8mn members. With nearly 12,000 respondents, it provides insights into expat life in 53 destinations, offering in-depth information on the respondents' satisfaction with their respective countries in five indices: Quality of Life, Ease of Settling In, Working Abroad, Personal Finance and the Expat Essentials Index.

His Majesty sends message to Russian President

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation. The message deals with the bilateral relations between Oman and Russia and means of promoting these.

It was handed over by Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, when his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov received him in Moscow on Tuesday.

Later, Sayyid Badr and Sergey Lavrov held a session of talks, which came within the framework of the visit of the Foreign Minister of Oman to Russia.

The two sides reviewed bilateral relations and explored areas of cooperation and means of enhancing these.

The two sides underscored their keenness to activate partnership opportunities in areas of transport, communications, renewable energy and converting industries, as well as encouraging tourism between the two countries.

The two ministers called on companies of the private sector to utilise the existing relations, agreements and memoranda of understanding (MoUs) that regulate economic, business and investment cooperation.

On the political forefront, the two ministers exchanged views on several regional and international issues. They underscored the importance of promoting di-



Russia vetoes UN vote to extend key Syria aid route via Turkey

United Nations, United States - Russia blocked a nine-month extension of a key Syria aid route at the United Nations Security Council on Tuesday, throwing a vital mechanism that provides life-

saving support to millions of people into doubt.

The UN-brokered agreement that allows for the delivery of aid overland from Turkey into rebel-held areas of Syria expired on Monday.

ologue and backing all means that lead to peaceful settlement of disputes. This, the two ministers, affirmed, is achieved on the basis of good neighbourliness, the rule of international law and

non-interference in internal affairs, as well as respecting the sovereignty of states in a manner that bolsters pillars of peace and stability in the world. ONA

► NEWS BRIEF

MINISTRIES OF DEFENCE, LABOUR SIGN COOPERATION PACTS

Muscat - Several joint cooperation agreements for employment-related training initiatives and the Employment Support Programme were signed at the Ministry of Labour (MoL) on Tuesday.

The agreements were signed by the Ministry of Defence, military and security units and MoL.

The agreements offer on-the-job training for Omani jobseekers and highlight the contribution of military and security units to the service of the country.

The agreements demonstrate the integration of national efforts, an ongoing partnership between military units and MoL.



Ukraine turns heat on allies as NATO stalls membership



Fashion and film merge in Paris show

Oman, Syria look to boost trade, investment opportunities

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), in cooperation with Omani-Syrian Business Council and Damascus Chamber of Commerce, organised the Omani-Syrian Business Forum in Muscat on Tuesday.

The forum was held under the patronage of H E Dr Saeed bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, and Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of Board of Directors of OCCI, in the presence of Omani businessmen and their Syrian counterparts.

The forum highlighted the opportunities and facilities offered by Oman and Syria to investors, which contribute to enhancing trade and investment exchange between the two countries. It also aimed to link Omani and Syrian business owners through bilateral sessions.

H E Saqri said the forum gives an opportunity to explore aspects of cooperation in various sectors for exchange of experiences and transfer of knowledge between



(Supplied photo)

the two countries, and facilitating the process of linking Omani and Syrian business owners.

He stressed that Oman is always ready to work to facilitate economic, investment and trade cooperation between the two countries to achieve the goals aspired by the leadership of the two countries.

On his part, Rawas stated that the forum seeks to strengthen trade and economic relations between the two countries, while stressing the depth of the histor-

ical relationship between the two brotherly countries.

He added that the forum is a platform for business owners to learn about the privileges, opportunities and incentives offered by the two countries to business owners.

Rawas pointed out that the forum focuses on a set of economic sectors, including food industries, import and export, contracting, the clothing and cotton industry, textile sector, tourism, veterinary medicines,

fodder, fertilisers, chemicals, and the plastics industry.

On the occasion, Dr Mohammad Samer al Khalil, Syrian Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade, said that economic relations between Oman and Syria are historic and continuous.

He added that Oman is an important regional trade centre for re-exporting Syrian products to eastern African countries, India and China. "The two countries have the potential to invest in many opportunities."

GCC denounces Israel, reiterates solidarity with Palestine

Geneva, Switzerland - The GCC states have affirmed their solidarity with the Palestinian people and their condemnation of all aspects of the Israeli aggression against Palestinians. They stressed the need to protect civilians and called for immediate intervention to stop the violations staged therein.

This was the essence of the GCC's collective stance expressed in a statement at the 53rd session of the Human Rights

Council in Geneva that was held within the context of interactive dialogue on the report of Francesca Albanese, Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Palestine and Arab territories occupied since 1967.

The statement was delivered by H E Idris Abdurrahman al Khanjari, Oman's Permanent Representative to the UN and international organizations in Geneva.

He said that the Israeli occu-

Currently, there are 5,000 Palestinians in Israeli prisons; about 1,100 detained without charge or trial

pation forces' continued aggression against the Palestinian people hinders the efforts of the

peace process aimed at resolving the Palestinian issue and establishing peace and stability in the Palestinian territories in a manner that guarantees the Palestinian people's ability to enjoy their legitimate rights.

The GCC countries thanked the Special Rapporteur for her report. They condemned what the report unearthed in terms of violations of basic rights of Palestinians. They condemned Israel's 'widescale, systematic depriva-

tion of Palestinians from liberty as a means of tightening control over the occupied territories'. They rejected Israel's persistent expansion in actions that violate all international laws and resolutions.

The GCC states also denounced the pretexts pursued by Israeli occupation forces to violate the rights of the Palestinian people and deprive them of rights.

They noted that Israel made use of the lack of international ac-

countability for its continued aggression against the Palestinian people, the latest of which was the storming of Jenin city and Jenin camp targeting civilians, children and women in civilian neighbourhoods in a flagrant violation of international conventions and laws.

Currently, there are 5,000 Palestinians in Israeli prisons, including 160 children; approximately 1,100 of them detained without charge or trial.

Muscat - To ensure an exceptional experience for tourists visiting Dhofar this khareef season, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) has launched a dedicated hotline for comments or complaints re-

lated to hotel services.

'Dear Tourist, please don't hesitate to call the hotline 92575114 to report any comment or complaint about hotel services in Dhofar governorate,' MHT said in a statement.

The hospitality sector in Dhofar is anticipating an occupancy rate of 90% in most hotels this khareef and the prospect of tiding over the financial crisis that unfolded due to losses incurred during the

COVID-19 pandemic.

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

(Supplied photo)

Our Correspondent

Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has set up an information centre at the ongoing Ajwaal Ashkharah Festival, which showcases the rich heritage and diverse tourism destinations of Jalan Bani bu Ali and the sultanate as a whole.

The festival, which commenced on July 5 and will run until July 24, aims to promote domestic tourism and highlight the captivating tourist destinations in South Sharqiyah governorate.

The information centre serves as a platform for visitors to explore the unique cultural and historical aspects of Jalan Bani bu

Ali, offering valuable insights into the local heritage. Additionally, the centre will host competitions and offer exciting prizes to children, enhancing their festival experience.

With the objective of showcasing South Sharqiyah and positioning it as a prominent tourist hub, the Ashkharah festival presents an excellent opportunity to highlight the remarkable archaeological and cultural sites that abound in the governorate. The festival boasts of a diverse line-up of entertainment, promotional and cultural events, including a heritage corner, fun games, beach activities and kite flying.

The festival is expected to not only contribute to the local economy but also foster social en-

gagement and cultural exchange. It invites visitors to immerse themselves in an enriching and memorable experience celebrating the vibrant heritage of Jalan Bani bu Ali.

Oman's tourism sector experienced a substantial boost during the winter season of 2022/23, evident from a notable increase in tourist arrivals. In February alone, the number of tourists reached 321,031, representing a remarkable surge of 156.7% compared to the same period in 2022. Among the top source markets for tourists were the United Arab Emirates, India, Germany, France, the UK, Yemen, China and Italy, reflecting the global appeal of Oman as a travel destination.

Our Correspondent

Muscat

Hossein Selahvarzi, Head of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, received H E Ibrahim Ahmed al Mu'aini, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Islamic Republic of Iran, on Tuesday.

During the meeting, the two sides explored means of enhancing economic relations, boosting trade exchange and highlighting promising sectors in Oman. They also reviewed areas of joint business cooperation in the fields of industry, banking, food, tourism, health and mining. Investment opportunities in the Iranian market were also explored during the

meeting.

H E Mu'aini said that special incentives are offered to foreign businesses in general and Iranian businesses in particular to invest in Oman.

He informed that the volume of trade exchange between the two countries is about RO2bn and underscored the importance of developing business and economic relations.

According to Selahvarzi, trade exchange between the two countries has recorded a 40% growth this year, compared to the corresponding period in 2022. He also affirmed the readiness of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture to expand economic cooperation with the sultanate, in addition to supporting the private sector of the two countries.

Muscat - H E Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, met Vyacheslav Viktorovich Volodin, Chairman of State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, in Moscow on Tuesday.

The meeting underlined the two countries' keenness on enhancing friendly relations, particularly in the parliamentary field.

The meeting was attended by H E Hamoud Salim al Tuwaih, Ambassador of Oman to Russia, and several officials from both sides.

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4.01am
Sunrise	5.27am
Duhr	12.11pm
Asr	3.31pm
Maghrib	6.56pm
Isha	8.17pm



Sultanate of Oman
سلطنة عُمان
وزارة التجارة والصناعة وترويج الاستثمار
Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion



Announcement No.3 / 2023

The ministry informs all industrial establishments that the customs exemptions for industry inputs will go into effect as of the date that the ministry refers the application to the ministry of finance, beginning on July 15, 2023.

The announcement is made in light of the ministry's desire to develop the local industry.

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Artisanal fishing accounts for 93.4% of fish landings

Our Correspondent
Muscat

By the end of May this year, artisanal fishing accounted for 93.4% of the total fish landed in Oman, amounting to 336,810 tonnes. This represents a 4% increase compared to the same period in 2022 when it totalled 324,040 tonnes.

Data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information shows that the value of the catch of artisanal fishing was RO177.259mn. Commercial fishing accounted for 20,516 tonnes, while coastal fishing contributed 2,930 tonnes.

Among the governorates, Al Wusta recorded the highest quantity of fish landed through artisanal fishing - 135,935 tonnes - followed by South Sharqiyah - 101,179 tonnes, Dhofar - 37,075 tonnes, North Batinah - 31,318 tonnes and South Batinah - 31,318 tonnes.

Musandam saw 19,239 tonnes of fish landed through artisanal fishing, while Muscat recorded 12,064 tonnes.

Small surface fish constituted the largest part of the catch, ac-



counting for 203,467 tonnes by the end of May 2023. This marks a 16.4% increase compared to the same period in 2022 when the quantity was 174,837 tonnes.

The quantity of large surface fish caught by artisanal fishing decreased 8.5% to 74,203 tonnes by the end of May, compared to 81,123 tonnes in May 2022. The quantity of demersal fish caught also decreased -

14.1% to 51,804 tonnes by the end of May from 60,276 tonnes in May 2022.

The quantity of sharks landed through artisanal fishing increased 7.6% to 2,075 tonnes this year compared to 1,927 tonnes in 2022.

A total of 3,548 tonnes of crustaceans and mollusks were caught through artisanal fishing by the end of May 2023, com-

pared to 3,362 tonnes in May 2022. Additionally, other types of fish accounted for 1,714 tonnes caught through artisanal fishing.

The dominance of artisanal fishing in Oman's fish landings underscores its significance in the local fishing industry and highlights the importance of sustainable practices to preserve marine resources for the future.

MoCIIP raises awareness on market competition

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), in collaboration with Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, organised a workshop titled 'Together to Ensure Freedom of Competition' in Taqah, Dhofar on Tuesday.

Held under the patronage of Sheikh Tariq bin Khalid al Hinai, Wali of Taqah, the event witnessed the participation of government officials, entrepreneurs, and small and medium enterprise owners in the governorate.

The workshop featured informative sessions addressing various topics, including the competencies of MoCIIP's Centre for Competition Protection and Antitrust Prevention, anti-dumping measures, and prohibited practices in international trade.

The objective of the workshop was to raise awareness about the economic laws and regulations that safeguard competition, prevent monopoly and combat dumping and harmful practices in international trade.

Zaher Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Director General of Centre for Competition Protec-



The ministry considers competition protection and antitrust prevention essential components of its economic and commercial endeavours

ZAHER AL MAHROUQI

tion and Antitrust Prevention, highlighted the significance of protecting competition to stimulate innovation, enhance service quality, generate employment

opportunities, and lower prices for consumers.

"The ministry considers competition protection and antitrust prevention essential components of its economic and commercial endeavours. These efforts align with Oman Vision 2040, which prioritises competitiveness as a means to achieve sustainable economic growth and prosperity," Mahrouqi said.

By prioritising competition protection, Oman is poised to create a vibrant business environment that encourages innovation, supports entrepreneurship and benefits consumers across various sectors.

Aster al Raffah Hospital Sohar launches cardiac cath lab services



Muscat - Aster al Raffah Hospital Sohar inaugurated an advanced cardiac cath lab on Tuesday, making it the first private hospital in North Batinah to offer such services. The opening took place in the presence of Mohammed bin Abdullah al Busaidi, Wali of Sohar, and other esteemed guests from the Ministry of Health, Sohar Hospital and the Ministry of Social Development.

Aster al Raffah Hospital Sohar extended its gratitude to the Ministry of Health and Directorate General of Private Health Establishments for granting approvals and enabling it to offer state-of-the-art services to the community for advanced cardiac care.

With the introduction of advanced cath lab services in Sohar, Aster al Raffah Hospital has eliminated the need for people to travel to Muscat for emergency cardiac care, ensuring timely access to life-saving interventions within the crucial 'golden hour' of emergencies.

The inauguration witnessed the gathering of prominent figures from the healthcare sector, including Shailesh Guntu, CEO of Aster Hospitals & Clinics Oman, Dr Shinoop, Regional Head of Aster Hospitals & Clinics, Dr Anuj Tiwari, Unit Head Aster al Raffah Hospital Sohar, Dr Swaroop Dundi, Medical Superintendent, and Dr Mohammed Sakib,

Interventional Cardiologist.

After touring the facility, the Wali of Sohar said, "I am happy to see the advanced facility and clinicians at Aster al Raffah Hospital Sohar. This facility will help both citizens and expat populations in the region to avail emergency heart services to save lives."

Introduction of the cath lab at Aster al Raffah Hospital Sohar is a remarkable advancement in cardiac care capabilities within the region, a press release said. Equipped with cutting-edge technology and staffed by highly skilled cardiologists and medical professionals, the cath lab will provide comprehensive diagnostic and interventional cardiac services. The facility is a testament to Aster al Raffah Hospital's unwavering commitment to delivering top-quality healthcare services, the release added.

The opening of the facility marks a significant step towards fulfilling the region's growing demand for specialised cardiac care. It showcases the hospital's dedication to collaboration and cooperation with governmental bodies to improve healthcare standards in the region.

At the opening ceremony, Aster al Raffah Hospital announced that it will provide 24x7 emergency cardiac services, ensuring around-the-clock access to life-saving care for patients experiencing cardiac emergencies.

The facility aims to minimise response times and enhance patient outcomes in critical situations.

In addition, the hospital will establish a dedicated Heart Failure Clinic, focusing on early detection, diagnosis and management of heart failure patients. The clinic's multidisciplinary team of specialists will provide personalised treatment plans, counselling and support to patients suffering from heart failure, promoting a better quality of life.

Aster al Raffah Hospital's commitment to exceptional healthcare services aligns with the national healthcare strategy and reinforces its dedication to the well-being of the community it serves. The hospital's relentless pursuit of excellence has earned it a reputation as a trusted healthcare provider, delivering compassionate care combined with the latest medical advancements.

The introduction of cath lab services, along with the announcement of 24x7 emergency cardiac services and the Heart Failure Clinic, showcase Aster al Raffah Hospital's commitment to enhancing the cardiac care landscape in the Sohar region. By providing access to advanced cardiac care, the hospital aims to improve patient outcomes and contribute to a healthier community.



SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH



ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 10:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/HQ-216/2023	Replacement of Medical Equipment for Medical Physics - 2023	17/7/2023	2/8/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	25/= Per set
MOH/HQ-218/2023	Supply and Installation of Medical Equipment for Cathlab in Expansion of Nizwa Hospital, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate	18/7/2023	16/8/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	25/= Per set
MOH/HQ-219/2023	Supply and Installation of Medical Equipment for Extension of A&E and Delivery Suite at Wadi Bani Khalid Health Center at North AlSharqiah	18/7/2023	16/8/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	25/= Per set
MOH/HQ-220/2023	Supply of Surgical Consumables (IVF Service)	20/7/2023	16/8/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	25/= Per set
MOH/HQ-221/2023	Replacement of Plasma Analyzer System at Central Public Health Laboratory, Darsit	19/7/2023	9/8/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	25/= Per set
MOH/HQ-222/2023	Supply & Installation of Computer Equipments for Various Health Facilities	13/7/2023	26/7/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	25/= Per set
MOH/HQ-223/2023	Supply & Installation of CCTV Camera for Royal Hospital	20/7/2023	16/8/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	25/= Per set
MOH/HQ-224/2023	Replacement of Medical Equipment for Various Health Facilities -Phase-III	20/7/2023	16/8/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	75/= Per set
MOH/HQ-225/2023	Upgrading of Radiology Ultrasounds for Various Health Facilities	20/7/2023	16/8/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	25/= Per set

- Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200 , Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Fitch Ratings upgrades OQ's Standalone Credit Profile to 'bbb'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Fitch Ratings, the international credit rating agency, has upgraded OQ's standalone credit profile (SCP) from 'b+' to 'bbb-' and reaffirmed the Long-Term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at 'BB', with positive outlook, this represents a significant improvement as OQ is now rated as investment grade.

It attributed the new rating to OQ's ability to meet its long-term financial obligations.

Fitch highlighted the exceptional achievements of the OQ Group, including reducing its debt as part of the Balance Sheet Optimisation programme, which demonstrated a committed approach to financial discipline.

The credit rating agency shed light on the improved EBITDA net leverage ratios, establishment of financial policy and increased hydrocarbon production among the significant achievements that contributed to the improved SCP.

OQ's rating is further bolstered by its diverse operations across exploration, production, refining, marketing, petrochemi-



cal segments, with focus on energy transition going forward, as well as the key role of the company as a national champion for clean energy.

The positive recognition reflects the unwavering commit-

ment to excellence and positions OQ as a strong player in the industry. The agency also emphasised OQ's proactive management of its balance sheet, leveraging strong cash flow generation and proceeds

from asset sales to prepay debt.

This positive shift in financial performance is largely attributed to the successful execution of the group's projects and robust financial performance due to higher oil and gas prices.



OPAZ launches e-reporting system to curb misconduct

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has established an electronic window through which all parties with an interest can provide information or data to reveal an incident that violates laws and regulations, including OPAZ employees, members of the Board of Directors, consultants, contractors, suppliers - who have contracts with OPAZ, former OPAZ employees, and consultants.

'The window enables creating a line of communication with officials in charge to maintain confidentiality and offer the necessary assurances to finish

the reporting procedure, and safeguard the individual submitting the report,' OPAZ stated.

The new electronic window, which is accessible through the authority's website (opaz.gov.om), aims to strengthen the authority's efforts toward preserving its positive image, enhancing its reputation, and improving the quality of its services, it further said.

OPAZ informed that the electronic window adheres to the fundamental principles of transparency, integrity, neutrality, and fairness, while following the best practices in asset preservation and efficiency enhancement.

'Any individual working or dealing with the authority can report any wrongful practices that

violate the laws, regulations, and systems currently in place. The electronic window ensures the protection of the whistleblower's identity while providing a high level of confidence in the reporting process'.

It is worth noting that this policy applies to a wide range of individuals, including employees, board members, consultants, contractors, suppliers contracted with the authority, and former employees.

The scope of reporting covered by this policy includes acts, violations, improper behaviours, and actions that violate the laws, regulations, and rules in force in the authority and committed by employees, whether inside or outside the authority.

MSX gains 25 points



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Stock Exchange general index (MSX30) on Tuesday gained 25.7 point to record a rise by 0.54% to close at 4801.88 points, compared to Monday's session, which stood at 4776.15 points.

The trading value on Tuesday stood at RO2,626,860, comprising a drop by 5.8%, compared to the last session, which stood at RO2,788,246.

The report released by MSX pointed out that the market value went up by 0.182% to reach about RO23.91bn.

The report added that the

value of shares bought by non-Omani investors reached RO702,000, comprising 26.73%.

The value of shares sold by non-Omani investors reached RO963,000, comprising 36.65%.

The net non-Omani investment decreased by 9.93% to RO261,000.

Cash-strapped Pakistan's reserves get boosted by \$2bn deposit from Saudi Arabia

Islamabad, Pakistan - Pakistan's desperately low foreign exchange reserves were boosted on Tuesday with a US\$2bn deposit from Saudi Arabia, ahead of a key IMF meeting this month to approve a new deal.

The economy has been stricken by a balance-of-payments crisis as it attempts to service crippling external debt, while months of political chaos have scared off foreign investment.

Inflation has rocketed, the rupee has reached a record low against the dollar, and the country is struggling to afford imports, causing a severe decline in industrial output.

"Saudi Arabia had announced in the recent past that it would deposit an additional US\$2bn in the account of the State Bank of Pakistan - that has been credited to the account of the State Bank," Pakistan's Finance Minister Ishaq Dar said in a televised



A man walks past a currency exchange market in Islamabad (AFP)

press conference.

It brings state foreign reserves to a total of US\$6.5bn, an almost 50% increase compared to last week's account balance.

Faisal Shaji, a research analyst with Standard Capital Securities, told AFP that the deposit

will stabilise Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves and will improve its credit rating in the international market.

"This is also a big and positive development towards the IMF program. As a result, Pakistan's currency will be strengthened

and it will have a better impact on the stock market."

After months of prolonged negotiations, the IMF last week announced a new standby deal worth US\$3bn for Pakistan after the government met the final conditions, including securing guarantees of further financial support from friendly nations.

The standby deal will be considered for approval by the IMF's executive board by mid-July.

Years of financial mismanagement have pushed Pakistan's economy to the limit, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, a global energy crisis and record floods that submerged a third of the country last year.

Pakistan's headline inflation eased for the first time in seven months in June, figures released last week showed, a bright spot for a beleaguered government that must call an election this year. AFP

Stock markets mostly rise on China support; pound rallies

London, UK - Major stock markets mostly rose on Tuesday as China moved to boost its flagging economy, while the pound hit a 15-month high against the dollar as UK data pointed to more aggressive interest rates hikes from the Bank of England.

Traders were looking ahead to US inflation data this week, set to provide fresh indication of the Federal Reserve's interest rate plans. Hong Kong was again one of the best performers after Beijing signalled a crackdown against the tech sector was nearing an end.

China has meanwhile urged banks and other financial institutions to provide easier terms for ailing property developers by renegotiating the terms of their loans, with the aim of ensuring homes under construction were

delivered.

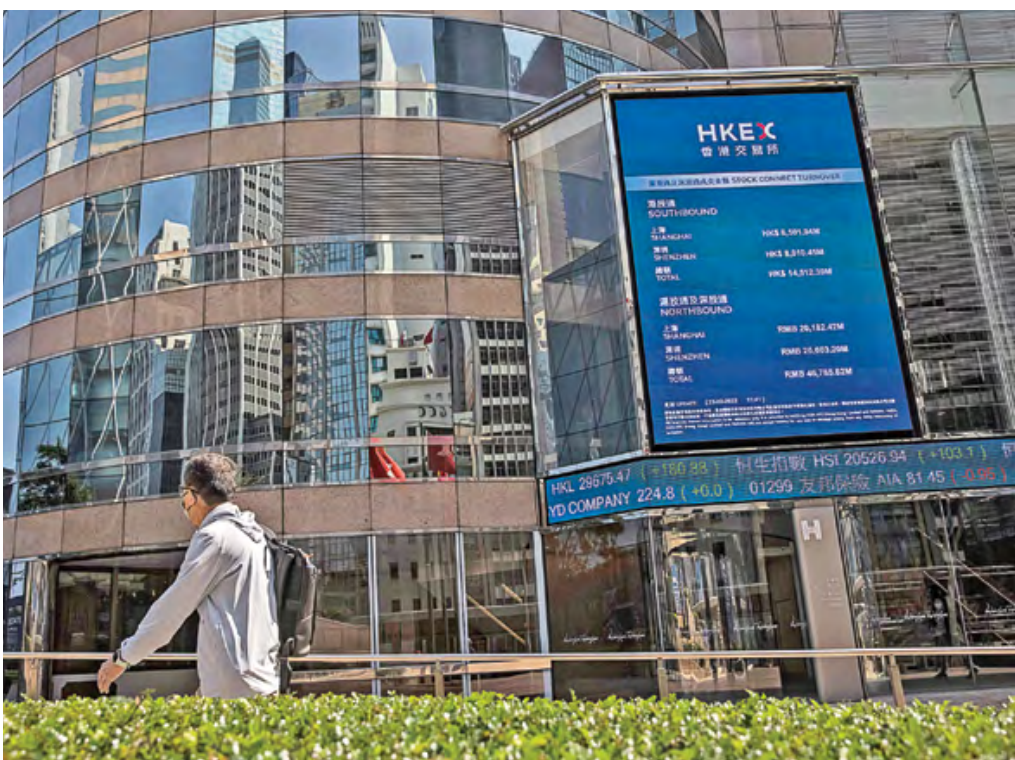
And on Tuesday, state-run financial newspapers said more announcements were in the pipeline as well as measures to boost business confidence.

The moves come as the vast property industry in China strains under the weight of enormous debts, with some firms such as Evergrande on the verge of collapse.

The crisis has sent shivers through the world's number-two economy, which has in turn weighed on global growth.

The chairman of Australian mining giant Rio Tinto this week warned of a knock-on effect on the commodities sector.

Beijing has come under immense pressure in recent months to unveil new growth-fuelling policies after a series of



below-par indicators showed the post-COVID rebound has run off the tracks.

"China's latest policy support toward the property sector was a bit surprising - given the low expectations on the property market," said Zhou Hao, of Guotai Junan International Holdings.

"The policies are intended to hedge against the strong headwinds in the market."

However, observers warn there is limited scope in the amount of stimulus officials can provide owing to huge local government debt and leaders' desire to recalibrate the growth model from a vast state investment model.

Pound jumps

Elsewhere on Tuesday, London was a rare faller among major

stock markets as the pound strengthened, impacting share prices of multinationals earnings in dollars.

The pound reached a 15-month high above US\$1.29 after UK jobs and wages data indicated that the Bank of England still had some way to go before its stops hiking interest rates aimed at cooling high inflation.

"While there are some signs the tightness in the labour market is starting to ease, wage growth remains uncomfortably high in the context of the Bank of England's efforts to get surging prices under control," noted AJ Bell investment director Russ Mould.

"Borrowers face more pain with the prospect of further rate hikes to come."

AFP

Specialists hold stroke awareness camp



The Higher Institute of Health Specialities represented by Adult Critical Care Program batch 2022-23 organised on Monday a scientific day on stroke awareness.

The event was held under the auspices of Hilal Hamad al Sarmi, Chairman of the Health and Environmental Committee of Shura Council and representative of Seeb, in the presence of Dr Manal Abdul Majeed al Zadjali, Dean of the Higher Institute for Health Specialities.

A number of the institute's academic and teaching staff, employees, students, and group of community members attended the event at Muscat Grand Mall.

The event highlighted the theme 'Minutes can save Lives, Mobility, and Memories ... Be F.A.S.T', marking symptoms of stroke.

The event was accompanied by an awareness exhibition of several stations including an overview of stroke, signs and symptoms of stroke, medical and surgical management, complications, post-stroke rehabilitation (physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy), and prevention of stroke corner. The exhibition further included entertainment stations for adults and children.

The Adult Critical Care Nursing Program is one of the unique programmes that promotes the professional development of adult critical care nurses across the Sultanate of Oman, qualifying them in dealing with acute medical conditions.

The event aimed at raising public awareness of stroke signs, causes, treatment and prevention, and the benefits of timely access to emergency medical care. It further aimed at educating people on how to avoid stroke, and exploring treatment options available for stroke patients and the rehabilitation services available in the Sultanate of Oman.

The day sought to enhance the individual's ability to recognise and respond to symptoms of stroke.

BankDhofar's Al Riadah Program offers 'premium priority' banking

Al Riadah Priority Banking, offered by BankDhofar, is a premium banking service tailored to the financial needs and goals of affluent individuals. It provides personalised services and exclusive benefits to enhance affluent customer's banking experience.

The key advantage of the Al Riadah program is its customer centric beyond banking service. Apart from a dedicated Relationship Manager, customers benefit from preferential rates and priority processing of their day-to-day banking transactions across BankDhofar's growing distribution network.

Customers can also benefit from a dedicated Al Riadah priority banking branch at the Royal Opera and take advantage of Locker Service for safekeeping their valuable items.

In addition to personalised financial solutions, Al Riadah members enjoy a range of exclusive privileges and benefits. These include preferential interest rates on deposits and loans, premium credit cards with enhanced features and rewards, access to exclusive lounges at select airports, and special discounts and offers from partner



merchants.

Members can access their accounts and conduct various banking transactions anytime, anywhere through a dedicated online banking platform and a feature-rich mobile banking app. These digital channels offer a seamless and secure banking experience, empowering members to effortlessly manage their finances.

Hind Abdul Malik al Sabbagh, AGM & Head of Priority Banking at BankDhofar, stated, "Al Riadah is an extension of the bank's commitment to delivering exceptional banking services and building lasting relationships with its customers.

"By combining personalised financial solutions, priority services, and exclusive privileges, we aim to exceed the expectations of our affluent clientele and provide them with an unmatched banking experience."

BankDhofar reaffirms its dedication to exceptional banking services through the introduction of the Al Riadah Referral Scheme. This exciting initiative offers customers enticing incentives, giving them the opportunity to win up to RO4,000 by referring friends and family members to join Al Riadah Priority Banking Services.

The Al Riadah Referral Scheme, valid until the end of March 2024, is exclusively available to existing Al Riadah Priority Banking customers.

ahlibank credit card holders to get special discount at Snow Oman

In line with its dedication to offering innovative solutions that cater to customer needs, ahlibank has partnered with Snow Oman, located in Mall of Oman, to provide an enticing offer. The offer is exclusively for its credit card holders.

Being the first-of-its-kind campaign in Oman, ahlibank credit card holders can now enjoy a 15% discount when purchasing tickets at Snow Oman.

The offer is valid for three days and is limited to a maximum of four tickets per transaction. Credit card holders can avail the discount on various ticket options, including Snow Park Pass, Full Park Pass, Snow Premium, and 2-Day Pass.

The offer can only be availed when purchasing tickets at the admissions counter at Snow Oman in Mall of Oman. The offer begins on July 12 and will continue until July 14.

Commenting on the offer, Muneer al Balushi, AGM - Head of Retail Distribution at ahlibank, said, "By providing our customers with such exciting offers, we are introducing new avenues of entertainment. We understand the importance of quality time with loved ones, and this



offer allows our customers to relax and enjoy unforgettable experiences.

"Snow Oman has gained immense popularity since its opening last year, and this exclusive offer is sure to entice our customers to visit and create lasting memories with their families."

"At ahlibank, we believe in the significance of offering the latest and most innovative digital banking solutions. Technology plays a pivotal role in today's financial landscape, and we strive to ensure that our offers and services are inclusive and adaptable to different lifestyles. Our commitment is to provide the best to our customers and continue our journey towards excellence," he added.

With its host of valuable offers and digital banking services and products, ahlibank strives to achieve greater heights. The bank ensures that it exceeds customer expectations and delivers a holistic banking experience.

By providing benefits for its credit card holders, ahlibank also encourages customers to adapt to digital means and services, as they have become increasingly more reliable. With these modern advancements, ahlibank has become one of the most preferred banks in the sultanate.

Al Mouj Golf launches Oman's first ever corporate golf league

Al Mouj Golf, the World top 100 oceanfront course, is excited to announce the launch of the Oman Golf League, the sultanate's first ever corporate golf tournament, which presents companies with a unique opportunity to network, connect and talk business over a friendly game of golf.

Registration is now open for the ground-breaking tournament which will tee off on October 12 and run for five months with teams from around 25 leading Omani businesses coming together to compete over 18 holes each month.

The magnificent 72-par Greg Norman-designed course is ranked in the top two in the region and has won multiple international awards for its playing attributes. Organisers of the new corporate competition are confident Al Mouj Golf provides a world-class setting for elite teams, with its club house, international restaurant and driving range the ideal environment for companies to network away from traditional office or conference spaces.

"At Al Mouj we excel at developing a strong sense of community and this applies to business communities too. We have created a world-class golf course and this league is the perfect platform for businesses from every sector to share in their enjoyment of golf whilst building relationships," said Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat.

"It is an excellent example of a pioneering initiative that will foster connections, support business growth and impact positively on the country's economy," he noted.

"This is healthy competition in a healthy outdoor setting at its very best and I am sure golfers from across the sultanate will be asking their CEOs to enter a team and be part of the first ever league of its kind in Oman."

Situated within premier lifestyle and leisure destination, Al Mouj Muscat, Al Mouj Golf was the country's first links-style course which opened in 2012 and, set along 2km of coastline, offers a challenging and rewarding game for players of all standards. It was the first in Oman to achieve PGA status and has hosted the Oman Open (European Tour) Championship on three occasions, and it was the first in the region to host the Oman Stage of the Asian Tour, the pan-Asian competition supported by LIV Golf.



Bank Muscat organises special event for customers in Batinah

Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, organised special meetings for customers in the wilayat of Musannah and Sohar in Batinah governorate, a release stated.

Held under a banner campaign 'Financial and Retail Wealth Planning', these events come in translation of the bank's customer-centric vision and to strengthen relationship and partnership with the bank's valued customers from various governorates.

'It is a part of a series of meetings organised recently by the bank in a number of wilayats with the aim of introducing customers to various updates developments related to the distinctive and exclusive benefits and offers offered by the bank,' the release explained.

In his opening speech, Saleh Mohammed al Maaini, Deputy General Manager - Capital Regions, Bank Muscat, said, "We are pleased today to meet with our valued customers in Batinah governorate and to connect with them aiming to exchange views and ideas that will contribute to the development of banking services and facilities provided to suit their aspirations.

"Over the past years, the bank has been keen to provide services up to latest modern devel-



opments in the sector by focusing on innovation and adapting to accelerated changes. The bank will to continue to provide the best banking services, solutions, offers and benefits that provide added value to customers. I would like to extend thanks and gratitude to all the bank customers for their trust and constant support."

Expressing her happiness with this ongoing partnership between the bank and customers, Khadija Khalfan al Rashdi, Head of Asalah Priority Banking, Bank Muscat, said, "Such events are important to meet with our customers. They represent a motivation for

us to continue hard work and maintain the bank's leading role in the sector. I would like to thank our valued customers for their valuable participation to make the bank's various events and activities a success."

These events are an opportunity to introduce customers to the wide range of services provided by the bank, which have been developed to achieve the bank's goals in terms of enhancing financial inclusion, like 'Baituna' financing option for house loans and 'Sayyarati' for car loans. It is a chance as well to highlight the advantages of personal financing and exclusive of-

fers offered by the bank to Asalah and Al Jawhar customers.

The bank has set its customers' various needs as a foundation to identify developments, innovation opportunities, and challenges, thus, gives them back the best possible services based on its vision "to serve you better every day".

The bank is proud today to continue the development of its services and launch new innovations in line with the latest global trends in the sector and in line with the aspirations of its customers, especially at a time when banking services are witnessing accelerated development in ac-

cordance with the current era.

Bank Muscat's ongoing efforts and the continuous development of its services and products have been well recognised by local and international institutions with the bank winning multiple awards across its different lines of business regularly.

It has been ranked by Forbes Middle East amongst its 'Top 50 Banks in the Middle East' and the 'Top 100 institutions in the region'. It won a number of prestigious awards including the Best Retail Bank in Oman from MEED as well as the Best Corporate/Institutional Digital Bank (Oman) award from Global Finance.



Abu Dhabi Customs, FCA delegations visits Khatm Melaha border facility

Sharjah Ports, Customs and Free Zones Authority's Khatm Melaha Customs Centre has received an official delegation from the General Administration of Abu Dhabi Customs and the Federal Customs Authority to exchange experiences and review practices applicable in this land port, which is one of the best and most prominent across the country.

Mohammed Ibrahim al Raisi, Director of Ports and Border Points Affairs and Chairman of the Organisational Committee of Ports and Border Points in the Emirate of Sharjah, received the visiting high-level team.

The delegation included Mubarak Matar al Mansouri, Executive Director of the Customs Operations Sector at Abu Dhabi Customs; Abdullah Mohammed al Khumairi, Director of the Policy and Governance Department; and Salem Issa al Hammadi, Director of Operations Sector Projects; along with a number of officials from both sides.

The visiting officials were briefed on how the Sharjah Ports, Customs and Free Zones Authority has been managing the border crossings in the emirate, the work mechanism of the Organisational Committee of border crossings and points, leveraging modern technologies in customs operations and customs inspection, in addition to the methodology for qualifying young national resources and preparing leaders.

During a visit meeting, Khatm Melaha border crossing's unit managers and heads of depart-

ments gave a presentation for the updates and studies on the development of the port, the work mechanism and the most prominent initiatives, achievements and implemented activities.

The delegation later had a field trip for examining the separately-built entry and exit paths of vehicles and trucks, in addition to the technical support building equipped with the latest inspection equipment and systems, the operations room of the customs port, and the customer happiness center in the customs operations building, which completes thousands of customs data monthly and operates around the clock, seven days a week.

Mohamed al Raisi stressed that the meeting was part of the joint efforts to enhance cooperation between all government agencies concerned with customs affairs, and aimed at exchanging experiences, transferring and sharing knowledge for the public interest, looking ahead for customs work at the state level. It is also helpful in developing the provided services through developing common future visions, and how to facilitate all customs procedures for customers.

The meeting also explored relevant potential cooperation opportunities, based on the desire of the Khatm Melaha Customs Centre to transfer its expertise and leading experiences in the field of managing land ports and customs operations, given that it is one of the distinguished land border crossings nationwide, due to its highest-level specialised and qualified national resources.

Sports management program holds 5th chapter

The Sports Management Diploma programme organised by Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), represented by Oman Olympic Academy, entered into its 5th chapter in cooperation with the International Olympic Solidarity.

The chapter - presented by lecturer Jaber bin Muhammad al Shabibi - discussed various issues, including effective communication, ways to improve the quality of services for institutions, marketing from a strategic perspective, and an analysis of the relevance of the institution's services in relation to the requirements of partners.

Shabibi also analysed the sponsorship programme for



sports institutions.

On the first day, the participants gave visual presentations about the last chapter, 'Management of Financial Affairs in the

Olympic Sports Foundation'.

The Sports Management Diploma Program is one of the most important programmes organised by the Oman Olympic

Academy for this year because it contains modern skills and concepts for those targeted in sports institutions, which is the latest book in the field of sports and

submitted by the Olympic Solidarity.

The last chapter is devoted to presenting the studies and final projects of the participants and evaluating the general return of this programme. The International Olympic Committee grants a diploma in the Advanced Sports Management Programme after the study submitted by each student fulfills the conditions for submission and evaluation by the program director.

With regard to the contents of the programme, each of the chapters covers an important aspect of management and includes a number of secondary parts and illustrative tables supported by graphs.

'Khareef Experience' with Ooredoo

Ooredoo has announced for its Shahry customers a chance to win two tickets to Salalah this summer.

'You can enter the prize draw now for an opportunity to enjoy the Khareef season, with seven lucky winners being announced every week,' the company stated.

The offer is valid for one month and is open to new and existing Shahry prepaid customers. 'Shahry will get you and your plus one to Salalah to sing in the rain,' Ooredoo added.

'While in Salalah, customers can also enjoy Ooredoo's recent 5G coverage network boost, which will keep them connected and experience an upgrade like never before'.

To join this contest, one can join Shahry by activating or upgrading the Shahry plan.

EAD begins receiving abstracts in 4 different languages

The Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi (EAD) is gearing up for the 12th edition of the World Environmental Educational Congress (WEEC), which will be hosted in Abu Dhabi - the first time it will be held in the Middle East.

Held under the patronage of H H Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed al Nahyan, Ruler's Representative in Al Dhafrah Region and Chairman of the Board of Directors of EAD, the Congress will be jointly organised with the WEEC Network Secretariat, Italy, from January 28 to February 2 next year at Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre.

EAD have also received the prestigious backing of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco), as the International Strategic Partner for the Congress. This recognition confirms the immense significance of this event at a global scale. Other significant partners include the UAE Ministry of Education and the Department of Culture and Tourism (DCT).

Following an international call for abstract submissions, the Agency has received abstracts from more than 30 countries across the globe. To encourage



increased participation from different countries, the abstract submissions have been made available in four different languages - English, Arabic, French and Spanish.

Since the official announcement, which was made during the 11th edition of WEEC in Prague, Czech Republic, in March 2022, EAD began preparing to host the 12th edition of the

congress, under the theme 'Connecting People, Creating Tomorrow', providing an important international platform for people who work in the field of environmental education and sustainable development.

Preparations to date include forming all the committee members for the Organising, National and International Scientific Committees, whereby the Local Or-

ganising Committee oversees and executes the Congress and implements its agenda.

The Scientific Committee is comprised of 50 local and international members, who are accomplished researchers, scientists and members from the academia, and will be involved in the abstract review process and designing of the technical programme of the congress.

A Youth Conference will also be held in parallel with the main Congress, managed by a dedicated Youth Committee. EAD has developed a youth survey to support drafting a full agenda for the Youth Stream at WEEC, receiving over 100 responses.

"Our preparations for the 12th edition of the World Environmental Educational Congress that will be held in 2024 are cur-

rently underway and going well," said Ahmed Baharoon, Executive Director of Environment Information, Science Outreach Management Sector at EAD.

"Early bird registration for the event is now open and the deadline for receiving abstracts is August 31 this year. We have seen positive interest generated from over 30 countries from academia and researchers for the submission of abstracts. We are also currently compiling our list of participants and speakers and we are expecting more than 2,000 individuals at the event."

He added: "Abu Dhabi, represented by the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi was selected to host the Congress as we have decades of experience in environmental education. In 2009 and 2014 we pioneered the Sustainable Schools and Sustainable Campus Initiative which are designed to harness the teaching of sustainability in schools and universities so that youth rank protecting the environment high on their personal agenda. To date all there are 152 schools and 24 universities committed to the initiatives and the number is rising."

Ukraine turns heat on allies as NATO stalls on membership bid

Vilnius, Lithuania - A frustrated President Volodymyr Zelensky launched a furious broadside against Ukraine's NATO allies on Tuesday as they began a summit still unsure how to advance Kyiv's membership bid.

Zelensky, who will come to Vilnius during the two-day summit, denounced as 'absurd' the reluctance of some NATO leaders to provide a clear timetable for Ukraine to join the alliance. "Uncertainty is weakness. And I will openly discuss this at the summit," Zelensky tweeted.

The alliance backs Ukraine in its battle against Russia's 16-month-old invasion, but several members - notably US President Joe Biden - oppose giving Ukraine a timetable for membership. Instead, the Vilnius summit is expected to produce more commitments on arms shipments and a reaffirmation that Ukraine's eventual place is within the alliance once the war is won.

Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz said that the G7 group of major industrialised economies would offer a package of support to kick in once 'peace is obtained'.

Russian 'terror'

Arriving at the talks, President Emmanuel Macron said France would join Britain in supplying long-range cruise missiles to allow Ukraine to strike Russian targets in depth.

But all this is unlikely to appease Zelensky whose forces have launched a counteroffensive to reclaim Russian-occupied territory at a cost of accelerating casualties.

"It seems there is no readiness neither to invite Ukraine to NATO nor to make it a member of the alliance," he said, citing 'signals that certain wording is being discussed without



Participants of the meeting of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) are pictured during the NATO Summit in Vilnius on Tuesday (AFP)

Ukraine'. "This means that a window of opportunity is being left to bargain Ukraine's membership in NATO in negotiations with Russia. And for Russia, this

the delivery of SCALP missiles. "From our point of view, this decision is a mistake with consequences for the Ukrainian side, because this will of course force

communicate will be made public within hours," he declared.

German Patriot missile systems and French fighter jets were guarding the skies as the NATO leaders gathered in the Lithuanian capital.

No timetable

While eastern European nations have pushed for an explicit timetable to allow Kyiv to join, the US and Germany are reluctant to go beyond an earlier vow that it will become a member one day.

Biden, who will meet Zelensky on Wednesday, has said there is no agreement to offer Kyiv membership while the war with Russia rages, as this could drag NATO directly into the conflict.

White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters NATO will draw up a path of reforms that Ukraine will need to undertake, but without giving a 'timetable'.

It seems there is no readiness neither to invite Ukraine to NATO nor to make it a member of the alliance. (There are) signals that certain wording is being discussed without Ukraine

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY

means motivation to continue its terror." But if Russia was encouraged by the tenor of the debate in Vilnius, it did not say so, instead denouncing what it dubbed 'the strong anti-Russian character' of the meeting.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov warned that Russia's security could be jeopardised by Sweden's imminent arrival in the alliance, and warned France over

us to take countermeasures," Peskov said.

The fury emanating from Moscow and Kyiv stood in stark contrast to the message to Ukraine from NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, buoyed by Turkey's decision to lift a veto on Sweden's membership. "We will send a clear message, a positive message on the path forward. The text in the

The US, Britain, France and Germany have been negotiating over long-term commitments on weapons supplies to reassure Kyiv before it joins NATO. These fall far short of Zelensky's desire to be under the alliance's collective defence umbrella, but could reassure him that his nation can keep on resisting.

Drawing up something similar to the US arrangement with Israel - which sees Washington sending US\$3.8bn (€3.5bn) of weapons each year for a decade - is one possibility.

Lithuania's President Gitanas Nausėda insisted only NATO's article five mutual defence clause 'can provide real security guarantees which would deter Russia from any future aggression'.

In a reminder of the daily threat facing Ukrainians, Russia targeted Kyiv and the port city of Odesa in yet another overnight drone attack.

AFP



Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (AFP)

Sweden deal: Erdogan makes post-election tilt towards West

Istanbul, Turkey - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has performed one of his trademark policy U-turns on Sweden's accession to NATO that culminates a gradual pro-Western tilt of course since his May re-election.

Erdogan ended more than a year of wrangling and struck a deal on Monday that will allow the Nordic nation to become the 32nd member of the US-led defence bloc. It followed a dramatic day during which Erdogan upped the stakes by suddenly demanding a clear path for Turkey's long-stalled accession to the European Union in return.

The new ask secured him a private meeting with EU chief Charles Michel and a pledge from Sweden and NATO to 'support efforts to reinvigorate Turkey's EU accession process'.

The agreement allows NATO to stand more united at a two-day summit that started on Tuesday in Vilnius with the aim of showing Western resolve in the face of Russia's war on Ukraine.

But it also highlights a strategic shift in thinking that appears to have occurred in Ankara since Erdogan nearly lost his two-decade grip on power in May elections.

The vote coincided with a dire economic crisis that Erdogan tried to buffer through deals with rich Gulf countries and - to the West's growing alarm - Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Erdogan's refusal to budge on Sweden added to the growing perception that NATO member Turkey was turning into a Kremlin tool for sowing divisions in the West.

That image began to change after Erdogan turned to Wall Street-trained economists who want to improve relations with Western investors post-election.

He then hosted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky

for more than two hours of talks on Friday that created huge unease in Moscow.

The deal on Sweden followed a call with US President Joe Biden during which Erdogan raised both EU accession and Turkey's desire to acquire a large batch of F-16 fighter jets.

"Ankara wants to improve its relations with Europe and the West," European Council of Foreign Relations analyst Asli Aydintasbas remarked.

"The recent policy balance had shifted too much towards Russia."

Ankara wants to improve its relations with Europe and the West. The recent policy balance had shifted too much towards Russia

ASLI AYDINTASBAS

Erdogan has long tried to leverage Turkey's strategic location between Europe and Asia to play off Russian and Western interests for maximum gain.

Few expect his westward turn to represent a fundamental or long-term shift.

"We tend to think of Erdogan as unpredictable. But that's not entirely true," said veteran Turkish analyst Salim Cevik.

"Once you understand his transactional style, he is quite predictable." Many note that Erdogan's change in tactics followed a June mutiny by Wagner mercenaries group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin that created mayhem in Moscow and suddenly left Putin looking weak.

AFP

Iran president's Africa tour delayed: Kenya ministry

Nairobi, Kenya - Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi will kick off his Africa tour a day late on Wednesday, the foreign ministry in Nairobi said after he failed to appear at a press event.

The rare visit to Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe marks the latest diplomatic effort by the Islamic Republic to forge new alliances and ease its international isolation.

The three-day trip will be the first by an Iranian president to Africa in 11 years.

Raisi was scheduled to hold a press conference with Kenyan President William Ruto on Tuesday morning, but neither showed up.

"The schedule of the president has now been reviewed to allow for finalisation of key MoUs (memoranda of understanding) that are central to the furtherance of relations," Kenya's foreign ministry said.

"The Iranian president will now arrive tomorrow for a state visit," it said, adding that the two leaders would hold bilateral talks at 7am (0400 GMT) on Wednesday.

A Ugandan official said Raisi's trip to the East African country would proceed as previously scheduled, with his two-day visit due to begin on Wednesday.

President Yoweri Museveni and his Iranian counterpart will hold talks, address the media and a business forum during the visit, said Faruk Kirunda, deputy press secretary to the

Ugandan leader.

The visit 'is aimed at strengthening cooperation and trade', Kirunda told AFP.

According to the official IRNA news agency, Raisi will head a delegation that includes the foreign minister as well as senior businesspeople. He is also scheduled to meet Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa.

'Turning point'

On Monday, Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani described the trip as 'a new turning point' which could bolster economic and trade ties with African nations.

He also said the rapprochement is based 'on common political views' between Tehran and the three African countries.

Iran has stepped up its diplomacy in recent months to reduce its isolation and offset the impact of crippling sanctions reimposed since the 2018 withdrawal of the United States from a painstakingly negotiated nuclear deal.

On Saturday, Raisi welcomed Algerian Foreign Minister Ahmed Attaf in a bid to boost ties with Algiers.

Last week, Iran became a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which includes Russia, China and India. In March, Tehran agreed to restore ties with regional rival Saudi Arabia under a China-mediated deal.

AFP

SKELETAL DISPLAY



A replica of the skeletal fossil of the Tarbosaurus dinosaur is seen on display during the Paleontology Exhibition at the National Taiwan Museum in Taipei on Tuesday (AFP)

Protests erupt after Israel adopts reform clause

Jerusalem - Protests erupted across Israel on Tuesday, hours after parliament adopted in a first reading a key clause of the government's judicial overhaul package which opponents say threatens democracy.

The government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu forged ahead with the controversial move despite mass demonstrations since the reforms were proposed in January.

Protesters blocked roads across Israel and gathered at Ben Gurion airport near Tel Aviv, with police reporting more than 40 arrests during the morning.

"I came here because this government is demolishing - totally - democracy in Israel," said Eitan Galon, a doctor protesting on a highway outside Jerusalem.

"We will fight until the end," he added as police nearby used water cannon to disperse demonstrators.

Traffic was also brought to a standstill by protesters along a



Israeli border guards stand alert as anti-government demonstrators rally with national flags behind barriers during a protest at Ben Gurion Airport near Lod on Tuesday (AFP)

highway near Modiin, a town between Jerusalem and Israel's commercial hub Tel Aviv.

Near parliament in Jerusalem, more protesters waved the blue and white national flag and banged drums while police deployed mounted officers.

Police in a statement said they 'authorise the freedom to demonstrate while upholding law and order'.

Israeli protest leaders had announced a day of mobilisation in anticipation of the parliamentary vote, with dozens of rallies ex-

pected across the country.

A demonstration was due on Tuesday evening in Tel Aviv outside the embassy of Israel's top ally, the United States.

In a CNN interview aired on Sunday, US President Joe Biden said he hoped Netanyahu would

'continue to move towards moderation and change in the court'.

The Israeli premier told the Wall Street Journal last month that he had removed one of the most controversial elements of the overhaul, a clause that would allow parliament to override Supreme Court rulings.

'Reasonability' clause

The latest parliamentary vote aimed to scrap the so-called 'reasonability' clause, through which the Supreme Court can strike down government decisions.

The measure was used recently to force Netanyahu to remove Aryeh Deri from his cabinet, over the senior politician's previous tax evasion conviction. Speaking in parliament during the overnight debate, opposition leader Yair Lapid slammed 'this damned government' and vowed the bill would not make it through its second and third readings.

AFP

Still hope to find missing toddler in French Alps: Rescue services

Le Vernet, France - Dozens of French police and soldiers backed by helicopter searched the terrain around a tiny hamlet in the French Alps on Tuesday, saying they still hoped to find a toddler who has been missing for three days.

Emile, who is two and a half, was staying with his grandparents when he went missing on Saturday. He was last seen by two neighbours walking alone on a street of Haut-Vernet, a tiny village of 25 inhabitants at an altitude of around 1,200 metres (4,000 feet).

"We're not stopping the search, we are not losing hope," the local prefect, Marc Chapuis, told reporters late on Monday. But after 48 hours of combing through the area without success, the search was now becoming 'more targeted' and 'more selective', he said.

Authorities said that large-scale searches involving volunteers which took place on Monday had been discontinued. Instead 80 military police officers were deployed for a targeted search on Tuesday, backed up by a dozen soldiers specialised in the clearing of terrain, search-and-rescue dogs and a helicopter.

"The work now will be very detail-oriented," local prosecutor Remy Avon said.

This included the analysis of local phone records to deter-



Volunteers take part in a search operation for two-and-a-half-year-old Emile who is reported missing for two days, on Monday in the French southern Alps village of Le Vernet (AFP)

mine 'what phone calls were made, by whom and to whom', around the time of the disappearance, he said.

Several witnesses had been questioned and houses in the hamlet searched, he said.

Specialist forensic units have also been called in, and more lo-

cals are set to be interviewed.

The terrain in the search zone is hilly and craggy with many streams, and the region has been hit by a heat wave, with temperatures forecast to reach 34 Celsius (93 Fahrenheit) on Tuesday.

"All possible explanations are on the table, we're not favouring any, and we're not ruling any out," the prosecutor said. The search has focused on an area of 5km around the hamlet. "The child should have been found after 48 hours in that perimeter," said Chappuis.

Police, still hoping for a breakthrough thanks to witness statements, have circulated a picture of the blond and hazel-eyed boy who was wearing a yellow top, white shorts and hiking shoes the day he disappeared. The site is off-limits to outsiders as of Tuesday, prosecutor Avon said.

Hundreds of volunteers have taken part in efforts to find the boy. "We took part in a big search this morning with 50 other people," said Roxane, 19, who came with two friends to help on Monday.

"There was a gap of two metres (7 feet) between each of us, we looked in the fields, and in the woods. We looked out for the smallest clue, maybe an item of clothing or a shoe he could have lost," she said.

AFP

Rescuers save 86 migrants from boat near Canary Isles

Arguineguin, Spain - Spain's coastguard said on Monday it rescued 86 migrants from sub-Saharan Africa aboard a boat near the Canary Islands that had been spotted earlier in the day by a rescue plane.

The Salvamento Maritimo coastguard service said they had found the boat with six females and 80 males on board as rescuers were searching for a missing migrant boat that had 'left Senegal with around 200 people on board'.

It did not indicate the ages of those rescued.

When a rescue plane spotted the vessel about 71 nautical miles south of the island of Gran Canaria, it was initially thought to have 'around 200 people on board', a spokeswoman said.

"We can't be 100 per cent sure but it's likely it is the same boat," she said.

But the coastguard later acknowledged that the estimate by the plane's crew was incorrect.

"It is difficult to determine the number of people from the air," she later told AFP.

A rescue ship brought the migrants to the port of Arguineguin on Gran Canaria, where they were greeted by Red Cross workers who provided them with medical care.

The situation remains confused, however, and the spokeswoman told AFP she was not able to say whether there was another boat adrift in the same area with 200 people on board.



Red Cross workers help migrants to disembark from a Spanish Maritime Rescue vessel in the Port of Arguineguin on the Canary Island of Gran Canaria, on Monday (AFP)

As a local authority, we have tried to raise awareness, but the state's silence is regrettable

DAVID DIATTA

Helena Maleno, head of Spanish NGO Caminando Fronteras, which helps migrant boats in distress, said a vessel had left the southern Senegalese town of 'Kafountine on June 27 with approximately 200 people on board'.

"There are many minors on board," she said in an audio message, explaining the families had 'told us about the disappearance of the boat, saying they had had no news for several days'.

Kafountine is a fishing village in the southern part of Senegal, which lies at least 1,700km (more than 1,000 miles) south of the Canary Islands.

She said the NGO knew of two other boats with around 120 people on board that were also missing after leaving Senegal on June 23.

An easy departure point

Senegal, and more specifically

the Kafountine region, is a regular departure point for migrants seeking to reach Europe.

For them, the nearest entry point is the Canary Islands, although Spain itself is often only a stopover as the migrants make their way to other EU countries.

David Diatta, the mayor of Kafountine, told AFP some migrants had recently left the village but that he'd not heard any news about them.

"They are Senegalese, Gambians, Guineans, Sierra Leoneans... Most of the time, they are foreigners," he said.

He said people chose to leave from Kafountine because it is surrounded by islands and inlets

that provide hiding places for people smugglers and migrants.

"As a local authority, we have tried to raise awareness, but the state's silence is regrettable - there are very few gendarmes on the ground (to stop them) and we lack the resources," he said.

In June 2022, a pirogue - a long wooden vessel - with migrants on board caught fire in the area, leaving 15 dead and 20 injured.

"People from outside the area organise their departure as they wish, and it's only after the event that we find out about it," said Abdoulaye Demba, head coordinator of the local fishing council.

He said none of the migrants' families approach him directly for help because they know it is against the law.

A highly dangerous journey

The Atlantic route to the Canaries is particularly dangerous due to the strong currents, with migrants travelling in overloaded boats, which are often unseaworthy, and without enough drinking water.

Many boats leave from ports in Morocco, Western Sahara or Mauritania but they also come from countries further south such as Senegal.

According to figures released by Caminando last week, 778 people died while trying to reach the Canary Islands by boat in the first half of 2023.

AFP



People watch flowing lava during a volcanic eruption near Litli Hrutur, south-west of Reykjavik in Iceland on Monday (AFP)

Volcano erupts near Icelandic capital

Reykjavik, Iceland - A volcano erupted near Iceland's capital on Monday, the country's meteorological office said, marking the third time in two years that lava has gushed out in the area.

Local media footage shows a massive cloud of smoke rising from the ground as well as a substantial flow of lava at the site around 30km (19 miles) from Reykjavik.

According to an AFP reporter, the smoke can be seen from the road connecting the capital to the international airport, with cars pulled over and people taking pictures.

"The eruption is taking place in a small depression just north of Litli Hrutur ('Little Ram' in Icelandic) from which smoke is escaping in a north-westerly direction," the meteorological office said.

"There are three fissures with lava basically running in all directions," Thorvaldur Thordarson, Professor in Volcanology at University of Iceland, told AFP.

He added that the fissures are in total around 200 to 300 metres long and 'it is a low intensity, effusive eruption'. This means

'it's not causing widespread threats due to explosive activity' but 'if the eruption continues for long enough it could be a threat to infrastructure'.

Thousands of small earthquakes were recorded in the area in the week leading up to the eruption, signalling that the magma below the ground was moving and an eruption was imminent. The Icelandic authorities advised against going to the site, located in difficult terrain without road connection, before they have assessed the situation.

The magma broke through the ground at around 1640 GMT, just a few kilometres from two previous eruptions in the last two years.

The first was on March 19, 2021 in the Geldingadalur valley and lasted six months, while the second occurred on August 3, 2022 in the Meradalir valley, lasting three weeks.

Prior to the 2021 eruption, the region had remained dormant for eight centuries, but volcanologists believe the new cycle of increased activity could last several years.

AFP

Uncle investigated in missing Vatican teen case

Vatican City, Holy See - Rome prosecutors investigating the disappearance of a teenager 40 years ago are looking afresh at the possible involvement of her uncle following information supplied by the Vatican, Italian media reported on Tuesday.

Emanuela Orlandi, the 15-year-old daughter of a Vatican employee, was last seen leaving a music class in Rome on June 22, 1983.

Decades of speculation followed over what happened to her, with suggestions that mobsters, the secret services or a Vatican conspiracy were to blame, theories which sparked a hit Netflix series.

The Vatican has been accused of obstructing investigation efforts over the decades, but eventually launched an inquiry into its most famous cold case in Jan-

uary. Rome prosecutors in May then opened their own fresh probe - the third so far.

The Vatican recently passed its case files to Rome, saying they included 'some lines of inquiry worthy of further investigation'.

Those include a letter in which a priest told the Vatican's then secretary of state that Orlandi's older sister Natalia had revealed during confession that her uncle, Mario Meneguzzi, had sexually abused her, Italian television channel La 7 said on Monday.

Orlandi's brother Pietro, who has for years campaigned for the truth and believes the Vatican knows what happened to Emanuela, reacted angrily to the report. "They cannot put it all on the family. I am furious," he said.

AFP

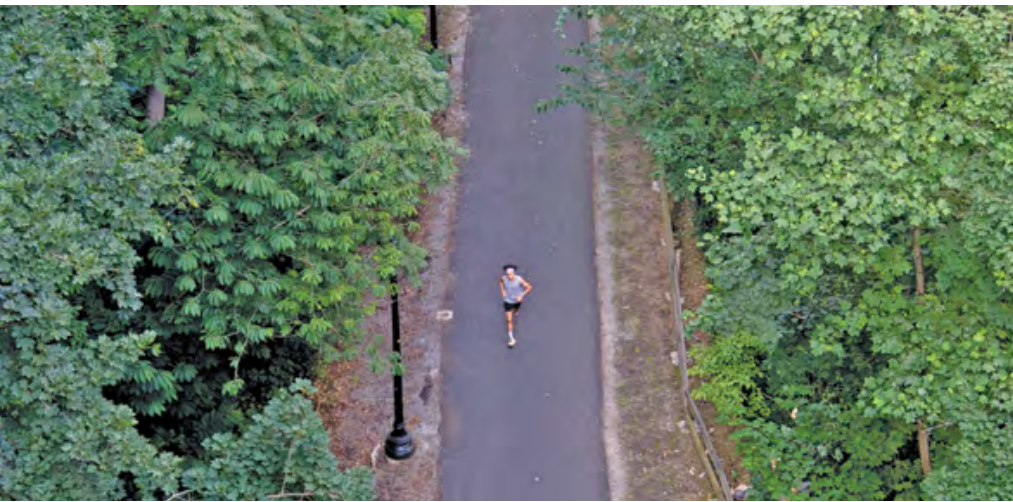
Southern US set to sizzle under heat wave

Los Angeles, US - More than 50mn Americans are set to bake under dangerously high temperatures this week, from California to Texas to Florida, as a heat wave builds across the southern United States.

A mass of hot air was settling over southwestern desert states, the National Weather Service (NWS) warned, with parts of Arizona, Nevada and New Mexico at risk of seeing the mercury soar past 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 C).

The NWS has issued excessive heat warnings for the southern and central regions of California, with temperatures expected to hit even as high as 112 degrees Fahrenheit in parts of Los Angeles County after Tuesday.

"Heat is the number one weather-related killer," the NWS in Las Vegas warned, saying this level of 'extreme heat with little to no overnight relief affects anyone without effective



A person runs through a shaded area of Rock Creek Park in Washington, DC, on Monday (AFP)

cooling and/or adequate hydration'. The new warnings come after world daily temperature records were smashed on three days last week, according to preliminary data.

On July 6 the planet's average surface temperature was 17.23C (63.01F), an unofficial record, according to the University of Maine's Climate Reanalyzer tool,

which uses a combination of observations and computer modeling. Climate scientists are sounding alarm about the impact of human-caused global warming, and warning 2023 is on track to be the warmest since records began.

In Texas, which is experiencing a prolonged 'heat dome' in which warm air is trapped in the

atmosphere like a convection oven, the border city of El Paso broke the record for most consecutive 100 F days on Sunday, according to the NWS.

The number is now 24, beating 23 days in 1994.

"Looks like plenty of more 100+ degree days on the horizon," the office said.

And the heat wave in Arizona

could prove to be 'one of the longest if not the longest, depending on how it is measured', the NWS in Phoenix said.

The area has now seen 10 days of temperatures at or above 110 degrees.

Aid organisations in Tucson, about two hours away, handed out ice and bottles of water and Gatorade over the weekend, according to the *New York Times*.

Dehydration is a major summertime risk in the United States.

Last week, a man died in California's Death Valley, which authorities said could likely be attributed to the heat. His car had two flat tires and the air conditioning had stopped working.

In addition to extreme heat, authorities in the Golden State are raising the alarm over flash flooding as high temperatures melt the deep snowpack that fell on the Sierra Nevada mountains last winter over several intense storms.

AFP

ASEAN: Myanmar crisis tops agenda at divided foreign ministers' meeting

The two-day meeting will be followed by talks later in the week with Beijing, Washington

Jakarta, Indonesia - ASEAN foreign ministers gathered in Indonesia on Tuesday for talks dominated by the crisis in Myanmar, with the regional bloc divided over how or whether to reengage with the country's ruling junta.

The two-day Association of Southeast Asian Nations meeting will be followed by talks later in the week with Beijing, Washington and other powers where top US diplomat Antony Blinken will seek to push back on China's assertiveness in the South China Sea.

Myanmar has been ravaged by deadly violence since a military coup deposed Aung San Suu Kyi's government more than two years ago, unleashing a bloody crackdown on dissent.

ASEAN has long been decried as a toothless talking shop, and it



Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi delivers her opening remarks during the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' meeting in Jakarta on Tuesday (AFP)

remains split over diplomatic attempts to resolve the crisis.

Those fractures were laid bare in a draft joint communique seen by AFP, where a section on Myanmar was left blank.

"The para is still being discussed... member countries are still taking time to propose their submission," a Southeast Asian diplomat told AFP.

ASEAN members were making 'extra efforts' before the meeting - a prelude to a leaders'

summit in September - to unite the group around the Myanmar issue, the diplomat said on condition of anonymity.

The official was 'not too optimistic' that would happen given that a 'few members have different perspectives', they said.

Myanmar remains an ASEAN member but has been barred from high-level meetings over the junta's failure to implement a five-point plan agreed two years ago to resolve the crisis.

'Clearer' plan

Thailand hosted the junta's foreign minister for controversial 'informal talks' last month, deepening the divisions between ASEAN members.

Cambodia sent a junior diplomat while ASEAN chair Indonesia and Malaysia snubbed the meeting.

Philippine Foreign Minister Enrique Manalo told reporters on the meeting's sidelines the Thailand talks would be discussed

but members were 'going to talk about Myanmar again'.

His Thai counterpart Don Pramudwinai told reporters Bangkok wants Myanmar to be represented again at future meetings.

"Yes, we'd like to see it - meaning all ASEAN members," he said, without specifying if he meant the junta.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi appeared to take aim at divisions within the bloc.

"Our differences should not

be an excuse for us to abandon pressing human rights issues in our own region," she said in remarks opening a session.

The bloc's initiatives are limited by its charter principles of consensus and non-interference, but analysts say the meeting could push members to do more.

"It is hoped there will be a clearer implementation plan on what ASEAN will do going forward," Lina Alexandra of Jakarta-based think tank the Centre for Strategic and International Studies told AFP.

Qin absent

On Thursday, an ASEAN-plus-three ministerial meeting with Japan, South Korea and China will take place ahead of the ASEAN Regional Forum and an 18-nation East Asia Summit foreign ministers' meeting on Friday, which will also include Washington and Beijing.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov is expected to attend the latter meeting, again putting him in the same room as US Secretary of State Blinken - after a brief March meeting - as Moscow's Ukraine invasion grinds on. China will be represented by top diplomat Wang Yi instead of Foreign Minister Qin Gang, a Southeast Asia diplomat

told AFP.

Qin was unable to attend due to 'health reasons', Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said in response to an AFP question at a daily briefing.

North Korea - which will participate in the ASEAN Regional Forum - has decided against sending Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui, Indonesian officials said.

Washington and ASEAN will seek to 'push back' on Beijing's actions in the dispute-rife South China Sea, top US diplomat for East Asia Daniel Kritenbrink told reporters on Saturday.

China has made sweeping claims in the strategic waterway despite protests from several ASEAN members who argue for unimpeded freedom of navigation and that their own territorial claims be respected.

The draft ASEAN joint communique called for self-restraint in the waterway and said there was 'positive momentum' in talks over a code of conduct.

The document also called on members to uphold a decades-old treaty preserving Southeast Asia as a 'nuclear-free' region.

"We cannot be truly safe with nuclear weapons in our region," Indonesian FM Marsudi told ministers in her opening remarks. AFP

WATER WORLD



A family pushes a bicycle cart loaded with their belongings in a flooded low lying area near the Yamuna River in New Delhi on Tuesday (AFP)

Six people dead in Nepal tourist helicopter crash

Kathmandu, Nepal - All six people aboard a tourist helicopter in Nepal were killed when it crashed soon after take-off in the Everest region on Tuesday, aviation authorities said.

The Manang Air flight was heading for the capital Kathmandu from near Lukla, the gateway for climbing expeditions to the world's highest peak, with five Mexican travellers and a Nepali pilot onboard.

The chopper lost contact eight minutes after taking off on Tuesday morning, the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) said in a statement. "The six bodies have been recovered and brought to Kathmandu," Pratap Babu Tiwari, general manager at the Tribhuvan International Airport, told AFP.

Two helicopters were deployed for search and rescue but could not land at the crash site because of the weather.

"The teams on the ground brought the bodies to the helicopters which were able to land close by," Tiwari said. Lhakpa Sherpa, a local resident who joined search and rescue efforts, said the scene was 'very scary'.

"It looks like the helicopter first collided with a tree and then slammed on the floor. It has caused a small hole in the ground," he said. Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'expressed



People unload the body of a victim who got killed in a helicopter crash, at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital in Kathmandu on Tuesday (AFP)

It looks like the helicopter first collided with a tree and then slammed on the floor. It has caused a small hole in the ground

LHAKPA SHERPA

grief' over the incident, his office said on Twitter.

Poor air safety

Nepal has a booming private helicopter industry, flying tourists and goods to remote corners of the Himalayan nation where

road access is limited or non-existent. The country is notorious for its poor air safety, and Tuesday's incident is the latest in a string of aviation accidents.

One person was killed and four were injured in May when a helicopter crashed in eastern Nepal after dropping off goods for a hydroelectricity project.

Multiple helicopter accidents claimed more than a dozen lives during rescue and relief operations in the aftermath of Nepal's devastating 2015 earthquake.

Plane crashes are also common in the Himalayan republic, home to remote and tricky runways flanked by snow-capped peaks. AFP

Key EU biodiversity bill may be scrapped

Brussels, Belgium - The European Parliament will hold a vote on Wednesday on a key biodiversity bill that some MEPs say has fallen victim to electioneering.

The main political grouping in the legislature, the conservative European People's Party (EPP), has rejected the draft Nature Restoration Law, saying it would hurt farmers, one of its main constituencies. The issue has become a potent campaign issue

ahead of European elections to be held in June 2024. The ballots cast will decide the next European Parliament and influence the make-up and priorities of the next European Commission, currently led by Ursula von der Leyen, who hails from the EPP.

Already a parliamentary commission has failed to agree a position ahead of Wednesday's vote, meaning the full chamber will have to vote on whether to

bin the text entirely.

Leftwing and centrist lawmakers accuse the EPP of using the bill as an election football.

"If it's rejected, it's game over," said Pascal Canfin, the chair of parliament's environment committee and a member of the centrist Renew grouping.

"What we are seeing now... I would call 'European Trumpism'," he said, referring to former US president Donald Trump's

go-it-alone governing style and policies rolling back environmental protections.

Greta Thunberg, the Swedish climate campaigner, was to protest on Tuesday outside the European Parliament in Strasbourg in favour of the proposed act, as MEPs hold their debate.

The Nature Restoration Act is a central pillar of the EU's biodiversity strategy. AFP

Bastille Day welcome for Narendra Modi as France courts India

Delhi, India - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is guest of honour on Friday for Bastille Day celebrations in France, the latest Western power to court the world's largest democracy and its booming economy.

President Emmanuel Macron's red carpet welcome comes weeks after Modi was given the rare honour of a White House state dinner in Washington - a city he was once banned

from visiting.

That visit saw deals on arms sales, semiconductor investment and space cooperation, breezing past human rights concerns over India's Hindu nationalist government and accusations of rising religious intolerance towards the country's Muslim minority.

Further strategic and economic tie-ups are expected in Paris, which is seeking to broaden its engagement in Asia

alongside other Western nations to check growing Chinese assertiveness in the region.

Modi's visit alongside Indian troops joining the annual Bastille Day military parade, marks 'a new phase in the strategic partnership between France and India', Macron's Elysee Palace office said in June.

Both countries have 'a shared vision of peace and security, especially in Europe and in the



India's PM Narendra Modi (AFP)

Indo-Pacific region', the statement added, using a term used by the US and its allies for the Asia-Pacific region.

Modi, who greeted the French leader with his customary bearhug during the latter's first state visit to India in 2018, said on Twitter last week that he was 'looking forward to meeting with my friend President Macron'.

"The India-France Strategic Partnership holds great significance for global good," he added.

India is already a customer for French arms, including Dassault's Rafale fighter jets, as it

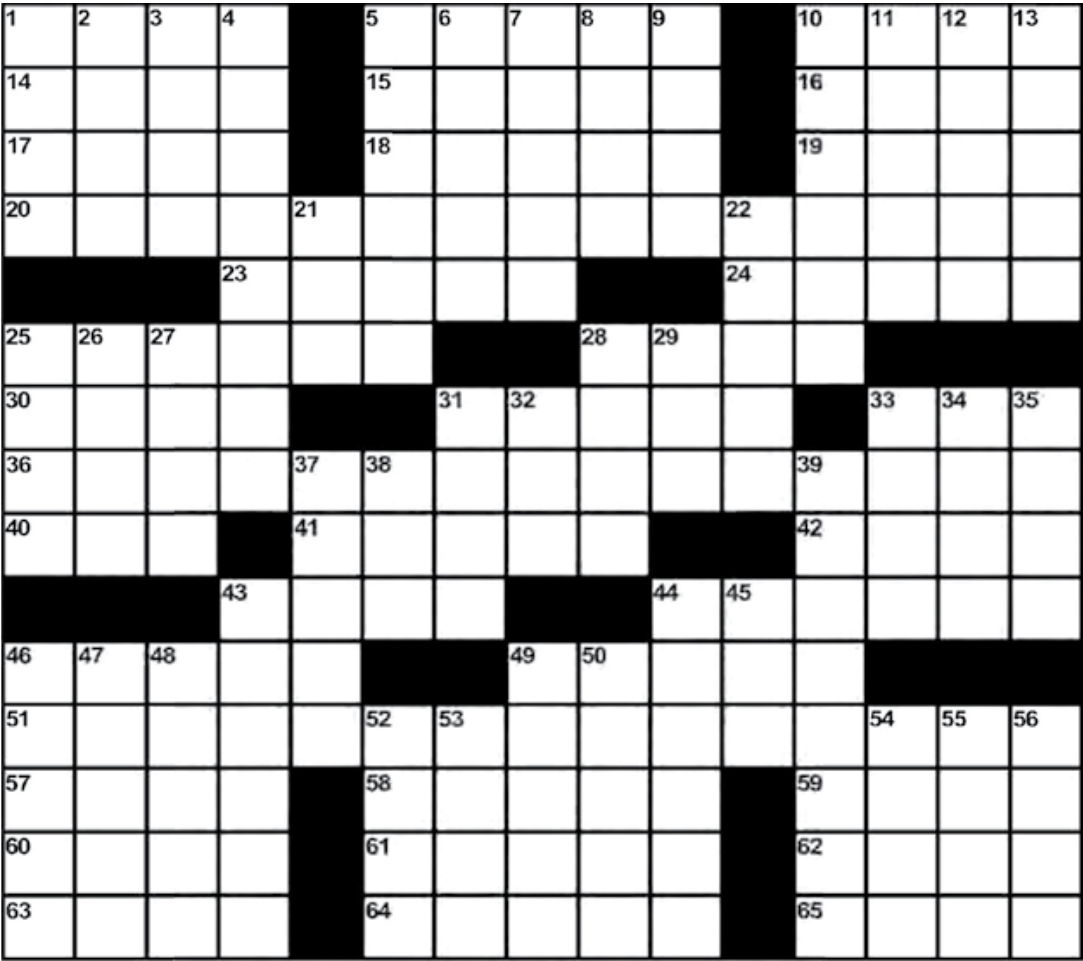
seeks to modernise its forces to match potential future threats from its northern neighbour.

The urgency of New Delhi's task has been heightened by simmering disputes with Beijing over the countries' immense Himalayan frontier, the site of a 2020 clash that killed 20 Indian and four Chinese troops, and sent relations between both capitals into free fall.

India once faced crushing

poverty, but its middle classes have swelled in recent decades on the back of a rapidly growing economy, which last year overtook former colonial ruler Britain to become the fifth-largest globally. In April, the country welcomed its first retail stores from Apple, eager to tap a burgeoning market for upscale consumer goods in what is now the world's most populous nation. AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Wrap of old Rome
5) Kind of knife or sandwich
10) Exiled Iranian ruler
14) Homecoming attender
15) Lily type
16) Volcano outpouring
17) What Italians used to spend
18) Kwanzaa principle
19) "The Dukes of Hazzard" character
20) Three for the "back" pack
23) Invisible emanations
24) Feed livestock
25) Hardly firm, as a waist
28) Tract of wet ground
30) Muddy up, as water
31) Bring happiness to
33) Teary-eyed
36) Three for the "back" pack
40) It gives golfers a little lift
41) Tastelessly showy
42) Poetic foot
43) Curved doorway
44) Wall-to-wall installation
46) Certain Arabian
49) Unsolicited manu-

scripts, to a publisher
51) Three for the "back" pack
57) Fleshy seed covering
58) Grayish-violet
59) Top-of-the-line
60) Hitchhiker's quest
61) Some cartography dots
62) Patronize a fine restaurant
63) Hurdle for a wannabe driver
64) Running score
65) Constellation unit

DOWN

1) Post-natal care powder
2) Collection of miscellaneous pieces
3) Wise advice-giver
4) Obedient
5) Move like a squirrel
6) Country music's Tucker
7) Omit in pronunciation
8) Type of saxophone
9) Slugger's decisive win
12) Admits bluntly
13) Word before "got a clue"
21) Movie popcorn unit
22) More difficult to collect
25) Fingerboard feature
26) Like Tonto's masked friend
27) Teacher's helper
28) A good number
29) "Addams Family" member
31) Make an impression, in a way
32) Albanian currency
33) Sound of a stick breaking
34) Highest stage
35) Overcharging condition?

37) "Take_ down memory lane"
38)_ fly (RBI method)
39) Space cadets
43) It's just above a foot
44) Schmaltzy
45) Viper variety
46) Abstract painting style
47) Ill-fated Antoinette
48) Some corrosives
49) Jolly Roger flag depiction
50) Palindromic tool

52) Opposite of include
53) Spanish abode
54) Nike's "Just" conclusion?

55) Tolstoy's " _ Karenina"
56) Sneering look

NOTE PAD

YARD
OLEO
ULAN
VIDEO
ENDER
LAS
ON THE
BEAU
OATER
SRI
LANAI
BERTH

ARMS
COAT
EURO
FOREC
SATES
TABOO
NEIGH
AHA
ORDER
ANAI
RENT

HAWSE
OCHER
ONICE
ORDER
LEO
DOCILE
AGOG
BORDER
GET
SNOOP
DOUBT
LYMANNER
MOUE
OPAL
ONES

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
There will be quite a few opportunities to have fun today, but one of them might require you to have fun at someone else's expense. You will get no joy knowing that someone is missing out, so make sure you know the political circumstances of any new activity before you join in. Choose wisely. If you take advantage of other people, you'll end up being the person who feels used. Stand up for the people who might not be strong enough to stand up for themselves.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
Give the gift of a smile to everyone you meet today, and you're sure to make a good impression on everyone. That's pretty much all it takes right now. Your energy is contagious, especially when you let it shine. This is a wonderful day for you to meet new people too. If you have a job interview or first date scheduled, you can rest assured that it will go well. Put some happy energy out into the world. You will surely get ten times that amount back again.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
Your creativity is at all-time high right now, and it's feeding your original mind some very original thoughts. You'll have a lot of fun adding your unique spin to things. And while not everything you put your stamp on will become a huge success, just showing the world how you think will score you a big win. Let your fashion choices convey the mood you're in, too. Wear something that helps you stand out from the crowd. Ask for attention. You're ready for it!

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
The energy that's growing between you and another person is giving you two a lot of power over your surroundings. Are you guys ready to use it? Unleash your dynamic duo on the world today! Dive right in and get more involved in things. You have the time to bend things to your will, and you definitely have the influence. The more you immerse yourself in the situation, the faster you'll gain a deep understanding, so hurry up and get your team in motion.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
This is not a good day to explore any unknown territory, so try to stick close to home or visit someplace where everyone knows your name. But it won't be hard to curb your curiosity. Your mood is such that you're not interested in trying new things or exploring. You're much more comfortable with the environment you've created for yourself. If you're trying to finish a book or project, today is a great day to hunker down at home until you're done.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
It's wonderful that you want to connect with a certain someone so badly, but are you trying too hard? Step back today. Retreat from your charm offensive. You're not normally this aggressive, so why send this person an inaccurate message about who you are? You'll have to be patient and natural. Let them come to you in the way they want, and, most importantly, at the speed they want. Waiting won't be fun, but your reward will be sweet, and it will be genuine.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
You are in an excellent position to help some of your buddies today, although it might not be the most convenient thing for you to do. Maybe a friend needs to move and you have a truck. Maybe someone needs a little loan to get through the week, or they want you to come with them on a particular errand. This is when you have to prove yourself and show them that you are there for the fun stuff and the not-so-fun stuff. Step up to the plate and don't let them down. You'll be glad you did.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Don't be impatient with yourself right now. It takes time to learn something new, and you have to readjust your expectations. Try to be a lot more realistic! Be prepared for this day to feel challenging, and don't be surprised if at the end of it you feel like you've moved three steps forward and two steps back. You're learning your limits, and learning is always a good use of your time. There is no futility in going on. It's all going to be worth something sooner or later.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
If you're tired of behaving yourself and getting nothing for your discipline, then today you should be a bit naughty and see where that gets you. Chances are you won't see any big difference in your day, but the exercise will help you get a taste of another kind of life, which will help you be more comfortable in your own routine. Liberating yourself from your self-imposed rules is a great way to remember why you put them in place to begin with.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
Waiting for other people to catch up with you is a total waste of time right now. If they aren't already up to speed, then there's no point in getting involved with them. Move on without their input. Problems at work could be making you impatient with everyone, but don't let your professional woes leak into your private life. The people you care about don't deserve your grouchiness. Let them pull you out of your blue funk. They're experts at it!

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Today, you should consider letting other people take control while you just go along for the ride. Socially, if you let a friend pick the activity, you'll get to do something you've never done before. Professionally, if you let a newcomer lead the team, then you'll see a whole new approach to a set of problems. And romantically, if you let yourself be chased, you will finally get a good idea of just how desirable you really are. Being passive isn't always a sign of weakness.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
Friends might be feeling like you're hiding out from the world right about now, so touch base and let them know that you're doing okay. Time is something you want to spend by yourself, and this is a healthy thing to do. Your energy level is strong, but it's not social. Mixing with other people and sharing small talk is not as fulfilling as curling up with a favorite book, taking a long walk, or experimenting in the kitchen. If you're a homebody right now, that's a good thing!

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. A hunter claimed to have seen what bird in 1688, thought to be the last recorded sighting?
A. Gryphon
B. Roc
C. Phoenix
D. Dodo

02. When was the first award ceremony for the US's Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences held?
A. 1951
B. 1919
C. 1941
D. 1929

03. Which of these was a former name of Northern Rhodesia?
A. Zanzibar
B. Zimbabwe
C. Zaire
D. Zambia

Answers: 1. D 2. D 3. D

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

A	O	E	O
T	O	S	U
O	B	N	L
Y	R	B	S

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

'UNBELIEVABLE MOMENT'

Ukraine’s Elina Svitolina stuns Poland’s World No 1 Iga Swiatek to reach Wimbledon semis

London, United Kingdom - Ukraine's Elina Svitolina stunned world number one Iga Swiatek to reach the Wimbledon semi-finals on Tuesday, just three months after returning from maternity leave.

The world number 76 came through 7-5, 6-7 (5/7), 6-2 despite being a break down in both of the first two sets against the reigning US Open and French Open champion.

Svitolina, also a semi-finalist in 2019, will take on Marketa Vondrousova of the Czech Republic for a place in Saturday's champions

wavering support of Ukraine following the Russian invasion of the country.

The Polish star organised a benefit exhibition match last year to raise funds for humanitarian causes in Ukraine.

A heavily pregnant Svitolina acted as chair umpire.

"Iga is a great champion and an unbelievable person," said Svitolina.

"She was one of the first to help Ukraine people. It's not easy to play against someone with whom you share great memories."

In my head, I don't know what's happening. It's an unbelievable moment. If you had told me before the tournament I would get to the semi-finals, I'd say you were crazy

ELINA SVITOLINA

onship match.

Svitolina has reached the last four by seeing off a quartet of Grand Slam title winners in Venus Williams, Sofia Kenin, Victoria Azarenka, in a stormy last-16 clash, and now Swiatek.

She said she intended to "enjoy the moment and have a beer".

"In my head, I don't know what's happening. It's an unbelievable moment.

"If you had told me before the tournament I would get to the semi-finals, I'd say you were crazy."

Svitolina, playing on a wild card, hailed Swiatek for her un-

Swiatek broke in the first game of the match but the resolute Svitolina hit back to level in the fourth game.

Again the Pole nipped ahead with another break and held for 4-2.

However, Swiatek could not serve it out and a double fault allowed Svitolina to level at 5-5.

At 5-6 down, Swiatek sat courtside in the changeover, scribbling into a notepad but whatever self-help tips she penned, they did not work.

She was broken for the third time as Svitolina claimed the set when Swiatek pushed a back-hand volley wide.



Ukraine's Elina Svitolina celebrates after beating Poland's Iga Swiatek in the Wimbledon quarter-finals on Tuesday (AFP)

The Centre Court action was paused as the roof closed on the rain, a welcome respite for the top seed, who had shipped four consecutive games.

That became five when Svitolina served a love game in the second set opener.

Swiatek grabbed the first break of the set in the third game before the 28-year-old Svitolina cancelled it out for 3-3.

In a rollercoaster conclusion, the top seed survived trailing 1/4 in the tiebreaker to level the quarter-final and set-up the decider.

Svitolina gathered herself from letting that set slip away to race to a double break and a 5-1 lead in the decider.

Victory was hers when Swiatek netted a return, the last of the Pole's 41 unforced errors.

AFP



Caster Semenya

Runner Caster Semenya was discriminated against, European rights court rules

Strasbourg, France - Double Olympic 800m champion Caster Semenya was discriminated against by rules requiring her to lower her testosterone levels, the European Court of Human Rights found in a ruling on Tuesday.

The 32-year-old South African appealed to the court over the way Switzerland handled her legal fight against World Athletics' rules that she must take medication to reduce her testosterone levels as mandated by track and field's governing body. Semenya who is classed as having "differences in sexual development (DSD)", has refused to take the drugs since World Athletics introduced the rules in 2018. She lost an appeal to the Lausanne-based Court of Arbitration for Sport, and three years ago Switzerland's

supreme court confirmed the decision of sport's top court.

As part of her long-running legal battle, Semenya took her case against Switzerland to the France-based ECHR.

The court said: "The court found in particular that the applicant had not been afforded sufficient institutional and procedural safeguards in Switzerland to allow her to have her complaints examined effectively, especially since her complaints concerned substantiated and credible claims of discrimination as a result of her increased testosterone level caused by differences of sex development."

The ruling is largely symbolic as it does not call into question the ruling by World Athletics and does not pave the way for her to return to competition in the 800m.

Liton, Shoriful help Bangladesh avoid Afghanistan whitewash

Chittagong, Bangladesh - Liton Das top-scored with 53 not out as Bangladesh defeated Afghanistan by seven wickets to avoid a series whitewash in Tuesday's third and final one-day international in Chittagong.

The hosts raced to 129-3 in 23.3 overs after Shoriful Islam's career best 4-21 helped them bowl out Afghanistan for 126 in 45.2 overs.

Tail-ender Azmatullah Omarzai offered some late resistance for Afghanistan to top-score with 56, his maiden ODI fifty.

Left-arm seamer Fazalhaq Farooqi gave Afghanistan a glimmer of hope, bowling out Naim Sheikh for a duck and Najmul Hossain for 11.

Liton and Shakib Al Hasan put on 61 runs for the third wicket to steady the innings and bring Bangladesh back into control.

Shakib fell to Mohammad Nabi after making a run-a-ball 39, but Liton, who struck three fours and two sixes in his 60-ball innings, took Bangladesh home.

Young Towhid Hridoy hit the winning boundary off Zia-ur-Rehman to stay unbeaten on 22.

The tourists earlier won the toss and elected to bat first, but never managed to get their innings going.

Shoriful struck early after taking the field for the first time this series, dismissing Ibrahim Zadran for one and Rahmat Shah for a duck in the third over.

Rahmanullah Gurbaz, who smashed a career-best 145 in the previous match, saw one catch land in no man's land but soon top-edged Taskin Ahmed to depart for six.

Shoriful compounded Afghanistan's woes by trapping Nabi leg-before to leave the tourists teetering at 15-4 inside

nine overs. Hashmatullah Shahidi and Najibullah Zadran stemmed the rot, but Shakib sent back the latter for 10 to stop their partnership from developing.

Shahidi dragged one off Tajul Islam onto his stumps to end his patient knock of 22 from 54 balls.

Omarzai helped Afghanistan past the 100-run mark after the quick departure of debutants Abdul Rahman (four) and Zia (five). He was the last man dismissed, holing out a catch to Naim Sheikh at long-off off Taskin, who claimed 2-23.

Afghanistan are already only the second team to win an ODI series in Bangladesh in the past seven years, with world champions England being the other.

Victory in the match would have made them the first side to win all three matches of an ODI series in Bangladesh since Sri Lanka in 2014.



Liton Das top-scored with an unbeaten 53

Player revolt and missing stars hurt Spain's title bid

Barcelona, Spain - Spain should be among the favourites for the Women's World Cup but without several key players because of a dispute they are taking the hard path.

La Roja will still be a threat in Australia and New Zealand this month, but they are undoubtedly weaker for the absences of stars protesting against the Spanish football federation (RFEF) and coach Jorge Vilda.

Patri Guijarro, who struck twice for Barcelona as they won the Champions League, and club team-mates Mapi Leon and Sandra Panos are big misses, even as two-time Ballon d'Or winner Alexia Putellas returns after injury.

Three players who were part



Spain players at a training session

of a 15-strong protesting group have been selected -- Aitana Bonmati, Mariona Caldentey and Ona Batlle, all at Barcelona too.

They stepped down from their position, ostensibly satisfied that sufficient improvements were being made in the areas the players demanded.

Discontent between players on the one side, and the RFEF and Vilda on the other, had been brewing for some time.

Issues they were concerned about included the atmosphere around the camp, Vilda being too strict, the team's lack of success under the coach since his reign started in 2015, and disputes over travel arrangements and staff numbers.

AFP

REVENGE MISSION

Jabeur to take on Rybakina after hammering Kvitova

London, United Kingdom - Ons Jabeur crushed two-time champion Petra Kvitova 6-0, 6-3 to reach the Wimbledon quarter-finals on Monday, immediately setting her sights on revenge against defending champion Elena Rybakina.

Tunisia's Jabeur, last year's beaten finalist, dominated Kvitova from the start, breaking the ninth seed three times in a 22-minute opening set on Centre Court.

Kvitova, who won Wimbledon in 2011 and 2014, got a foothold in the match in the first game of the second set but sixth seed Jabeur then reeled off four straight games to take a vice-like grip.

"You know, I was having a good grass season, but still, you know, fighting here in Wimbledon," Petra Kvitova said. "I didn't really put pressure on me, to be honest. Maybe in the previous matches but not really today. It was I felt like a 50/50 for today's match, and then it was pretty quickly the other side. Didn't feel it today," said Kvitova.

But, I mean, anyway, it was a too-quick match," she continued. "I've been just destroyed. That's how it is and that's how I take it."

The Czech left-hander broke for the first time in the match in

the sixth game to give herself hope, holding serve to close to 4-3.

But it proved merely to be stay of execution for Kvitova as Jabeur broke again to end the match with just 63 minutes on the clock.

"I'm loving every moment that I'm here and you guys have no

I'm loving every moment that I'm here and you guys have no idea the energy that you bring to me

ONS JABEUR

idea the energy that you bring to me and I just want to win every match so I can see you the next day," Jabeur said.

Jabeur will play Kazakh third seed Rybakina in the last eight, desperate to avenge her defeat in the 2022 final.

"I'm probably going for my revenge," she said. "It was a difficult final last year. It's going to bring a lot of memories.

"I'm hoping to play like today and get the win because she's an amazing player."



Tunisia's Ons Jabeur celebrates after beating Czech Republic's Petra Kvitova in their round of 16 match at Wimbledon on Monday (AFP)



Aryna Sabalenka

Sabalenka wants shield from 'hate' after Azarenka booing

London, United Kingdom - Women's tennis chiefs on Monday pleaded with spectators to show "understanding and respect" when Ukraine players refuse to shake hands with Russian and Belarusian opponents in protest at the ongoing war in their country.

The WTA, which runs the women's game, became the first governing body to acknowledge demands that they publicly explain the reasons for the stance.

Earlier on Monday, Aryna Sabalenka backed Elina Svitolina's call for officials to respond to help shield players from "so much hate".

Victoria Azarenka, from Belarus, was booed off court following her defeat by Ukraine's Svitolina at Wimbledon on Sunday.

As has become common, Svitolina did not shake hands with Azarenka in protest over Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Belarus is a key military ally of Moscow.

Azarenka, who held her hand up in the direction of Svitolina, seemingly in a gesture of respect, left the court to a chorus of boos from some sections of the crowd.

The two-time Australian Open champion said her treatment "wasn't fair".

"I thought it was a great tennis match," she added.

"If people are going to be focusing only on handshakes or the crowd, quite drunk crowd, booing in the end, that's a shame."

Svitolina and her fellow Ukraine players all refused to shake hands with Russians and Belarusians at the recent French Open.



Denmark's Holger Rune celebrates winning a point against Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov

Rune into Wimbledon quarters, 'not afraid' to face Alcaraz

London, United Kingdom - Holger Rune on Monday became the first Danish man in 65 years to reach the Wimbledon quarter-finals and insisted he is "not afraid" to face anybody, even world number one and close friend Carlos Alcaraz.

World number six Rune came back from a set and a break down to defeat Grigor Dimitrov 3-6, 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (7/4), 6-3.

He will next tackle Alcaraz in the last eight after the top seed defeated 2021 runner-up Matteo Berrettini in his fourth-round clash.

"I am not afraid, I am excited," said Rune, who was supported on Court One by Denmark's Crown Prince Frederik.

Rune is just seven days older than Alcaraz and they have been friends since their junior days.

When they were 12, they even played doubles and reached the

semi-finals of a boys event.

"I think he's the same, just so much better now. I think back then he was Carlos, now he's still Carlos," said Rune.

"He's the same, just improved a lot and very quickly."

Rune hopes one day they can play doubles again even if they may get in each other's way.

"When a singles player plays doubles, they want to cover the court by themselves. We both try and did that a little bit, which is fun.

"Again, it was good, because he's amazing."

As professionals on the ATP Tour, they have met just twice.

Alcaraz came out on top at the 2021 NextGen Finals before the Dane gained revenge at the Paris Masters last year when his rival retired from their quarter-final with an injury.

AFP

Alcaraz strikes back to beat Italian Berrettini and reach quarter-finals

London, United Kingdom - Carlos Alcaraz saw off dangerman Matteo Berrettini in four sets to reach the Wimbledon quarter-finals for the first time on Monday but said he was "hungry for more".

Berrettini, a finalist in 2021, won the first set but the top seed roared back to win the Centre Court match-up 3-6, 6-3, 6-3, 6-3.

Top-ranked Alcaraz is seen as one of the few genuine threats to defending champion Novak Djokovic, who has not lost a match on Centre Court for 10 years.

But he was given a wake-up call by the 38th-ranked Italian at the showpiece arena, losing the



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz returns the ball to Italy's Matteo Berrettini

first set after being broken in the eighth game.

The Spaniard, 20, forged a break of his own in the fourth game of the second set, which enabled him to get back on level terms.

A double break in the third set put him in control and he broke again in the eighth game of the fourth set.

He sealed victory when Berrettini, forced to miss last year's Wimbledon after testing positive for Covid, went wide with a backhand.

Alcaraz has little experience on grass in his short career but won last month's tournament at Queen's to set himself up for a tilt at the Wimbledon title.

Wimbledon sensation Eubanks falls in love with grass



Christopher Eubanks poses for selfie pictures with supporters after beating Stefanos Tsitsipas

Mannarino in the final in Mallorca to win the first title of his career, before hitting his purple patch at the All England Club.

He has now won nine consecutive matches on grass.

He beat Frenchman Adrian

out of my mouth for the rest of my career," he said in reference to his previous derogatory comments. "The grass and I, we've had a very strenuous relationship over the years but right now I think it's my best friend."

Before arriving at the All England Club, Eubanks' record at Grand Slams had been modest.

Of his eight main draw appearances he had lost in the first round six times. He had tried and failed four times to qualify for

Wimbledon.

Eubanks, who stands at 6 feet 7 inches (2.01 metres), described his experience this year as "surreal". "Everything from realising that I have two credentials at Wimbledon for the rest of my life, to checking my phone and seeing my name as an ESPN alert, to realising how much I disliked grass at the beginning of the grass court season, to now look at where I am," he said.

"There's so many different ways I could go about it. I just think the entire experience all together has just been a whirlwind."

Eubanks has had to change his hotel checkout times on a number of occasions due to his run to the last eight.

"If we got to move it one more time, we might just move it all the way to the end of the following week," said the American.

AFP

India aim to pile on 21-year Test misery for West Indies

The first match of the two-Test series starts on Wednesday

Roseau, Dominica - India attempt to extend West Indies' 21 years of misery when they meet in the lush tropical setting of Windsor Park Stadium in Dominica on Wednesday in the first match of a two-Test series.

Rocked by the failure of the two-time winners to qualify for the World Cup in India in October-November this year, the Caribbean cricket community is unlikely to find solace in the shape of Kraigg Brathwaite's Test side. The West Indies last won a Test match against India back in 2002. This brief series, which ends in Trinidad the following week in what will be the 100th Test between the two teams, marks the start of the next two-year World Test Championship cycle leading to the final in 2025.

Beaten by New Zealand in the inaugural final in 2021 and then outplayed by Australia in the 2023 decider just four weeks ago, Rohit Sharma's team is likely to show no more than three changes from the side that lost the new Test cricket showpiece by 209 runs at The Oval.

With veteran batsman Cheteshwar Pujara dropped and pacer Mohammed Shami rested,



Indian players train at Windsor Park Stadium in Dominica

there are now opportunities for either of the uncapped Yashasvi Jaiswal or Rituraj Gaikwad to make the number three spot their own while it will be a toss-up between Jaydev Unadkat and Navdeep Saini to fill the breach in the fast bowling department.

Spinning all-rounder Ravichandran Ashwin, unlucky to

have been omitted from last month's duel with Australia, should have the chance to add to his already impressive record against the West Indies.

In 11 Tests against these opponents he has taken 60 wickets and compiled four of his five Test centuries in averaging just over 50 with the bat.

India will also look for runs from recalled Ajinkya Rahane, the vice-captain who made 89 and 46 in the loss to Australia after a two-year absence.

"I'm still young and there's a lot of cricket left in me," the 35-year-old told cricinfo.com

"In the last year or so, I've worked a lot on my fitness. There

were a few points in my batting that I've worked on. I'm enjoying my cricket a lot."

As disconsolate as they may be by the West Indies' failure to advance to the World Cup, fans in Dominica are anticipating that one of their own, 24-year-old Alick Athanaze, will make his Test debut in the series opener in

the middle-order in place of fellow left-hander Kyle Mayers.

While Mayers has been ruled out of contention due to niggling injuries, two other players who were part of the West Indies' abysmal World Cup qualifying campaign in Zimbabwe - all-rounder Jason Holder and fast bowler Alzarri Joseph - are ex-

pected to shoulder much of the responsibility to quell the threat of a formidable India batting line-up.

Senior pacer Kemar Roach will still lead the attack though, while the decision on whether or not to go with two specialist spinners in Jomel Warrican and the recalled Rahkeem Cornwall or opt for the raw pace but questionable fitness of Shannon Gabriel will be determined by the appearance of the pitch on Wednesday morning.

"I'm still young and there's a lot of cricket left in me. In the last year or so, I've worked a lot on my fitness. There were a few points in my batting that I've worked on

AJINKYA RAHANE

Notwithstanding their obvious underdog status and especially concerns about the ability of the batting line-up to cope with the Indian attack, West Indies batting legend Brian Lara - the performance mentor for the team - is hopeful that the home side can offer more than a glimmer of encouragement.

"It may take some time but obviously as an international cricketer if you are at this stage, it doesn't matter what age you're at, you've got to learn very, very quickly and I think they have that sort of attitude to learn and are willing to listen," said Lara.



Sergej Milinkovic-Savic

Milinkovic-Savic wants Saudi switch: Lazio owner Lotito

Milan, Italy - Sergej Milinkovic-Savic has asked Lazio to leave for Saudi Arabian club Al-Hilal, the Italian team's owner Claudio Lotito said on Monday.

In an interview with online outlet Tag24, Lotito said that Milinkovic-Savic begged him for "a change of scenery" after eight years in Rome which would reportedly involve him earning 60 million euros (\$66 million) over three seasons.

Italian media report that Al Hilal have agreed to pay 40 million euros for the Serbia midfielder, 28, whose contract with Lazio expires next summer.

Lotito said Lazio had received an offer which was "a little bit less than 50 million euros".

"When someone leaves to go to Saudi Arabia their motivation is money, but you need to ask him why he wants to leave," said Lotito.

"I tried my best to keep him here but when he asks to go for his own personal reasons what can I do? We were willing to extend his deal and increase his salary.

"At the end of the day it's the player who decides what to do with his life. He phoned me begging me to let him go."

Fan favourite Milinkovic-Savic has scored 69 goals in 341 appearances since joining Lazio for 10 million euros in 2015, winning the 2019 Italian Cup and two Italian Super Cups.

He was one of Lazio's stars as Maurizio Sarri's team finished second in Serie A and qualified for next season's Champions League.

The Saudi Pro League has begun to snatch big names from the major European leagues thanks to the backing of the country's sovereign wealth fund.

Should Milinkovic-Savic make the switch to Al Hilal he would join a number of other familiar faces enticed by the prospect of huge salaries.

Last week Brazilian forward Roberto Firmino became the latest to move to the Gulf state after signing for Al-Ahli, while former Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard took over as coach at Al Ettifaq.

England fast bowler Wood set to deliver more Ashes 'thunderbolts' at Old Trafford

Leeds, United Kingdom - England fast bowler Mark Wood has said he is ready to hit Australia with more "thunderbolts" in next week's fourth Ashes Test at Old Trafford following his impressive return to international duty at Headingley.

Wood was named player-of-the-match in Leeds after a fine all-round display where the Durham express quick returned match figures of 7-100.

He also hit a vital 40 runs off just 16 balls faced as England won the third Test by three wickets to revive their series hopes at 2-1 down with two to play.

His extra speed gave England's attack an added dimension and shook up several Australia batsmen who had faced nothing quite like it during the tourists' wins at Edgbaston and Lord's.

Wood was clocked at 96.5 mph at one stage during his Headingley heroics, with the paceman saying England captain and Durham team-mate Ben



Mark Wood

Stokes had given him just one instruction prior to his first spell in Test cricket since December's tour of Pakistan.

"Ben just asked me, 'Are you ready? Are you ready to bowl some thunderbolts?' I said yes and that was it," Wood told re-

porters.

"He was ready to unleash me. I know him well and he knows me well. Having that relationship

with someone makes it easier."

Wood, asked if he was ready for a repeat performance in Manchester next week, replied with a grin: "Absolutely. Lightning strikes twice, eh?"

One of the fastest bowlers to play for England, the amiable Wood's career has been blighted by injuries, notably ankle problems, with his body rebelling at the sheer strain of his job.

Wood's fitness problems are underlined by the fact that since his debut in 2015 he has appeared in just 29 out of a possible 109 Tests. Nevertheless, Wood remains confident he can feature throughout the remainder of the Ashes, even though there is a just a three-day gap between the fourth and fifth games of the series. "I did four (Tests) in Australia last time and three of them were in a row," he said.

"It's a big ask, but one I've done before and I will lean on that experience to try to do it again."

AFP

Postecoglou will tell Bayern target Kane his Spurs vision

London, United Kingdom - Tottenham's new manager Ange Postecoglou said on Monday he will meet with Harry Kane this week to outline his vision for the club after being given no assurances over the England striker's future amid interest from Bayern Munich.

Bayern have reportedly had a £60 million (\$76 million) bid for Kane rebuffed by Tottenham, with the German champions believed to be set to return with an improved offer.

Kane will start pre-season training on Wednesday and former Celtic boss Postecoglou is



Ange Postecoglou

keen to lay out his plans to Tottenham's record goalscorer.

Grilled on the Kane situation when he held his first press conference since being hired in June, Postecoglou said: "I haven't had any assurances and I wouldn't expect any assurances.

"That's just my nature. What I know right now is that Harry is part of this squad and he's looking forward to coming back to training and starting to work together."

Kane has just one year left on his Tottenham contract, increasing the urgency to resolve his future before the north Londoners'

potentially lose him for free when his deal expires.

The 29-year-old, also linked with Manchester United and Chelsea, is reportedly keen to leave after failing in his attempt to engineer a move to Manchester City two years ago.

Postecoglou, the first Australian to manage in the Premier League, would clearly prefer to keep Kane.

His attempt to win over the England captain will start this week before the squad jet out to Australia, Thailand and Singapore for their pre-season tour.

AFP

Aqib Ilyas to lead Oman A at Emerging Teams Asia Cup

Rafiullah, Wasim recalled for the tournament in Sri Lanka from July 13-23

MUSCAT: Following a top-six place in the recently concluded ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Qualifier in Zimbabwe, Oman cricketers are all set to compete in the 2023 Asian Cricket Council (ACC) Emerging Teams Asia Cup in Sri Lanka from July 13-23.

The Oman A squad reached Sri Lankan capital Colombo on Monday evening for the fifth edi-

tion of the eight-nation continental tournament.

The tournament will feature U23 sides of defending champions Pakistan A alongside four other full-member ACC nations - India, Bangladesh, hosts Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. They will be joined by the top-three teams from the inaugural edition of the ACC Men's Premier Cup [Nepal, UAE and Oman], which was held in Nepal in April-May 2023.

Oman chief coach Duleep Mendis announced the 15-member squad for the Emerging Teams Asia Cup and retained ten of the players that played in Zimbabwe while picking three new faces among the five called



Oman squad for Emerging Teams Asia Cup in Sri Lanka

up. Aqib Ilyas, who led Oman in the final two Super Six matches in the Qualifier, has been retained skipper of the Oman A side. All-rounder Rafiullah, who

was a member of the provisional squad of 17 for the ICC Cricket World Cup Qualifier before being dropped, has been recalled. The 26-year-old has al-

ready represented the national team in T20Is. Another player recalled into the team is 24-year-old all-rounder Wasim Ali, who made his ODI debut for Oman

OMAN SQUAD

Aqib Ilyas (captain), Jatinder Singh, Kashyap Prajapati, Ayaan Khan, Shoaib Khan, Suraj Kumar (wicket-keeper), Jay Odedra, Kaleemullah, Fayyaz Butt, Samay Shrivastav, Wasim Ali, Rafiullah, Abdul Rauf (wk), Shubo Pal, Muhammed Bilal Shah.

Muhammad Bilal Shah.

Regular skipper Zeeshan Maqsood, who is recovering from a hamstring injury that kept him out of the last two matches at the Qualifier has been rested along with pacer Bilal Khan, all-rounder Sandeep Goud, wicket-keeper Naseem Khushi and experienced all-rounder Mohammed Nadeem. All five were part of the team that returned from Zimbabwe recently.

Mendis said: "This is another great opportunity for our players to showcase their talent at a big stage. It will be a good test to play against A teams from Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan."

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HAUTE COUTURE



SILK ROUTE

Fashion and film merge as Paris shows its opulent side in fashion week



Models present creations by Stephane Rolland during the Women's Haute-Couture Fall/Winter 2023-24 Fashion Week in Paris



rom an absurdly opulent film shoot at the Opera Garnier to a Chanel catwalk along the Seine, fashion week offered a very different view of Paris from the riots of recent days.

The country is still licking its wounds and facing up to the deep societal divisions exposed by days of violence sparked a week ago by the police killing of a teenager.

The riots have died down since the weekend, and it was the other France - of unbridled luxury, craftsmanship and conspicuous excess - that took centre-stage on the second day of haute couture week.

Chanel's models paraded alongside the River Seine with the Eiffel Tower in the background, some with little dogs or baskets of flowers, in a show of 'sophistication and simplicity', said designer Virginie Viard.

She mixed tweeds, silk muslins, organzas and encrusted lace with floral and graphic motifs. A few bright colours, including Barbie pink, stood out against a largely grey palette.

Over at the Opera Garnier, the 19th-century monument to late-imperial excess, couturier Stephane Rolland put on a fabulously opulent show that was also being filmed by veteran filmmaker Claude Lelouch for his next movie, *Finalement*.

There was a strapless velvet dress with a glittering diamond hood, an elaborate headpiece that looked like a mass of gold flames, and a long red satin dress with a bejewelled collar.

The show was an homage to Greek singer Maria Callas, whose voice was heard through the show, aimed at reliving one of her most legendary performances at the Opera Garnier in December 1958.

Rolland is known for bright colours, such as the bright-yellow dress in which he put singer Pretty Yende for the coronation of King Charles III recently.

He, however, said, "In the heart of the Palais Garnier, I didn't want to disturb the scenery with pinks, yellows and greens," and stuck mostly to black, white and a few flashes of deep red.

Actors mingled with the guests for the upcoming movie from Lelouch, best-known for his Oscar-winning 1966 film *A Man and a Woman*.

The director's request to film during the show was 'like a gift from heaven', Rolland told AFP, adding that it was vital to merge fashion and other art forms. "It's very important in our profession. I find that from time to time it lacks a bit of refinement. Money is not everything," he said.

Also showing on Tuesday was French de-



signer Alexis Mabille, who created a female take on the tuxedo. And there was another luxurious display from Giorgio Armani, all sumptuous ballgowns adorned with many variations on poppies and roses. Red was a dominant colour for the Italian - even for the wedding dress at the end. AFP