

OMAN ENDORSES JOINT ACTION ON 'ONE FUTURE'



New Delhi, India - Representing His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Co-operation Affairs, and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, chaired the delegation of the Sultanate of Oman at deliberations of the closing session of the 18th G20 summit, which was held in New Delhi.

Sayyid Asaad delivered a speech during the closing session in which he stressed that Oman lays emphasis on joint action and that the sultanate agrees with the vision of the Indian presidency on establishing 'One Future' for human civilisation, notably at a time when challenges are expected to emerge in the coming years. The theme of the 18th G20 summit is 'One Earth, One Family, One Future'.



Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said visits Mahatma Gandhi Memorial in New Delhi with other G20 leaders on Sunday (OMA)

Sayyid Asaad stated that

Oman welcomes the remarkable efforts exerted along many tracks aimed at defining a map of global skills and minimising the gap between available skills and requirements of the labour market.

Sayyid Asaad pointed out that the dedication of digital infrastructure to serve all nations will play an important role in realising sustainable economic growth, noting that this is consistent with Oman's approach. He added that Oman welcomes initiatives to provide all means of making knowledge accessible to all, and reiterated that the sultanate agrees with the G20 countries to devise safe, reliable and well-established policies for a digital economy.

Appreciating India's invitation to Oman to participate in the 18th G20 summit, he said the gesture reflects the depth of relations between the two friendly

countries. He also congratulated India on the successful landing of its spacecraft on the moon, a development he described as "a great achievement and a turning point for a promising future".

Prior to the closing session, Sayyid Asaad and his delegation joined other delegates in visiting the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial in New Delhi to pay floral tributes.

The summit focused on the issue of sustainable development, in addition discussing ways to spread economic growth in a more balanced way between developed and developing countries.

Oman's participation in the summit on the invitation of India consolidates the sultanate's position as an active partner in development and prosperity, regionally and internationally.

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H M orders dispatch of rescue teams, relief material to Morocco

Muscat: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal orders on Sunday to dispatch rescue teams and relief and medical assistance to Morocco to help the sisterly kingdom cope in the wake of the earthquake that struck on Friday.

The Royal orders are within the framework of the brotherly relations between the two countries and in line with the sultanate's humanitarian role to provide relief to those affected by natural calamities.

Airport taxis to offer app-based services

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has approved licences for two companies to oversee taxi services at Oman's airports.

A statement issued by MTCIT said the two companies meet the regulatory requirements of the Land Transport Law. As part of set conditions, both companies will incorporate existing airport taxi owners onto their platforms, providing them training and skill development. They will also meet the ministry's technical specifications and elevate Oman's public transportation system.

The licensees are Al Sahab World Company, with its Otaxi app, and Ubar Smart Cities Company, with the Oman Taxi app. 'Both are Omani enterprises, equipped with user-friendly smart features. These applications offer route monitoring and upfront fare determination, while



prioritising users' privacy and security,' MTCIT stated.

It has advised all airport taxi drivers to register with these approved apps by October 1. Only taxis registered with these apps will serve airport passengers.

In alignment with this, the ministry will unveil the Aber app. This innovative platform will consolidate all licensed taxi services in Oman, offering users a centralised portal to select their preferred service and destination, whether for immediate travel or future bookings.

New MoCIIP decision issued to regulate e-commerce

Our Correspondent Muscat

In a move to bolster the national economy, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has issued a decision (No 499/2023) detailing regulations for e-commerce in Oman.

The decision aligns with Oman's e-commerce strategy. At its core, it aims to establish a robust legal and regulatory framework that fosters e-commerce growth. Key measures include streamlining e-store documentation and ensuring easier access for consumers. The decision also emphasises the importance of transparent online transactions, with emphasis on reducing e-commerce fraud and closely monitoring e-stores.

For those seeking to foray into e-commerce, the regulations specify a clear path. Individuals without a commercial register can obtain a licence by submitting an electronic application, provided certain criteria are met. Commercial entities, on the other hand, must be registered in the commercial registry. Furthermore, non-Omani entrepreneurs can also venture into e-commerce activities by following the guidelines laid out in the Foreign Capital Investment Law.

To ensure adherence to these regulations, MoCIIP wields the authority to enforce corrective measures. These can range from imposing fines of up to RO500 or suspending the licence of online stores until compliance is restored. In severe or repeated cases of violations over a three-year period, MoCIIP can revoke licences and block online stores.

Decision No 499/2023 will be operational 90 days post its official announcement in the Gazette on September 10.

With the National Plan for E-commerce, Oman's vision is to diversify its economy, position the nation as a regional e-commerce hub, and stimulate sectoral growth. This proactive approach encapsulates a holistic plan to integrate e-commerce deeply into the Omani business ecosystem, MoCIIP stated.

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Fire prevention is self-protection

Incidents of fire in residential and commercial establishments saw an alarming increase in the month of August with Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority reporting 24 people were injured in these across the sultanate. What measures should be taken to reduce fire incidents? Here's what readers of *Muscat Daily* said -

Mohsesan Maqsood
Private sector employee

To reduce fire incidents, ensure regular maintenance and install fire alarms and smoke detectors. Promote responsible fire behaviour, maintain firebreaks in wildfire-prone areas, and invest in firefighting equipment and training. Additionally, educate communities through

awareness campaigns.

Amirhossein Anvarizadeh
Private sector employee

There should be periodic visits and inspections at commercial establishments by related authorities and proper training given in order to mitigate the risk of any kind of accident.

Hafsa Nayeb Ali
Student

Implementing and installing standard fire protection systems is important to reduce fire incidents and prevent fire-related injuries. Probably the most common type of fire protection equipment, fire extinguishers should be properly installed and inspected regularly. As a prevention

system, fire alarms detect and alert people to a fire to facilitate prompt building evacuation. Ensure the fire alarm system is working and that the other fire protection systems connected to it also work well. Fire sprinklers can dramatically reduce the heat, flames and smoke produced in a fire.

Andrea
Housewife

To reduce fire incidents, implement measures like installing smoke detectors, conducting fire drills and adhering to fire codes, ensuring safety across buildings and workplaces.

Nasser Mohammed al Adawi
Brand manager

It is necessary to follow a set of preventive procedures and measures to reduce the risk of fires occurring in industrial facilities and homes. These include designing and planning of facilities or houses to enhance fire safety; installing an effective early warning system that alerts workers to a fire in order to take appropriate evacuation procedures; and providing training and awareness to learn about the basics of safety and how to deal with emergencies and the use of basic firefighting equipment.

Additionally, it is important to pay attention to maintaining devices and equipment regularly to ensure their proper operation and prevent malfunctions that may lead to fires, and installing multiple extinguishing systems in a facility or home, such as manual extinguishing devices and automatic sprinkler systems.

Hazardous materials must be controlled, handled with care, and stored, used and disposed properly in accordance with approved industry guidelines and regulations. Also, it is important to cooperate with relevant local authorities to exchange information and provide training and support in the field of fire safety.



Dr Wail al Harrasi,
Undersecretary, MERA

3-day GCC forum on zakat opens in Manah

Muscat - The Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MERA) opened a training forum for authorities responsible for managing and distributing zakat in the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council at Oman Across Ages Museum in Manah on Sunday.

The three-day forum opened under the auspices of Abdullah bin Salem al Salmi, Executive President of Capital Market Authority.

Titled 'Modern Methods in Managing and Distributing Zakat Resources', the forum aims to achieve decent living standards for the people of Oman based on the fact that achieving sustainable well-being requires creating a stimulating environment for social responsibility programmes, civil voluntary contributions, and programmes to support women and youth that aim at economic empowerment and social empowerment.

The forum will also focus on exchanging expertise and experiences among participants and introduce zakat committees in Oman to their counterparts in the GCC, developing the administrative work of the agencies responsible for zakat in light of contemporary developments, discussing challenges and difficulties, and finding solutions and proposals to develop work in the field of zakat.

NEXT ON YOUR SAY

Muscat Municipality is planning to develop a multifaceted festival ground to be a single venue capable of hosting a variety of events throughout the year. How will this help in having quality festivals/events and attracting large crowds?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by *Muscat Daily*. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om You can also log on to our Facebook page or tweet us your comments on the issue.

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

Share your comments in not more than 50 words along with your full name and profession before next Sunday, 10am, via WhatsApp, Facebook or Instagram

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International riders converge on Salalah for 4-stage tour

Our Correspondent
Salalah

The Tour of Salalah commenced on Sunday marking the start of an intense four-stage race.

Organised by Oman Cycling Association and backed by several entities, including Dhofar Municipality, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the race has attracted wide participation.

Thirteen teams from nations such as Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE, Algeria, the Netherlands and Germany have converged on Salalah to showcase their talent.

The inaugural stage on Sunday covered a distance of 126km from Khor Rori to Ayn Isha.

Cyclists will tackle a 153km route from the wilayat of Sadah to Hajeeb in Stage 2 on Monday.

Stage 3 on Tuesday will chal-



lenge participants with a 123km stretch from Souq al Hafa to Wadi Darbat.

Wrapping up the tour on Wednesday, the cyclists will face their longest challenge - a 247km race from Ayn Razat to Ateen Park in Salalah - in Stage 4.

Apart from the competition, the tour also showcases Dhofar's tourist locales, while serving as a platform for Omani cycling talents.

The event intends to hone the skills of local riders, identify standout talents and select the best riders for national teams.

Additionally, it's a training ground for young Omani organisers to refine their technical capabilities.

In light of the event, Royal Oman Police has issued an advisory, urging motorists to co-operate with law enforcement officers for public safety.

Intensive campaign against palm pest menace in Dhahirah from Sept 17

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a continued effort to safeguard palm trees and bolster agriculture production, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) is set to initiate its third campaign against the red palm weevil. The campaign will commence on September 17, targeting several villages in Dhahirah.

Salim bin Ali al Omrani, Director General of Agriculture and Water Resources in Dhahirah, highlighted the strategic importance of the operation. "Specialist teams are getting ready to engage in a comprehensive field campaign across several wilayats in Dhahirah starting September 17," he said.

Scheduled to run till September 28, the campaign's objective is to fortify the health of palm trees and prevent weevil infestation from spreading to healthy palms, mitigating potential economic losses in the agriculture sector.



In recent times, the directorate, in collaboration with various community and volunteer groups, has orchestrated expansive operations to curb the threat of the palm weevil

SALIM AL OMRANI

Reflecting on past endeavours, Omrani said, "In recent times, the directorate, in collaboration with various community and volunteer groups, has orchestrated expansive operations to curb the threat of the palm weevil."

The specialist teams spearheading these efforts employ a combination of trapping devices and chemical control. In in-

stances of severe infestations, affected palms are strategically removed and promptly incinerated onsite to halt further contamination.

Owing to the relentless work of field teams and ministry experts, over 3,611 palm trees have been treated and a further 761 pruned to contain the spread of the pest.

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APSR issues decision on potable water quality

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) issued a decision on Sunday regulating the quality of drinking water in the sultanate.

Recognising water as a critical resource, the decision focuses on strengthening operational and administrative measures ensuring water safety. This includes clearly outlined rights, duties, stipulated requirements, and designated technical emergency procedures for both licensees and consumers.

Central to these regulations is the principle that water sources must remain protected. If an individual jeopardises the quality or safety of these sources, they are responsible for its swift restoration, in collaboration with the licensed provider.

They must also compensate any affected parties for damages or losses experienced, APSA decided.

Licensees, on their part, are



now required to formulate a robust water safety plan. This includes a detailed risk assessment regarding potential threats to water quality.

They must also set protocols for water sample testing, equip consumers with designated me-

tergo regular checks, with a set minimum of monthly samples taken and assessed.

Licensees must also produce a monthly report for the authority, detailing all sample test results, along with an annual risk assessment review and any initial response measures.

If the water quality doesn't meet the approved standards, the licensee must pinpoint the source, halt its supply, and immediately notify the authority about the corrective measures in place to safeguard public health.

The affected consumers must be informed, and if there's a water shortage exceeding six hours, a contingency plan needs to be in place. Furthermore, the licensee must identify and address the reasons for non-conformity in sample quality.

This regulatory step aligns with the recent enactment of the Water and Wastewater Law introduced earlier in June, ensuring that the operations of regulated entities align with the highest standards.

MHT invites tenders for development of Maritime History Museum in Sur

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) has invited bids for the Maritime History Museum in Sur - a port city in South Sharqiyah governorate.

Bids have been invited for the design and consultancy services for the construction of the Maritime History Museum, the ministry stated.

'The new Maritime History Museum will be a cultural and educational national institute that will house, preserve, and showcase the sea-faring Omani heritage,' MHT said in a statement.

The ministry said that the consultant shall carryout all the services required for the successful delivery of the project and shall be responsible for executing the concept design, preparing all other design and tender documents and supervise design implementation during the construction of the project.

The group would have to work in coordination with the client's team, project consultants/sub-consultants, identified stakeholders and users onboard, and incorporate nec-



essary modifications.

The last date for submission of offers is October 23.

The ministry has allocated 14,154sqm of land for the project along the coast, beside Al Ayjah Bridge and opposite to the well-known Al Ayjah Watch Tower, in Khor Al Batah.

In October last year, the Museum of Maritime History in Sur was chosen as the project for the second edition of the Bilal bin Haitham Architectural Design Award, in which a concept design for the museum had been presented.

Mohammed Salah al Balushi won the first place for his design inspired by the scene of the gathering of ships in Khor Al Battah during periods of prosperous maritime activity in Sur.

ODB allots RO10.2mn to boost manufacturing, food security

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Development Bank's (ODB) Board of Directors has approved to fund four key projects in manufacturing and food security, dedicating a significant RO10.2mn.

This decision was taken during the board's 6th meeting of 2023 on Sunday, presided over by Eng Mohammed Abu Bakr al Ghassani, ODB's Chairman.

Ghassani highlighted the benefits of an expanded lending ceiling, noting that such an increase allows the bank to back projects that have significant local value. These ventures are expected to propel growth in vital economic areas.

The board also reviewed 2023's performance metrics, assessing the strides made in



the digital transformation initiative. This programme's primary objective is to streamline lending processes, ensure timely project completions, and enhance client satisfaction. They also touched upon upcoming development forums and business opportunities slated for October in the Dhofar and North Sharqiyah governorates.

Looking ahead, Ghassani shared ODB's strategy. "The bank plans to intertwine production chains by collaborating with both public and private entities. This approach aims to finance a blend of large projects, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and micro-enterprises. These collaborative efforts will enrich the local economy by

North Batinah unveils plans for six new public parks

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a move to enhance public recreational spaces, the Office of the Governor of North Batinah has announced plans to establish six new parks across the governorate.

Eng Sulaiman Hamad al Sunaidi, Director General of North Batinah Municipality, confirmed that the tendering process for these parks has concluded. The central objective of choosing to have more parks is to augment the region's green spaces, advance afforestation efforts, and align with international environmental standards.

This initiative not only revitalises existing green sites but also supports Oman's 2050 goal of achieving carbon neutrality.

Key features of the six parks:



Waterfront Park, Shinas: Spanning 30,000sqm, this park will feature lush landscapes, shaded seating areas, children's playgrounds, a prayer hall, and a fountain.

Jasmine Park, Suwaiq: Occupying 26,878sqm, the park will boast green spaces, areas for sports, children's play zones, and other essential amenities.

Al Dhuwaihir Park, Khaboura: A 3,032sqm space with children's play areas and essential facilities.

Al-Khuwairat Park, Khaboura: This extensive 57,000sqm area will encompass children's playgrounds, investment sites, and more.

Al Bax Park, Khaboura: A more intimate 870sqm setting, complete with play zones for children and seating areas.

Makhailif Park, Saham: Covering 13,000sqm, visitors can expect children's play areas, seating spots, and other essential services.

Four poachers arrested for hunting wild animals

Muscat - The Environment Authority (EA) and the Royal Oman Police have arrested poachers for killing Nubian ibex, Arabian gazelle, and wild birds.

'Environment Authority rangers in Al Najd unit of the Directorate General of Environment in Dhofar, in cooperation with the Royal Oman Police, arrested four citizens who had hunted a number of wild animals. Those arrested were referred to the competent authorities for legal action against them,' EA said in a statement. 'We confirm that these actions are in clear violation of the Law on Nature Reserves and Wildlife Conservation, and the act is punishable by imprisonment and a fine for anyone who causes disruption in nature conservation areas.'

According to Royal Decree No 6/2003, anyone who intentionally kills, hunts or smuggles any animal or bird will be subjected to imprisonment for a period not less than six months and/or a fine not less than RO1,000.

GCC countries' environmental progress highlighted in Jabal Akhdar meet

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The 43rd environmental summit of undersecretaries from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries highlighted the Gulf countries collective initiatives and progress in protecting the environment in the region.

The Environment Authority (EA) of Oman, which chaired the meeting in Jabal Akhdar on Sunday, reminded that the collective initiative for environmental protection, set in motion by the Supreme Council in Muscat in 1985, remains a pillar for coordinated efforts across the GCC.

In this context, Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, chairman of the Environment Authority and summit head, reflected on the GCC's rich history of collaboration.

Amri highlighted key cooperative outcomes including unified environmental systems, wildlife conservation regulations, waste management standards, and a collective approach to radioac-



tive material handling.

The meeting decided to establish a unified directive for controlling substances that deplete the ozone layer. Cross-border waste transfers and standards on air, noise, and wastewater also emerged from these efforts.

Drawing attention to the Muscat Declaration of December 2008, Amri emphasised the importance of plans and poli-

Under the GCC's broader initiatives, their strides in energy transition, water, food security, climate change mitigation, and efforts to achieve carbon neutrality are commendable

cies to safeguard the Gulf's environment and natural resources. He commended the GCC nations for their dedicated environmental work and expressed support for the UAE's role in hosting the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 28).

He also appreciated Saudi Arabia's Green Middle East Initiative and Qatar's hosting of the Doha Horticultural Expo

2023. Acknowledging broader GCC initiatives, he mentioned their strides in energy transition, water, food security, climate change mitigation, and efforts to achieve carbon neutrality.

Khalid bin Ali al Sunaidi, Assistant Secretary for Economic and Development Affairs at the General Secretariat of GCC, presented encouraging data.

Between 2020 and 2023, there was a 5.2% reduction in substances that deplete the ozone layer.

From 2005 to 2015, carbon dioxide emissions decreased by 4.5%, with per capita emissions dropping by 10.3%. These figures underscore the region's positive trajectory in climate change mitigation.

Key topics discussed during the summit included the 2020 environmental trends in GCC countries, non-tariff environmental restrictions, and the establishment of a GCC pavilion at COP28.

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OQ Group posts \$1.1bn profit for 2023 first half

Our Correspondent
Muscat

OQ Group, Oman's international integrated energy group, has reported a net profit of \$1.1bn for the first half of this year, while the group's total assets reached \$31.2bn as of the end of June 2023.

OQ Group posted earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortisation (EBITDA) of \$2.3bn for the first half of 2023, according to an Oman News Agency report.

The group's semi-annual report indicated that OQ achieved an average total production of oil from its operated assets and investment partnerships amounting to 222,000 barrels per day.

This represents a 7% increase in production during the first half of this year compared to the same period last year.

Oil production in Block 60 rose to 61,000 barrels of oil equivalent in the first half of 2023, up from 49,000 barrels of oil equivalent in the first half of 2022.

Turning to gas operations for the first half of 2023, the avail-



During the first half of 2023, OQ Group achieved an average total production of oil from its operated assets and investment partnerships amounting to 222,000 barrels per day

ability ratio of OQ's gas networks was approximately 99.999% across Omani governorates.

The group's daily natural gas production reached 471mn cubic feet, with 18mn cubic feet from the group-operated assets.

Production of OQ's partnership assets reached 454mn cubic feet of gas per day.

Within the refineries and petrochemicals division, OQ reported an average refinery production of 302,000 barrels per day in the first half of 2023.

Additionally, the group's refining output included 595,000 metric tonnes of polymer, approximately 497,000 metric tonnes of methanol, 1,016,000 metric tonnes of aromatics, and 167,000 metric tonnes of LPG.

Moreover, OQ's expenditure on goods and services totalled approximately \$653mn for the first half of the year. Local expenditure on contracts and procurement made through Omani companies and institutions amounted to roughly \$488mn, yielding a retained in-country value (ICV) of \$211.23mn.

OAB, Omran sign financing deal for Nikki Beach Resort

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) and Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group), the sultanate's tourism investment and development arm, have sealed a strategic partnership to solely finance the upcoming Nikki Beach Resort & Spa Muscat project, currently being developed adjacent to the Sustainable City - Yiti.

For Oman Arab Bank, this marks the latest landmark project that the bank has financed in Oman, further supporting the sultanate's advancement across developmental and economic sectors.

In a press statement, Sulaiman al Harthi, CEO of Oman Arab Bank, said, "We are proud to partner with Omran Group to bolster the nation's hospitality sector. The bank has a proven track record of handling large-scale, complex projects and catalysing economic diversification efforts that are aligned with the objectives of Oman's Vision 2040. Economic diversification is vital to stimulate Oman's sustainable development at a global level, and this project represents another step forward on that journey."

Omran Group's CEO Hashil al



Mahrouqi said, "We are excited to be working with Oman Arab Bank to see the Nikki Beach Resort & Spa Muscat project through to its successful completion. This resort is part of our continued endeavor to build on the nation's position as a preferred global destination for tourists. It is a landmark development widely considered to be one of the most significant additions to Oman's luxury hospitality sector. It will undoubtedly play a vital role in pushing Oman's tourism sector to reach its full potential, which aligns with Omran Group's commit-

ment to developing exceptional and sustainable destinations."

Nikki Beach Resort & Spa Muscat will feature 140 hotel rooms and 30 villas with private pools. Facilities will include the Beach Club, three signature restaurants, three swimming pools, a spa, gym, and Marina.

Founded in 1998, Nikki Beach is a global concept that combines elements of music, dining, entertainment, fashion, film, and art. Its Muscat property will be the latest in a portfolio that currently boasts 11 Beach Clubs and five hotels and resorts located around the world.

Oil rises over 2% last week amid extension of OPEC+ cuts

Muscat - Oil prices climbed by over 2% during the week ended September 8 over supply risks triggered by output curbs announced by the world's biggest producers, Russia and Saudi Arabia.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at \$90.53 per barrel on Friday, increasing by around 2.23% relative to the closing price of \$88.55 a barrel on Friday of previous week.

The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) saw gains while trading at \$87.38 per barrel on Friday, posting a 2.14% rise from previous Friday's session that closed at \$85.55 a barrel.

Both benchmarks hit their highest levels this year after major OPEC+ producers announced their decision to extend oil production cuts and curb exports.

Saudi Arabia and Russia announced Tuesday their plans to extend existing output cuts until the end of the year, with possible



monthly revisions.

Saudi Arabia said it would extend its production cut of 1mn barrels per day (bpd) for another three months to cover October, November and December, pushing the country's output to 9mn bpd for those months.

Russia also announced its intention to continue its voluntary oil export reduction of around 300,000 bpd for the rest of this year.

The week's price upturns were backed by demand optimism

from the world's largest oil user, the US.

US commercial crude oil inventories decreased by 6.3mn barrels during the week ending September 1, according to data released by the Energy Information Administration (EIA) on Thursday.

Signalling a demand increase in the country, the drawdown exceeded the American Petroleum Institute's expectations of a 5.5mn barrels fall.

Agencies

Egypt inflation hits record high of nearly 40%

Cairo, Egypt - Annual inflation in Egypt hit 39.7% in August, official figures showed Sunday, an all-time high for the country as it grapples with a punishing economic crisis.

It comes immediately after the previous record of 38.2% was recorded in July, and over a year into an unrelenting economic crisis that has seen the currency shed half its value against the US dollar since early last year.

Food and drink prices alone registered a 71.9% increase compared to August 2022, state statistics agency CAPMAS announced on Sunday, adding to the burden of families who have been struggling to make ends meet.

The economic crisis in the import-dependent country was catalysed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year, which destabilised crucial food supplies and unsettled global markets.

Investors pulled billions out of Cairo's foreign reserves, which remain buoyed by deposits from wealthy Gulf allies whose prom-



Food and drink prices in Egypt registered a 71.9% increase in August (AFP)

ises to purchase Egyptian state assets have fallen short of government targets.

Even before the current crisis, 30% of Egyptians were living below the poverty line, according to the World Bank, with another 30% vulnerable to falling into

poverty.

Egypt, the Arab world's most populous country, has been dependent on bailouts in recent years, from both Gulf allies and the International Monetary Fund.

Last year, the IMF approved a \$3bn loan for Egypt conditioned

on "a permanent shift to a flexible exchange rate regime".

The country's external debt bill has tripled over the past decade, rising to a record high of \$165.4bn this year, according to Ministry of Planning figures.

AFP

Global rice prices hit 15-year high after India export curbs: FAO

Paris, France - Global rice prices reached a 15-year high in August after top exporter India banned some overseas sales of the grain, the Food and Agriculture Organization said.

While global food prices eased in August, those of rice rose 9.8% compared to the previous month, "reflecting trade disruptions in the aftermath of a ban on Indica white rice exports by India", the FAO said in a monthly report.

"Uncertainty about the ban's duration and concerns over export restrictions caused supply-chain actors to hold on to stocks, re-negotiate contracts or stop making price offers, thereby limiting most trade to small volumes and previously concluded sales," the UN agency said.

Rice is a major world food staple and prices on international markets have soared in the wake of the Covid pandemic, the war

in Ukraine and the impact of the El Nino weather phenomenon on production levels.

India announced in July a ban on exports of non-basmati white rice, which account for around a quarter of its total.

The consumer affairs and food ministry said at the time that the move would "ensure adequate availability" and "allay the rise in prices in the domestic market".

India accounts for more than 40% of all global rice shipments.

The ban was expected to hit African nations, Turkey, Syria and Pakistan, all of which were already struggling with high inflation, data analytics firm Gro Intelligence warned in a note in July.

The Philippines, one of the world's top importers of rice, reached a five-year agreement with Vietnam on Thursday to buy rice.



While global food prices eased in August, those of rice rose 9.8% compared to the previous month

El Nino effect

World rice stocks are forecast to reach an all-time high of 198.1mn tonnes, with India and China holding nearly three quarter of this volume like in previous sea-

sons, according to the FAO.

This total represents around 38% of rice consumption forecast over the same period.

But aggregate rice reserves held by the rest of the world are expected to end the year with a

second successive contraction, it added.

El Nino could also have a negative effect on the next harvests.

The turmoil in the rice market comes as global food prices have been progressively easing from a

peak last year after war broke out between major grain producers Russia and Ukraine.

The FAO's global food price index, which tracks monthly changes in international prices of a basket of food commodities, averaged 121.4 points in August, down 2.1% from July.

The index was 24% below the summit it reached in March 2022. Prices of cereal, meat, dairy and vegetable oils all fell in August.

Sugar prices, however, rose by 1.3% due to "heightened concerns over the impact of the El Nino phenomenon on sugarcane crops, along with below-average rains in August and persistent dry weather conditions in Thailand".

'Modest' recovery

Global food prices had slightly rebounded in July when Russia pulled out of a deal brokered by

the UN and Turkey that had enabled Ukraine to ship grains via the Black Sea.

The FAO said on Friday it had lowered its forecast for world trade in cereals in 2023 and 2024 to 466mn tonnes - a 1.7% drop from the previous marketing season. "Traded volumes of wheat and maize are all predicted to decline, due to a mix of reasons, including falling exports by Ukraine due to trade disruptions associated with the ongoing war," it said.

"FAO has also lowered its forecast for world trade in rice from the July figure considering the stepped-up export restrictions by India," the FAO added.

An expected recovery of the rice trade in 2024 would be "modest" if the India restrictions are protracted and El Nino disrupts production in other Asian exporters, the FAO added.

AFP

China exports, imports fall as onshore yuan hits 16-year low

Beijing, China – China's exports and imports sank again in August, official data showed, as the onshore yuan fell to the lowest dollar level since 2007.

The disappointing yet expected trade figures add to growing pressure on authorities to introduce fresh stimulus for the world's number two economy even as the data showed some sign of improvement.

The threat of recession in Europe and high inflation in many major economies have contributed to a plunge in demand for Chinese goods, which has been compounded by tensions with the United States and a move by parts of the West to reduce dependence on Beijing.

On top of that, a much-anticipated strong recovery following the lifting of painful zero-Covid rules at the end of last year has run off the tracks, while the gargantuan property sector continues to teeter.

All of this has given leaders a headache as they try to reinvigorate growth while at the same time trying to recalibrate the economy from one driven by state investment to one that is consumer-led and more sustainable.

Customs figures Thursday showed they have a long way to go to achieve the latter, with imports shrinking 7.3% on-year last month as consumers remained reluctant to purchase while prices fell in July for the first time in more than two years.

Exports – which have historically



China's trade surplus fell to \$68.3bn in August, compared with \$80.6bn in the previous month (AFP)

cally served as a key growth engine for China – sank 8.8%.

Still, the pace of contraction in both was slower than the previous month and was better than the nine percent drop forecast by economists in a survey by Bloomberg News.

Shipments to Western countries in August fell significantly on-year, with US-bound goods diving 17.4% and those to the European Union 10.5% lower.

At the same time exports to Russia remained robust – surging 63.2% – demonstrating the continued strength of economic ties between the neighbours despite Moscow's war in Ukraine.

Shipments to Western countries in August fell significantly on-year, with US-bound goods diving 17.4% and those to the European Union 10.5% lower

The drop in trade was "in line with expectations", given persistently weak external demand, economist Zhiwei Zhang of Pinpoint Asset Management said in a note.

"The focus of the policymakers is on the domestic economic challenges, particularly the property market," wrote Zhang.

Meanwhile, China's onshore yuan, whose trade is regulated by Beijing, dropped to its lowest level against the dollar in almost 16 years.

At about 0925 GMT, the onshore yuan fell 0.13% to 7.3279 yuan to the US dollar, moments after hitting 7.3284 yuan – which was the lowest level since December 2007.

The offshore yuan – which is circulated outside mainland China and is more freely traded than currency in the domestic market – fell 0.19% to 7.3350 to the dollar.

"Speculation has increased recently that domestic policymakers could eventually allow the renminbi (yuan) to devalue more significantly to help provide more support for growth from net trade," said Lee Hardman, currency economist at MUFG bank.

"However, their actions to support the renminbi suggest a gradual depreciation path is favoured as they remain wary of

encouraging a sharp pick-up in capital outflows," he added.

Property turmoil

China's property sector remains in turmoil, with major developers failing to complete housing projects, triggering protests and mortgage boycotts from homebuyers.

Authorities have come under increasing pressure to introduce fresh support after months of debilitating data. Rather than adopt a broad but costly stimulus, Beijing has so far adopted more targeted measures such as easing restrictions on mortgages and cutting key interest rates.

But that has left investors and observers frustrated and warning the economy could fall into a period of stagnation similar to that experienced in Japan since an economic bubble burst at the start of the 1990s.

More time is needed to determine how effective these policies are in stabilising woes in the property sector and wider economy, suggested Zhang.

"We think the policymakers have turned much more proactive than a few months ago," wrote Zhang.

"If the macro momentum doesn't turn around soon, Beijing will likely launch more policy measures to boost growth in coming months."

Apart from a brief rebound in March and April, China's exports have been in constant decline since October.

AFP



Eurozone economy grew slightly in Q2

Brussels, Belgium – The eurozone economy grew by a mere 0.1% in the second quarter, lower than previously estimated, official data showed.

The European Union's Eurostat data agency had previously put growth at 0.3% between April and June compared with the previous quarter in the countries that use the euro currency.

Eurostat also revised its first-quarter figures, saying the economy grew 0.1% and did not stagnate as previously thought.

"The European economy is generally stagnating. It is suffering from high interest rates, energy prices and the global slowdown," said Charlotte de Montpellier, analyst at ING bank.

The European Central Bank has hiked rates in efforts to tame soaring inflation.

Europe's top economy, Germany, slipped into a recession at the turn of the year and stagnated in the second quarter.

Eurostat maintained its estimates for the wider, 27-nation EU, with zero growth in the second quarter and output grew by 0.2% in the first quarter.

AFP



US Federal Reserve headquarters in Washington, DC

US GDP growth continues: Fed

Washington, US – The US economy saw "modest" growth over the summer as consumers kept the wheels turning by dipping into rapidly diminishing savings to finance tourism spending, the Federal Reserve said Wednesday.

The US economy has shown signs of resiliency in recent months despite an aggressive campaign of interest rate hikes by the Fed to tackle high inflation.

A recent spurt of good economic news has led analysts to cut the likelihood of the world's biggest economy entering a recession this year, while keeping pressure on the Fed as it battles inflation through rate increases.

Analysts and traders broadly expect the central bank to hold interest rates steady this month amid signs of a slowdown in new job creation and uptick in unemployment.

In its regular report on economic conditions known as the "beige book," the Fed indicated that positive economic news could soon come to an end,

along with consumer savings accumulated during the pandemic.

"Contacts from most Districts indicated economic growth was modest during July and August," the Fed said on Wednesday, in contrast to its previous report noting only "slightly" increasing growth.

"Consumer spending on tourism was stronger than expected, surging during what most contacts considered the last stage of pent-up demand for leisure travel from the pandemic era," the Fed added.

Spending on tourism helped balance out a slowdown in other non-essential retail spending, as some Fed districts suggested that "consumers may have exhausted their savings and are relying more on borrowing."

Most districts noted a rise in loan balances, while some also flagged a worrying increase in delinquencies on consumer loans, indicating that many consumers are running into challenges making repayments.

AFP

Oil permits threaten UK net zero pledge

Aberdeen, UK – With the provision of a swathe of new oil and gas exploration licences and a crisis in offshore wind energy, clouds are gathering over the UK's net zero promises.

The Conservative government of Rishi Sunak in July promised "hundreds" of new licences for oil and gas exploration and production in the North Sea, arousing the anger of environmentalists.

The NGO Greenpeace later covered the prime minister's private residence with a huge "oil black" tarpaulin to denounce the "drilling frenzy".

"Any government support for continuation of fossil fuels has a negative impact on the transition because it drives investors away", Erik Dalhuijsen, co-founder of Aberdeen Climate Action, told AFP on the sidelines of the Offshore Europe conference in Aberdeen, Scotland, this week.

"Opening new oil fields, I don't see how that's consistent with net zero," added Jean Boucher, a member of activist group Extinction Rebellion and an environmental sociologist.

More bad news for the wind energy sector, which is at the heart of the UK's plan to become a net zero carbon emitter by 2050, arrived this week when the



Pedestrians walk along the shore as wind turbines are pictured at RWE's Scroby Sands Wind Farm, off the coast of Great Yarmouth, eastern England (AFP)

government's auction of permits to build offshore wind farms failed due to a lack of takers.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has caused inflation and production costs to soar around the world, raising the cost of steel and other materials used to build wind turbines.

Electricity tariffs that energy companies can charge have also been capped, leading companies

in the sector to claim that offshore wind projects are no longer profitable.

Greenpeace called the failed auction the "biggest disaster for clean energy in almost a decade", putting the net zero target "in jeopardy".

Swedish energy company Vattenfall has already thrown in the towel on one major project, Norfolk Boreas, and others may fol-

low.

"I know for a fact other companies are looking really hard at their licences and their ability to invest" in wind power in the UK, Michael Tholen, sustainability director of energy lobby Offshore Energy UK (OEUK), told AFP at the Offshore Europe conference.

Mads Nipper, boss of Danish electricity giant Ørsted, also warned that "offshore wind ambi-

tions will only happen with sane auction frameworks and realistic prices".

Shifting priorities

A few days before Friday's embarrassing admission of failure, Downing Street announced that it was lifting a de facto ban on the construction of new onshore wind farms, which was hailed as a step in the right direction, but too timid by some.

The war in Ukraine and political upheaval at home has seen London's priorities shift.

"There's been a lot of political change in the UK over the last few years," Clare Bond, professor of geophysics at Aberdeen University, told AFP.

"There is this interplay between energy security and net zero...but we really need to question how quickly we're getting toward net zero and what we can do to accelerate that," she added.

NGOs, experts and companies in the sector are calling for urgent reform of the tendering process, for example by introducing a minimum profit for energy companies, as suggested by Dalhuijsen.

Others stress the need for long-term stability in taxation and regulation.

AFP

Germany to put 15mn electric cars on road by 2030

Geneva, Switzerland – The German chancellor recently said that his country is sticking to its goal of putting 15mn electric cars on the roads by 2030.

In his opening speech at the International Motor Show in Munich (IAA), Olaf Scholz appealed to automakers to offer more affordable cars.

He also announced a push to



German chancellor Olaf Scholz

expand charging stations for e-cars.

"The goal is not new – what is new is that we are also implementing it," the chancellor said.

With regard to the competition from China, which was very present at the IAA, Scholz firmly rejected any fears that the German automotive indus-

try could be left behind.

"Competition should spur us on, not scare us," Scholz said. He pointed out that there had been concerns about competition from abroad in the past as well, only back then it had been about Japanese, and later Korean manufacturers.

"Germany is still the linchpin of the automotive industry and

will remain so," the chancellor said.

However, he said, the goal must be "climate-neutral mobility in Germany and from Germany."

"We must get around in a way that doesn't harm nature, both in this country and around the world," Scholz added.

Anadolu Agency

Abraj Energy showcases technical expertise with global publications

Abraj Energy Services, a leading provider of oil and gas services, in partnership with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), a leading oil exploration and production company, has published a series of technical papers that highlight industrial progress and advancement.

The research was presented during several international conferences earlier in the year, demonstrating the company's unwavering commitment to technical contribution and leadership in the oil and gas industry.

The first paper, titled, *Enhancing Productivity and Ineffectivity in the Sultanate of Oman's Nimr Cluster Using Hydraulic Fracturing; Challenging The Status Quo High Permeability Fracturing*, was presented at the SPE Hydraulic Fracturing Technology Conference and Exhibition held at The Woodlands, US, in February this year.

It focuses on the methodology and processes of an injector well fracturing campaign and explores an innovative method called hydraulic fracturing to boost productivity and extract more oil.

The second paper, titled, *Fields High Permeability Propped Fracturing Case Studies and Lessons Learnt*, was put forward at the SPE Gas and Oil Technology Conference in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, in March.

It highlights case studies and lessons learned from hydraulic fracturing operations in Nimr cluster. The paper also emphasizes the importance of main-



taining post fracture retained conductivity in high permeability zones and discusses the successful results of fracturing treatments in Nimr fields.

Four technical papers are scheduled for publication at the SPE International Hydraulic Fracturing Conference to be held in Muscat this month.

This series of technical journals on hydrocarbon production enhancement complements the area of study and work coverage from the North to South petroleum basin in Oman.

The research and results are a testament to our commitment to thought leadership and demonstrate our ability to drive innovation and success in the oil and gas sector

SAIF AL HAMHAMI

The topics of these papers highlight the process of fracturing for screenless sand control, acid and propped fracturing in carbonate rock reservoirs, and scale solution with scale inhibition-infused proppant fracturing.

Additionally, the company has another publication scheduled for the SPE Annual Technical Conference and Exhibition, to be held in San Antonio, US, in October this year.

This publication highlights a

study conducted after a hydraulic campaign in a high-permeability heavy crude reservoir in the South Oman basin.

This series of publications marks the first time that Abraj Energy Services has published technical papers internationally. The milestone achievement showcases the company's position as both a service and solutions provider beyond its domestic market, with its technical contribution to prestigious global industrial forums.

"Our focus has always been

on providing clients with solutions that go beyond conventional approaches. The research and results are a testament to our commitment to thought leadership and demonstrate our ability to drive innovation and success in the oil and gas sector," said Abraj Energy CEO Saif al Hamhami.

By actively engaging at both regional and global levels, Abraj Energy Services aims to contribute to the continuous improvement and sustainable growth of the oil and gas sector.

International conference on liver transplant held

Lama Polyclinic in association with Yashoda Hospital, Secunderabad, India and Global Treatment Services organised a medical conference on 'Liver Transplant' at Crowne Plaza Muscat on Friday.

Liver transplant is a growing need both in adults and children, with biliary atresia (cholestatic liver disorder) being the most common cause. Other causes include acute and chronic hepatitis, metabolic disorders, alcoholic liver damage, liver and bile duct cancers - hepatoblastoma, congenital, genetic, autoimmune disorders especially in children.

Dr Yahya al Azri, senior consultant and HoD Hepato-Biliary Unit at The Royal Hospital was the guest of honour. In his opening speech, he gave an 'overview of liver transplant in Oman and future vision of the government'.

Dr Azri's speech was followed by a presentation from the guest speaker Dr Dharmesh Kapoor, senior consultant, Hepatologist and Lead Transplant Physician at Yashoda Hospital.

The topic was 'Liver transplantation for high acuity recipients'. He deliberated on defining sick liver recipients, their optimisation, their care pathways, namely transplantation or futility. He also touched upon the very important issues of resource utilisation, cost of care and psychosocial aspects associated with care of ICU bound patients who undergo this niche treatment.

The meeting - organised by Dr Sanjay Dalal, founder, Muscat Family Physicians Group - was attended by around 60 eminent doctors from Oman.

ROHM to start of season with Barber of Seville opera

The Royal Opera House Muscat has announced the start of a new season packed with exciting musical performances filling the calendar from September to May 2024.

The dazzling opera which will open the season with traditional elegance and fanfare is *The Barber of Seville* from popular composer Gioacchino Rossini.

The opera will be performed by the Orchestra Nazionale Sinfonica della Rai and Intermezzo Choir conducted by Antonino Fogliani, with a spray of glittering opera stars in the main roles.



Antonino Siragusa sings *Conte d'Almaviva*, Carlo Lepore takes the role of Dr Bartolo, Nicola Olivieri will sing *Don Basilio*, Maria Kataeva will sing the *Role of Rosina*, and Vito Priante takes the main role of the wily fixer Figaro. The Omani Choir Group will also participate in this production.

Rossini's opera is a comic tale of bribery, deception, and disguise. Enjoy Figaro's mischievous escapades as he assists Count Almaviva in prising the beautiful Rosina away from her fortune hunting guardian, Dr Bartolo. Figaro contrives to help

the Count out-wit Dr Bartolo and ensure true love wins the day.

The Barber of Seville will be performed on September 29 and 30 at the Royal Opera House Muscat at 7pm.

Tickets are available now and can be purchased from the box office or via the ROHM app. Each performance is preceded with a talk by the creative team, revealing fascinating insights into their production.

On September 23, the opening Lunch Music concert of the new season will take place in the Opera Galleria at 12.30pm. This

popular informal event is free of charge.

Singers from the Intermezzo Choir will perform arias from across the Rossini canon ahead of the performance of his much-loved opera, *The Barber of Seville*, on the main stage the following weekend.

'Discover Opera Talks at the beautiful Music Library in the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts on September 27 at 7pm. Gaston Fournier leads the discussion on themes within the opera, and opera singers give the audience a close up of Rossini's incredible work.

Mysk al Mouj welcomes world's youngest professor Soborno Isaac Bari

Mysk Al Mouj has received remarkable luminary, Prof Soborno Isaac Bari, widely acclaimed as the world's youngest professor and an extraordinary mathematical talent on Thursday.

This exceptional event marked a significant moment as Prof Isaac Bari graced Muscat with his presence and intellect, Mysk al Mouj stated.

Professor's visit to Muscat was not only a testament to his unparalleled accomplishments but also a reflection of Mysk al Mouj Hotel's commitment to fostering inspiration and learning within the community. At an astonishingly young age, Prof Soborno Isaac Bari has already made indelible contributions to the world of mathematics and education, earning accolades and admiration from across the globe.

During his visit to Muscat, he



made a special appearance at the prestigious Indian School of Muscat, where he delivered enlightening lectures that promise to ignite the minds of young scholars and aspiring mathematicians.

These lectures provide a unique opportunity for students and educators alike to engage with Prof Soborno Isaac Bari and

immerse into the world of mathematics and academia.

"Mysk al Mouj Hotel's collaboration with Prof Soborno Isaac Bari underscores our commitment to supporting education and fostering a sense of curiosity and excellence within our community. We are honoured to host Prof Soborno Isaac Bari and play a role in enriching the educa-

tional landscape of Muscat," said the hotel's general manager Ehab Mourad.

In addition to his groundbreaking work in mathematics, Prof Soborno Isaac Bari is widely recognised for his numerous television appearances in the United States. He has shared his insights and expertise on various prominent platforms, including appearances alongside renowned personalities such as Melissa McCarthy.

Mysk al Mouj is the flagship hotel of Mysk Hotels, an upscale brand launched under Shaza Hotels. Mysk is a contemporary theatre of life that puts the spotlight on the ever-evolving Arabian lifestyle showcasing the richness of Arabian culture.

Shaza is the leading hotel management company dedicated to offering true Arabian hospitality.

HEALTH MINISTER RECEIVES SUDANESE AMBASSADOR



As part of the bilateral relations between Oman and Sudan, H E Dr Hilal Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health on Sunday received at his office H E Salah al Din al Hajj Muhammad al Kando, Ambassador of the Republic of Sudan appointed to the Sultanate of Oman. Both parties had cordial conversations on various topics of common interest with a special focus on promoting cooperation in the field of health

Morocco mourns quake victims as death toll passes 2,000 mark

Tafeghaghte, Morocco - Morocans on Sunday mourned the victims of a devastating earthquake that killed more than 2,000 people as rescue teams raced to find survivors trapped under the rubble of flattened villages.

The strongest-ever quake recorded in the North African country has killed at least 2,012 people and injured over 2,000, many seriously, according to the latest official figures.

Friday's 6.8-magnitude quake struck 72km (45 miles) southwest of the tourist hub of Marrakesh, wiping out entire villages in the hills of the Atlas mountain range. "I've lost everything," said Lahcen, a resident of the mountain village of Moulay Ibrahim, whose wife and four children were among those killed.

Rescue workers recovered the bodies of Lahcen's three daughters from the rubble of their home, but had not yet found the remains of his wife and son.

"I can't do anything about it now, I just want to get away from the world and mourn," he said.

Troops and emergency services have scrambled to reach remote mountain villages where victims were still feared trapped under the rubble of houses, many of which were constructed from mud bricks.

I saw the devastation of the earthquake live and I'm still shaking. It's like a ball of fire that swallowed up everything in its path. Everyone here has lost family, whether in our village or elsewhere in the region

BOUCHRA

Al-Haouz province, site of the epicentre, suffered the most deaths with 1,293, followed by Taroudant province where 452 lives were lost, authorities reported. Citizens on Sunday rushed to hospitals in Marrakesh to donate blood to help the many injured.

'Everyone lost family'

Bouchra, another resident of Moulay Ibrahim, dried her tears with her scarf as she watched men wielding pickaxes to dig graves for the victims.

"My cousin's grandchildren are dead," she said. "I saw the devastation of the earthquake



A woman walks past an earthquake-damaged car in a neighbourhood in the old quarters of Marrakesh on Sunday (AFP)

live and I'm still shaking. It's like a ball of fire that swallowed up everything in its path.

"Everyone here has lost family, whether in our village or elsewhere in the region."

Many residents of the usually bustling tourist hotspot of Marrakesh spent a second night sleeping out on the streets, huddled together under blankets and among bags filled with their belongings. Fatema Satir, a Marrakesh resident, said many were sleeping in the street for fear of their houses collapsing.

"Look where all these people are sleeping," said Satir. "There is no help for us. Our houses have been cracked, others destroyed - like my daughter's house which was wiped out. We are in a chaotic state."

In the city's historic Jemaa el-Fna square, about 20 people were huddled on the ground, wrapped in blankets, while others were staying on the lawn of the nearby town hall, with its 12th century ramparts partially collapsed. "We spent the night outside the old town, in a safe place," said Maria, a Spanish tourist.

The kingdom declared three days of national mourning while countries including France, Israel, Italy, Spain have offered aid.

AFP

Air raids kill at least 30 in Sudanese capital

Wad Madani, Sudan - At least 30 people were killed and dozens injured on Sunday in air strikes on a neighbourhood in the south of Sudan's capital Khartoum, local activists said.

"At about 7:15am (0515 GMT), military aircraft bombed the Qouro market area," said the local resistance committee, one of many groups that used to organise pro-democracy protests and now provides assistance during the war.

"The number of victims of the Quoro market massacre" had risen to 30 three hours after the raid, the committee said, after initially giving a death toll of 11.

The committee said the toll was expected to rise further, as casualties continued to arrive at Bashair hospital. The hospital had issued an 'urgent appeal' for all medical professionals in the area to come and help treat the 'increasing number of injured



Sudanese who fled the war cool off on the banks of the Nile river in the Egyptian city of Aswan, on Friday (AFP)

people arriving'.

Since April 15, Sudan has been gripped by a devastating war pitting the regular army, led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, commanded by his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan

Daglo. Nearly 7,500 people have been killed, according to a conservative estimate from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project.

The real death toll is presumed to be much higher, with many of those wounded and

killed never reaching hospitals or morgues. Access to many areas has been cut off completely and the warring sides have not declared their losses.

Nearly five months in, neither side has been able to seize an advantage. The armed forces con-

trol the skies over Khartoum, while RSF fighters continue to dominate the city's streets.

The army has been accused of repeated indiscriminate shelling of the residential areas where the paramilitaries have embedded themselves, including by evicting families and taking over homes.

Over 2.8mn people have fled the Sudanese capital, whose pre-war population was around five million.

Those who cannot or refuse to leave Khartoum remain trapped by air strikes, artillery fire and street battles, forced to ration precious water and electricity.

In addition to the capital, the fighting has been mainly concentrated in the western region of Darfur, where violence linked to the RSF and its allies has prompted the International Criminal Court to open a new investigation into alleged war crimes.

AFP

Family of Swedish EU diplomat held in Iran call for his release

Stockholm, Sweden - The family of a Swedish EU diplomat held captive in Iran for more than 500 days called on Sunday for his immediate release, as he marked his birthday in a Tehran prison.

"Today on Johan's 33rd birthday, he should be with us celebrating... He should be released immediately and allowed to travel home," the family of Johan Floderus wrote in a statement, releasing a picture of him taken during the only video call with his family he has been granted.

Floderus was arrested on April 17, 2022 at Tehran's airport as he was returning home from a trip with friends.

The Swede, who had been working in Brussels for the EU delegation to Afghanistan as a programme officer since September 2021, is being held at Tehran's notorious Evin prison.

Iran announced in July last year that it had arrested a man on suspicion of espionage, two weeks after an Iranian citizen received a life jail term in Sweden for his role in the Iranian regime's 1988 mass executions of thousands of opponents.

A Stockholm court found former Iranian prison chief Hamid Noury guilty of 'aggravated crimes against international law' and 'murder'.

AFP

Niger military accuses France of deploying forces with eye to 'military intervention'

Niamey, Niger - Niger's coup leaders have accused France of gathering forces, war materials and equipment in several of the neighbouring West African countries with a view to 'military intervention'.

Relations with France, Niger's former colonial power, degraded after Paris stood by ousted president Mohamed Bazoum following the July coup.

"France continues to deploy its forces in several ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) countries as part of preparations for an aggression against Niger, which it is planning in collaboration with this community organisation," Niger's regime spokesman Colonel Major Amadou Abdramane said on Saturday.

The Sahel state is also embroiled in a standoff with the West African bloc ECOWAS, which has threatened to inter-



A supporter of Niger's National Council for Safeguard of the Homeland holds a national flag outside the French airbase in Niamey on Saturday (AFP)

vene militarily if diplomatic pressure to return Bazoum to office fails. In his statement, Abdramane said France had deployed military aircraft, helicopters and 40 armoured vehicles to Cote d'Ivoire and Benin.

"Military cargo aircraft have enabled large quantities of war material and equipment to be

unloaded in Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire and Benin, to name but a few," he added.

On August 3, Niger's coup leaders renounced several military cooperation agreements with France, which has about 1,500 soldiers stationed in the country.

AFP

Israelis protest against judicial overhaul

Tel Aviv, Israel - Thousands of Israelis protested on Saturday against the hardline government's judicial overhaul, ahead of a court hearing on a major element of the controversial reforms that have split the nation.

Since Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition government unveiled its proposals in January, tens of thousands of Israelis have demonstrated weekly in what has become the largest protest movement in the country's history.

"There is no such thing as democracy without the Supreme Court. Democracy, democracy!" chanted the protesters in Tel Aviv, where the rallies have taken place every Saturday since January. "The Supreme Court is Supreme," said one banner unfurled at the protest.

On Saturday, protests were also held in Jerusalem, Haifa, Beer Sheva, Modiin, Herzliya, and some other cities, organisers



People attend a protest against the Israeli government's judicial overhaul bill, in Tel Aviv on Saturday (AFP)

said. The latest demonstration comes ahead of a Tuesday hearing in the Supreme Court on annulling parliament's July vote to limit the so-called 'reasonableness clause' used by the top court to review some government decisions.

Israel does not have a constitution or upper house of parlia-

ment, and the 'reasonableness' law was put in place to allow judges to determine whether a government had overreached its powers.

The Supreme Court had used the measure in a high-profile ruling which barred Aryeh Deri, a Netanyahu ally, from serving in the cabinet because of a tax eva-

sion conviction.

Opponents allege that Netanyahu, who is on trial for corruption charges he denies, of trying to use the proposed legal overhaul to quash possible judgments against him.

He rejects the accusation.

"On Tuesday, the Supreme Court will have a discussion on whether the law the government has passed is legal or not," protester Yuval Inbar, 21, told AFP.

'If we don't come here (to protest) we are afraid that the government is not going to respect the Supreme Court.'

The July 24 amendment to the 'reasonableness clause' states that the courts cannot hear cases or issue orders against elected officials on the basis of that doctrine, activists say. Opponents say this will give unlimited powers to the government and pave the way for more authoritarian rule.

AFP



Relative mourn next to the coffin of a victim of a cyclone in the city of Vespasiano Correa on Saturday (AFP)

Southern Brazil begins to bury victims of cyclone

Muçum, Brazil - Families in southern Brazil on Saturday began to bury victims of a cyclone that left at least 42 dead and affected some 150,000 people, many of whom lost their homes or faced isolation from landslides that washed away roads and bridges.

In the cemetery of Mucum, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, mourners wept and hugged one another as loved ones were buried.

Pallbearers carried caskets through mud and puddles left by the storm.

The heavy rains and strong winds that hit the area last week tore away stone slabs weighing several tons and opened up tombs, some of which were flooded with mud. A jawbone lay uncovered on the ground.

Fabiano Bolnr, a 48-year-old policeman, lost his aunt, uncle

and cousin. He said his cousin escaped flooding but returned to try to save his parents.

All three were buried on Saturday.

"They had already been through several floods, they had even moved to a house on higher ground. But unfortunately the waters came back and this time they took them away," he told AFP.

Mucum was hit harder by floods and landslides than any other municipality in Rio Grande do Sul. Authorities on Saturday night lifted the death toll from the cyclone to 42 people and said 46 remain missing.

Relatives of nine victims had to go to the neighboring town of Vespasiano Correa to say their last goodbyes in an emotional ceremony in the municipal gymnasium.

AFP

Kyiv fends off new wave of overnight drone attacks

Kyiv, Ukraine - Ukraine said it shot down most of the three dozen drones launched by Russia in an overnight attack mainly directed around the capital.

The latest attack comes as Ukraine's forces are urging more Western support for their grueling counteroffensive to gain back land in the east and south.

"We recorded the launch of 33 Shahed (drones) in the direction of Kyiv... 26 were destroyed," the Ukrainian Air Force said on Sunday. Earlier, officials said air defence downed 25 out of 32 drones.

An AFP journalist in the capital heard multiple explosions - presumably from air defence - starting around 1:30am (2230 GMT).

"Drones entered the capital in groups and from different directions," Sergiy Popko, head of the Kyiv City Military Administration, wrote on Telegram.

Debris fell in several districts, damaging an apartment in a multi-storey building, as well as road surfaces and power lines, he added, saying one person was injured. Ukrainian emergency services published photos of rescuers putting out fires in several districts.

Mayor Vitali Klitschko said a resident suffered from an 'acute stress attack' and was receiving medical assistance after debris fell in the central Podil district.

'More weapons'

Kyiv had seen drone and missile attacks on an almost nightly basis last winter and spring, as Russia pounded cities across



Rescuers working at the site of a drone attack in Kyiv on Sunday (AFP)

Ukraine in a bid to wipe out Ukraine's energy infrastructure and destroy morale.

The strikes had since become less frequent, but last month the capital faced the 'most powerful strike' since spring, with more than 20 drones and missiles destroyed. And as summer is coming to a close, Klitschko on Tuesday told journalists that the city was already preparing for a 'tough' winter.

In a conference in the capital on Friday and Saturday, officials

said the West should not lose any time and provide Kyiv with powerful arms to back up its army pushing Russian troops out of the territories it seized.

Newly appointed Defence Minister Rustem Umerov called for more military equipment.

"We are grateful for all the support provided... We need more heavy weapons," Umerov said.

He added: "We need them today. We need them now."

Ukrainian President

Volodymyr Zelensky said the provision of weapons was slowing down, hampering the counteroffensive against Russian positions.

'Enemy is strong'

Deputy Defence Minister Ganna Malyar acknowledged that 'the enemy is strong, they have more people and weaponry'.

Ukraine is leading a difficult counterassault since June, a far cry from the lightning successes of last fall.

But this time, Ukrainian forces are contending with well-trenched Russian defences built over several months of occupation. Deputy Intelligence Chief Vadym Skibitsky estimated Saturday that Russia has more than 420,000 soldiers in the east and south of Ukraine, including Crimea.

The number, he said, does not include special law enforcement units 'that maintain occupation authorities on our territories'.

AFP

Maldives President Solih seeks allies in his bid for re-election

Malé, Maldives - Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih said he was seeking allies Sunday in his bid for re-election in a runoff vote, a day after finishing second in initial polls.

Solih's attempt for a second term has been turned into a referendum on his pursuit of renewed ties with India, the archipelago nation's traditional benefactor.

Final official results showed Solih took 39.05 per cent of the vote, behind his key rival, the capital's mayor Mohamed Muizzu, on 46.06 per cent.

'We have to ally with others,' 61-year-old Solih told reporters on Sunday, blaming his poor showing on 'unforeseen factors' but without giving details.

The independent Elections Commission said the runoff election will be on September 30.

Muizzu got 101,635 votes while Solih managed 86,161, with



Electoral workers examine ballots while vote counting during Maldives' presidential election in Male on Saturday (AFP)

Party (MDP) who got 15,839 or 7.18 per cent, has not indicated which of the top two candidates he will now support.

Muizzu, 45, is a proxy of former president Abdulla Yameen, who is both pro-China and a campaigner for drastically reducing economic and military ties with India.

Yameen is serving an 11-year sentence following his corruption conviction in December and was barred from contesting Saturday's vote. He borrowed heavily from China for construction projects during his autocratic five-year tenure, making the Maldives - better known for its luxury tourism - a hotbed of geopolitical rivalry.

AFP

OFFERINGS TO THE MONKEY KING

Participants pose for pictures before taking part in a procession with offerings to Hanoman, the monkey king who protects people from evil spirits in local folklore, as part of the Kendalisada Art Festival 2023 in Kaliori, Banyumas, Central Java, Indonesia on Sunday (AFP)

Germany's Roncalli circus replaces live animals with holograms

Lübeck, Germany - The smell of sawdust and popcorn fills the air. The clowns, acrobats and magicians are all in place.

As the audience are guided to their seats inside the big top, all the classic elements of the circus are there - except one. The live animals have been replaced by holograms.

Due to concerns over animal welfare, Germany's Roncalli circus stopped using lions and elephants in its shows in 1991.

But it went further in 2018 and completely removed live animals from its programme.

"It is no longer appropriate for Roncalli to show real animals in the ring," circus boss Patrick Philadelphia, 49, told AFP.

Over the last years, circuses have found themselves increas-

It is no longer appropriate to show real animals in the ring... If you can project someone who's no longer living onto a holographic screen, why can't you do it with an animal, a horse, an elephant?

PATRICK PHILADELPHIA

ingly constrained by space.

"If you're setting up in the middle of a marketplace in the centre of town, there is no space for out-



Spectators look at a hologram projection during the show in Luebeck, northern Germany on August 16 (AFP)

door enclosures for animal runs," said Philadelphia.

The nomadic character of circus life was also a strain for animals like horses which had to be loaded onto wagons and then driven to the next town.

"This no longer made sense for an animal-protecting circus," said Philadelphia.

As Roncalli looked for ways to preserve the magic of animals for

children, a show in which Justin Timberlake 'collaborates' with a hologram of the late Prince triggered the idea to turn to 3-D imagery.

"If you can project someone who's no longer living onto a holographic screen, why can't you do it with an animal, a horse, an elephant? So that's where the idea came from," said Philadelphia.

In Luebeck, a steam train circling the ring kicks off the show to the sound of 'Sunday Morning' by Nico and The Velvet Underground, before a bright green parrot appears. The bird gives way to an elephant and her baby, who stomp and trumpet at the audience, only to be chased by a herd of galloping horses.

Designing the visual illusion was a technical challenge, as the

circus seats its audience in a circle, unlike a theatre where the public sits in front of the stage.

Using 11 cameras, arranged on the ceiling of the big top around the ring, the high-resolution images are projected onto a fine-mesh netting which surrounds the performance space.

When the lights go down, the netting becomes almost invisible, but the images pop out.

While live animals gave a thrill, the new technology also makes it possible for Roncalli to do something unexpected.

"Whatever you can imagine, it can be created by an animator, by a graphic designer, then it can also be shown up in a circus show," said Toni Munar, the technical director of the circus.

AFP

G20 summit concludes with India, Brazil and Russia boasting success

The summit played down deep divisions over the war in Ukraine and climate change

New Delhi, India - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrapped up Sunday a G20 summit that played down deep divisions over the war in Ukraine and climate change, but gave him a moment in the diplomatic spotlight.

G20 nations have been riven over the Ukraine war since Moscow's invasion last year, with Russian President Vladimir Putin skipping the summit entirely to dodge political opprobrium.

Leaders of the Group of 20, which brings together Russia and China as well as some of Ukraine's most ardent backers, have recently struggled to agree on much, in particular about the 18-month-old invasion.

Facing a major diplomatic embarrassment, host India pressed members to agree a common statement on Saturday that denounced the use of force for territorial gain, but shied away from direct criticism of Russia.

Kyiv said the G20 had 'nothing to be proud of' but Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who stood in for Putin at the meeting, on Sunday claimed a diplomatic



India's PM Narendra Modi presents a sapling to Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva at the G20 Leaders' Summit in New Delhi on Sunday (AFP)

win.

"We were able to prevent the West's attempts to 'Ukrainize' the summit agenda," the veteran diplomat said, dubbing the two-day gathering a 'success'.

"The text doesn't mention Russia at all."

On Sunday, Modi formally closed the summit by passing on a ceremonial gavel to Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, whose country will take the bloc's presidency in December.

"We cannot let geopolitical is-

sues sequester the G20 agenda of discussions," Lula said, an implicit reference to wrangling over the Ukraine war.

"We have no interest in a divided G20. We need peace and cooperation instead of conflict."

Indian civil servant Amitabh Kant wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter, that the compromise text on Ukraine had involved 'over 200 hours of non-stop negotiations, 300 bilateral meetings (and) 15 drafts'.

But despite meeting in what

We cannot let geopolitical issues sequester the G20 agenda of discussions. We have no interest in a divided G20. We need peace and cooperation instead of conflict

LUIZ INACIO LULA DA SILVA

the EU's climate monitor says is likely to be the hottest year in human history, the leaders failed to agree to a phase-out of fossil fuels, despite a UN report a day

earlier deeming the drawdown 'indispensable' to achieving net-zero emissions.

Instead, they backed a target of tripling global renewable en-

ergy capacity by 2030, while committing only to a 'phase-down' of coal 'in line with national circumstances'.

G20 members Russia and Saudi Arabia are major oil exporters, while coal consumption is rising in China and India, already the world's biggest consumers of the dirty fuel.

The climate outcomes were 'insufficient', French President Emmanuel Macron said on Sunday, saying the world must 'phase out coal very rapidly and much more quickly than today'.

'People's G20'

Modi, who painted the summit as India's diplomatic coming of age and is pushing for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, celebrated the accession of the 55-member African Union to the G20.

As the G20, the grouping included 19 countries and the European Union, representing 85 per cent of the world GDP, with South Africa its only member state from the continent.

Modi has sought to position New Delhi as a voice for the Global South and the move turned the grouping into a 'people's G20'.

He also proposed another G20 leaders' meeting in November by video-link, opening up the possibility of Putin joining - along with China's Xi Jinping, who skipped the summit with the Asian giants at loggerheads over territorial and other issues.

AFP

Spanish aid worker killed in Ukraine

Madrid, Spain - A Spanish volunteer aid worker was killed in Ukraine after a missile hit the vehicle she was travelling in, Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares said on Sunday.

"A projectile fell on a vehicle in which this Spanish citizen was travelling. She was working there at an NGO helping with the humanitarian situation in Ukraine and we have verbal confirmation of her death," he told reporters at the G20 summit in India.

Albares did not provide further information but Spanish media identified the woman as Emma Igual, the 32-year-old director of Road to Relief, a non-profit organisation dedicated to evacuating civilians from the front line in Ukraine.

The NGO said in a post on its Instagram account that a Canadian aid worker was also killed and two others wounded when their vehicle 'came under Russian attack' in Chasiv Yar in eastern Ukraine on Saturday morning.

In 'a direct hit, the vehicle flipped over and lit on fire', it said.

A German and a Swedish aid worker 'were badly injured with shrapnel wounds and burns but are now stable in separate hospitals far from the scene'.

AFP

Japan PM Kishida to reshuffle cabinet

New Delhi, India - Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Sunday said he will reshuffle his cabinet as early as Wednesday.

The conservative leader, on a visit to New Delhi to attend the G20 summit, also said he planned to issue a fresh economic package to help families deal with inflation.

"After I return to Japan early on Monday, I will coordinate with relevant individuals and will carry out personnel appointments for the (ruling) party's leadership positions and ministerial posts," Kishida told a televised press conference in the Indian capital.

"I want to protect people's lives from rising prices while en- ergising the trend of wage in- creases and expanded investment," he added.

"I want to implement a bold economic package, backed by a necessary budget, to do that. We need to do this very urgently," He



Japan's PM Fumio Kishida (AFP)

did not provide further details.

The announcement came as Kishida attempts to lift his sag- ging popularity as well as his standing within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party ahead of a party leadership election next year. Kishida also reiterated his call on China to drop an import ban on Japanese seafood that began in August.

AFP

Sri Lankan President Wickremesinghe orders probe into 2019 Easter bombings

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka's president announced an investigation on Sunday into allegations made by a British television documentary that his current spy chief was complicit in the country's worst attack against civilians.

Ranil Wickremesinghe said he was naming a retired Supreme Court judge to probe accusations that Suresh Sallay, the head of the State Intelligence Service (SIS), orchestrated the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks.

The documentary aired this week featured a political insider who accused Sallay of complicity in the bombings by Islamist extremists at three churches and three hotels, which killed 279 people including 45 foreigners.

"As the nation grapples with the legacy of this tragic event, President Wickremesinghe's ac- tions represent a determined ef-



Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe (AFP)

fort to uncover the truth and en- sure accountability in the face of grave allegations," his office said in a statement.

It said the findings of the new inquiry would be referred to a parliamentary panel for action.

Wickremesinghe's announce- ment of a fresh local investiga- tion falls short of calls from the

island's Catholic church for an in- dependent international inquiry.

The alleged involvement of local intelligence operatives in the attacks has already been raised in Sri Lankan courts, but no one has been prosecuted.

Several local investigations into the attacks found authorities had failed to act on warnings

Wickremesinghe's actions represent a determined effort to uncover the truth and ensure accountability in the face of grave allegations

PRESIDENT'S OFFICE

from an Indian intelligence agency 17 days before the bomb- ings that an attack was imminent.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has also urged an independent investigation with international help to estab- lish the 'full circumstances' of the bombings. Britain's Channel 4 network said Sallay was linked to the Easter Sunday bombers and wanted to destabilise Sri Lanka

to clear the way for the return to power of the Rajapaksa family, two members of which have served as president.

The spy chief told Channel 4 that he was not in the country at the time of the bombings.

However, his former boss, field marshal Sarath Fonseka, has told parliament that Sallay travelled using several passports.

Two days after the attacks, Gotabaya Rajapaksa said he was entering the fray to defeat Is- lamist extremists.

Gotabaya went on to win the presidential poll held seven months later and Sallay was named as head of the SIS.

Gotabaya stepped down in July last year after months of public protests over an unprece- dented economic crisis that led to shortages of food, fuel and medicines.

AFP

Russia holds local polls denounced as 'fake' by Kyiv and the West

Moscow, Russia - There is little suspense over the results of Russian local elections ending Sunday, with no real opposition and ballots in occupied regions denounced as 'fake' by Kyiv and the West.

The Kremlin is seeking to le- gitimise its annexation of the Ukrainian territories it seized in the east and south but are seen by the international community as part of Ukraine.

The polls are also a test for the Kremlin ahead of a presidential election planned for next year that is expected to prolong Rus- sian President Vladimir Putin's long rule until least 2030.

Today's outcome is unlikely to be a surprise.

Most of Putin's opponents have been forced into exile or in jail. And as criticism of the mili- tary campaign in Ukraine has been de-facto banned, thou- sands of Russians have been de- tained for protesting against the Kremlin's assault over the past year and a half.

Russian authorities have set up mobile polling booths for sev- eral days of voting in the regions of Donetsk, Lugansk, Zapor- izhzhia and Kherson, annexed last year.

In the face of a Ukrainian counteroffensive to take back occupied territory, Kremlin-in- stalled officials pressed on with the vote, seeking long-term of- fice in areas Kyiv has vowed to



An elderly woman holds a list of candidates as she votes at home during local elections in Moscow on Sunday (AFP)

take back.

Voting was also taking place in Crimea, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

Kyiv has denounced the elec- tions as a sham and urged allies to condemn the 'fake' vote.

Ukraine's SBU security service said it had a list of 'collaborators' who were helping to organise the voting and vowed to punish them.

'Live in peace'

In several regions of Russia, where Sunday is usually the busiest polling day, the Ukraine conflict was also on voters' minds, even though campaign posters did not address the sub- ject directly.

In Rostov-on-Don, a large city in southwest Russia close to the Ukrainian border that was at- tacked by drones this week, two voters outside a polling station spontaneously told AFP the con- flict was their main worry.

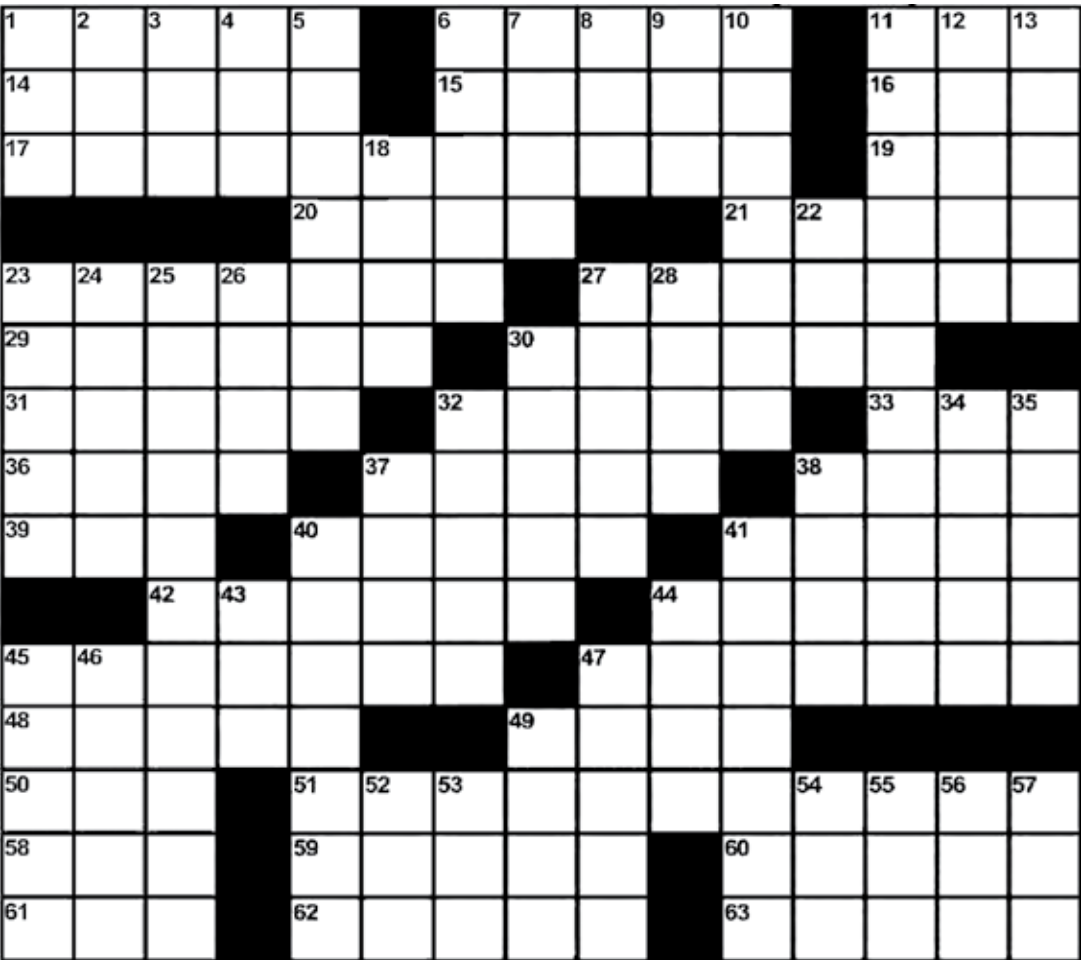
"We just want to live in peace with our children," said 40-year- old safety expert Nina Antonova.

"Everyone is worried about this one problem - the war. We don't have any other concerns," said 84-year-old Anatoli, a pen- sioner who declined to give his last name.

The election campaign in Moscow was conspicuous by the almost total absence of cam- paign posters.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Church focal point
- 6) Far away from port
- 11) "Boo" mo.
- 14) Difficult to get through
- 15) Understand
- 16) Promise
- 17) Driving toward
- 19) 112.5 degrees from S
- 20) Add it to "a one" to make "none"
- 21) Material that's worsted for wear?
- 23) Zagreb's place
- 27) Old pro
- 29) Moved by semi
- 30) Gen. Charles de _
- 31) Bewhiskered mammal
- 32) Group of officers
- 33) Software program, briefly
- 36) Customary practice or observance
- 37) Prefix meaning "bone"
- 38) Cut remnant
- 39) Word from Homer
- 40) Like a DC comics "man"

- 41) "I'll second that"
 - 42) Mexican Januaries
 - 44) Like many radials
 - 45) If everything fails miserably
 - 47) Chinese dumplings
 - 48) Where Dolphins play
 - 49) Start up a computer
 - 50) Wood shaping tool (var.)
 - 51) Attempt to lure
 - 58) _Paulo
 - 59) Dangerous sub of WWII
 - 60) Aligned perfectly
 - 61) _pitch softball
 - 62) Numerical sense?
 - 63) America's bird
- DOWN**
- 1) Big hullabaloo
 - 2) Sportscaster Berman
 - 3) Blast maker
 - 4) Fire remnant
 - 5) Come again?
 - 6) Old Greek marketplace
 - 7) Food carrier
 - 8) Feeling blue
 - 9) "To the max" suffix
 - 10) Last Supper guest

- 11) Be melodramatic
- 12) Kind of line
- 13) Adolescent, almost
- 18) Make a sudden attack
- 22) Sniggler's catch
- 23) Musical combo?
- 24) 6:1, e.g.
- 25) Expensive way to pay?
- 26) Away from gales
- 27) Skywalker's daddy
- 28) Certain dollar
- 30) Airport choices
- 32) A hundred bucks
- 34) Eucharist plate
- 35) Gives the goad-ahead?
- 37) Yours and mine
- 38) Deposit for a moist bank
- 40) Not to be taken lightly
- 41) Having toothlike notches
- 43) _ de plume
- 44) TV, informally (with "tube")
- 45) Gather for a collection
- 46) Type of wave
- 47) Market value
- 49) Defeated
- 52) Agent's org.
- 53) Sly critter

NOTE PAD

E	M	E	N	D	B	L	A	D	E	C	U	R
M	A	T	E	O	R	A	V	E	N	R	N	A
S	N	A	P	D	R	A	G	O	N	S	A	D
A	D	O	S	W	O	N	C	U	E			
H	A	P	L	E	S	S	T	A	L	K	E	D
U	F	O	R	E	N	O	E	R	I	E		
L	O	P	S	T	I	R	S	E	R	R	E	D
L	O	F	T	S	T	E	A	M	A	J	A	R
S	T	E	E	P	S	O	P	O	R	A	G	A
S	A	L	E	S	O	D	A	C	R	Y		
L	A	T	R	I	N	E	R	E	V	O	K	E
A	R	I	A	D	A	R	A	H				
N	O	V	B	U	S	T	I	N	G	A	G	U
A	M	A	L	E	T	O	N	E	R	A	S	E
S	A	L	E	S	S	E	S	S	E	D	A	N

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Are you getting a bit bored with your regular way of doing things? If so, then your timing is perfect. This day could bring you just enough tumult to keep things interesting and keep you on your toes! But if you're happy as a clam with the status quo, have no fear. You'll be able to negotiate any tiny hiccups that you encounter throughout the day. Regardless, you should consider this an experimental time in your life. Exploring new ways of thinking will be very illuminating.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You're getting more curious about living life according to other philosophies. Foreign cultures are intriguing, so it might be a wonderful time to learn something new about one of them. Exposing yourself to different cultures will not only fascinate you right now, it could bring you face-to-face with someone who alters your life in a very significant way. So don't shy away from places where they don't speak your language. There are ways of communicating that go beyond words.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

All different types of people will be attracted to you today, some who delight you, some who surprise you, and some who might even annoy you. But immense popularity is to be expected when you have as much charm and sparkle as you have today. Your mere presence in a room will give pleasure to everyone, so don't be surprised if you're pursued by people left and right. Take this in stride with your usual poise.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Being aggressive isn't the same thing as being rude, so don't hesitate to go against someone who is holding you back today. You know how to deliver a challenge without delivering an insult, so trust yourself and tell that certain person who's being a roadblock that they need to get out of your way. You're usually slow to anger by nature, but your temper could be a lot closer to the surface right now, so you might want to warn folks that you're not in any mood to pussyfoot around.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

If you are trying to convince someone to agree with your ideas or opinions today, you must remember that people like to be charmed into agreeing with you. They don't want to feel forced. Avoid being combative by showing them you can see things from their perspective. If they truly believe that you're acting in their best interests (and you are), they'll trust you more and listen to you longer. Make sure you do enough research ahead of time to have all the answers that they need.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You and a friend have your own mutual appreciation society, reminding each other how wonderful you are and outdoing one another in the compliment department. They're feeding your ego, you're feeding theirs, and it's good not to have to worry about whether or a friend is jealous of you. Seeing how proud they are will keep you moving in the right direction and tackling those tough challenges. As long as you keep cheering them on, they'll keep cheering you on.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

This is a good time for everyone to embrace positive thoughts. There's a lot of positive energy in the air, and you need to reach out and grab it! Even just a handful can work wonders in your day. Be confident that things will work out fine and they just might! Your hopes and wishes have just as much of a chance to come to fruition as anyone else's. Thinking negatively will only encourage other people to do the same, so steer clear of that.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You are all about your relationships right now, and this focus has enabled you to overcome a major hurdle with one of them. You said how you really felt, which pushed things right over the edge into happiness! But this is no time to quit and assume that's as far as it goes. You still have some headway to make, so don't be shy. Come out of your shell even more, take advantage of this momentum, and show this person that you want them to know who you really are.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Someone's powerful magnetic charisma captivates you today, but be careful that it doesn't distract you from recognizing their altruism as well. You can learn a lot from this person, and you should let them inspire you to get more involved in your own selfless acts. You're coming out of a very inward phase, and now you're ready to share your time and ideas with others. Feeling more connected to other people is important right now, so consider volunteering.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

This could be a day of bustling activity, split-second decisions, and lots of surprises. But with your quick mind, you'll be able to handle every task like pro and be ready for more! No one and nothing can slow you down or intimidate you now, so feel free to put yourself in the center of the action. You're a superstar in the making, and a lot of people want to watch your rise. Expect your crowd of admirers to grow by leaps and bounds.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

The amount of energy it will take you to avoid conflict today might not be worth it, so if an argument is looming at home or a scene is brewing at work, just go with it and see what happens. It might end up being nothing but an entertaining episode you can talk about later with friends. Just try to think the best of the situation. And even if things end up not going very well, don't worry. You're much better off facing this situation head-on anyway.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

If you're confused about a big decision, you need to get more information. It's as simple as that. It takes the sun to burn off the fog, and it takes details to make the picture you're looking at clearer. Do whatever you have to in order to better understand the options ahead of you. Ask the right questions of all the right people. Make a chart. Use color coding. Sort things alphabetically. Do whatever it takes to know this thing inside and out.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. The oldest surviving almost-complete tablets recording a kingdom's code of laws, formed c. 2100-2050 BCE, applied to what region?

 - A. Babylon, southern Mesopotamia
 - B. Judea
 - C. Sumer, southern Mesopotamia
 - D. Mycenae, Greece
02. The critically acclaimed, but only 2-season, American TV series "Lot 49" (2018-19), described by one critic as "a fantastic puzzle of a series", references a book by which writer?

 - A. Eleanor Catton
 - B. Truman Capote
 - C. Edgar Rice Burroughs
 - D. Thomas Pynchon
03. What did Emperor Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, aim to achieve when he called the Diet of Worms together in 1521?

 - A. To call Martin Luther to defend or recant his views on Indulgences in the Christian Church
 - B. A review of Church riches
 - C. To examine the doctrines of Christian redemption through grace or works
 - D. Stocktake of numbers of adherents

Answers: 1. C 2. D 3. A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

E	Y	R	E
O	P	O	H
A	L	O	T
H	U	S	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

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

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

GAUFF MAKES HISTORY

American teenager defeats Sabalenka to win US Open crown

New York, United States - American teenager Coco Gauff came from behind to win the US Open on Saturday, clinching her first Grand Slam title with a battling win over Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus.

Gauff, 19, produced a gutsy performance on the Arthur Ashe Stadium court to win 2-6, 6-3, 6-2 in 2hr 6min to complete a fairy-tale transformation in her season's fortunes.

The sixth seed from Florida had gone into the final as the underdog against the hard-hitting second seed Sabalenka, who will become world number one in next week's rankings.

But with both players making a slew of mistakes throughout an error-strewn final watched by a star-studded record crowd of 28,143 it was Gauff who held her nerve when it mattered to seal a deserved victory.

The win completed a remarkable turnaround for Gauff, who was left distraught after a first round exit at Wimbledon in July.

However she bounced back to win titles in Washington and Cincinnati and has now landed the biggest win of her career, after a shattering loss in her first Grand Slam final at the French Open last year.

"It means so much to me," an elated Gauff said afterwards. "I feel like I'm a little bit in shock in this moment."

"That French Open loss (last year) was a heartbreak for me. This makes this moment even



Coco Gauff of the US celebrates with the trophy after defeating Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus in the US Open final in New York on Sarurday (AFP)

PATH TO TITLE			
1st rd:	bt	Laura Siegemund (GER)	3-6, 6-2, 6-4
2nd rd:	bt	Mirra Andreeva (RUS)	6-3, 6-2
3rd rd:	bt	Elise Mertens (BEL x32)	3-6, 6-3, 6-0
4th rd:	bt	Caroline Wozniacki (DEN)	6-3, 3-6, 6-1
QF:	bt	Jelena Ostapenko (LAT x20)	6-0, 6-2
SF:	bt	Karolina Muchova (CZE x10)	6-4, 7-5
F:	bt	Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x2)	2-6, 6-3, 6-2

sweeter than I could imagine."

Gauff was in trouble in the opening game, Sabalenka breaking her straight away with a rasp-

tage of a shaky service game from Sabalenka to break at 2-2 in the fourth.

The Belarusian double-faulted twice to allow Gauff to get back on level terms. But that hard-won parity was surrendered in the next game as Sabalenka broke back to go 3-2 ahead.

Australian Open champion Sabalenka then wobbled on her own serve once more as Gauff eked out two break points in the sixth game.

But Sabalenka got it back to

deuce with an ace and then took a 4-2 lead with an emphatic smash.

Gauff's problems on serve continued and Sabalenka broke for the third time to race 5-2 ahead, and she duly wrapped up the set by holding in the next game. Yet with the match threatening to become a rout, Gauff finally clicked into gear in the second set, making fewer unforced errors and ironing out the kinks in her serve.

AFP



Coco Gauff returns a shot to Aryna Sabalenka (AFP)

‘Thank you to those who didn’t believe in me’

New York, United States - Coco Gauff said critics who doubted her ability to win a major title fuelled her breakthrough Grand Slam victory at the US Open on Saturday.

The 19-year-old American captured the first major championship of her career with a battling 2-6, 6-3, 6-2 defeat of incoming world number one Aryna Sabalenka in front of a packed Arthur Ashe Stadium in New York.

Gauff, who climbed into the stands to embrace her family after the win, afterwards gave a cheeky 'thank you' to those who wondered whether she was capable of landing major titles.

"Honestly, thank you to the people who didn't believe in me...two weeks ago, I won a 1000 title (in Cincinnati) and people were saying that was the biggest it was going to get," she said. "Three weeks later, I'm here with this trophy right now."

"Honestly, those who thought they were putting water on my fire, you were really adding gas to it, and now I'm really burning so bright right now."

Gauff had been beaten in her first Grand Slam final appearance at the French Open last year, a defeat she told

ESPN on Saturday left her feeling like "my life was going to end."

"That French Open loss (last year) was a heartbreak for me. That makes this moment even sweeter than I could imagine," Gauff said.

"I'm so grateful for this moment. I don't have any words for it to be honest."

Gauff meanwhile paid trib-

Today was the first time I've ever seen my dad cry. He doesn't want me to tell you about that

COCO GAUFF

ute to her father, who took her to the US Open when she was growing up to watch her tennis idols Serena and Venus Williams.

"Today was the first time I've ever seen my dad cry," Gauff continues. "He doesn't want me to tell you about that."

"I've been coming to this tournament (for so long). My dad took me to this tournament sitting right there watching Venus and Serena compete, so it's really incredible to be on this stage."

Williams sisters paved the way, says Gauff

New York, United States - Coco Gauff said tennis icons Serena and Venus Williams paved the way for her breakthrough US Open triumph on Saturday after the American teenager captured her first Grand Slam title.

The 19-year-old from Florida battled to a 2-6, 6-3, 6-2 defeat of Aryna Sabalenka at the Arthur Ashe Stadium - where as a child she had watched the Williams sisters dominate.

The win ensured Gauff will have her name etched into tennis history alongside other Black American women to lift the title such as the Williams sisters, Althea Gibson and Sloane Stephens.

"It's crazy. I mean, they're the

reason why I have this trophy today, to be honest," Gauff said of the Williams sisters.

"They have allowed me to believe in this dream growing up. You know, there wasn't too many just Black tennis players dominating the sport. It was literally just them that I can remember when I was younger."

"Obviously more came because of their legacy. So it made the dream more believable. But all the things that they had to go through, they made it easier for someone like me to do this."

Gauff referenced the Williams sisters' 14-year boycott of the prestigious Indian Wells tournament - due to alleged racist heck-

ling and Venus Williams' push for equal pay for women at major championships.



"You look back at the history with Indian Wells, with Serena, all she had to go through, Venus fighting for

equal pay," Gauff said.

"Words can't describe what (Serena and Venus Williams) meant to me. I hope another girl can see this and believe they can do it and hopefully their name can be on this trophy too."

Gauff's breakthrough victory will catapult her to a new level in the hierarchy of American sport. Hollywood celebrities and sports stars such as NBA greats Kevin Durant and Jimmy Butler were on hand to witness Saturday's triumph. She was soon bombarded with congratulatory messages from former US President Barack Obama and current President Joe Biden.

"Congratulations to US Open champion, @CocoGauff," Obama

wrote on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter.

"We couldn't be prouder of you on and off the court - and we know the best is yet to come."

As the dust settled on Saturday's victory, video footage of Gauff dancing in the crowd as a fan at the US Open rapidly went viral. Asked what message she would send to her younger self, she replied: "I would tell her don't lose that dream."

"That little girl, like she had the dream, but I don't know if she fully believed it," Gauff said. As a kid, you have so many dreams. You know, as you get older sometimes it can fiddle away...I would tell her don't lose the dream. Keep having fun."



Aryna Sabalenka looks dejected during her match against Coco Gauff

‘Me against me’: Sabalenka rues final unravelling

New York, United States - Aryna Sabalenka said she only had herself to blame for losing to Coco Gauff in Saturday's US Open final after an error-riddled performance proved her undoing.

Sabalenka overpowered the American teenager in the first set but Gauff leaned on her brilliant defensive abilities to turn the match around and triumph 2-6, 6-3, 6-2, denying the Belarusian her second Grand Slam of the year.

"She was moving really well and defending really great, better than anybody else. So I always had to play like an extra ball," said the 25-year-old Sabalenka.

"It's a combination of everything. But I would say that today

was more because of me."

"Not the whole match, but, like, there was key moments in the second set which the one I lost, I mean, the moments I lost, about me than her, I lost this match."

Sabalenka hit almost double the number of winners to Gauff but finished with 46 unforced errors - the majority of them on her forehand.

Gauff became just the second woman since 2000 to win the US Open after losing the opening set.

She was moving unbelievable today. But then second set I start probably overthinking, and because of that I start kind of like losing my power. I start missing a lot of easy shots

ARYNA SABALENKA

"She was moving just unbelievable today. But then the second set I start probably overthinking, and because of that I start kind of like losing my power," said Sabalenka.

"I start missing a lot of easy shots. I mean, the good news is that it's me against me. The bad one is that I'm still having these issues playing against myself."

Australian Open champion Sabalenka took solace in the knowledge she will ascend to world number one on Monday, replacing Iga Swiatek at the top of women's tennis.

"That's why I'm not super depressed right now. I'm definitely going to be. I'm definitely going for a drink tonight if I'm allowed

to say that," she said.

"But becoming a world number one, it's a huge improvement, and achievement, actually. I'm really proud of myself that all those years I have been working so hard helped me to become world number one."

Sabalenka is the first woman since Serena Williams in 2016 to reach the semi-finals or better at all four Grand slams in the same season. She hopes that consistency will enable her to remain at the summit for the long haul.

"For me it's more about end the year as world number, not just like become world number one and then next week you're second," said Sabalenka.

AFP



North Macedonia players celebrate after scoring against Italy in their Euro 2024 qualifier on Saturday (AFP)

Italy held by North Macedonia on coach Luciano Spalletti’s debut; England and Belgium on track

Paris, France - Defending European champions Italy drew 1-1 with North Macedonia in a Euro 2024 qualifier on Saturday to suffer a blow in their hopes of making it to next year’s finals from Group C where leaders England took a valuable point in a 1-1 away draw against Ukraine.

England lead the group on 13 points with Ukraine on seven. Italy and North Macedonia both have four points.

Italy next face a crucial qualifying test against Ukraine on Tuesday.

Luciano Spalletti took charge of Italy for the first time following Roberto Mancini’s shock resignation but his team flopped against the side which dumped them out of the last World Cup in the play-offs.

Ciro Immobile put Italy ahead but Enis Bardhi smashed in a free-kick for the hosts with nine minutes remaining in Skopje.

Ukraine hosted England in Poland and marched out onto the pitch in Wroclaw with national

Luciano Spalletti took charge of Italy for the first time following Roberto Mancini’s shock resignation but his team flopped against the side which dumped them out of the last World Cup in the play-offs

flags draped over their shoulders in front of around 40,000 of their own fans.

“Very tough place to come. You could feel the atmosphere, a unique occasion,” said England manager Gareth Southgate after his team’s run of four consecutive wins in the group came to an end.

Oleksandr Zinchenko put Ukraine in front with a thunder-

ing shot after a sweeping drive through midfield on 26 minutes.

England, however, hit back in the 41st minute when Harry Kane played a ball over the top and Kyle Walker slipped the ball home for his first international goal on his 77th appearance.

Belgium went joint top of Group F with a 1-0 away win at Azerbaijan, lifting them level on 10 points with Austria.

Yannick Carrasco scored the only goal in Baku as new manager Domenico Tedesco ex-

tended his run to five games without defeat.

Sweden are third in the group on six points after they thumped Estonia 5-0.

Switzerland lead Group I by two points after a see-saw 2-2 draw with Kosovo for whom La Liga based Vedat Muriqi scored twice.

In the same group, Romania and Israel drew 1-1 and are locked in a struggle for second place, separated by a point on nine and eight points respectively.

The top two teams in each group qualify for the finals.

As hosts, Germany are playing only friendly internationals but they are a team in crisis and their problems worsened in a 4-1 humiliation at the hands of Japan in Wolfsburg.

Germany captain Ilkay Gundogan said simply “we are not good enough right now, it’s a completely bitter day - we all need to ask questions of ourselves.”

AFP



Nicolas Pepe

Arsenal confirm Pepe exit after Trabzonspor move

London, United Kingdom - Arsenal’s former record signing Nicolas Pepe left the Premier League club on Saturday as the Ivory Coast winger completed his move to Turkish side Trabzonspor.

Pepe cost Arsenal £72 million (\$89 million) from Lille in 2019 but made only 43 Premier League starts during a troubled spell in north London.

Arsenal agreed to terminate Pepe’s contract with a year remaining, allowing the Ivory Coast international to secure a transfer

to Trabzonspor

The 28-year-old, who scored 27 goals in 112 Arsenal appearances, spent last season on loan at French side Nice and last started a league game for the Gunners in October 2021.

“We can confirm that Nicolas Pepe is leaving the club. We have agreed with Nicolas to terminate his contract with immediate effect,” an Arsenal statement said.

“Everyone at Arsenal thanks Nicolas for his contribution during his time with us and wish him well for the future.”

Liverpool’s Van Dijk says red card ban ‘a hard and expensive lesson’

Dublin, Ireland - Virgil van Dijk said Saturday he had learned “a hard and expensive lesson” after receiving an extra one-game ban and a £100,000 (\$124,000) fine after his angry reaction to a red card against Newcastle.

The Dutch defender admitted acting in an improper manner following his dismissal for a foul on Newcastle’s Alexander Isak in the first half of Liverpool’s 2-1 victory at St James’ Park in August.

The furious Van Dijk felt the tackle was not worthy of a sending off and he initially refused to leave the pitch before arguing with referee John Brooks as he swore at the match official.

An automatic one-match ban saw Van Dijk suspended for the 3-0 win over Aston Villa before the international break.

But on Friday he also received an additional suspension, ruling him out of the Reds’ trip to Wolves on September 16.

“It has been a hard and expensive lesson,” Van Dijk said during the Netherlands pre-match press



Virgil van Dijk

conference ahead of Sunday’s Euro 2024 qualifier against the Republic of Ireland in Dublin.

“I can’t really say more about it. I have accepted it and I am

happy that there is an end to it.”

The centre-back added: “Hopefully the money goes to the right people. A good cause is always better.”



Japan’s Ao Tanaka celebrates after scoring against Germany in their friendly match in Wolfsburg on Saturday (AFP)

Germany sack coach Flick after humiliating defeat against Japan

Wolfsburg, Germany - Germany have sacked coach Hansi Flick just nine months from hosting Euro 2024 after Saturday’s humiliating 4-1 defeat by Japan, the German FA (DFB) announced on Sunday.

Flick became the first and only Germany head coach to be sacked since the position was created in 1926.

Sporting director Rudi Voeller, who coached the side to a 2002 World Cup final against Brazil, will take over on an interim basis.

German FA boss Bernd Neuendorf said the sacking was “unavoidable” after the team’s recent run of “disappointing” results.

In a statement, Neuendorf said “with a view towards the European championships in our own country, we need a spirit of optimism and confidence”, saying the decision was one of his “most difficult so far.”

Voeller is reportedly unlikely to lead Germany to Euro 2024.

Out-of-work manager Julian Nagelsmann, who previously replaced Flick as Bayern Munich manager, has been touted as a possible replacement ahead of the tournament. Former Eintracht Frankfurt boss Oliver Glasner, out of work since May, has also been named as a possible successor.

The Germans were thoroughly outclassed by the Blue Samurai on home soil in the friendly in Wolfsburg, with only some acrobatic ‘keeping from Marc-Andre ter Stegen preventing the score from eclipsing 2001’s 5-1 loss to England in Munich.

Germany have now lost four of their six matches since their early exit from the World Cup in December.

Euro 2024 kicks off in Germany in June 2024.

The home fans booed the German team at half-time, with some chanting “Hansi out” at the end of the match.

AFP

No Messi, no problem as Miami win again

Miami, United States - Despite missing Lionel Messi, Inter Miami moved within six points of the playoff positions in Major League Soccer with a 3-2 win over Sporting Kansas City on Saturday.

Messi was one of eight Inter Miami players away on international duty, but Gerardo “Tata” Martino’s team showed their strength in depth as they extended their unbeaten run in all competitions to 12 games.

With Miami battling to rise from their pre-Messi position at the bottom of the Eastern Conference into the top nine, they



Inter Miami players celebrate their 3-2 win against Sporting Kansas City on Saturday (AFP)

know they have little room for error but their night began poorly.

Goalkeeper Drake Callender failed to hold on to a drive from Felipe Gutierrez and Daniel Salloi slotted home the loose ball.

Miami drew level though in the 25th minute through a Leonardo Campana penalty after the Ecuadoran forward was flattened by Kansas City keeper Tim Melia as they challenged for a high ball.

Campana proved decisive as he put the home side 2-1 up with a fine header from a DeAndre Yedlin cross on the stroke of half-

time. Campana went close to a hat-trick after the break with a deft touch goalwards from a low Jordi Alba cross but Melia got down well to save.

Melia was in action to deny Nicolas Stefanelli after more good work from Alba, who recently retired from duty with the Spanish national side.

Miami’s other former Spain stalwart, midfielder Sergio Busquets, created the third when he showed great awareness to take a quick free-kick on the half-way line and send Argentine forward Facundo Farias through.

AFP

GERMANY CHAMPIONS

Dennis Schroder stars as Germans beat Serbia to win Basketball World Cup

Manila, Philippines - Germany beat Serbia 83-77 on Sunday to win the Basketball World Cup for the first time.

The Germans, who went unbeaten through the tournament and were appearing in their first final, broke clear of Serbia in the third quarter in Manila.

Serbia launched a furious fourth-quarter fightback but Germany managed to hold them off and put their name on the Naismith Trophy.

Dennis Schroder finished as Germany's top scorer with 28 points, followed by Franz Wagner with 19.

Germany had beaten the United States in a dramatic semi-final.

"We're the champions of the world, we're undefeated, we won every single game," said Germany's Maodo Lo.

"We had a tough group to begin with, we were able to keep building, we had huge wins throughout the whole tournament and then we faced the United States in the semi-final.

"I think we deserved this world championship."

Serbia, who were looking to win the title for the first time as an independent nation, lost small forward Ognjen Dobric to injury with less than three minutes of the game gone.

Dobric had to be carried off after a hard landing while attacking the basket.

He later reappeared at court-side, cycling on an exercise bike, but did not come back into the game.



Germany's Dennis Schroder (C) dunks the ball during their Basketball World Cup final against Serbia in Manila on Sunday (AFP)

Serbia were cheered on by a large group of travelling supporters but could not keep up with Germany in the second half.

"We made a great success," said Serbia's Aleksa Avramovic.

"Our heads are already up. Our next goal is to go to the Olympics... and make a better success than this."

Avramovic finished as Serbia's top scorer with 21 points, followed by Bogdan Bogdanovic with 17.

There was little to separate the two teams in a fiercely fought first half that ended 47-47.

That all changed in the third quarter when Germany outscored the Serbians 22-10.

Serbia came roaring back into the game in the fourth quarter, and cut the deficit to three points with less than a minute remaining.

A lay-up from Schroder helped steady Germany's nerves, and a missed three-point attempt from Avramovic ended Serbia's hopes.

"They deserved this win," said Serbia head coach Svetislav Pesic.

"They played 40 minutes at a high level, with continuity, very physical.

"If one team like Germany won all the games from the start until the end, we must everybody say bravo."

Serbia were playing without power forward Borisa Simanic, who underwent surgery to remove a kidney after getting injured earlier in the tournament.

They were also without superstar Nikola Jokic, who skipped the tournament to rest after leading the Denver Nuggets to the NBA title last season.

US leave World Cup without medal

Manila, Philippines - Head coach Steve Kerr said the United States "didn't defend well enough" at the Basketball World Cup after losing to Canada in Sunday's bronze-medal game to go home empty-handed.

The United States went down 127-118 in overtime to miss out on a medal for the second straight World Cup, after finishing seventh in China in 2019.

It was the Americans' third defeat of the tournament, having lost to Lithuania in the second round and Germany in the semi-finals.

Kerr said his team "tried everything" to stop Canada, who finished on the World Cup podium for the first time.

"When it comes down to it for us in this tournament, we put ourselves in a great position, we got to the semi-finals, we were right there, we just didn't get enough stops," said Kerr.

"We didn't defend well enough against Germany or Canada. That's the bottom line."

Kerr was without Paolo Banchero, Jaren Jackson Jr. and Brandon Ingram, who all fell ill after a bug swept through the US camp.

The Americans fell behind in the first and third quarters but took the game into overtime when Mikal Bridges hit a game-tying three-pointer with 0.2sec remaining.

Martin wins San Marino MotoGP to close gap on leader Bagnaia

Misano Adriatico, Italy - Jorge Martin won the San Marino MotoGP on Sunday to further close the gap on championship leader Francesco Bagnaia.

Pramac rider Martin, who also won Saturday's sprint, is now 36 points behind world champion Bagnaia after winning from pole position well over a second ahead of Marco Bezzecchi.

Injured Bagnaia, however, completed the podium after a superb ride which delighted the home supporters at the Italian track.

Martin was on pole after smashing the lap record by nearly half a second in qualifying on Saturday morning, and the



Jorge Martin celebrates on the podium after winning the San Marino MotoGP Grand Prix on Sunday (AFP)

25-year-old never looked troubled by the Italian pair chasing him.

Bagnaia and VR46 rider Bezzecchi were riding in pain after bad crashes at last weekend's Catalunya MotoGP.

Ducati's Bagnaia flew off his bike at high speed at Montmelo and was then run over by Brad Binder, while Bezzecchi had to deal with a hand injury sustained in a multi-bike pile up in Spain.

But Bagnaia rode well this weekend on pain killers and limited the damage to his lead in the overall standings in what given the circumstances must be one of the best rides of his career.

AFP



Viktor Axelsen celebrates after winning the China Open title

Axelsen, An win China Open titles

Beijing, China - Badminton powerhouse Viktor Axelsen clinched his first China Open title on Sunday as An Se-young took the women's trophy.

World number one Axelsen overcame a second-game surge by hometown finalist Lu Guangzu to triumph 21-16, 21-19 in 49 minutes.

After sailing through the first game, the Dane found himself 18-12 behind in the second before taking nine of the last 10 points to win the match.

"It feels absolutely amazing, honestly," Axelsen said at the venue in the eastern Chinese city of Changzhou. "To be honest, the most important thing is how I bounced back after the World Championships."

At that tournament in Copenhagen last month, Axelsen slumped to a shock quarter-final defeat to India's H.S. Prannoy.

"I have proved to myself that if I try to do my best every single day and if I try to get back after some losses, I can get better," Axelsen said.

It was a day for the top-ranked players as South Korea's An downed Akane Yamaguchi of Japan 21-10, 21-19.

An also breezed through the opening game but fell behind in the second.



Finland's Kalle Rovanpera extended his lead at the top of the 2023 standings over teammate Elfyn Evans to 33 points (AFP)

Finland's Rovanpera wins Acropolis Rally to extend championship lead

Lamia, Greece - World champion Kalle Rovanpera won the Acropolis Rally on Sunday to move a significant step closer to a second successive title.

The Toyota driver benefitted from the defection on Saturday of Sebastien Ogier to wrap up his third win of the year.

The 22-year-old extended his lead at the top of the 2023 standings over teammate Elfyn Evans to 33 points with three rallies remaining.

"Of course, it's a big relief," said Rovanpera.

Evans took second in Greece, over a minute and a half adrift, with Hyundai's Dani Sordo in third.

Evans clocked the fastest time in the first of Sunday's closing three stages, with Sordo claiming the honours in the next and Rovanpera taking the 15th and final Power stage.

"After a difficult rally in Finland, we needed to come back now, even though we never left," added Rovanpera.

"A strong performance, starting first and finishing first is quite nice. We had a clever drive and still a good push here (in the

Power Stage)."

Rovanpera's fortunes changed dramatically on Saturday after eight-time world champion Ogier was forced out on the day's last stage when his Toyota suffered a broken suspension as it clattered into a rock.

That allowed teammate

After a difficult rally in Finland, we needed to come back now, even though we never left

KALLE ROVANPERA

Rovanpera, who had been more than 12 seconds in arrears at the time, to finish the day two minutes clear.

The WRC season moves on to Chile at the end of the month, then the Central European Rally, a new addition to the calendar, in Austria, Czech Republic and Germany, with Japan hosting the 13th and final round in November.

AFP

England beat Argentina to dispel Rugby World Cup jitters as Ireland hail Sexton

Paris, France - England overcame a potentially dangerous Rugby World Cup opener against Argentina on Saturday thanks to the prolific boot of George Ford as Ireland welcomed back their dynamo Johnny Sexton.

England had recorded just four wins in 13 matches heading into the clash in Marseille and Argentina had stunned them in November.

It started badly for the 2003 champions after Tom Curry was red-carded for a clumsy clash of heads with Argentine full-back Juan Cruz Mallia in just the third minute, becoming the first England player in history to be sent off at a World Cup.

But Ford stepped up to take a scrappy game by the scruff of the neck, kicking every single one of England's points, including three drop-goals and six penalties, in a



England's fly-half George Ford kicks a drop goal during their Rugby World Cup Pool D match against Argentina on Saturday (AFP)

27-10 victory to lift the pre-tournament tension in the Red Rose camp.

Ford is standing in for Owen Farrell, who is serving a ban for a dangerous tackle that rules him out of this game and the next

against Japan, but on this evidence Farrell will have a fight on his hands to get the No 10 jersey back.

"We have had a bit of a rocky build-up to this World Cup but I think in the last 10 days there has

been a different feeling to the place. It is only game one and we will look to build next week," Ford told ITV.

England coach Steve Borthwick said: "There was a sense I had from the players they had been written off a bit too early. They are a quality group that are going to keep on improving and moving forward."

Ireland, the world's number one ranked side, were able to select Sexton - so often their inspiration - for the first time following a six-month injury absence as they took on minnows Romania in the Pool B curtain-raiser.

Sexton's errant kick handed Gabriel Rupanu the first try for Romania, but Ireland then flattened them with 12 tries in response to romp home 82-8 in Bordeaux.

AFP



Sri Lanka's Maheesh Theekshana (2ndL) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Bangladesh's Taskin Ahmed on Saturday (AFP)

Samarawickrama helps Sri Lanka beat Bangladesh

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sadeera Samarawickrama smashed 93 to set up a 21-run win for Sri Lanka in their opening Super Four clash of the Asia Cup against Bangladesh on Saturday.

Samarawickrama's knock steered Sri Lanka to 257-9, a total their bowlers defended to put Bangladesh on the brink of elimination in the 50-over tournament, a precursor to the upcoming World Cup in India.

Bangladesh were bowled out for 236 in 48.1 overs despite a valiant 82 by Towhid Hridoy and suffered their second loss in the Super Four stage.

With one match to go, Bangladesh need a mathematical miracle for a place in the final on September 17.

Dasun Shanaka, who turned 32 on Saturday, played a captain's role with his 24 and three wickets from his medium-pace bowling.

Spinner Maheesh Theekshana and fast bowler Matheesha Pathirana also took three wickets each.

"When there's no frontline bowlers someone needs to chip in and today was my day," Shanaka said on the absence of injured bowlers including Dushmantha Chameera and Wanindu Hasaranga. "Maheesh bowled and in the end the result matters. Our players, specially Kusal Mendis and Sadeera Samarawickrama played really well, read the wicket very well."

Sri Lanka, who co-host the tournament with Pakistan, faltered after being invited to bat first with Bangladesh fast bowlers getting regular breakthroughs.

However, Kusal Mendis (50) and then Samarawickrama, who was named man of the match, made sure they reach a competitive and eventually a winning total on an inconsistent pitch.

Samarawickrama reached his 50 in 45 balls and accelerated in a 60-run partnership with Shanaka to rouse the home fans at a largely empty ground.

RAIN PLAYS SPOILSPORT

India-Pakistan super four clash forced into reserve day

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Rain on Sunday forced a blockbuster clash between India and Pakistan into a reserve day after just 24.1 overs of play in the Super Four stage of the Asia Cup.

India will resume on 147-2 on Monday in the 50-over contest after rain abruptly ended their innings following Pakistan's decision to bowl first in Colombo.

An extra day was a last-minute addition to the Super Four clash -- the only game to get the advantage other than the final -- after a previous group meeting between the two teams was washed out due to rain in Pallekele.

Rain in Sri Lanka, who co-host the tournament alongside Pakistan, has put the organisers in a spin. The tournament is a precursor to the upcoming ODI World Cup.

Virat Kohli, on eight, and KL Rahul, on 17, were batting when rain forced the players off and groundstaff worked tirelessly to try and restart the game after showers stopped.

After three inspections and fans helped to dry wet patches, the umpires looked like restarting play after over four hours of stoppage, but rain came to have the final say.

Skipper Rohit Sharma (56) and fellow opener Shubman Gill (58) gave India a blazing start in a stand of 121 off 100 balls to put Pakistan on the backfoot.

The batsmen took on the new-ball pair of Shaheen Shah



India captain Rohit Sharma (L) celebrates with Shubman Gill after scoring a half-century in their Asia Cup super four match against Pakistan on Sunday

Afridi and Naseem Shah with aerial shots in the powerplay when only two fielders are allowed outside the inner circle.

Both Shaheen and Naseem looked menacing in their first spell as the ball kept flying past the bat, and one edge from Gill went between two slips.

Rohit smashed leg-spinner Shadab Khan for two sixes and a four off successive balls in a 19-run over to raise the noise of the

Indian fans at a largely empty stadium.

Shadab redeemed himself after the first drinks interval to send back Rohit caught out, and Shaheen returned to get Gill in the next over.

Scoring dipped as Kohli and Rahul looked to rebuild before rain intervened.

Play will begin at 3pm local time (GMT 09:30) on Monday with weather forecasts predict-

ing another rainy day.

The reserve day also means relentless cricket for India, who will meet hosts Sri Lanka in their next Super Four match on Tuesday at the same venue.

Ticket prices slashed

Sri Lanka Cricket slashed ticket prices for the Asia Cup by up to 95 percent on Sunday after costs were hiked 40-fold and the matches were played in near-

empty stadiums.

Tickets for one-day internationals in crisis-hit Sri Lanka have generally cost around 250 rupees (\$0.78) previously.

That was hiked to 10,000 rupees for the Asia Cup, which is being organised by the Pakistan Cricket Board despite largely taking place in Sri Lanka, and fans in the cricket-mad island country have stayed away in droves.

AFP

CLASSIFIEDS

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MOUNT FUJI

Visitors descending the slopes of Mount Fuji - Japan's highest peak at 3,776m

ICON OF JAPAN

Japan's Mount Fuji encounters too many tourists who take away the serenity of this popular destination

With its millions of visitors every year and the buses, supply trucks, noodle shops and fridge magnets, Japan's Mount Fuji is no longer the peaceful pilgrimage site it once was.

Now authorities have had enough, saying the number of hikers trekking up the world-famous volcano - night and day - is dangerous and an ecological embarrassment.

"Mount Fuji is screaming," the governor of the local region said last week.

Hailing its religious importance and its inspiration to artists, in 2013 UNESCO added the 'internationally recognised icon of Japan' to its World Heritage List. But as has happened in places such as Bruges in Belgium or Rio de Janeiro's Sugarloaf Mountain, the designation has been both a blessing and a curse.

Visitor numbers more than doubled between 2012 and 2019 to 5.1 million, and that's just for Yamanashi prefecture, the main starting point.

Day and night

It's not just during the day that a stream of people trudges through the black volcanic grit on their way

up the 3,776m mountain. At night, long lines of people - on their way up to see the sun rise in the morning - trek upwards with torches on their heads. The main starting-off point is a car park that can only be reached by taxi or buses that take a couple of hours from Tokyo, around 100 kilometres (60 miles) away.

Greeting visitors is a complex of restaurants and shops selling souvenirs as well as snacks and drinks for walkers before they set off. They are powered by diesel generators and the thousands of litres of water they use has to be brought up in lorries. Trucks also take all the rubbish down.

"I saw a lot of food waste and empty bottles of drinks lying around the hand-washing area of the toilet," complained Japanese hiker Yuzuki Uemura, 28.

Impending dangers

Masatake Izumi, a local official, said the high numbers of people increased the risk of accidents. Some people who climb at night get hypothermia and have to be taken back to first aid stations, he said, adding that at least one person has died so far this season.

For an optional access fee of 1,000 yen (US\$6.80), visitors get a



Two visitors resting at the fifth stage on the slopes of Mount Fuji (Below) Visitors passing under a red gate, or 'torii' at Mt Fuji Komitake Shrine at the fifth stage on the slopes of Mount Fuji

We firmly believe that with regard to Mount Fuji tourism, a shift from a quantitative approach to a qualitative one is essential

KOTARO NAGASAKI

booklet in Japanese - there is a QR code for the English version - with some dos and don'ts. But some don't realise how tough the five-to-six-hour climb is to the top, where oxygen levels are lower and where the weather can change quickly. "It's almost winter up there, it's



really cold," Rasyidah Hanan, a 30-year-old hiker from Malaysia, told AFP on her way down. "People should be filtered a little bit because some people were not ready to climb Mount Fuji. They were like in really light clothes... Some of them really looked sick."

Crowd control

As tourist numbers get back to pre-pandemic levels, it's not only Mount Fuji whose returning crowds have authorities worried.

This week government ministers met to discuss measures to tackle what Kenji Hamamoto, a senior

Japan Tourism Agency official, called 'overcrowding and breaches of etiquette' across heavily touristed sites.

For Mount Fuji, authorities announced last month that they would impose crowd control measures for the first time if paths got too busy. The announcement alone had an effect and in the end no such measures were taken, Izumi said.

Visitor numbers are expected to be down this year from 2019, but in 2024 they could rise again as tourists - particularly from China - return.

Yamanashi's governor Kotaro Nagasaki said last week Japan needed to take measures to ensure Mount Fuji did not lose its UNESCO designation.

One solution, he said, could be constructing a light rail system to replace the main road leading to the main starting point for hikers.

"We firmly believe that with regard to Mount Fuji tourism, a shift from a quantitative approach to a qualitative one is essential," Nagasaki said.

"I think that Mount Fuji is one of the things that makes Japan proud," said Marina Someya, 28, a Japanese hiker. "There are a lot of people, and lots of foreigners."

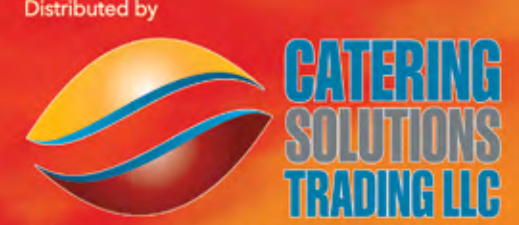
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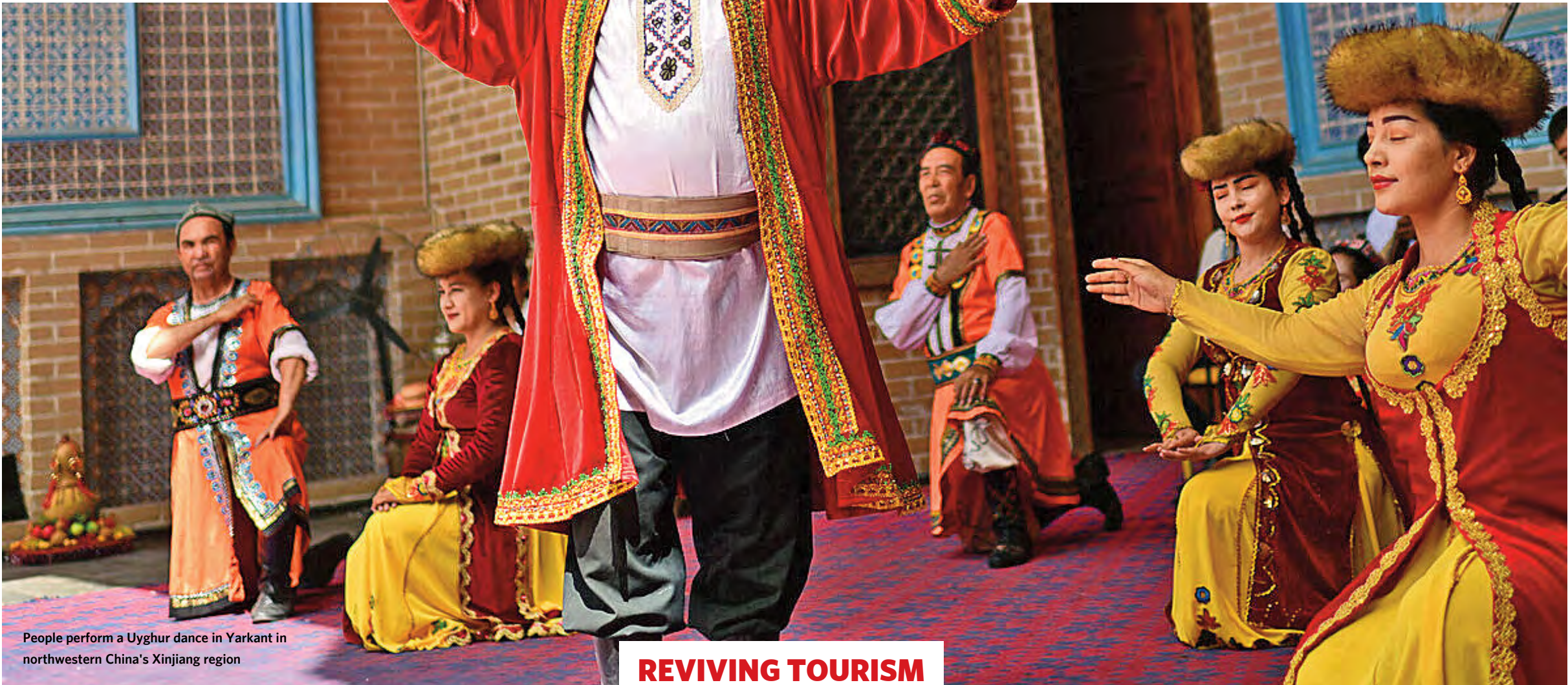
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People perform a Uyghur dance in Yarkant in northwestern China's Xinjiang region

REVIVING TOURISM

Chinese travellers throng the bazaars of old Kashgar, munching mutton kebabs and soaking up heavily commodified Uyghur culture - part of a government push to remould troubled Xinjiang into a tourism paradise.

Kashgar, an ancient Silk Road oasis, was more recently on the frontlines of Beijing's sweeping anti-terrorism campaign in the northwestern region.

The city's outskirts are still pockmarked with facilities that the ruling Communist Party once called vocational schools but Western researchers describe as extralegal detention camps for Muslims - with the United States linking them to policies of 'genocide'.

Now, after years of assault on Uyghur traditions and ways of life, the government is pumping cash into repackaging a state-approved version of their culture to attract domestic and foreign travellers.

On a recent visit by AFP journalists to old Kashgar, thousands of tourists crowded streetside stalls that were selling silk scarves and steaming naan.

Other visitors snapped selfies in front of the pastel-yellow Id Kah Mosque.

"The old town is the heart and soul of Kashgar, with a long history, rich culture and unique architecture," said a Uyghur tour guide as she whisked visitors, mainly from China's Han majority ethnic group, through the narrow streets.

"Many tourists like it so much that they come back, start businesses, and live here alongside other ethnic minorities as one big family."

Dozens of stores catered to a trend for 'travel snaps' taken by a professional photographer, where tourists can pay over 1,500 yuan (US\$205) to don spangled veils and pose around the city in Uyghur clothing.

The celebration of traditional dress comes despite a ban authorities placed a few years ago on Uyghur women wearing veils and men growing long beards. Looking beyond the tourist activities, however, there were other signs pointing to a loss of traditions and lifestyles for Uyghur residents.

An expanse of rubble lay at the site of Kashgar's former Grand Bazaar just beyond the fringes of the old town. The vast market, where thousands of traders once hawked fabrics, spices and other wares, was reportedly razed by authorities last year.

Much of the old town had also been demolished and rebuilt over recent decades as part of the government's development drive.

Tourism boom

Chinese officials have long viewed tourism as a way to develop resource-rich but historically impoverished Xinjiang. The strategy has gained new impetus this year as the economy staggers out of a hardline zero-Covid policy that gummed up domestic travel and throttled consumption.

Last month, President Xi Jinping called on officials to "strengthen positive publicity and show Xinjiang's new atmosphere of openness and self-confidence".

The region's tourism bureau plans to

XINJIANG'S BIG BANG

STATE-BACKED TOURISM BOOMS IN CHINA'S TROUBLED XINJIANG

spend over 700mn yuan in 2023, more than double its pre-pandemic budget in 2019. A suite of new projects has been announced across Xinjiang, from luxury hotels to campsites, rail routes and activity parks.

They include agreements totalling 12.6bn yuan (US\$1.72bn) with Western hotel brands like Hilton, Sheraton and InterContinental, the ruling party-run People's Daily newspaper reported in June.

Tourism has also provided an opportunity for Beijing to push back against criticism of its policies in the region.

A chorus of researchers, campaigners and Uyghurs overseas have alleged systematic rights abuses in Xinjiang stretching back years - including mass internment, forced labour, coercive birth controls, political indoctrination and curbs on religion.



Women wearing traditional Uyghur attire pose for a photo at the Old Kashgar tourist area in China's northwestern Xinjiang region (Above) A monument to late Chinese leader Mao Zedong outside Yarkant in Xinjiang region

"Do people look oppressed? Does the city look like an open-air prison like the US said?" wrote one state-linked journalist in July on Twitter - the platform rebranded as X, which is blocked in China - alongside clips of herself dining and dancing with Kashgar locals.

China has dismissed a UN report detailing 'serious' abuses that may constitute 'crimes against humanity', and blasted US claims of a 'genocide'.

Its foreign ministry told AFP that in Xinjiang 'people's lives are continuously improving, cultural spaces are prospering, and religion is harmonious and agreeable'.

The development push has coincided with a relaxation of security in cities where Uyghur residents were once subjected to pervasive body scans and other inspections by armed police.

In Kashgar, AFP saw just a handful of officers, and abandoned or barely used scanners dotting the streets.

Prayers prohibited

Off the main tourist trail, in the mostly Uyghur town of Yengisar, AFP reporters saw a sign in a cemetery prohibiting Islamic 'religious activities' such as kneeling, prostrating, praying with palms facing upwards, and reciting scripture.

The same sign permitted certain offerings for the Qingming Festival, typically observed by Han but not Uyghurs.

Around a dozen mosques in other towns and villages around Kashgar were found locked and rundown. Some appeared to have had minarets and other Islamic markings removed, and many bore the same government slogan: Love the country, love the party.

In Kashgar, no more than two dozen mostly elderly Uyghur men were seen entering Id Kah Mosque for Friday afternoon prayers, vastly outnumbered by tourists - a stark change from the thousands of believers that would congregate a decade ago.

Three other community mosques within a few hundred metres were shuttered when AFP visited, with a store advertising adult products operating a stone's throw from one of them.

Such closures were largely deemed unnecessary until the recent wave of repression, beginning in 2017, said Rian Thum, an expert on Uyghur history at Britain's University of Manchester.

"The destruction of religious sites... is part of a larger set of policies that are transforming the landscape and disconnecting Uyghur culture from the geography of Xinjiang," Thum told AFP.

The sharpest reminders of Beijing's policies still lurk on Kashgar's periphery, which houses many of the alleged internment camps. While some appear to have been converted or abandoned, others look to still be operating - and provoke official unease when exposed.

"Don't take any photos!" yelled an unidentified woman in an unmarked car that followed AFP to a nondescript compound on a bleak industrial estate an hour's drive from the city. "That's not permitted around here." AFP