

His Majesty presides over Sandhurst graduation parade

Sayyid Theyazin commissioned as officer from Royal Military Academy Sandhurst

London, United Kingdom - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik presided over the graduation ceremony of the Commissioning Course Short 222 of Officer Cadets at Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in London, United Kingdom, on Saturday.

His Majesty the Sultan inspected the parade of which Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said and other graduates were a part.

Upon arrival of His Majesty the Sultan at the academy's headquarters, he was received by Maj Gen Duncan Capps, the academy's commander.

After that, His Majesty the Sultan stepped on the dais accompanied by Maj Gen Capps as the column of graduates saluted them. His Majesty later inspected the column of graduates and interacted with a few.

His Majesty the Sultan praised the high level of skills they ac-



quired during their training at the academy, calling on them to renew their determination and continue their efforts to achieve more for their countries.

His Majesty the Sultan also met the Omani officers studying in the academy, and congratulated them on graduating. He

stressed on the importance of continuing to develop their skills, wishing them success in their future endeavours.

On the occasion, His Majesty presented a souvenir to Maj Gen Capps, while His Majesty the Sultan accepted a souvenir from the commander of the academy.

The graduation ceremony was attended by the Honourable Lady, the spouse of His Majesty the Sultan, Bilarab bin Haitham al Said and the Ambassador of Oman to the United Kingdom.

Concluding his visit to the academy, His Majesty wrote a message in its visitor's book.

The graduation ceremony saw 103 Officer Cadets commissioned on Saturday. The parade marks completion of eight weeks of training for the Commissioning Course Short 222. The course included nine international cadets from Oman, Jordan, Bahrain and Kosovo.

London conference to promote Oman as green energy hub

Muscat - An international conference on sources of renewable energy available in Oman will be held in London on Wednesday to promote the sultanate as a global destination with promising potential for investment in green energy.

The 'New Energy' conference will see industry leaders gather to discuss new energy in Oman, including panels and Q&As on renewables, decarbonisation of oil and gas, and green finance.

Oman's sovereign wealth fund, Oman Investment Authority (OIA), will attend the conference to explore the new energy ecosystem and opportunities to partner with the UK.

Organised by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in cooperation



H E Asila bint Salem al Samsamiya

with the Foreign Ministry, the Oman delegation will be headed by H E Abdulsalam bin Muhammad al Murshidi, chairman of OIA, with representation of the Omani Embassy in London, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the Anglo-Omani Society and the Omani British Friendship Association.

Continued on Page 02

Five dead, 14 injured in bus accident in Al Hamra

Muscat - Five people died and 14 others sustained injuries when a bus carrying 19 passengers fell from the mountains in Jabal al Sharqi in the wilayat of Al Hamra on Saturday morning.

In a statement, the Ministry of Social Development said 'With great sadness, the ministry has received news of an

accident of a vehicle that was carrying some members of a youth hostel and the Child Care Centre. We are closely following the details of the accident.'

Royal Oman Police said that a specialised team from the General Traffic Department reached the crash site to determine the cause of the accident.

Sincere congratulations and blessings
to His Highness

Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said

The Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth

on the occasion of his graduation from

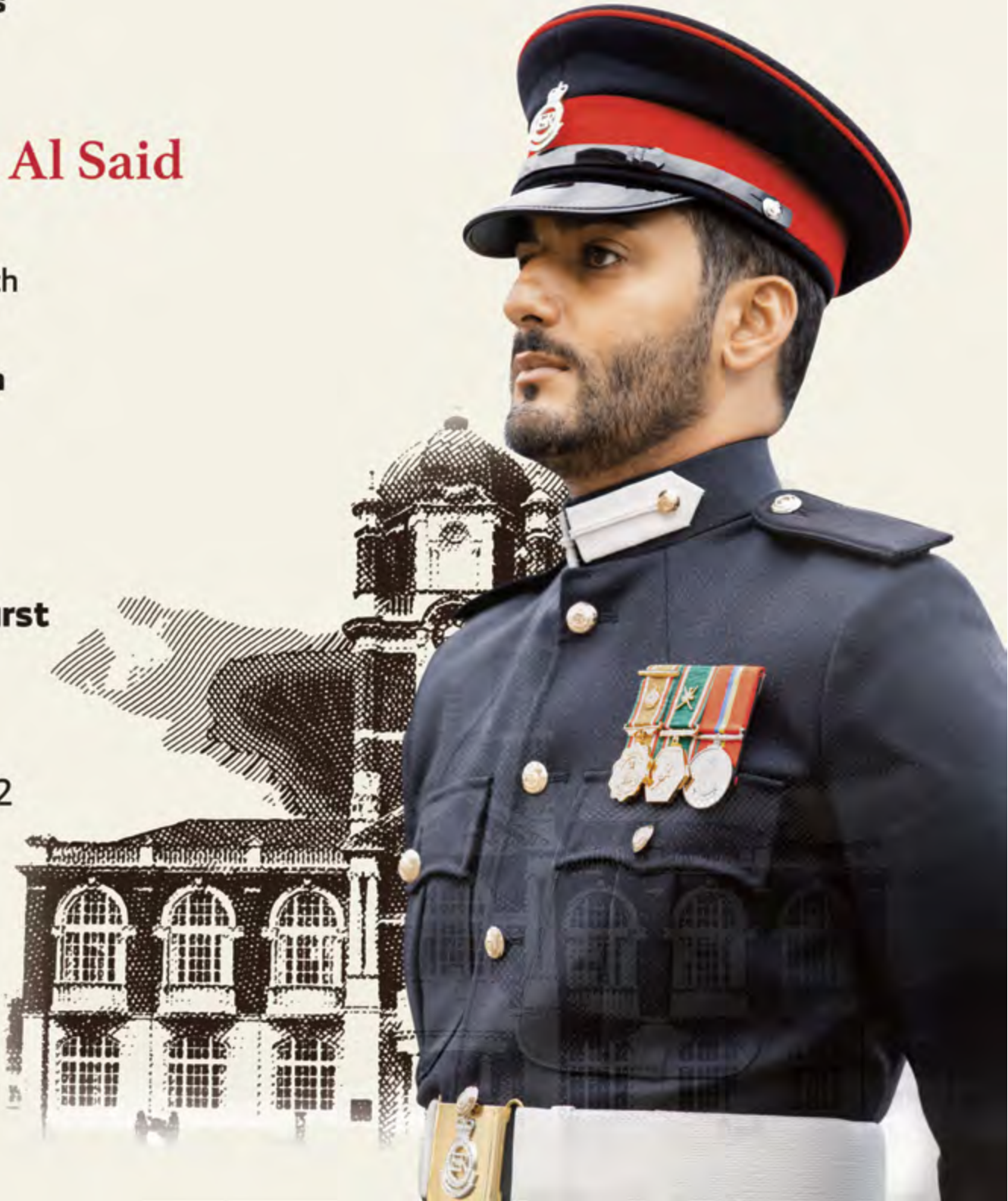


The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst
in the United Kingdom

which was held
yesterday, Saturday, 23rd July 2022

May Allah grant him
all success and prosperity

Bilarab bin Haitham Al Said





Association for Children with Disability, Kempinski sign MoU

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Kempinski Hotel Muscat signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Association for Children with Disability on Thursday to support the latter through donations from hotel guests during check-in.

Donations will be processed upon receiving confirmation from the guest and the donated amount will go directly to the association towards the end of the year to aid and assist in its charity efforts.

The MoU was signed by Carsten Wiegandt, general manager of the hotel, and H H Sayyida Hujaija al Said, chairperson of the association.

"It is our pleasure to partner

One of our most important goals is to support children with disabilities, help them in all areas of life and enable them to adapt and integrate into society

H H SAYYIDA HUJAIJA AL SAID

with the local charity to support and give back to the community," Wiegandt said at the signing ceremony. "Corporate social responsibility is of utmost importance to Kempinski hotels worldwide and is at the core of our business model. Only by collab-

orating with partners who share our values will we be able to achieve our ambitious goal - to celebrate the hospitality industry in a luxurious yet sustainable manner."

H H Sayyida Hujaija said the aim of the MoU is to achieve the goals of the association. "One of our most important goals is to support children with disabilities, help them in all areas of life and enable them to adapt and integrate into society professionally, psychologically and socially."

Nestled within the community of Al Mouj Muscat with over 6km of stunning coastline, Kempinski Hotel Muscat has 310 rooms and suites, ten authentic restaurants and lounges, a fully equipped fitness centre and a luxury spa.

Dakhliyah farmer tastes success in grape farming

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Grape cultivation in the Governorate of Dakhliyah is all set to script a new chapter in agricultural diversification with one farmer tasting success in his experiments.

Farmer Abdul Rahman Zaher al Abri from the wilayat of Bahla in Dakhliyah cultivated grapes with 500 seedlings, the vines now having grown to 180cm.

Abri has been farming for 55 years, producing a diverse mix of crops on his 20 acres of land. He started cultivating grapes in 2021 and hopes it will be a profitable effort. "I started growing grapes for additional income," Abri told *Muscat Daily*.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources provided 500 grape seedlings to Abri in December 2021 as part of a national project called Model Farms.

"I have planted five types of grapes - Sultan, Lebanese White, Ashhab, Taifi and Omani Black - on an acre of land."

About the challenges he faces in cultivating grapes, he said, "We have to face extreme heat, wind and drought. Although setting up windbreakers has helped in dealing with harsh winds, but extreme heat remains a major challenge in grape cultivation."

Asked why he chose to grow grapes, Abri said he followed experts' recommendations regarding expansion and diversification of crops to boost food security and self-sufficiency.

"Currently, I grow wheat, onions, sugarcane, dates, okra and black-eyed peas, besides grapes. I plant 45 varieties of dates."

The new venture, which has the active support of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and experts, has become Abri's obsession.

"The ministry facilitated an integrated programme to help us choose the right land, equipping



We should not leave this work to expatriate labourers. Our land is a treasure for future generations. Many countries depend on agriculture as the main source of income

ABDUL RAHMAN ZAHER AL ABRI

it with a modern irrigation system and using organic fertilisers," he elaborated.

Though he gained vast experience and knowledge from more than five decades of farming, to learn modern methods, Abri has visited several countries.

"Today, farmers in the sultanate grow a wide variety of fruits all year round."

Urging jobseekers to work in the agriculture sector, he said, "It

is profitable work. We should not leave this work to expatriate labourers. Our land is a treasure for future generations. Many countries depend on agriculture as the main source of income."

Abri said he hopes the concerned authorities will help in increasing cultivation of wheat to achieve self-sufficiency in food and to provide land to those interested to start farming, especially in Salalah.

In July 2021, Oman Investment Authority (OIA) announced the formation of an integrated company specialising in production of high-quality vegetables and fruits and marketing of local produce domestically and internationally.

The project aims to establish model farms across Oman based on comparative advantage, diversity of weather and environments suitable for the growth of various crops.

The project is within the framework of a close and fruitful cooperation between OIA and the ministry with an aim to encourage Omani farmers and small and medium-sized enterprises to market their produce inside and outside the sultanate.

WEATHER WATCH	Max	Min
Muscat	35	30
Abu Dhabi	43	31
Doha	40	29
Kuwait City	45	32
Manama	39	31
Riyadh	46	30

PRAYER TIMINGS	
Fajr	4.09am
Sunrise	5.33am
Duhr	12.18pm
Asr	3.40pm
Maghrib	6.59pm
Isha	8.18pm

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Companies specialized in the field and registered with Tender Board, may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link:
(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	No E-Tender	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/22/071	2022/MM/HQ-6	Maintenance of Roads in Bousher, A'Seeb and Muttrah 2022 (E- Tender)	Rail 190	31/07/2022	11/08/2022	Excellent
PRE/22/073	2022/MM/HQ-7	Maintenance of Roads in AL Merat and Quriyat 2022 (E- Tender)	Rail 300	31/07/2022	11/08/2022	Excellent
PRE/22/040	2022/MM/QS-34	Rehabilitation of Rainwater Drainage at Burj AL-Sabwa (E- Tender)	Rail 25	11/08/2022	28/08/2022	First
PRE/22/052	2022/MM/QS-35	Chain link Fence & Gate at AL-Amirat (E- Tender)	Rail 25	11/08/2022	28/08/2022	Specialist
PRE/22/057	2022/MM/QS-36	Cleaning & Grading of Wadis in Muscat Governorate (E- Tender)	Rail 25	11/08/2022	28/08/2022	First
PRE/22/076	2022/MM/QS-37	Construction of Proposed Solution to Resolve Water Stagnation at Bousher in Alkhawair area (E- Tender)	Rail 25	11/08/2022	28/08/2022	First

Tender Conditions :-

1- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.

- Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond and to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+96824402200).
- For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+96824402200/24402330).

Cinemana, MIFF to be held in early 2023

Muscat - Organisers of the two most important festivals related to cinema in Oman have revealed tentative dates of the events.

Cinemana Arab Film Festival 4 (CAFF) is set to be held in January 2023, while Muscat International Film Festival (MIFF) is scheduled for March 2023.

The third edition of CAFF was held online in early February this year under the theme of COVID-19.

Film enthusiasts across the sultanate are looking forward to attend the fourth edition in-person, watching films and attending filmmaking workshops.



"Over 100 films have already been submitted and will go through the selection process

once the jury committee resumes work in the month of September," said Khalid al Zadjali,

director and president of CAFF.

Mohammed al Kindi, film director and producer and one of the organisers of the 12th MIFF, informed that a press conference will be held to announce details of the festival.

The previous edition of MIFF was held in March 2020 under the theme 'Make your film in Oman' and introduced international filmmakers to the most important tourist sites in the sultanate, besides having seminars and workshops on the formalities and procedures involved in obtaining the necessary licence to film in the sultanate.

(Contributed by Fletcher Dsouza)

London conference to promote Oman as green energy hub

Continued from Page 01

H E Asila bint Salem al Samamiya, Undersecretary for Investment Promotion in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, told ONA that the conference aims to focus on attracting the international business community to the opportunities available primarily in the green energy sector in Oman and also other sectors such as industry, tourism, fisheries, mining and logistics.

She added that the conference will also introduce the investment environment in the sultanate and the facilities and incentives pro-



vided by the government to investors, besides presenting Oman's current view of clean energy as one of the most important sectors targeted in Oman Vision 2040 and the National En-

ergy Strategy.

Oman has embarked on a number of green energy projects with the aim of generating 30 per cent of electricity from renewable energy sources by 2030.

H E Asila pointed out that the UK is the largest investment partner of the sultanate, and the partnership has expanded to include several sectors, most notably oil and gas, technology, infrastructure, defence and education. "By the end of 2020, the UK had invested RO7.112bn in Oman."

OIA signed a partnership agreement with the UK in January to enhance investment cooperation in the fields of clean energy and information technology. "The conference and Oman delegation's visit is an effort to work further under that agreement."

Many scholarships available to Omani students

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Medicine, business, engineering and computer science remain the most popular career choices for students from Oman. Within the humanities, students are interested in law, economics, international relations and political science. The US Visa data indicates that there were 2,654 Omani citizens on student visas in the US in 2021.

Soraya Beheshti, regional director of Crimson Education, MENAT, said, "As per our records, there were approximately 16,000 students from Oman (expats and citizens) studying abroad. Approximately 2,300 students from Oman are currently studying in the UK.

"Our students have received 500+ Ivy League offers, 300+ Oxbridge offers, 3,000+ top 50 US offers and 100+ top UK offers in the past decade."

According to Soraya, Oman too welcomes a large number of overseas students. Foreign students are enrolled in Sultan Qaboos University as well as private higher education institutions.

Among the many challenges that students face, Soraya said settling into a brand-new community tops the list. "There are many resources, clubs and networks available to students to overcome this. Students may elect to join religious groups, which can be a great source of like-minded friends, as well as cultural, linguistic, career-focused or interest groups."



As per our records, there were approximately 16,000 students from Oman (expats and citizens) studying abroad. Approximately 2,300 students from Oman are currently studying in the UK

SORAYA BEHESHTI



In some cities such as London and New York, she noted that it can be difficult for students to find housing. "We recommend students seek out options, join accommodation-focused Facebook and other community groups and apply for institutional accommodation as soon as possible."

Another challenge lies in the contrasting curriculum. The Omani curriculum is not accepted for direct entry to UK universities. Students completing the national curriculum are required to complete a foundation year prior to entering their degree programme. "This can be limiting, as foundation year programmes are less prestigious and not offered at all universities or for all subjects. Several Omani citizens have been able to bypass

the foundation year requirement by studying for Advanced Placement (AP) exams with Crimson Global Academy. Students who complete 3-4 APs and the SAT or ACT exam are eligible to apply directly to Bachelor's programmes," Soraya said.

Omani students have numerous scholarships available, while other students can opt for financial aid at US universities. The financial aid system is unique to the US and more common and comprehensive than scholarship programmes at other universities.

"Crimson's students have obtained over US\$70mm in scholarships and financial aid and are accepted to Ivy Leagues and Oxbridge 4-7 times the usual rate," Soraya added.

Omani delegation visits Tanzania to review investment opportunities



(Supplied photo)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A joint team consisting of personnel from Oman Investment Authority, Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and De-

velopment and Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa visited Tanzania on an invitation of the Tanzanian Investment Centre recently.

In a statement, the Embassy of Oman in Dar es Salaam said

that multiple investment opportunities were identified in the food sector in order to achieve the objectives of Oman in diversifying import sources for livestock and other agricultural products.

It stated that the visiting delegation included the deputy head of the Omani mission in Dar es Salaam, the Tanzanian ambassador in Muscat, and representatives of the Oman Investment Authority Office in East Africa.

Taqah, Dalkout get over 200mm rainfall in 17 days

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The monsoon in Dhofar is continuing to bring rain to the governorate with Taqah recording 244mm of rainfall in 17 days.

The rains have resulted in overflowing springs across the governorate besides turning hill-tops and plains green. The wilayat of Dalkout received the second highest amount of rainfall (237mm) from July 7 to 23, followed by Rakhyout (124mm), Salalah (66mm), Mirbat (55mm) and Muqshin (7mm), according to the weather monitoring stations of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

In its forecast for Sunday, the Directorate General of Meteorology stated that clear to partly cloudy skies are expected over all the governorates with chances of convective clouds developing and isolated rain and thundershowers associated with downdraft over the Al Hajar Mountains and adjoining areas towards evening.

"Partly cloudy skies are expected along the coastal areas of Dhofar and adjoining mountains with intermittent drizzle and chance of isolated rain," the Met Office predicted.

The Arabian Sea will be rough and Sea of Oman moderate along the coast.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS FOR THE PROVISION OF TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF WIND INDEPENDENT POWER PLANTS (IPPS)

The Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC (OPWP), a member of Nama Group, is responsible for procuring new capacity for power and water in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the requirements of the Law for the Regulation and Privatisation of the Electricity and Related Water Sector promulgated by Royal Decree 78/2004, as amended, and the OPWP licence.

Tender Description	In line with Oman's vision to diversify fuel sources for power generation, OPWP seeks to undertake a technical and economic feasibility study for developing wind IPPs. This project shall consist of two stages: the first stage shall involve producing the feasibility study, whereas the second stage shall consist of providing technical consultancy services for the wind IPPs constructed as a result of the aforementioned study, and that is after obtaining the necessary approvals. Accordingly, OPWP would like to appoint a qualified and experienced technical and economic consultant for the development of wind IPPs.
Tender Number	OPWP/2022/22
Tender Purchase Period	19 th July 2022 to 2 nd August 2022
Tender Fee	1,000 OMR / free of charge for (SME) with valid Riyada card.
Submission date	5th of September 2022 Before 12 PM (Gulf Standard Time)
Collection & Payment Methods	The tender documents are available for purchase in an electronic format through OPWP website: (https://www.ompanpwp.om/new/Default.aspx). The payment is done electronically through OPWP website. In case of any queries, please send an email to: procurement.officer@Omanpwp.nama.om.
Bank Guarantee	A bid bond (in the form set out in the tender) of at least 1% of the fixed price value of the Contract, to be valid for a period of 120 days from the submission deadline date referred to above. The bid bond shall be enclosed as part of the bid.



Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC (OPWP)
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Bidding Announcement

University of Technology and Applied Sciences
Local bidding

University of Technology and Applied Sciences (Ibra Branch) announces the bidding shown in the following table

M	Bidding number	Bidding Name	Companies that are eligible to participate	Document's Price	Purchase and Bidding department	Last date bid submission
1	3/2022	Management and operation of main restaurant and a restaurant in English language building	Companies and institutions specialized in this field	(25) Twenty five Riyal Omani	(Department of Administrative Affairs) University of Technology and Applied Science Ibra Branch	Thursday 04/8/2022 at 10:00 am

- Those interested can obtain bidding documents from Sunday 24/07/2022 starting from (07:30 am).
- Companies and institutions specialized in this field must attach with their bid a temporary electronic insurance in the form of a bank guarantee or certified check. It must be from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, not less than (1%) of the value of the bid, addressed to the name of the head of the committee. Sub-Tenders are valid for a period of (90) days from the date of bid submission.
- Temporary insurance requested will not be considered. Bids shall be submitted signed and sealed on the form prepared for this in envelopes sealed with red wax. It is addressed to the Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee, University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Ibra Branch and written on it the number and name of the bidding, provided that the envelope shall not have the name of the bidder or what it refers to. Bids shall be received in the Administrative Affairs Department before ten o'clock in the morning of the day specified in the above table
- Preference in awarding will be given to small and medium enterprises registered with the Authority for SME development and whose bid includes the biggest percentage of Omanisation and a biggest purchase percentage of national products.

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CBO's planned Islamic money market instruments will be positive for sector: Moody's

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman's planned introduction of Shariah-compliant money market instruments will be positive for the sultanate's Islamic banking sector, Moody's Investors Services has said.

Last week, CBO published its Financial Stability Report 2022 which announced progress in the introduction of Islamic money market instruments for the Islamic banking sector.

'The availability of Shariah-compliant short-term money market instruments will support the Islamic banking sector growth and diversify Islamic banks' asset base, a credit positive,' Moody's said in a sector comment note on Thursday.

The Islamic money market instruments that CBO plans to introduce are part of a medium-term Islamic banking strategy. The list of instruments includes and is not limited to Shariah-compliant emergency liquidity support, a lender of last resort facility and a wakala-based remunerative deposit facility.

These instruments, Moody's noted, will support Oman Islamic banks' and windows' liquidity needs and will position Islamic entities on the same competitive platform of conventional peers.



Availability of Shariah-compliant short-term money market instruments will support Islamic banking sector growth and diversify Islamic banks' asset base

MOODY'S

'Future availability of short-term Islamic instruments to place excess liquidity will further support the sector growth,' Moody's added.

Over the decade since its introduction in 2012, Oman's Islamic banking assets have grown to comprise nearly 16 per

cent of total banking assets as of May this year.

Growth rates in Oman's Islamic banking assets increased to 14 per cent in 2021 and was up 3 per cent year-to-date as of May 2022, fuelled by economic growth and higher oil prices, compared to 6 per cent in 2020.

Islamic banking growth rates were well above conventional banking assets growth rates at 7 per cent in 2021, one per cent in 2020 and no growth as of May 2022 year-to-date, according to Moody's.

'Planned introduction of short-term Shariah-compliant liquidity instruments will also help diversification of Islamic banks' asset base in Oman,' the ratings agency said.

On the asset side of the aggregate Islamic banking balance sheet, as of May 2022, financ-

ings were the main component (82 per cent), followed by investment securities (9 per cent), cash and due from financial institutions (6 six per cent) and others (3 per cent), Moody's noted. Among the securities, more than two thirds is invested in long and medium-term government sukuk issuances, the ratings agency added.

'The regulator in Oman has supported Islamic finance since its inception in 2012, introducing at the time a detailed Islamic banking regulatory framework. It followed the first sovereign sukuk issued in 2015 and the first sukuk issuance available to retail investors was in 2020, providing banks with Shariah-compliant instruments to manage their liquid assets,' Moody's said.

To ensure robust and sustained growth of Oman's Islamic banking sector, CBO is also finalising its medium-term Islamic banking strategy, which is built on five pillars, namely (1) sustain the momentum, (2) enhance the stability, (3) expand the outreach, (4) nurture the talent, and (5) boost the awareness.

Each pillar of the Islamic banking strategy is supported by several 'goals', with a total of 40 'initiatives' in the strategy, about half of which are to be undertaken by CBO and rest by Islamic banking sector, CBO said in its Financial Stability report.



Photo for illustrative purpose only

Deal signed for sale of green ammonia from Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Indian renewable energy development company ACME Group and Norwegian firm Scatec - which are developing a major green hydrogen and ammonia project in Duqm - have signed a term sheet with Yara International, a leading global ammonia player, for offtake from the first phase of green ammonia project in Oman.

ACME and Scatec are already evolving the green ammonia project in Oman. The joint venture aims at building a state-of-the art facility. Yara is a front-runner in global ammonia production, logistics and trade and are growing the market for green ammonia that can be used for decarbonising other industries.

ACME and Scatec will begin developing the first phase of the project over 12 sqkm of land to produce 100,000 metric tonnes of green ammonia per annum in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. Once fully developed, a

second phase will be added, and the project is expected to produce up to 1.1mn tonnes of green ammonia annually.

According to a press statement, the parties have agreed the principal terms for offtake of 100,000 tonnes annually of green ammonia in a first phase, and potential further offtake from the project's second phase as this develops.

'This agreement is groundbreaking for enabling the partners' first green ammonia project in Oman. For Yara the green ammonia supply will contribute to produce green fertiliser and for decarbonising other industries like shipping, power, and steel industry,' the statement added.

Magnus Krogh Ankarstrand, president of Yara Clean Ammonia, said, "Yara Clean Ammonia is working on enabling the clean ammonia market. The green ammonia from Oman will go into our scalable distribution system and contribute to emission-free fuel for deep-sea shipping, power production and fertiliser globally."

Rajat Seksaria, CEO of ACME Group, said, "We are delighted to partner with Yara Clean Ammonia as an offtaker from our under development project in Oman. We hope that this project will be an early success story in the sector and play a vital role in accelerating large scale adoption of green ammonia. We are also grateful to the Omani authorities for their proactive support in enabling fast track development of this project."

Terje Pilskog, CEO Scatec, said, "This is a crucial milestone for Scatec with ACME and Yara in this exciting project. The project is part of our strategy to capitalise on our experience in large-scale renewables in attractive regions, and the agreement will further our ambitions within green hydrogen and ammonia."

Oman has excellent conditions for renewable energy and a strategic location to produce green hydrogen and green ammonia for export to both Europe and Asia, which are the pacesetters in reducing carbon-emissions.

MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

MSX posts 3.6% weekly gains on Q2 earnings

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) posted 3.63 per cent gains during the last week as the announcements of second quarter financial results boosted investor sentiments.

Gains in the main index were supported by the rise of all sectoral indices. Financial Index posted the biggest increase of 3.37 per cent for the week, while Services Index and Industrial Index rose 1.53 per cent and 2.22 per cent, respectively. The MSX Shariah Index closed flat for the week.

Local news

►Oman's total oil production in the first six months of 2022 grew by 9.7 per cent to 189.55mn barrels compared to 172.84mn barrels in the same period of 2021, according to the official data released on Wednesday by National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Of the total production, crude output jumped by 13.2 per cent year-on-year to 150.47mn barrels during the first half of 2022 from 132.92mn barrels recorded in the same period a year ago, while condensates output decreased by 2.1 per cent to 39mn barrels during January - June period this year. The sultanate's total oil exports grew by 16.2 per cent during the first six months of this year to 162.4mn barrels as compared with 139.8mn barrels recorded in the corresponding period of 2021, the NCSI data showed.

►Oman's liquified natural gas

(LNG) exports during the first six months of 2022 increased by 8 per cent to 5.9mn tonnes during the corresponding period of 2021. The increase in exports of LNG reaffirms that the Oman LNG terminal is operating at full production capacity, which is estimated at 11.4mn tonnes per annum. During the first six months of the current year, Oman's monthly exports of LNG amounted to 0.9mn tonnes which made Oman's liquified natural gas shipments reach new destinations.

►Oman telecom sector data for June revealed that the fixed-line subscribers are down by 5 per cent while mobile subscribers are up 5.7 per cent year-on-year. Within mobile subscribers, prepaid subscribers were up one per cent, while postpaid subscribers were higher by 24 per cent. Active mobile broadband subscribers increased by 8 per cent. Mobile penetration level in Oman remained higher at the end of June 2022 as compared to June 2021.

►Value of traded property in Oman went up by 40 per cent in June 2022 to RO293.7mn compared to RO209mn in June 2021. Traded value of mortgage contracts went up by 22 per cent to RO119mn compared to RO97mn in same period last year. Traded value of sale contracts increased by 58 per cent to RO174mn compared to RO110mn a year ago. Number of properties issued as of June 2022 also increased by 12 per



cent to 23,476 compared to 20,926 in June 2021.

►Oman Investment Authority (OIA) said it has green-lighted an "exit plan" submitted by wholly-owned energy and petrochemicals subsidiary OQ Group envisioning divestments totalling between RO1.5bn and RO2bn. OIA made the revelation in its maiden annual report, covering its financial and operational performance over the June 2020 - December 2021 period.

►A strategy is being prepared for the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) sector in line with Oman Vision 2040 by the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises (ASMED). The new strategy seeks to extend a supportive environment for SMEs through the development of mechanisms and programmes that strengthen the integration of all entities related

to entrepreneurship. It is also being prepared to augment the contribution of SMEs to the gross domestic product (GDP), raising Oman's indicators in the field of entrepreneurship and also to bring in new initiatives to generate employment opportunities in the country.

►Nama Group, the holding company of state-owned power and water utilities and service providers, has organised a pre-tendering roadshow for National Automated Meter Reading (AMR) rollout project. Nama Group said AMR is an integrated system of equipment, communications, and information management systems for utilities to automatically collect consumption, diagnostic the data from electricity meter and transfer that data to a central database for billing, troubleshooting, and analysis. The project is being implemented

on a design, build, finance, own, operate, and transfer model. According to Nama, the roadshow was aimed to present high-level briefing about Nama Group and its plan for AMR rollout.

GCC markets

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) economies, including Oman, are predicted to grow due to increasing energy prices (oil and gas) and the impact of the ongoing geopolitical uncertainties. According to the KPMG's Global Economic Outlook H1 2022 report, the oil and gas prices are expected to continue soaring in 2022 and 2023, driven by their increased production and hike in prices. Moreover, the economic activity in the GCC is expected to pick up further pace owing to the private sector activity and easing of Covid-19 related re-

strictions, the report added.

Moody's credit rating agency expected that Saudi Arabia's economy would register an average growth rate of around 3.9 per cent during the period from 2022 to 2026. Moody's issued an annual in-depth credit analysis report which elaborates on Saudi Arabia's credit profile in terms of economic strength, institutional and governance strength, fiscal strength, and susceptibility to events' risks with the ability to avoid or minimize their impact, which are the four main analytic factors in the agency's Sovereign Credit Ratings Methodology

Dubai's Consumer Price Index (CPI) jumped by 5.84 per cent year-on-year to 105.35 points in June 2022, according to the latest data by the Dubai Statistics Centre (DSC). Higher inflation in Dubai was driven by an increase in the prices of recreation, sport, and culture with 35.76 per cent, transport with 33.32 per cent, and food and beverages with 8.94 per cent.

S&P Global Ratings placed Kuwait's currency sovereign credit ratings at A+, raising the Gulf country's future outlook from 'negative' to 'stable'. In its report, the ratings agency expected the major oil exporter to benefit from favorable oil prices and production until the end of next year. It also forecasted a 2022-23 cumulative general government surplus of 18 per cent of GDP based on an US\$75-80 per barrel oil price,

saying this would allow authorities to 'replenish liquidity in the previously depleted main treasury buffer'.

Global news

The US Federal Reserve will opt for another 75 basis point rate hike rather than a larger move at its meeting next week to quell stubbornly-high inflation as the likelihood of a recession over the next year rises to 40 per cent, a Reuters poll of economists found.

US inflation hit 9.1 per cent in June, another four-decade high, stoking expectations that the Fed, having only just shifted gears from 50 to 75 basis points at the last meeting, would act even more forcefully and go for a 100-basis point hike. But some of the more hawkish Fed officials in public remarks have favored a 75-basis point hike, tempering those expectations in recent days. Last month's 75 basis points hike was the first of that size since 1994.

Recommendation

Global equities saw some relief during the week as US dollar weakened to some extent against some other equities, supporting the US markets. All GCC equities closed the week higher.

Locally, we recommend investors to analyse the detailed financials available on the MSX website for the first half of 2022 in order to understand the companies' performance as well as future outlook.

Ukraine, Russia sign grain export deal

Istanbul, Turkey – Russia and Ukraine on Friday signed a landmark deal with the United Nations and Turkey on resuming grain shipments that could ease a global food crisis in which millions face hunger.

Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and Ukrainian Infrastructure Minister Oleksandr Kubrakov each signed separate but identical agreements with UN and Turkish officials on re-opening blocked Black Sea delivery routes, at a ceremony witnessed by AFP.

Ukrainian officials said they did not want to put their name on the same document as the Russians because of the five-month war.

Diplomats expect grain to start fully flowing for the first time since Russia's invasion of its Western-backed neighbour by the middle of August.

"Today, there is a beacon on the Black Sea – a beacon of hope, a beacon of possibility, a beacon of relief," UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said as the deal was signed after months of laborious negotiations that threatened to break down several times.

"It will bring relief for developing countries on the edge of bankruptcy and the most vulnerable people on the edge of famine," Guterres said.

The United Nations estimates that an additional 47mn people began to face "acute hunger" as a direct consequence of the war.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan – a key player in the negotiations who has good relations with both Moscow and Kyiv – said he hoped the deal would pave the way for eventual peace in Ukraine.

"This joint step we are taking with Ukraine and Russia will hopefully revive the path to peace," the Turkish leader said.

The war is being fought across one of Europe's most fertile regions by two of the world's biggest producers of grain. But Russian warships and Ukrainian mines laid across the sea to avert an amphibious assault have blocked exports and left up to 25mn tonnes of wheat and other grain in danger of rotting in ports and silos.

UN officials say it was quickly decided that de-mining the area would take too long to relieve the threat of starvation spreading to some of the poorest parts of the world.

The deal agreed through UN and Turkish mediation establishes safe corridors along which Ukrainian ships can come in and out of three designated Black Sea ports in and around Odessa.

Both sides also pledged not to attack ships on the way in or out.

Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhaylo Podolyak warned Russian breaches of the deal and incursions around Ukraine's ports would be met with "an immediate military response".

A joint command and control centre will be set up in Istanbul to oversee smooth operations and resolve disputes. But all the pieces may not start coming together until next month. UN officials say Ukraine may send out a few ships at first to make sure the deal works.

"We're talking about a few weeks before we'll see a proper implementation of vessels going in and out," one UN official said.

AFP



(From left) Ukrainian Minister Oleksandr Kubrakov, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar attend signature ceremony in Istanbul, on Friday (AFP)

Wheat prices fall to level last seen before Ukraine invasion

New York, US – Wheat prices tumbled Friday, retreating to levels last seen prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine following a landmark agreement to unblock Ukraine's Black Sea grain exports.

In Chicago, the price of wheat for delivery in September dropped 5.9 per cent to US\$7.59 per bushel, which is equivalent to about 27 kilograms and the lowest close since Russia invaded its neighbor on February 24.

On Euronext, wheat prices for delivery in September fell 6.4 per cent to US\$325.75 per tonne.

Russia and Ukraine together produce about 30 per cent of the world's wheat exports. Up to 25mn tonnes of wheat and other grain have been blocked in Ukrainian ports by Russian warships and landmines Kyiv has laid to avert a feared amphibious assault.

Despite Friday's retreat in wheat prices, analysts expressed skepticism about the accord's ability to sidestep the realities of the grinding Russia-Ukraine conflict amid doubts over Moscow's willingness to implement the deal.

"I'm still skeptical and I don't think I'm alone in that in questioning that it will actually move much grain," said Michael Zuzolo, president of Global Commodity Analytics & Consulting.

But Zuzolo said wheat prices may not have much further to fall, given that drought conditions are hitting output in some other parts of Europe.

AFP

Russia resumes 'unstable' gas supplies to Europe via Nord Stream pipeline

Berlin, Germany – Russia restored critical gas supplies to Europe through Germany via the Nord Stream pipeline after 10 days of maintenance, but suspicion lingered that the Kremlin would trigger an energy crisis on the continent this winter.

Germany, which is heavily dependent on Russian gas, had feared that Moscow would not reopen the pipeline after the scheduled work and accused Moscow of using energy as a "weapon".

The showdown came amid the worst tensions in several years over Russia's invasion of Ukraine. EU states have accused Russia of squeezing supplies in retaliation for Western sanctions over the war.

Klaus Mueller, head of Germany's energy regulator, said gas flows were on track to return to 40 per cent of the pipeline's capacity – the same reduced level as before the maintenance work.

"But given the missing 60 per cent (of supply) and political instability, there is no reason to sound the all-clear," he tweeted.

German Economy Minister Robert Habeck angrily dismissed Russian claims that it was a guarantor of Europe's energy supply, saying that Moscow had become a growing "insecurity factor" in the sector.

"In fact, Russia is using the great power we gave it to blackmail Europe and Germany," Habeck of the ecologist Green party told reporters.

Enduring German reliance on Russian gas coupled with alarming signals from Moscow have turned up the pressure on Europe's top economy.

A total shutdown of imports or a sharp reduction in the flow from east to west could have a catastrophic effect, shutting factories and forcing households to turn down the heat.

Even the resumption of 40 per cent of supplies would be insufficient to ward off energy shortages in Europe this winter, experts warned.

"It is obvious that (Russian President Vladimir) Putin can and will turn off the tap again when it seems strategically convenient," said energy economist



Lion Hirth of Berlin's Hertie School.

"We must therefore prepare for a winter without Russian gas. This means that saving gas must be at the centre of all political efforts."

The International Monetary Fund said on Wednesday that a halt in supplies could shave 1.5 per cent off Germany's gross domestic product this year.

'Will fulfil'

Russia's state-owned energy giant Gazprom cut flows to Germany via the Nord Stream 1 pipeline under the Baltic Sea to some 40 per cent of capacity in recent weeks, blaming the absence of a Siemens gas turbine that was undergoing repairs in Canada.

The turbine is reportedly en route to Russia and expected to arrive on Sunday at the earliest.

The German government has rejected Gazprom's explanation as an "excuse", noting that the turbine was one of several available.

Moscow's grounds for the supply shortfall shifted again on Thursday, as it said gas delivery problems to Europe were caused by Western sanctions.

"Any technical difficulties linked to this are caused by those restrictions that European countries introduced themselves," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters, dismissing blackmail accusations as "completely" unfounded.

Putin insisted this week that Gazprom would meet all its delivery obligations "in full".

He warned, however, that as another gas turbine was due to be sent for maintenance at the end of this month, energy flows could fall to 20 per cent of capacity from next week.

'Prepare for winter'

As of Thursday, German gas reserves were about 65 per cent of capacity according to official estimates.

Habeck said he was setting targets to boost the level to between 90 and 95 per cent by November.

The European Commission on Wednesday urged EU countries to reduce their demand for natural gas by 15 per cent over the coming months, and to give it special powers to force through needed demand cuts if Russia severs the gas lifeline.

AFP

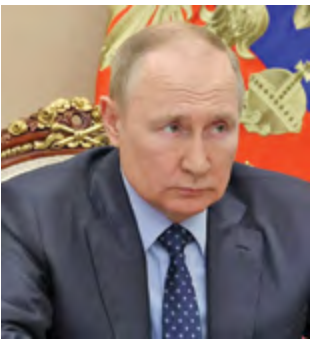
Putin, Saudi crown prince talk oil

Moscow, Russia – Russian President Vladimir Putin and Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman spoke about the oil market in a telephone conversation on Thursday, the Kremlin said.

The call comes less than a week after Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler met visiting US President Joe Biden.

Putin and Prince Mohammed discussed "in detail the situation on the international oil market. They stressed the importance of reinforcing cooperation in OPEC+," the Kremlin said in a statement.

The Saudi-led OPEC oil cartel has been cooperating with a number of other oil-exporting nations including Russia for several years to better control the oil



Vladimir Putin



Mohammed bin Salman

market.

The group, called OPEC+, introduced production cuts during the coronavirus pandemic that helped the oil market to recover from a crash in prices to below zero. OPEC+ nations have been gradually unwinding those cuts, but the end of Covid restrictions in most countries has seen demand rebound.

With Russia's military operation in Ukraine also triggering supply worries, oil prices have jumped briefly above US\$120 per barrel this year.

The Kremlin statement said Putin and Prince Mohammed noted with satisfaction that the cooperation by OPEC+ members

had made it possible "to maintain the needed balance and stability on the global energy market".

The call comes as global energy markets have been marked by volatility as traders swing between concerns about supply and worries that a global recession will crush demand.

The International Energy Agency warned last week that oil supply may not keep up with demand next year.

According to the Kremlin, Putin also discussed the summit earlier this week in Tehran that brought together the Iranian, Russian and Turkish leaders – three countries which have been involved in the Syrian conflict that erupted in 2011.

AFP

ECB sees rising inflation after rate hike

Frankfurt, Germany – Inflation in the eurozone is set to stay above two per cent for the foreseeable future, according to an economists survey published by the European Central Bank Friday, which policymakers consulted before raising rates for the first time in 11 years.

Professional forecasters in the survey "revised up their inflation expectations for all (time) horizons", the ECB said in a statement.

For 2022, 2023 and 2024, the economists raised their predictions to 7.3 per cent, 3.6 per cent and 2.1 per cent respectively.

The forecast figure was up 1.3 percentage points for 2022 compared with the previous exercise in April. For 2023 it was 1.2 points higher, and 0.2 points higher for 2024.

Inflation in the eurozone hit 8.6 per cent in June, an all-time high for the currency club and well above the ECB's two-per cent target.

The upward revisions "mainly reflect higher energy and food prices", as well as the pass through of higher input costs in production, the ECB said.

The ECB's governing council had access to the forecast on Thursday as they agreed a surprisingly large interest rate



hike of 50 basis points, central bank sources told AFP.

The rate increase, the ECB's first since 2011, was double the size of the move signalled by the central bank and brought an end to negative interest rates in the eurozone in a stroke.

"It is likely that this survey influenced the governing council" and encouraged them to "send a strong signal to markets", said Frederik

Ducrozet, head of macroeconomic research at Pictet Wealth Management.

Figures above the ECB's target across the whole forecast may have prompted concerns over the "deanchoring" of inflation expectations that would make it harder to maintain price stability, said Carsten Brzeski, head of macro at the ING bank.

The possibility "must have made several ECB members

extremely nervous", he said.

While there is little the ECB can do to tame short-term price rises driven by a supply shock from the coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine, it can "focus on inflation expectations" by showing it is committed to fighting inflation, Brzeski said.

The survey also showed lower growth expectations from mid-2022 into 2023.

AFP

Oman Sailing Championship starts today after one week delay due to heavy rains

Oman Sailing Championship, which had to be postponed due to the inclement weather that impacted the sultanate recently, is beginning on Sunday, said a press statement.

Due to a period of prolonged heavy rains across the country, the Oman Sailing Championship 2022, originally scheduled to begin in Sur on July 17, has been rescheduled and will now take place from July 24 to 27, said the Oman Sail press release.

Approximately 75 sailors from Oman Sail's sailing schools at Al Mouj Muscat, Marina Bandar al Rowdha, Mussanah and Sur will compete for a place in the Oman National Team for international events.

Sailors in Optimist, Diam24, ILCA 4, ILCA 6, ILCA 7 and iQ-Foil classes, along with athletes from the SailFree programme competing in the RS Venture class for the first time in championship history, will put their training to test to claim gold, silver, and bronze medals, while impressing coaches from Oman Sail.

Said al Araqimi, Sur Sailing



School Manager, said, "The recent rains have given us little choice but to delay the start of the championship in the interests of the safety of our sailors and the local community."

"We still anticipate a high

quality event at the Oman Sailing Championship, which gives us an exciting opportunity to gauge the progress of the talented sailors together from our four sailing schools and select the top performers for forthcoming interna-

tional competition," he added.

Organised by Oman Sail and held under the authority of the Oman Maritime Sports Committee, there will be 20 races and no more than five each day in the iQFoil competition and 12 with

a maximum of three in all other classes. The top three sailors in each class will receive prizes and be considered to be part of the Oman National Team for upcoming national, regional and international competition.



adidas celebrates new academic year with special offers

With a new academic year approaching, adidas aims to excite students with exclusive offers for the back-to-school season running from July 21 to August 6 across stores in Oman.

In an effort to engage with all students through their vision, passion and creativity, adidas said the brand sought to offer "a range of products that are authentic, relevant, and conducive to their learning and leisure environments".

Throughout the duration of the promotion, students and parents have the chance to redeem

RO10, for every RO40 spent on specific items across adidas concept stores, originals and kid.

The promotion also includes 30 per cent off on selected items online at www.adidas.com.om.

Whether its school accessories, sneakers, or clothing, adidas offers mixed ranges for their back-to-school assortment, allowing students to get inspired and pick items that cater to their own personal lifestyle, simultaneously encouraging a positive and confident mindset in addition to kicking off the academic year in style.

Wizz Air Abu Dhabi to start flights to Kuwait, Maldives from October

Wizz Air Abu Dhabi, the ultra-low-fare national airline of the UAE, has announced the launch of two new routes from Abu Dhabi to the idyllic island paradise of the Maldives, and Kuwait - the airline's fifth key destination in the Gulf. Tickets are on sale now on wizzair.com and on the airline's mobile app, with fares starting from just AED99 for Kuwait and AED319 for Maldives, the airline said.

From October, Wizz Air will offer flights four times a week on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday from Abu Dhabi to Malé, the main international airport in the Maldives.

Located in the Indian Ocean, the Maldives is an unrivalled holiday destination, boasting white



sandy beaches, spectacular sunsets and colourful reefs brimming with wildlife.

Flights to Kuwait will operate daily from Abu Dhabi, providing travellers with the opportunity to experience authentic Arab traditions and learn about its unique history over the years, it said.

Ooredoo partners with SPMP for digital transformation programme

Ooredoo, Oman's enabler of digital innovation, has signed a strategic agreement with Strategic & Precious Metals Processing (SPMP) to transform the Oman-based antimony producer's business operations.

Under the agreement, Ooredoo will supply, implement, and manage its Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) solution for SPMP over the next seven years - to enhance the automation of the company's day-to-day operations like production planning, quality control, shop floor operations, HSE management, sales, distribution, finance management, and other key functional areas.



With the support of its partners, SAP, one of the world's leading producers of software for the management of business processes; data2cloud, Ooredoo's award-winning subsidiary; and consulting partner, KAAR Tech - Ooredoo's cutting-edge,

cloud-based solutions - is helping companies across Oman enhance their IT infrastructure, cost-effectively, flexibly and securely.

Sultan Ahmed al Wahaibi, Chief Business & Wholesale Officer at Ooredoo, said, "Ooredoo

is pioneering world-class technologies to help businesses navigate the digital world. We are delighted to count SPMP amongst our growing number of partners, and to be able to enhance the experience of its customers, employees, and

suppliers through integrated and end-to-end processes and systems, as well as increased automation and optimisation.

"As we continue to leverage our network and infrastructure", Wahaibi said, "our tailored solutions are shaped to transform businesses of all sizes to help them achieve growth and contribute to Oman's development," he added.

Located in Sohar, SPMP is the minerals and metals processing plant leading the way in leveraging green design technology to produce a clean source of antimony - considered a critical and strategic metalloid - for the international market.

ISM records extraordinary results in Class X, Class XII

CLASS X TOPPERS

FIRST POSITION 98.8%



Sree Vallabh Goud Manga

SECOND POSITION 98%



Reyna Jeprison



Arka Roy Choudhury



Mohammed M Akram

THIRD POSITION 97.8%



Deepika Anbalagan

CLASS XII TOPPERS

SCIENCE 97.8%



Tejasree Mohanakrishnan

COMMERCE 96.8%



Svetlana Ruth D'souza

HUMANITIES 97.4%



Charlotte Carvalho

Indian School Muscat is basking in glory after a major achievement in the recently held Class X and Class XII board examinations with several students securing high percentage, besides hitting cent per cent marks in several subjects.

In the Class X CBSE board examination results for the academic year 2021-22, the school registered cent per cent success, with a total of 507 students - who appeared for the examination - displaying an outstanding performance.

In all, 37 students secured A1 in all five subjects adding to the historical performance of the school, ISM said.

Sree Vallabh Goud Manga emerged school topper securing 98.8%. Reyna Jeprison, Arka Roy

Choudhury and Mohammed Mobasshir Akram shared the second position securing 98% marks, while Deepika Anbalagan secured the third position scoring 97.8%.

The school average soared to massive 81.2%. It is exemplary to see 19 students scoring a perfect score 100 out of 100, 28 per cent students scoring above 90%, 60 per cent students scoring above 80% and 82 per cent students getting above distinction.

Remarkably 7 per cent students secured A1 in all five subjects, 27 per cent A1's in subjects' appeared and 43 per cent A1 and A2 grade together.

Adding to the golden feathers 19 students scored centums, a perfect score of 100, and they are: Ahana Chakraborty, Jayatee

Choudhury, Aniruddh Sajit Menon, Herschell Mahendra Thykkandy and Pratham Prakash Ullegaddi in Mathematics Standard; Kamalesh Dhinesh Babu, Anoushka Basak, Soha Alam Khan and Joshua Alex Pratheesh in Science; Prashanthi Rajesh, Sree Vallabh Goud Manga, Srijaanee Maity and Shreejita Chakraborty in French; Arka Roy Choudhury and Shreejita Chakraborty in English Language and Literature; Anwesha Chakraborty and Jayatee Choudhury in Hindi Course B and Bhumiika Gulani and Venkata Sri Ujwal Chillarage in Sanskrit.

Another proud endorsement as ISM sees a rise in the subject toppers. Ahana Chakraborty, Jayatee Choudhury, Aniruddh Sajit Menon, Herschell Mahen-

dra Thykkandy and Pratham Prakash Ullegaddi scored 100% in Mathematics Standard; Kamalesh Dhinesh Babu, Anoushka Basak, Soha Alam Khan and Joshua Alex Pratheesh 100% in Science; Prashanthi Rajesh, Sree Vallabh Goud Manga, Srijaanee Maity and Shreejita Chakraborty (100%) in French; Arka Roy Choudhury and Shreejita Chakraborty (100%) in English Language and Literature; Anwesha Chakraborty and Jayatee Choudhury (100%) in Hindi Course B; and Bhumiika Gulani and Venkata Sri Ujwal Chillarage (100%) in Sanskrit. Adding to the toppers' list, Austine Philip Abraham, Alby Justin, Diya Prem, Nayana Jos, Niranjana Ranjeev, Devananda Krishnan Harikrishnan and Ashwin Manoj

scored highest in Malayalam (99%); Vedika Chandra Mouli, Reyna Jeprison, Mitansh Nilesh Khandawala, Sree Vallabh Goud Manga and Mohammed Mobasshir Akram in Social Science (99%); Umar Mohammed Amin Petiwalla, Mohammed Mobasshir Akram, Saadiya Shabir Ahmed Sayed and Varsha Venkateswaran in Arabic (99%); Joepaul Kuruvilla in Home Science (99%), Painting (98%) and Elements of Business (96%). Antonice Johnson scored highest in Computer Applications (89%) and Soham Santosh Dhuri in Information Technology (87%).

Indian School Muscat Management Committee president Sachin Toprani lauded the students for their brilliant, conscientious and sterling performance.

Principal, Dr Rajeev Kumar Chauhan credited the sheer hard work and determination of ISM scholars for the grand success.

Class XII achievement

The school also took pride in announcing "splendid plumage of success chapters" in the CBSE Class XII - All India Senior School Certificate Examination (AISSCE) held in May-June this year.

The students of Science, Commerce and Humanities have successfully cemented their school's position in the league of extraordinary educational institutions, with their commendable accomplishment.

Of all the 437 students who appeared for the above examination, 20.1 per cent of students secured overall A1 grade, which is

the top 1/8 of the total CBSE schools in India and abroad.

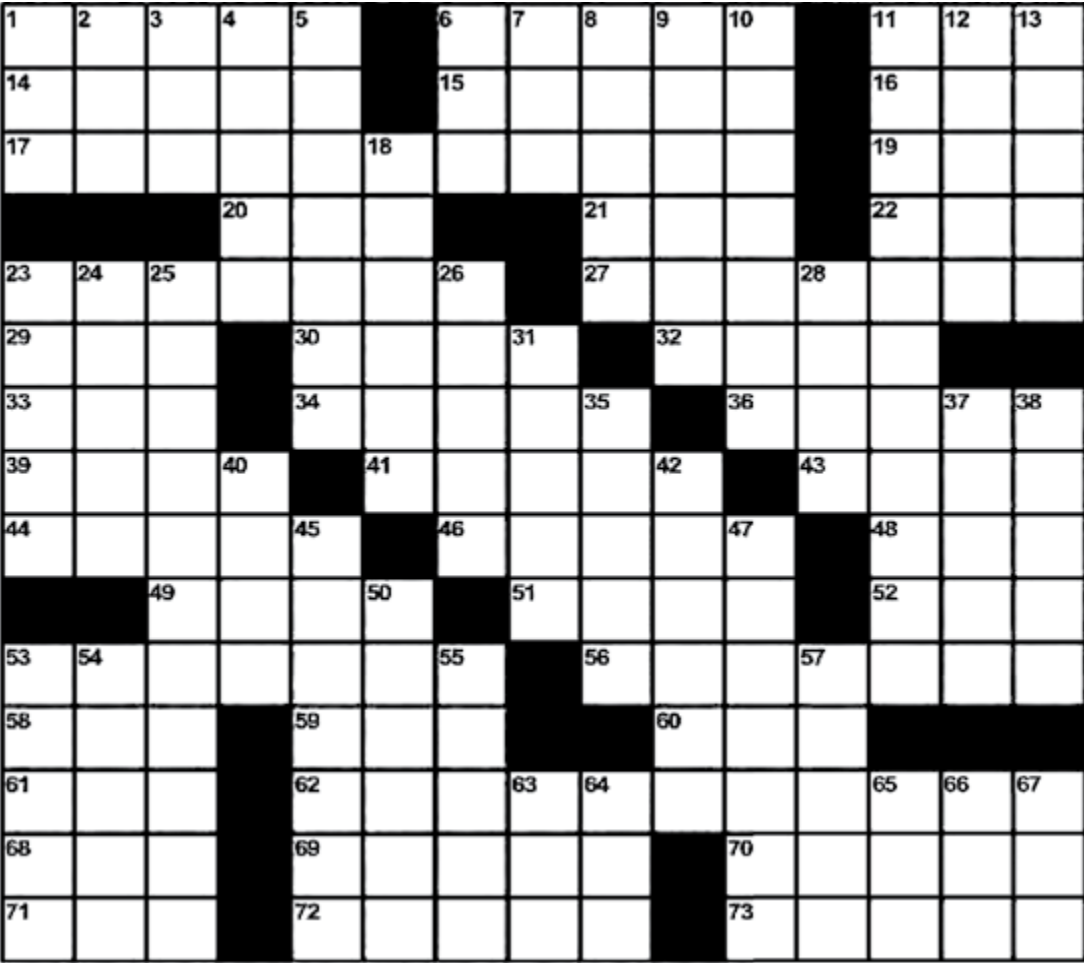
Stream toppers

In the Science stream, Tejasree Mohanakrishnan, scored 97.8% and secured the first position and topped the school result. Sumairaa Khan and Rimaz Alam Khan bagged the second position with 96.6%, and Anant Agrawal secured the third position with 96.2%.

In the Humanities, Charlotte Carvalho came first securing 97.4%, Aaron Arthur Menezes second (96.4%) and Aditi Shekar third with 95.2%.

In the Commerce stream, Svetlana Ruth D'souza stood first scoring 96.8%. Naisa Shetty B came second with 96.4% and Ithi Arunkumar third with 95.6%.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Some muffins
6) Curtain material
11) Like one hatter
14) Eastern Christian
15) Wizards play in one
16) Butler in "Auntie Mame"
17) It may be full of junk
19) _ Lanka
20) Absorbed, as the cost
21) Fish eggs
22) Preacher's subject
23) Casino affliction
27) Postman's burden
29) Commotion
30) Barely made (with "out")
32) Low, sideless cart
33) Banned insecticide, briefly
34) Serious or solemn
36) Suit to the circumstances
39) Suddenly inhale
41) Full, at last
43) Diving bird
44) World's fairs
46) Louis-Dreyfus' "Seinfeld" role

48) Bad temper
49) Ages on end
51) Tenant's payment
52) Baldfaced bit
53) No longer single
56) Most sinewy and thin
58) "I am the greatest" claimant
59) Not at hand
60) Bled
61) "Smoking or_?"
62) Likely to be first on a track
68) P.I.
69) "Get outta here!"
70) Calliope relative
71) Havana hanging
72) Made a slip
73) Moth-eaten

DOWN

1) Token transportation?
2) Geneticist's letters
3) Be ill
4) Kind of base or reserve
5) Rodin art
6) Oil can letters
7) Let it all out
8) Furnish guns again
9) An invasion or hostile attack

10) Fortified dessert wine
11) Fail to come close
12) Building courtyards
13) Cost of_ business
18) Small tropical lizards
23) Every cop is behind one
24) Spiral-homed ante-lope
25) Printer stat
26) Skewered steak
28) Youngsters
31) Block or dissuade
35) Extend, as a library loan
37) Sprites' kin
38) Sound from the bird-cage
40) Shoddy in quality
42) "Grudge Match" star
45) Cold sufferer's sound
47) Airborne machine-gunner
50) Pre-painting application
53) Skate's kin
54) Succulents that soothe
55) Gloomy, to a poet
57) Prefix with red or structure

63) Nervous time, maybe
64) Danson of TV
65) Type of meal?

66) Baseball's "The Little Giant," Mel
67) Play (with)

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You might not have psychic abilities per se, but today you could have such a strong sense of your future that you experience a level of confidence you haven't felt in quite a while. Your dreams have been giving you clues for some time, and even if you don't remember all your nighttime reveries, your subconscious has been busy putting the pieces together. Deep down you know how things are going to pan out, so trust your gut today. It knows what it's talking about!

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Intriguing travel opportunities, exciting social invitations, and new work challenges may all come your way today, but you can handle all of it without blinking an eye. You'll have all the energy you need to tackle as much as your ambition allows, so get ready. But what's really going to drive your day is the fact that you're gaining a growing understanding of your situation and the possibilities

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

If things are veering off track in an important relationship, today offers you a great opportunity to push them back in the direction you want to go. This could apply to a love interest, family bond, or business partnership. Things are much more malleable than you think right now, and people are waiting for someone to take the lead. Things are like a quarter that's balanced on its side. One puff and you could blow things over your way.

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

You're entering a very contemplative time in your life, so be open to your moods and follow them. Any urge you have to turn your thoughts inward might distance you from your friends a little bit, but if you keep the lines of communication open, you can get the space you need without making anyone worry or feel shut out. Feel free to ignore the external world for a while, and focus your energy on getting centered in your own mind. Take all the time you need.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

All your friends could be running around visiting the latest hot spots, shopping for the latest fashion trends, and picking up on the latest celebrity gossip, but you have more substantial matters on your mind. Beg out of a frivolous discussion or outing and skip out on the action for a while. Being in the middle of everything isn't right for you now. Shallow ideas and shallow people hold no attraction. Seek substance and things that last today.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Your energy is higher than it has been in a long while, and today is a great day to make the most of it. It's time to roll up your sleeves and dive in to something new. Whether you choose something as challenging as household renovation or as sedentary as a new novel, you'll make a lot of progress today. Even if you don't get out of the preliminary planning stages, you'll still be well positioned for a successful outcome.

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

Someone who is usually strictly business suddenly shows you a softer, more personal side today. Your nonjudgmental attitude has encouraged this person to cut out the game playing and just keep it real. This is the turning point in your relationship and in your self-image. You will be building bridges today and creating new connections between surprising groups of people. These changes are vivid proof of your charm, popularity, and potential.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

This is a great day to sit back and admire your handiwork. You need to register your success in your own mind. What other people say is nice, but it isn't important ultimately. You've done very well recently, and although you have received a good amount of credit, you should take some time to give yourself a real reward. Go out and splurge on something for yourself like a trip to a spa, new gadget , or maybe spectacular dinner. Whatever you choose, make it memorable.

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

A voice from the past could interrupt an otherwise placid day. You might not be prepared for the conversation or email exchange, but it's time you both got some closure. Old issues aren't relevant to your life any more, so keep that in mind when you reply. Let go of emotions and thoughts that are no longer useful or healthy for you. If the other person can't do the same, that's not your problem. You must focus on moving on with your life.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

If you're looking for some good luck right now, you can simply create it. All you have to do is focus on beefing up your karmic bank account. Be big-hearted and generous to a fault. Take the high road at every opportunity. Display your immense maturity in the face of the ridiculous childishness that might creep into your afternoon. As long as you act with the comfort and convenience of other people in mind, you'll start to experience quite the charmed life.

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Your recent period of growth is slowing down. It's not that you have nothing new to learn, it's that you need some downtime to process the things you've learned so far. Put new ideas into practice and start working on the things you promised yourself you'd work on. This isn't the time to continue expanding or reaching toward the next goal. It's the time to stick with what's on your plate and finish it. Follow-through is the final lesson you really need to learn.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

This day is all about fitting in, not in a compromising way but in a celebratory way. What you add to a group dynamic is special and currently in high demand. You're like the last missing piece of a jigsaw puzzle. Get yourself out there and get involved as much as you can. You need to spread yourself around a bit more. That way you can make the connections you need to make in order to feel more a part of everyone's life.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. A cummerbund is worn on which part of the body?
- A. Hand
B. Head
C. Waist
D. Foot
02. Who is being spoken about with the Shakespearean line "Frailty, thy name is woman"?
- A. Juliet
B. Lady Macbeth
C. Hamlet's mother
D. Goneril
03. What numbers are on the two orange pool balls?
- A. 5 and 13
B. 3 and 11
C. 1 and 9
D. 6 and 14

Answers: 1.C 2.C 3.A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

M	E	M	Y
W	O	A	R
O	A	P	E
N	A	B	R

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

Hundreds protest against Tunisia draft constitution ahead of vote

Referendum will take place a year to the day after the President suspended parliament and sacked government

Tunis, Tunisia - Hundreds of people protested on Saturday in Tunis against a draft constitution put forward by President Kais Saied, demanding his resignation two days before Tunisia votes on the disputed charter.

The referendum will take place a year to the day after Saied sacked the government and suspended parliament in a decisive blow against the country's often chaotic young democracy.

"Get out!", the demonstrators yelled as they waved Tunisia's red-and-white flag at a gathering on Habib Bourguiba Avenue in the capital.

"The people want the fall of Kais Saied; the people want the fall of the constitution," chanted those who rallied in response to a call by the National Salvation Front (FSN) opposition alliance.

Among the demonstrators, who numbered fewer than 1,000, were elected officials of the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party, the political rivals of Saied. Tunisia is preparing to



Tunisian protesters raise placards during a demonstration along Habib Bourguiba avenue in the capital Tunis on Saturday, against their president and the upcoming July 25 constitutional referendum (AFP)

vote on Monday on a draft constitution that would enshrine the vast powers that Saied has exercised since he sacked the government and suspended parliament on July 25 last year.

His move was seen as a decisive blow against the crisis-ridden political system in Tunisia, and his rivals allege his constitution aims to restore an autocracy.

"A year has passed and Saied has failed to manage the country and present a clear vision," Imed Khemiri, spokesman for Ennahdha, told the crowd.

Ahmed Nejib Chebbi, a veteran opposition figure, also addressed the gathering that was closely monitored by police.

"Saied will get a good slap on Monday because the people will show him they're not inter-

ested," he said.

The new text aims to replace the mixed presidential-parliamentary system enshrined in a 2014 constitution, which saw Tunisia praised as the sole democracy to emerge from the 2011 Arab uprisings.

The leader of Saied's 'new republic' would have ultimate executive power and would appoint a government without

the need for a confidence vote in parliament. The president would also head the armed forces and appoint judges, who would be banned from striking.

Opponents have called for a boycott of Monday's referendum, but while observers have predicted most Tunisians will snub the poll, few doubt the charter will pass.

AFP



Members of the '444 Brigade' man positions in the area of an overnight gunbattle in Tripoli's suburb of Ain Zara, on Friday (AFP)

Libya militia clashes kill 16: Health ministry

Tripoli, Libya - At least 16 people were killed and 52 wounded in fighting between armed groups in Tripoli, the health ministry said on Saturday, following the latest politically driven violence to hit the Libyan capital.

The fighting began on Thursday night and extended into Friday afternoon. The toll revises up an earlier figure of 13, including three civilians, provided by the ambulance service.

The clashes were between two armed groups with major clout in the west of the war-torn country: the Al-Radaa force and the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade.

Several sources said one group's detention of a fighter belonging to the other had sparked the fighting, which extended to several districts of the capital.

On Friday, another group called the 444 Brigade intervened to mediate a truce, deploying its own forces in a buffer zone before they too came under heavy fire, an AFP photographer reported.

'All the wounded received medical care in hospitals' in Tripoli, the health ministry said in a statement.

It did not provide an update on how many civilians were among the dead.

Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah's government sus-

pended interior minister Khaled Mazen after the fighting, replacing him on an interim basis with Bader Eddine al-Toumi, the local government minister.

Mitiga, the capital's sole functioning airport, was closed for several hours on Friday before it reopened late in the day.

Libya has been gripped by insecurity since a NATO-backed uprising toppled and killed dictator Muammer Gaddafi in 2011, leaving a power vacuum armed groups have been wrangling for years to fill.

Tensions have been rising for months in Libya as two prime ministers vie for power, raising fears of renewed conflict two years after a landmark truce ended a ruinous attempt by eastern military chief Khalifa Haftar to seize Tripoli by force.

The dead were the first civilian casualties of fighting in Tripoli since the 2020 truce.

Both groups involved in this week's fighting are nominally loyal to Dbeibah's Government of National Unity, appointed last year as part of a United Nations-backed peace process.

Dbeibah has refused to cede power to Fathi Bashagha, named in February as prime minister by a parliament based in Libya's east after he made a pact with Haftar.

AFP

Tourist resort evacuated as Lesbos wildfire destroys homes

Athens, Greece - Tourists and local residents were evacuated on Saturday from a popular resort on the Greek island of Lesbos as a wildfire destroyed homes in the beachside village of Vatera.

Firefighters deployed seven planes and a helicopter to fight the surging blaze, with reinforcements expected to arrive from northern Greece.

The fire broke out at 10:00

local time (0700 GMT) on Saturday and is blazing on two fronts, heading towards the Vrisa village and another inside Vatera.

West Lesbos mayor Taxiarchis Verros ordered the evacuation of the busy beach resort as a precautionary measure, acting on the advice of the fire brigade, Athens News Agency reported.

He did not provide figures

on how many were evacuated but there were several buses and small boats to take people away.

At least two houses were ravaged by the fire, state TV ERT said.

On Saturday, firefighters were also battling for a third day a wildfire raging in the Dadia National Park, the country's largest Natura 2000 site known for its black vulture colony, in

the northeastern region of Evros.

The fire brigade said the thick smoke from the blaze prevented firefighting planes from operating.

A wildfire in mountains near Athens on Wednesday damaged homes and forced hundreds of people to evacuate after gale-force winds earlier this week.

The country's worst wildfire

disaster was in 2018 in the coastal suburb of Mati, claiming 102 lives, just a few kilometres from the area affected by Wednesday's blaze.

On Saturday, a memorial service was held at the seaside town to commemorate the victims. A heatwave and wildfires last year destroyed 103,000 hectares and claimed three lives in Greece.

AFP

Abe murder suspect to undergo mental examination: Reports

Tokyo, Japan - The man accused of assassinating Japan's former prime minister Shinzo Abe is set to undergo an examination of his mental condition around the time of the incident, local media reported on Saturday.

Abe was gunned down on the campaign trail on July 8 in the western city of Nara, two days before the country's upper house elections.

His accused killer Tetsuya Yamagami is in custody and reportedly targeted Abe because he believed the former leader was linked to the Unification Church.

On Friday, the Nara District Court approved a request by the local public prosecutors office for a psychiatric examination of 41-year-old Yamagami, the Asahi Shimbun and other local media reported, citing unnamed investigative sources. The examination is expected to wrap up in late November, the reports said.

Investigative questioning of the suspect will be halted during the mental examination.

Tetsuya Yamagami reportedly targeted Abe because he believed Japan's former PM was linked to the Unification Church

Prosecutors will determine whether Yamagami can bear criminal liability based on the examination before making a decision on whether to indict him, the reports said.

Abe was Japan's best-known politician, maintaining a prominent place in public life even after resigning in 2020 for health reasons. He was also a divisive figure who faced cronyism allegations and was criticised for his staunch nationalist views. Prosecution and court officials could not immediately be reached to confirm the local media reports.

AFP

Iraq mountain rest spot bears scars of shelling

Parakh, Iraq - Abandoned sandals and upturned chairs attest to the panic that gripped this peaceful rest spot in Iraq's Kurdish mountains when deadly shelling slammed into it this week.

Turkey denies that its forces were responsible for the artillery fire that killed nine people and wounded 23 on Wednesday.

But both the government in Baghdad and the Kurdish regional authorities, who organised a press tour of the lunch spot in the border village of Parakh, have said Turkish forces were to blame.

Civilians have been repeatedly caught up in the crossfire of Turkey's nearly four-decade-old war against the rebel Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has repeatedly extended across the border into northern Iraq.

It is easy to understand why this mountain village less than five kilometres from the Turkish border is so popular with holidaymakers and day-trippers from the scorching plains of Iraq. A mountain stream runs through the village watering a tree-lined valley that provides welcome shade from the heat.



Iraqi security forces stand guard outside a mountain tourist spot which was hit with artillery bombardment in the Zakho district village of Parakh in the north of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region on Friday (AFP)

Now the stream is filled with upturned tables and chairs from the riverside restaurants where the artillery bombardment sowed panic.

"We didn't know what to do,"

said shopkeeper Ali Osman. "Things were so bad that families were fleeing leaving their children behind."

Osman said that business had been good but he didn't

know how much longer it could last. "Arab tourists (from the plains of Iraq) come here a lot," said the 52-year-old, sporting traditional Kurdish dress.

"Daily we receive about 100

We didn't know what to do. Things were so bad that families were fleeing leaving their children behind. The business had been good, but I do not know how much longer it could last. Arab tourists come here a lot

ALI OSMAN

coachloads of day trippers and then there are those who come with their own vehicles.

"In our village there are around 35 houses. I don't think we can live here any longer. We are going to have to leave the village."

A public outcry over Wednesday's deadly bombardment sparked anti-Turkish demonstrations in cities across central and southern Iraq.

AFP

Russian missiles hit Ukraine's Odessa port

Kyiv described the attack as a ‘spit in the face’ of a deal signed a day earlier to resume grain exports

Kyiv, Ukraine - Russian missiles struck Ukraine's key Black Sea port of Odessa on Saturday, officials said, in an attack Kyiv described as a 'spit in the face' of a deal signed by the warring neighbours a day earlier to resume grain exports blocked by the conflict.

Two cruise missiles hit terminal infrastructure, regional authorities said on social media, casting a shadow over the landmark agreement hammered out over months of negotiations aimed at relieving a global food crisis caused by stalled deliveries that sent wheat prices tumbling.

"The Russian missile (strike) is (Russian President) Vladimir Putin's spit in the face of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Turkish President Recep (Tayyip) Erdogan, who made enormous efforts to reach an agreement," said foreign ministry spokesman Oleg Nikolenko.

The first major accord between the countries since the February invasion of Ukraine aims to ease the 'acute hunger' that the United Nations says faces an additional 47mn people because of the war.



Police experts inspect a crater caused by a shell explosion outside the National University of Urban Economy in Kharkiv on Saturday (AFP)

Nikolenko said Russia would bear 'full responsibility for deepening the global food crisis' if the agreement were jeopardised by the assault. "The enemy attacked the Odessa sea port with Kalibr cruise missiles. Two of the missiles were shot down by air defences. Two hit port infrastructure," Sergiy Bratchuk, a

representative of the Odessa region said in a statement on social media.

The hostility between Moscow and Kyiv had spilled over into Friday's signing ceremony in Istanbul - delayed briefly by disputes about the display of flags around the table and Ukraine's refusal to put its name

on the same document as the Russians.

20mn tonnes of wheat

Ukraine had entered the ceremony by bluntly warning that it would conduct 'an immediate military response' should Russia violate the agreement and attack

its ships or stage an incursion around its ports.

The two sides eventually inked separate but identical agreements in the presence of Guterres and Erdogan at Istanbul's lavish Dolmabahce Palace.

"Today, there is a beacon on the Black Sea - a beacon of hope, a beacon of possibility, a beacon

of relief," Guterres had said moments before the signing.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky later said the responsibility for enforcing the deal would fall to the UN, which along with Turkey is a co-guarantor of the agreement. The agreement includes points on running Ukrainian grain ships along safe corridors that avoid known mines in the Black Sea.

Huge quantities of wheat and other grain have been blocked in Ukrainian ports by Russian warships and landmines Kyiv has laid to avert a feared amphibious assault. Zelensky said that around 20mn tonnes of produce from last year's harvest and the current crop would be exported under the agreement, estimating the value of Ukraine's grain stocks at around \$10bn.

Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu told Kremlin state media he expected the deal to start working 'in the next few days' although diplomats expect grain to only start fully flowing by mid-August.

The United States, Britain and the European Union hailed the Istanbul agreement while urging

Moscow to abide by its rules.

Global alarm about grain has been accompanied by European fears that Russia is starting to use its stranglehold on energy exports as a geopolitical weapon in its standoff with the West.

The grain deal was signed one day after Russia's restart of the Nord Stream natural gas pipeline eased concerns in Europe of a permanent shut off after a 10-day maintenance suspension.

Analysts say the partial resumption of gas supplies was insufficient to ward off energy shortages in Europe this winter.

The ornate halls of Istanbul's Dolmabahce Palace felt far removed from east Ukraine's Donbas war zone on another day of relentless shelling across the front. Russia is trying to fight deeper into the war zone's Donetsk region after securing full control of neighbouring Lugansk.

Russian missile strikes on railway infrastructure and a military airfield in the central area of Kirovograd on Saturday killed at least three people and wounded nine, regional governor Andriy Raikovich said.

AFP

Ex-Trump aide Steve Bannon found guilty of contempt of Congress

Washington, US - A federal jury found Donald Trump's former aide Steve Bannon guilty of contempt of Congress on Friday for defying a subpoena to testify before lawmakers investigating the assault on the US Capitol.

Bannon, who led Trump's 2016 presidential election campaign, was among hundreds of people called by a House of Representatives committee to address the storming of Congress by Trump supporters on January 6, 2021.

The 68-year-old Republican strategist did not appear on the summons date or provide requested documents, and was indicted on two charges of contempt of Congress.

The 12-person jury deliberated for less than three hours before finding Bannon guilty of both misdemeanor charges.

Bannon, who served as Trump's strategy chief at the White House before being sacked in 2017, faces a minimum of 30 days in jail and a maximum sentence of a year for each count.

Sentencing was set for October 21.

"We may have lost the battle here today but we're not going to lose this war," Bannon said after the verdict. "I stand with Trump and the Constitution."

Later, in an interview with Fox News, the former investment banker said there would be 'a long appeals process' ahead.

"If I go to jail, so be it," Bannon said.

Bennie Thompson and Liz Cheney, the chair and vice chair of the House committee, welcomed the verdict, saying 'no one is above the law'.

"The conviction of Steve Bannon is a victory for the rule of law and an important affirmation of the Select Committee's work," they said in a statement.

"Just as there must be accountability for all those responsible for the events of January 6th, anyone who obstructs our investigation into these matters should face consequences."

Presenting the government's case, prosecutor Amanda Vaughn told the jury that Bannon had made a 'deliberate decision' not to obey the subpoena.



We may have lost the battle here today but we are not going to lose this war. I stand with Trump and the Constitution

STEVE BANNON

'Politically motivated'

Bannon's attorneys did not call any witnesses during the brief trial and he did not testify in his own defense.

Bannon's lawyer Evan Corcoran denied his client had ignored the subpoena, saying the date was 'the subject of ongoing discussions and negotiation' and 'flexible'.

The decision to hold Bannon in contempt was politically motivated, Corcoran said.

Vaughn said the House committee had cause to believe Bannon and other Trump advisors may have information on links between the White House and the Capitol rioters.

According to the committee, Bannon spoke to Trump the day before thousands of his supporters stormed Congress in an effort to block the certification of Democrat Joe Biden's election victory. They had been egged on by Trump in a fiery speech near the White House, during which he repeated his false claims of election fraud.

After refusing to testify for months, Bannon finally agreed to cooperate with the House investigation, a move prosecutors dismissed as a 'last-ditch attempt to avoid accountability'.

AFP

US releases \$270mn in military aid to Ukraine

Washington, US - The United States on Friday signed off on another US\$270mn in military aid to Ukraine including four new HIMARS precision rocket systems.

Russia has 'launched deadly strikes across the country, striking malls, apartment buildings, killing innocent Ukrainian civilians', White House spokesman John Kirby told reporters.

"In the face of these atrocities, the president has made clear that we're going to continue to support the government of Ukraine and its people for as long as it takes," he said.

The fresh aid will bring to 20 the number of M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) sent to Ukraine.

Kyiv has called the HIMARS, which can precisely strike targets



Coordinator for Strategic Communications at the National Security Council John Kirby (AFP)

within 80km, a game-changer in countering Russia.

The Pentagon, giving further details on the package, said Ukraine would receive up to 580 Phoenix Ghosts - small and highly portable drones that det-

onate on their targets.

The latest aid also includes 36,000 rounds of artillery ammunition and four Command Post Vehicles, armored posts that can function as operations centers on the battlefield.

Trump, Pence hold duelling rallies as rivalry intensifies

Washington, US - Donald Trump and his ex-wingman Mike Pence, who went from White House partners to bitter rivals, held duelling rallies on Friday in Arizona, where an upcoming Republican primary election offers an early test of their potential 2024 showdown.

The convergence of campaign events came a day after a congressional hearing on the US Capitol assault, in which a White House security official said members of Pence's Secret Service detail feared they would die as rioters stormed the building.

Trump, who like Pence is considering running for president in 2024, has savaged his former vice president for what he describes as a failure to block the certification of the 2020 election results and send the process back to the US states.

Such a plan had been cooked up by Trump aides who supported his discredited theory that the election was stolen, but Pence ultimately decided that the action would be illegal.

During the January 6, 2021 insurrection, Trump tweeted an attack on Pence, saying he 'didn't have the courage to do what should have been done to protect our Country'.



Donald Trump speaks at a 'Save America' rally in support of Arizona GOP candidates in Prescott Valley, Arizona on Friday (AFP)

Administration officials testified at Thursday's hearing that the social media post poured fuel on the fire and turned rioters against the vice president.

In extraordinary revelations at the hearing, a White House national security official who testified under anonymity said 'members of the VP detail at this time were starting to fear for their own lives'.

Trump's gathering on Friday in the central Arizona town of Prescott Valley was part of a series of 'Save America' rallies he has held to boost his favoured

candidates ahead of Republican primary elections.

Earlier in July, he held an event in Alaska to support Kelly Tshibaka, a challenger to the state's incumbent senator, Lisa Murkowski, who was one of the few Republicans to vote to impeach Trump after the January 6, 2021 insurrection.

Focus on immigration

In Arizona, a state he narrowly lost in 2020, Trump campaigned for Kari Lake, a far-right gubernatorial candidate who supports his

false claim that the election was stolen.

Lake, a former TV news host, took the stage in the crowded stadium first, declaring that in Arizona, 'we will no longer accept corruptness, and I know for a fact we will no longer accept rigged elections'.

The former president, leaving the crowd to wait more than two hours, began his speech by focusing on immigration - a major campaign topic in the state which shares a large border with Mexico. But it did not take long before he turned his attention to the 2020 election.

"The election was rigged and stolen and now our country is being systematically destroyed because of it!" he shouted, with the crowd roaring in response.

Pence made stops in Phoenix and southern Arizona for governor-hopeful Karrin Taylor Robson, a more traditional Republican than Lake who also has the backing of the state's term-limited governor.

With his rivalry with Trump intensifying, Pence has positioned himself as a principled, religious conservative. But he has declined to attack Trump directly.

AFP

however, has drawn a line at sending longer-range rockets, concerned that Ukraine would strike into Russian territory and draw the United States more directly into the war.

Biden 'does believe that while a key goal of the United States is to do the needful to support and defend Ukraine, another key goal is to ensure that we do not end up in a circumstance where we're heading down the road towards a third world war', his national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, said at the Aspen Security Forum. "But we have moved billions of dollars of equipment in what by any kind of reasonable historical analysis would say is lightning speed, and we will continue to do so," Sullivan said.

AFP

Iranian dissident summit in Albania postponed

Tirana, Albania - A global summit in Albania dedicated to advocating regime change in Iran has been postponed due to security threats, an exiled Iranian opposition group said on Friday.

The Free Iran World Summit was set to take place this weekend outside the Albanian capital Tirana, at the headquarters of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (MEK).

The event was called off 'upon recommendations by the Albanian government, for security reasons, and due to terrorist threats and conspiracies', the MEK said in a statement.

The Albanian authorities have not commented on the issue.

The US embassy in Tirana on Thursday evening tweeted about a 'potential threat' targeting the summit and warned its citizens in Albania to avoid the event and keep a low profile.

AFP

More than 20 people killed in flooding in southern Iran

Tehran, Iran - Flooding in southern Iran has killed at least 21 people and left others missing following heavy rainfall in the largely arid country, state media reported on Saturday.

“Twenty-one people were killed and two are still missing,” in the floods that affected several towns in and around Estahban county in the southern province of Fars, Hossein Darvishi, provincial head of the Red Crescent Society, was quoted as saying by state TV.

Videos posted on local media and social media showed cars caught in the rising waters of the Roodball river and carried away while parents tried to rescue their children from the vehicles.

The governor of Estahban, Yousef Kargar, said ‘around 5pm yesterday, heavy rains... in the central parts of Estahban County led to flooding’, according to state news agency IRNA.

Estahban is 174km east of the provincial capital Shiraz.

The tragedy happened on a summer weekend in Iran, when families tend to head to cooler areas such as riversides, lake-sides and valleys.

“A number of local people and sightseers (from other areas) who had gone to the riverside and were present in the river bed were caught in the flood due to the rise in the water level,” Kargar added.

Iran has endured repeated droughts over the past decade, but also regular floods, a phenomenon made worse when torrential rain falls on sun-baked



Rescue workers searching near a river bank after flooding in Estahban county in southern Iran on Saturday (AFP)

A number of local people and sightseers who had gone to the riverside and were present in the river bed were caught in the flood due to the rise in the water level

YOUSEF KARGAR

earth.

Photos released by Iran’s Red Crescent Society showed rescuers walking on cracked dry soil while others worked among reeds.

In 2019, heavy inundations in the country’s south left at least 76 people dead and caused damage estimated at more than

US\$2bn.

In January two people were initially reported killed in flash flooding in Fars when heavy rains hit the area, but the toll rose to at least eight there and elsewhere in Iran’s south.

Scientists say climate change amplifies extreme weather, including droughts as well as the

potential for the increased intensity of rain storms.

Drying up

Like other nearby countries, Iran has suffered chronic dry spells and heat waves for years, and these are expected to worsen.

In the last few months, demonstrations have occurred against the drying up of rivers, particularly in central and southwestern Iran.

Last November, tens of thousands of people gathered in the parched riverbed of the country’s Zayandeh Rood river, which runs through the central city of Isfahan, to complain about the

drought and blame officials for diverting water.

Security forces fired tear gas when the protest turned violent and said they arrested 67 people.

Last week, official media said Iranian police had arrested several suspects for disturbing security after they protested the drying up of a lake once regarded as the Middle East’s largest.

Lake Urmia, in the mountains of northwest Iran, began shrinking in 1995 due to a combination of prolonged drought, and the extraction of water for farming and dams, according to the UN Environment Programme.

AFP

Blame game as UK port tries to clear traffic logjam

London, UK - The English Channel port of Dover on Saturday battled to clear a chronic backlog of summer getaway delays, which Britain blamed on France but others said was caused by Brexit.

UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss risked a cross-Channel row by calling Friday’s lengthy tailbacks ‘entirely avoidable’ and urging Paris to act.

Port officials blamed ‘woefully inadequate’ understaffing of French border posts for ruining the start of the holidays for thousands of people.

Passengers go through both UK and French border checks at Dover before boarding ferries to northern France.

Port of Dover chief executive Doug Bannister said on Saturday was expected to be busier because of Friday’s logjam. “We processed about 8,500 cars going out (on Friday). Today we were predicted to be around 10,000,” he told BBC radio.

Cars and lorries queuing for the port snaked through Dover, stretching kilometres up the M20 motorway leading to the town.

At 7am (0600 GMT), P&O Ferries told travellers to allow at least three to four hours to reach the port and clear all security checks.

Many faced six-hour waits - or longer - on Friday.

“We believe there’s around 3,000 HGVs (heavy goods vehicles) held on the M20,”

said the leader of Kent county council, Roger Gough.

The situation had eased due to the arrival of more French border agency staff, he added, but said the situation overall remained ‘extremely serious’.

“The problem is that we have both very high volumes of passengers coming through and clearly a backlog in relation to HGVs,” he said.

Dover has previously been a bottleneck for delays since Britain left the European Union, its single market and customs area in January last year. The queues have been blamed on increased border checks and additional paperwork for freight traffic.

One French lawmaker, Pierre-Henri Dumont, said this weekend’s travel chaos would happen again, calling it ‘an aftermath of Brexit’.

“We have to run more checks than before,” Dumont, whose constituency includes the French Channel port of Calais, told BBC television.

Bannister agreed there were ‘increased transaction times’ post-Brexit but said capacity had been increased and the port was confident of handling demand at peak periods.

French authorities blamed an ‘unforeseen technical incident’ in the Channel Tunnel for delaying the arrival of its border staff on Friday morning. But operator Eurotunnel rejected the explanation.

AFP

Three killed in clash over DR Congo gold mine

Bunia, DR Congo - Three people died as rival militias clashed for a second day on Saturday for control of a gold mine in DR Congo’s troubled northeastern province of Ituri, the groups said.

Scores of armed groups roam Ituri and neighbouring North Kivu, many a legacy of two regional wars a quarter of a century ago. Ituri and North Kivu have under an army-led ‘state of siege’ since May 2021 in a bid to clamp down on the militias.

Fighting began on Friday around the Tulabo mine in Irumu territory between the Patriotic Resistance Force of Ituri (FRPI) and the Patriotic and Integrationist Force of the Congo (FPIC), residents said.

“FRPI militiamen built a camp to exploit the Tulabo gold mine.

It’s a provocation. During the fighting to drive them out, two were killed and one died on our side”, said Kabulano Nyamabo, an FPIC spokesman.

An FRPI spokesman confirmed the two deaths.

“Some of our elements can end up exploiting gold illegally. But the FPIC attacked us for no reason,” the militia’s spokesman Munu Munobi told AFP.

The army claimed to have restored order.

“The regiment commander and his men arrived on the ground and the army imposed order. We are already putting in place a mechanism to control the natural resources’ in this area, said Lieutenant Jules Ngongo, a spokesman for the army in Ituri.

AFP

Macron embarks on first Africa trip of new term

Paris, France - President Emmanuel Macron on Monday begins a three-nation tour of western African states in the first trip to Africa of his new term as he seeks to reboot France’s post-colonial relationship with the continent.

Macron will begin his July 25-28 tour, also the first venture outside Europe of his new mandate, with a visit to Cameroon, before moving on to Benin and then finishing the trip in Guinea-Bissau. Top of the agenda in the talks will be food supply issues, with African nations fearing shortages especially of grain due to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

But security will also loom large as France prepares to complete its pullout from Mali this year, with all countries in the region seeking to head off fears of



France’s President Emmanuel Macron gestures prior a meeting with Egypt’s President at the Elysee Palace in Paris on Friday (AFP)

Islamist insurgencies.

The trip to three countries which rarely feature on the itinerary of global leaders comes with Macron, who won a new term in April, pledging to keep up his bid for a new relationship between France and Africa.

France has also followed with concern the emergence of other powers seeking a foothold in an area Paris still considers parts of its sphere of influence, notably Turkey under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan but also increasingly China and Russia.

‘Political priority’

The tour ‘will show the commitment of the president in the process of renewing the relationship with the African continent’, said a French presidential official, who asked not to be named.

It will signal that the African continent is a ‘political priority’ of his presidency.

In Cameroon, which has been riven by ethnic violence and an insurgency by anglophone separatists, Macron will meet President Paul Biya, 89, who has ruled the country for almost 40 years and is the longest-serving non-royal leader in the world.

Biya has run the country with an iron fist, refusing demands for federalism and cracking down on the rebellion by separatists.

Macron will move on Wednesday to Benin, a neigh-

bour of Africa’s most populous nation Nigeria. The north of the country has faced more deadly attacks, with the militant threat now spreading from the Sahel to Gulf of Guinea nations.

He is likely to be lauded for championing the return in November of 26 historic treasures which were stolen in 1892 by French colonial forces from Abomey, capital of the former Dahomey kingdom located in the south of modern-day Benin.

Benin was long praised for its thriving multi-party democracy. But critics say its democracy has steadily eroded under President Patrice Talon over the last half decade. Opposition leader Reckya Madougou was sentenced in 2021 to 20 years in prison on terrorism charges.

AFP

Neglected forests at the mercy of wildfires in Spain, Portugal

Madrid, Spain - With climate change making devastating wildfires more likely, experts warn Spain and Portugal need to better manage their forests to stop vast swathes of land from being torched every year.

Close to 200,000 hectares of forest in Spain have been lost to fire so far this year, more than in any other nation in Europe, according to the European Union’s satellite monitoring service EFFIS.

Portugal has lost just over 48,000 hectares to flames, the third highest amount in Europe that is only surpassed by Romania. The spread of wildfires depends on the weather, the type of vegetation and the topography of the land, said Monica Parrilla, a forest campaign manager with Greenpeace Spain.

“Right now we have the ideal

context for very intense fires,” she added in a reference to the scorching temperatures, strong winds and drought conditions Spain and Portugal have faced.

And the only factor which humans have some control over is the vegetation, Parrilla added.

“When it is dry, it feeds the fire. We need to focus on this flammable vegetation,” she said.

Parrilla called for brush to be cleared in woodlands either manually or through controlled burns, and for more firebreaks - a barrier of open land intended to check a wildfire.

Fire resistant trees

To be more ‘fire resistant’ forests also need to be made up of a greater variety of trees, she said.

Most forest area in Spain and Portugal is made up of monocultures of eucalyptus and pine



This file photo shows private firefighters from Afocelca, clearing bushes close to an eucalyptus forest, during a drill at Constancia in Abrantes, central Portugal on August 30, 2019 (AFP)

trees, which are favoured by the paper industry but are highly flammable. Around 36 per cent of both Portugal and Spain’s land mass is covered by forest, ac-

cording to World Bank data.

And about one-quarter of Portugal’s forests are eucalyptus, a fast-growing tree native to Australia. Fully 83 per cent of the

land ravaged by flames in Portugal between 2011 and 2020 consisted of pine and eucalyptus trees, according to figures from the Institute for Nature and For-

est Conservation.

Ecologists in Portugal are calling for the planting of more indigenous tree species that better resist fire such as chestnut, cork and oak trees.

Financial incentives should be given to small producers ‘so they can wait several years for these more resistant trees to become profitable’, said Marta Leandro, vice president of Quercus, Portugal’s biggest environmental group. This would prevent them from ‘systematically turning to eucalyptus’, she added.

Rural exodus

Dwindling rural populations are also contributing to the neglect of forests, increasing the fire risk.

Many fields are abandoned and undergrowth left wild because the landowners are too old. There are also fewer farm

animals such as goats which help clear the land of scrub.

The biggest wildfires in Spain have been in the most sparsely-populated regions like Extremadura in the west and the northwestern region of Castille and Leon.

Spain’s Ecological Transition Minister Teresa Ribera on Thursday stressed the importance of rural residents, saying they are ‘the real guardians of the land who are on the front line in the prevention of fires all year round’.

Similar views have been expressed by politicians in neighbouring Portugal, where forest fires in 2017 killed over 100 people. Portuguese Interior Minister Jose Luis Carneiro said on Tuesday that the ‘enhancement of rural development’ was key to ‘fighting fires’.

AFP

Sri Lanka troops demolish main protest camp

Troops and police Special Task Force commandos wielding batons and armed with automatic assault rifles charged on people

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lankan security forces demolished the main anti-government protest camp in the capital on Friday, evicting activists in a pre-dawn assault that raised international concern for dissent under the crisis-wracked country's new pro-Western president.

Troops and police Special Task Force commandos wielding batons and armed with automatic assault rifles charged on people blockading the sea-front Presidential Secretariat in Colombo.

Hundreds of soldiers removed demonstrators' barricades and tents outside the colonial-era building, while the last remaining protesters on the premises - some were still on the steps - were baton charged away.



A demonstrator interacts with police special task force personnel standing guard while blocking a road as demonstrators take part in a protest march against Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe in Colombo on Friday (AFP)

The operation came hours before new president Ranil Wickremesinghe appointed an old friend as prime minister and the ousted head of state's personal lawyer as foreign minister.

Wickremesinghe was elected by legislators on Wednesday to replace Gotabaya Rajapaksa,

who fled to Singapore and resigned after demonstrators chased him from his palace.

The remaining protesters - far fewer than the thousands who overran several government buildings earlier this month - have been demanding Wickremesinghe also quit.

They accuse him of protecting the Rajapaksa clan who have dominated politics for much of the last two decades.

'Listen to us'

By sunrise, police commandos and soldiers barricaded the complex and the main roads leading

to the area were cordoned off.

Hundreds of activists demonstrated at a nearby designated protest site against the military action, demanding the new president resign and dissolve parliament to allow fresh elections.

"Don't attack peaceful protesters, instead listen to us," said

student Dimmithu, 26.

The activists insisted they would continue their struggle.

"The peoples' wish is system change, and parliament should be dissolved. It has no public mandate," said Basantha Samarasinghe, 45, a businessman and trade union leader.

Police said in a statement that security forces acted to clear protesters who were 'illegally occupying' the presidential compound, with nine people arrested, two of whom were injured.

Wickremesinghe later met with several Colombo-based diplomats and US ambassador Julie Chung tweeted that she expressed 'my grave concern over the unnecessary & deeply troubling escalation of violence against protesters overnight'.

"This is not the time to crack down on citizens," she added.

The European Union said freedom of expression was essential for Sri Lanka to transition from its chaos.

"Hard to see how restricting it severely can help in finding solutions to the current political and economic crises," the EU delegation in Colombo said.

Human Rights Watch said more than 50 people were injured in the crackdown and called on authorities to release the detained and prosecute those responsible for the violence.

"This action sends a dangerous message to the Sri Lankan people that the new government intends to act through brute force rather than the rule of law," the New York-based rights group said in a statement.

Political rival

A foreign exchange crisis triggered by the coronavirus pandemic was exacerbated by mismanagement, critics say, with Sri Lankans left to suffer lengthy power blackouts and record-high inflation. The country's 22mn people have also endured months of food, fuel and medicine shortages.

On Friday, Wickremesinghe swore in his political rival Dinesh Gunawardena as the country's new prime minister.

The two men have been schoolmates and friends since the age of three but lead political parties that are ideologically opposed.

Wickremesinghe is a free-market champion and a pro-West politician while Gunawardena is a staunch Sinhala nationalist who wants greater state control over the economy.

"We have differences, but we have enough friendship to unite to deal with the main problem of the country, that is the economy," Gunawardena told reporters.

AFP



Iraqi FM Fuad Hussein (AFP)

Preparing to host Iran, Saudi FMs meet: Iraq

Baghdad, Iraq - Iraq said on Saturday it was preparing to host a 'public' meeting of the foreign ministers of Iran and Saudi Arabia as the two rivals seek to mend ties.

Since April last year, Iraq has hosted five rounds of talks between Sunni Muslim Saudi Arabia and Shiite-majority Iran, which support opposing sides in various conflicts around the region.

Those encounters were held privately and at a low level, involving security and intelligence officials.

But on Saturday, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein said his Iranian and Saudi counterparts would be meeting in Iraq at an undisclosed date.

"I contacted the foreign minister of Iran about this," Hussein said in an interview with Kurdish television channel Rudaw.

"We are preparing the meeting, trying to find the best time to invite the foreign ministers of Iran and Saudi Arabia," he said.

"It will be a public meeting, (unlike) previous encounters which were secret and were held between intelligence and security officials," Hussein added.

His comments came days after Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian told Iranian state television that his country and Saudi Arabia are ready to move reconciliation talks to a higher level.

AFP

Suicide raid by militants at key garrison town in Mali thwarted

Bamako, Mali - Mali said it had repelled a suicide raid on Friday by Al-Qaeda-linked militants at a town on the fringes of the capital that houses a base used by the ruling military.

One of Africa's most troubled states, Mali is struggling with insurgents and political turbulence, experiencing two coups within the last two years.

'Suicide' attackers aboard two explosive-laden vehicles attacked an army depot at the garrison town of Kati, 15km from Bamako, the army said in a statement. The Malian armed forces 'have... contained a desperate attempt by terrorists from the Katiba Macina', it said, referring to an affiliate of the Al-Qaeda militant group.

One soldier was killed and six other people including a civilian were wounded, while seven attackers were 'neutralised' and eight were detained, it said.

The attack, launched at around 0500 GMT, was mounted against 'an installation of the army department for equipment, hydrocarbons and transport', it added.

Residents said they heard gunfire and explosions at dawn. "We were woken up at five o'clock by



A crowd gathers around a man (not seen) suspected of taking part in thwarted 'terrorist' attack after being beaten by a crowd, in front of the military base in Kati, Mali, on Friday (AFP)

firing, by explosions, we don't know what's going on," said one resident. Another source said: "Our base is being attacked."

Several hours later, an AFP correspondent heard detonations as special forces personnel were deployed in the area and helicopters flew over the base.

By midday, the helicopters had landed, and normal life had resumed in the town.

The US embassy in Mali condemned the attacks 'in the strongest terms', while African Union chief Moussa Faki Mahamat said he was encouraging all efforts to restore security.

The depot lies outside a base that is a major hub for the ruling military, which has been behind a string of coups since Mali gained independence from France in 1960.

The camp is reputedly the residence of strongman Colonel Assimi Goita, who is Mali's transitional president, and Defence Minister Colonel Sadio Camara. The base was the springboard for mounting a putsch led by Goita in August 2020, and afterwards was used to detain the ousted elected president, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita.

AFP

WHO triggers highest alert on monkeypox

Geneva, Switzerland - The World Health Organization on Saturday declared the monkeypox outbreak, which has affected nearly 16,000 people in 72 countries, to be a global health emergency - the highest alarm it can sound.

"I have decided that the global #monkeypox outbreak represents a public health emergency of international concern," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at a press conference.

The WHO chief said a committee of experts who met on Thursday was unable to reach a consensus, so it fell on him to decide whether to trigger the highest alert possible.

"WHO's assessment is that the risk of monkeypox is moderate globally and in all regions, except in the European region where we assess the risk as high," he added.

Monkeypox has affected over 15,800 people in 72 countries, according to a tally by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published on July 20.

A surge in monkeypox infections has been reported since early May this year outside the West and Central African countries where the disease has long



WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus (AFP)

been endemic.

On June 23, the WHO convened an emergency committee (EC) of experts to decide if monkeypox constitutes a so-called Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) - the UN health agency's highest alert level.

But a majority advised Tedros that the situation, at that point, had not met the threshold.

The second meeting was called on Thursday with case numbers rising further, where Tedros said he was worried.

"I need your advice in assessing the immediate and mid-term public health implications," Tedros told the meeting, which lasted more than six hours.

AFP

Battered by climate change, Latin America must brace for worse

Montevideo, Uruguay - Floods, heat waves and the longest drought in 1,000 years: Latin America is grappling with devastating climate change impacts that will only get worse, a World Meteorological Organization report warned on Friday.

In its State of the Climate report for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) for 2021, the WMO said ecosystems, food and water, human health and welfare were all taking a battering. Glaciers in the tropical Andes have lost more than 30 per cent of their area in less than 50 years, increasing the risk of water scarcity in many regions, it said.

Sea levels continued to rise at a faster rate than globally, and

the so-called Central Chile Mega Drought - 13 years and running - is the longest in at least 1,000 years. Meanwhile, deforestation rates 'were the highest since 2009, a blow for both the environment and climate change mitigation', said the report.

Brazilian Amazon deforestation doubled from the 2009-2018 average, with 22 per cent more forest area lost in 2021 than the previous year. The Amazon provides oxygen-producing and carbon-trapping functions that are crucial not only for the region but for the world.

'Decades of progress' stalled

The report also documented the



An aerial view of the drought in Peñuelas Lake, a reservoir in Chile's Valparaíso Region, on March 18, 2022 (AFP)

third-highest number - 21 - of named storms on record for the 2021 Atlantic hurricane season, and extreme rainfall that caused hundreds of fatalities and destroyed or damaged tens of

thousands of homes. "Increasing sea-level rise and ocean warming are expected to continue to affect coastal livelihoods, tourism, health, food, energy, and water security, particularly in

small islands and Central American countries," said WMO Secretary General Petteri Taalas.

"For many Andean cities, melting glaciers represent the loss of a significant source of freshwater... for domestic use, irrigation and hydroelectric power." Worsening climate change, compounded by the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, have 'stalled decades of progress against poverty, food insecurity and the reduction of inequality in the region', added Mario Cimoli of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

In Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua, 7.7mn people experienced high levels of food insecurity

in 2021.

The LAC region had registered an average rate of temperature increase of about 0.2 degrees Celsius per decade between 1991 and 2021, said the report - double the 1961-1990 rate.

"Unfortunately, greater impact is in store for the region as both the atmosphere and ocean continue to rapidly change," said a WMO press release.

"Food and water supplies will be disrupted. Towns and cities and the infrastructure required to sustain them will be increasingly at risk." The region was in urgent need of early warning systems to help it adapt to climate extremes, said the WMO.

AFP

{ INVASION THROUGH ART }

NO TO WAR

The paintings by Ukrainian children from across the country depict horrors from places like Mariupol - a city brutally besieged and bombed by Russian forces - and Bucha, one of the first towns where civilians were found killed en masse

A woman's portrait painted in blue and yellow - the colours of the Ukrainian flag - and streaked with blood-red paint is among 300 pictures by Ukrainian children displayed in a Kyiv bomb shelter.

"It's worth reminding adults - the whole world - that children see all this, experience it, feel it. And unlike us, they can't make decisions," said Olena Sotnyk, a Ukrainian politician and advisor to the prime minister, as well as one of the exhibition's organisers.

"They expect adults and the world to act to stop the war."

The exhibition, titled 'Children. War. Future' was held in a central Kyiv metro station that has been closed since the beginning of Russia's invasion on February 24.

The Maidan Independence stop has instead functioned as a bomb shelter beneath the site of massive pro-democracy protests in 2014 that toppled Ukraine's Kremlin-friendly leader.

The paintings by Ukrainian children from across the country depict horrors from places like Mariupol - a city brutally besieged and bombed by Russian forces - and Bucha, one of the first towns where civilians were found killed en masse.



It's worth reminding adults - the whole world - that children see all this, experience it, feel it. And unlike us, they can't make decisions

OLENA SOTNYK

Others are optimistic: A smiling soldier straps on a helmet, a woman wears a blue and yellow wreath of flowers with a dove surrounded by multicoloured flowers.

But the captions are unambiguous: 'No to war', 'I don't want to die'.

"What these children feel is the fear of war, anxiety. But on the other hand, there is faith, hope, support, understanding that there will be bright days in the future," said Danylo Tsvyok, who was also involved in staging the collection.

Sotnyk said there were plans in place to create a digital exhibition of several thousand images by children reflecting on the conflict.

The Ukrainian prosecutor general says that at least 347 children have been killed and another 646 wounded since the beginning of Russia's invasion.

AFP



A visitor takes photos of drawings by children during the opening of an exhibition called 'Children. War. Future' on the platform of Independence Square metro station in the Ukrainian capital Kyiv on July 8 (AFP)

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ART FROM THE HEART

Dr Benny Panakkal - Oman’s most popular interventional cardiologist at Badr Al Samaa Hospital – has pulled a rabbit out of his sleeve this time round. Having created a collection of meaningful paintings amid his busy schedule during the current pandemic, Dr Benny believes, the great masters of art always struck a special connection between art and human anatomy. “When I do a procedure I imagine it as an artistic work,” he says.

DIFFERENT Strokes



As I am home only on weekends, on Fridays, when I spend my time painting. Obviously it becomes very demanding. But somehow, I am able to balance everything

DR BENNY PANAKKAL



(Photos: Syed Fasiuddin)

Hubert Vaz

Guiding catheters through arteries, up groins and arms, to locate and clear cardiac blocks for over two decades, Dr Benny Panakkal, interventional cardiologist and medical director of Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals, is quite dexterous with every task on hand. But the silver lining of his profession doesn’t stem from the satisfaction derived from every successful procedure carried out by him, rather from the fact that he views every procedure as an artistic work and delivers it with utmost finesse.

“Actually, my artistic endeavours date back many years before I became a medical professional and cardiologist. In fact, my childhood dream was to become an artist. But fate and destiny decided otherwise. I was not inspired by other doctors but by many artists,” says Dr Benny, whose collection of paintings done during lockdown days are on display at City Seasons hotel at Al Khuwayr, in an exclusive interview to *Muscat Daily*.

“Those who inspired me varied between different time periods. For example, when in college, my paintings were more of abstract surrealist nature inspired by those like Salvador Dali. Then, there was a time when the old impressionist style inspired me. Even now, I like to paint natural scenes in this style. I had an opportunity to visit the mansion of Claud Monet - the great impressionist master at Giverny, in France. Then these days some how my paintings are more of a realistic style,” he explained.

Art and anatomy

Asked how his hobby had a bearing on his profession, Dr Benny said, “Being an interventional cardiologist gives plenty of opportunities to be creative and artistic. An occluded artery during an acute heart attack, which almost looked like a withered tree, after the procedure, suddenly comes back into full bloom and the individual comes back to life, after the uncertainty between life and death,” he said, adding that it gives the operator almost the same satisfaction like when he completes a painting.

He asserted, in the olden days, masters like Leonardo Da Vinci also had a great knowledge of human anatomy. They used to conduct dissection of dead bodies to understand human anatomy. In that way art always had a relationship with anatomy.

“In my practice as an interventional cardiologist, when I do a procedure I imagine it as an artistic work. Restoration of lost anatomy is the art here! The eye for details, the precision and hand skills are common factors for an artist and an interventional cardiologist,” Dr Benny said.

Forty inspirations

About the display of his work, he said it comprises different types of paintings. One section has watercolour paintings that are of two types - cityscapes around the world and natural scenes, including those from Oman.

Another set of paintings are oil on canvas. These include a few on still life, abstract paintings, and some paintings related particularly to COVID-19 and its uncertainties and hope amidst despair. There are some acrylic paintings, as well, which comprise natural scenes. Altogether, 40 paintings are on display till the end of the month.

About striking a balance between work and his hobby during the lockdowns in Muscat, Dr Benny said, “As a cardiologist, that too specialised on coronary intervention and acute cardiac care, during the initial period of lockdown I was available only on call. There were no regular outpatient clinics or scheduled procedures, only cardiac emergencies to attend. Basically, it was ‘work from home’ with visits to the hospital as and when required. This gave certain amount of free time as well as a sudden break from the routine and it needed a different channel to spend my energy. I took the creative route and resumed an old passion. Later, even after the resumption of normal work, on weekends I continued to paint.”

Family support

“My parents were a great support during my childhood. Now, my wife and children continue to support me and my hobby. As I am home only on weekends, on Fridays, when I spend my time painting. Obviously it becomes very demanding. But somehow, I am able to balance everything,” he said.

About his way with colours, Dr Benny said he had no particular obsession with any colour, neither any favourite shades, but he generally uses primary colours in his paintings. “The other shades are all mixed and made from these primary colours. So this gives more balance to the paintings,” he said.

INDIA SURVIVE SCARE

Stand-in captain Shikhar Dhawan scores 97 as India beat West Indies by 3 runs in first ODI

Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago - India just managed to hold off the challenge of an inspired West Indies team with the under-strength visitors coming away with a three-run victory in the first One-Day International of a three-match series at Queen's Park Oval in Trinidad on Friday.

Stand-in captain Shikhar Dhawan's 97 was the foundation of his side's total of 308 for seven which appeared to be more than enough at the halfway stage given that the hosts were just coming off a 3-0 drubbing at the hands of Bangladesh in Guyana a week earlier.

However, opener Kyle Mayers set the tone for the Caribbean side's chase with a top-score of 75 and with the rest of the batting order making important contributions the West Indies reached the final over needing 15 runs for victory.

Romario Shepherd, playing only because former captain Jason Holder was ruled out with Covid 19 in the morning, and Akeal Hosein managed to scramble 11 against the bowling of seamer Mohammed Siraj as they finished agonisingly short at 305 for six.



Indian players celebrate their victory in the 1st ODI against the West Indies in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, on Friday (AFP)

Dhawan's innings off 99 balls with three sixes and ten fours earned him the "Man of the Match" award although the opener was not too pleased with his team's effort in the field.

"We had a few nerves obviously towards the end of the match and maybe we didn't stick to our plans as well as we should have because if we had done so, especially with a few runs given

Dhawan via an excellent diving catch by Shamarh Brooks at backward-point as India lost momentum when ominously poised at 213 for one in the 34th over.

Motie and fellow left-arm spinner Hosein were the most economical of the West Indies bowlers although pacer Alzarri Joseph bolstered the home side's rearguard in the field with two important wickets.

We competed well against one of the best teams in the world and we need to keep on improving against this type of opposition if we want to get our ODI cricket back on track

NICHOLAS POORAN

away on the leg-side, the game would have been over as a contest earlier," Dhawan said after the match.

Put in on a sweltering morning, he saw opening partner Shubman Gill (64) play most of the shots early on in a stand of 119 off 18 overs. Shreyas Iyer stroked his way to 54 before becoming the second wicket for Gudakesh Motie.

Motie had earlier dismissed

"It's a bittersweet feeling," was West Indies captain Nicholas Pooran's summary of the match. "We've been talking about batting 50 overs and we did it this time but came up short."

"Still, we really competed well against one of the best teams in the world and we need to keep on improving against this type of opposition if we want to get our ODI cricket back on track."

AFP

Topley strikes as England thrash South Africa in 2nd ODI



England's Reece Topley (3L) celebrates with Joe Root (AFP)

Manchester, United Kingdom - The returning Reece Topley sparked a dramatic collapse as England hammered South Africa by 118 runs in the second one-day international at Old Trafford on Friday to level the three-match series at 1-1.

South Africa, chasing 202 for victory in a match reduced by rain to 29 overs per side, were bowled out for just 83.

Topley, whose career has been stalled by several stress fractures, sparked a top-order slump to 27-5 during a spell of 2-

17 in four overs.

Spinners Adil Rashid and Moeen Ali shared five wickets between them as South Africa were dismissed with nearly nine overs remaining for their equal second-lowest completed ODI total, behind a 69 all out against Australia at Sydney in 1993 and level with an 83 against England at Nottingham in 2008.

"It feels great, it's great for us to get the win," said England captain Jos Buttler.

"The guys are bowling brilliantly. Topley coming back in

and getting early wickets, Dave (Willey) doing the same."

The in-form Topley, rested from England's 62-run defeat in the first ODI at Durham on Tuesday, removed Janneman Malan and Rassie van der Dussen for ducks just three days after they had scored a fifty and a hundred respectively.

Malan chipped to mid-on attempting to flick one off his pads and Van der Dussen feathered a thin edge through to wicket-keeper and England captain Jos Buttler.

Willey, like Topley a left-arm quick, had the dangerous Quinton de Kock chipping to cover. And South Africa were 6-4 when Aiden Markram was run out without facing a ball by Buttler.

Sam Curran, another left-arm seamer, then bowled David Miller for 12 to leave the Proteas 27-5 inside nine overs.

And there was no way back from there for the Proteas against 50-over world champions England, for all that Heinrich Klassen made 33 -- one of just three double-figure scores in the

innings -- against a disciplined England attack.

Earlier, Dwaine Pretorius marked his return to South Africa duty by taking four wickets as England were dismissed for 201.

Pretorius finished with career-best figures of 4-36, including removing star batsmen Joe Root and Jonny Bairstow in the space of three balls.

Left-arm wrist-spinner Tabraiz Shamsi (2-39) and fast bowler Anrich Nortje (2-53) took two wickets apiece.

AFP

Glamorgan's Northeast scores 410 as records tumble

London, United Kingdom - Glamorgan batter Sam Northeast reached 410 not out against Leicestershire in the English County Championship on Saturday - the ninth-highest first-class score of all time.

Northeast's marathon innings, in a mammoth team total of 795-5 declared, is just the 11th individual score of 400-plus in the history of first-class cricket and is the highest of the 21st century.

The 32-year-old went to his 400 with a six back over the bowler's head, following up with another six from the next delivery.

In total he faced 450 balls, hitting 45 fours and three sixes, with his team declaring at the lunch interval in Leicester.

Northeast now has the third-highest score in the history of the County Championship, which dates back to 1890.

Glamorgan led by 211 runs at lunch on the final day of the four-day match in division two of the County Championship, with the declaration depriving Northeast of the chance to chase down more records.

The total of 795-5 is the highest in the Welsh county's history, beating the previous record of 718-3 in 2000.

Northeast now has the highest individual score in the county's history, beating Steve James's 309 not out in the same



Sam Northeast hit 45 fours and three sixes in his unbeaten 410, which came off 450 balls

match 22 years ago.

Northeast's partnership of 461 runs for the sixth wicket with Chris Cooke, who was 191 not out when the declaration came, is the highest for any wicket in the county's history.

The all-time record for a first-class match is Brian Lara's 501 not out for Warwickshire against Durham in 1994.

Lara also scored 400 not out for West Indies against England 10 years later - the only other score of 400 in this century.

Aside from Lara's 501, the only other individual score higher than Northeast's in the County Championship is Archie MacLaren's 424 for Lancashire against Somerset in 1895.

AFP



Jonathan Trott

Trott named new coach of Afghanistan

Dubai, UAE - Former England middle-order batsman Jonathan Trott was on Friday named as the new coach of Afghanistan, replacing Graham Thorpe who had to withdraw from the position on health grounds.

Trott will take over for the tour of Ireland in August where the team will play five Twenty20 Internationals ahead of the World Cup in Australia later this year.

"I'm honoured and excited to have the opportunity to take one of international cricket's most exciting teams through what is a huge year for their development as a team," Trott said.

The 41-year-old Trott, who played over 200 international matches for England, worked as a batting coach for the England team on their tour of India in 2021.

AFP

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Neymar fights for the ball during PSG's match against Urawa Reds in Saitama on Saturday (AFP)

Neymar does not want to go anywhere

Saitama, Japan - Neymar said Saturday that he wants to stay with Paris Saint-Germain and does not "need to prove" himself to anyone after five years with the French club.

The 30-year-old Brazilian said no one from PSG had spoken to him regarding his future but he wants to continue playing in the French capital alongside Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe.

"I still want to stay here with the club," Neymar said after PSG's 3-0 win over J-League side Urawa Reds on the club's tour of Japan.

"So far the club hasn't said anything to me so I don't know what their plans are for me.

"I don't need to prove myself to anyone - I just need to play my football and I have to be happy playing football," he added.

Neymar said he was feeling "fit" after coming on as a substitute with Messi to play the last 30 minutes of Saturday's game.

He said it was "too early to speak about" his impression of new coach Christophe Galtier, who arrived at PSG from Nice.

Galtier said Neymar "has been working well" in pre-sea-

So far the club hasn't said anything to me so I don't know what their plans are for me

NEYMAR

son and "seems happy and very fit". "What will happen in the near future when the transfer window closes, I don't know," said Galtier.

"We announce he's leaving, we announce he's staying - I haven't spoken to Ney about this. But he doesn't seem to be bothered about what is said about him and his situation at the club."

Mbappe scored as PSG made it two wins out of two on their Japanese tour against Urawa in front of a crowd of 61,000 in Saitama.

Mbappe was the only PSG player retained in the starting line-up after Wednesday's 2-1 win over Kawasaki Frontale and he fired home a well-taken goal from a tight angle in the 35th minute.

AFP

NOWHERE TO GO?

Ronaldo in limbo as Europe's elite turn their backs on Man Utd star

London, United Kingdom - Cristiano Ronaldo faces an uncertain future after the Manchester United striker's attempt to force his way out of Old Trafford failed to spark the expected rush for his signature.

The Portugal superstar shocked United earlier this month with his bombshell exit request after the team's failure to qualify for the Champions League.

Ronaldo would have anticipated a host of top clubs jostling to sign him.

But for the first time in his glittering career he is no longer a must-have item for Europe's wealthy elite as Chelsea, Bayern Munich, Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain all appear to have turned their backs on the forward.

Concerns over Ronaldo's declining work-rate and his notoriously demanding personality have left the 37-year-old in limbo.

Chelsea co-owner Todd Boehly was reported to have spoken to Ronaldo's agent Jorge Mendes about a deal to mark the new era at Stamford Bridge.

But Blues boss Thomas Tuchel is believed to have concerns about trying to integrate Ronaldo into his plans for a fluid front three after signing Raheem Sterling from Manchester City.

"We focused on our top target Raheem Sterling who we signed and everything else stays behind closed doors," Tuchel said when asked about Ronaldo.

Selling Robert Lewandowski to Barcelona could have created



Cristiano Ronaldo

I love Cristiano Ronaldo and everyone knows how fantastic he is. But every club has a certain philosophy and I'm not sure if it would be the right thing for Bayern and the Bundesliga if we signed him now

OLIVER KAHN

space for Ronaldo at Bayern, but the German champions' CEO Oliver Kahn poured cold water on that idea.

"As highly as I rate Cristiano Ronaldo as one of the greatest, a transfer wouldn't be a fit with our philosophy," he said. "I love Cristiano Ronaldo and everyone knows how fantastic he is. But every club has a certain philosophy and I'm not sure if it would be the right thing for Bayern and the

Bundesliga if we signed him now."

United manager Erik ten Hag has repeatedly stated the club's public position that Ronaldo is "not for sale".

Yet, although Ronaldo finished as United's top scorer last season, there is a growing sense in Manchester that his departure could benefit Ten Hag's chances of building a side more suited to the style he created at Ajax.

United have flourished without Ronaldo on a pre-season tour of Asia and Australia, scoring 11 goals in victories over Liverpool, Melbourne Victory and Crystal Palace.

Dwindling options

A dynamic front three of Marcus Rashford, Anthony Martial and Jadon Sancho has shown what they are capable of.

All three of those players

struggled last season after Ronaldo's arrival changed the style of a United side that had finished second in the Premier League the season before.

Ronaldo's time at Juventus also coincided with a decline in European results for the Italian giants, despite his goalscoring record of 101 goals in 134 games.

After witnessing two European giants struggle to accommodate the ageing five-time Ballon d'Or winner, there are few takers for the veteran goalscorer.

Ronaldo's iconic status at United, established in his trophy-laden first spell with the club, has also lost some of its lustre.

AFP

Sweden strike late to enter Euro semis

Leigh, United Kingdom - Linda Sembrant's stoppage time winner broke Belgian hearts as Sweden won 1-0 in Leigh on Friday to set up a Euro 2022 semi-final with hosts England.

The Olympic silver medallists were strong favourites to progress against a Belgian side playing in their first ever knockout game at a major women's tournament.

However, the number two ranked side in the world were frustrated by Belgium goalkeeper Nicky Evrard, poor finishing and a controversial VAR review for 92 minutes until Sembrant made the breakthrough.

"I think it's a game where we were in control," said Sembrant.

"They made it really hard because they made it very tight in front of the goal, but in the end we got that goal that we needed."

Sweden's preparations had been hit by a trio of positive coronavirus cases for Jonna Andersson, Hanna Glas and Emma Kullberg. But they still dominated from start to finish with 34 attempts to Belgium's three.



Sweden's Linda Sembrant (3R) celebrates with team-mates after scoring against Belgium on Friday (AFP)

The Belgians had surpassed expectations just by making it through the group stages for the first time in only their second major tournament in the women's game.

"We were the underdogs from the beginning but we did really

well as a team," said the Red Flames' captain Tessa Wullaert. "That's what I want to remember from this tournament."

Filippa Angeldal forced Evrard into the first of a series of saves inside the first 10 minutes.

The Manchester City mid-

fielder, who scored twice in Sweden's 5-0 win over Portugal in their final group game, then fired over with a clearer opening from the edge of the box.

Sweden thought they had made the breakthrough on 26 minutes when Stina Blackstenius

coolly slotted past Evrard from Kosovare Asllani's through ball.

However, for the third time in the tournament, the Arsenal striker was denied by a VAR review for offside which harshly ruled the goal out.

The fluency of Sweden's attack disappeared after the break as they struggled to break through the mass ranks of Belgian defence. Set-pieces then became the biggest threat from Peter Gerhardsson's side.

Blackstenius should have scored when she headed too close to the excellent Evrard.

The Gent goalkeeper was even equal to Nathalie Bjorn's effort in the final minute of stoppage time, but the rebound fell kindly for Sembrant to smash the rebound home and spark wild scenes of celebration among the Swedish squad.

Sweden have not lost in open play since March 2020.

But they face a huge step up in quality against England in front of a 30,000 capacity crowd in Sheffield on Tuesday.

AFP

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'THE SKY'S THE LIMIT'

Sydney McLaughlin smashes world record to win 400m hurdles, becomes the first woman to finish under 51 seconds

Eugene, United States - Olympic champion Sydney McLaughlin wrote another astonishing chapter in her track and field career on Friday, obliterating her own world record as she powered to a jaw-dropping victory in the women's 400m hurdles at the World Championships in Oregon.

The 22-year-old American prodigy left rivals trailing in her wake at Hayward Field as she took gold in a stunning time of 50.68sec - the first time any woman has ducked under the 51-second barrier.

McLaughlin's incredible performance sliced more than half a second of her own world record of 51.41sec, set at the same venue during the US trials last month.

Femke Bol of the Netherlands took silver in 52.27sec while McLaughlin's team-mate and defending champion Dalilah Muhammad of the United States took bronze in 53.13sec.

"Honestly I just wanted to go for it," McLaughlin said afterwards.

"The last 100 really hurt, but I'm grateful to have this crowd...It all came together today and another medal for the Team USA.

"It was absolutely unreal to have my family in the stands. I have never had them together on one place. So this was for me so big," said McLaughlin, who warned "the sky is the limit", but also hinted that she could well switch disciplines.

McLaughlin said everything would come down to what plan her renowned coach Bobby



Sydney McLaughlin of the US wins gold in the women's 400m hurdles at the World Athletics Championships in Eugene, Oregon, on Friday (AFP)

Kersee might hatch.

"Bobby and I have talked about possibly looking at other events," McLaughlin admitted.

"But I don't know if that's going to happen. I think we're going to just figure it out at the end of the

season ... if we want to switch events or stay with the 400m hurdles."

Asked whether a switch might be to the 400m flat, McLaughlin said: "I think anything's possible... but I leave it in the hands of my

coach, Bobby.

"My coach thinks there's a lot more to be done," she said. "The sky's the limit for sure."

Bol and Muhammad would have had realistic hopes of challenging McLaughlin for gold before the race.

But McLaughlin was in a league of her own almost from the gun, surging clear of Muhammad with a blistering opening 200m and coming off the final bend several meters

clear of her rivals.

'It was crazy'

Any fears that McLaughlin had gone out too hard over the opening 300 was wiped out down the home stretch as she kicked for



Honestly I just wanted to go for it, The last 100 really hurt, but I'm grateful to have this crowd...

SYDNEY MCLAUGHLIN

home with a vengeance, powering through the line to complete one of the greatest performances in track and field history.

Her astonishing winning time was faster than the seventh and eighth placed times in the women's flat 400m final raced earlier Friday.

McLaughlin sat crouched on the track after her win, seemingly in disbelief at the scale of her own achievement.

"The time is absolutely amazing and the sport is getting faster and faster. Just figuring out what barriers can be broken. I only get faster from here," said McLaughlin.

AFP

Leclerc on pole for French Grand Prix

Le Castellet, France - Charles Leclerc scorched to a sizzling pole position with a commanding lap in Saturday's sun-baked qualifying session at the French Grand Prix, the Ferrari driver beating series leader and world champion Max Verstappen of Red Bull by 0.304 seconds.

The 24-year-old Monegasque driver clocked a best lap of one minute and 30.872 seconds to claim his seventh pole this year and the 16th of his career in front of a sell-out crowd at the Paul Ricard circuit.

Leclerc was assisted by Ferrari team-mate Carlos Sainz giving him a decisive slip-streaming 'tow' on the long back straight.

"Grande Carlos!" said Leclerc on his slowing down lap.

The Spaniard, very fast throughout practice, will start Sunday's race from the back of the grid after taking penalties for new engine components.

Verstappen was second behind Leclerc ahead of Red Bull team-mate Sergio Perez with



Charles Leclerc

seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton fourth for Mercedes ahead of Lando Norris of McLaren and George Russell in the second Mercedes.

"It was a great lap," said Leclerc, who is bidding to complete a hat-trick of Ferrari victories and reduce Verstappen's 38 points lead in the title race. "But I have to thank Carlos for his help - and I hope he can get forward and challenge in the race."

AFP

Miller-Uibo wins women's world 400m title

Eugene, United States - Two-time Olympic champion Shaunae Miller-Uibo of the Bahamas finally bagged world gold in the women's 400m in Eugene on Friday, signing off on the one-lap event to re-focus on her favoured 200m.

Miller-Uibo, who was deprived of gold in Doha in 2019 by Salwa Eid Nasr of Bahrain - since banned from the Tokyo Games and these championships after three missed doping tests - timed a world lead of 49.11 seconds at Hayward Field.

Marileidy Paulino of the Dominican Republic claimed silver in 49.60sec, with Sada Williams of Barbados taking bronze in a national record of 48.75.

"It has been a long time coming and the main thing for us this season was the world championships and a gold medal," said the Bahaiman, who ran to embrace her husband Maicel, the Estonian decathlete, after the race. "I'm just really happy. That's it for me running the 400 meters. The plans for me are the 200 which has always been my first



Shaunae Miller-Uibo of wins gold in the women's 400m at the World Athletics Championships (AFP)

love and get back into that."

The men's one-lap final was claimed by American Michael Norman, whose victory made up for a disappointing fifth-placed

finish at the Tokyo Olympics.

Norman, who failed to advance from semi-finals in the Doha worlds in 2019 with a thigh injury, clocked a winning time of

44.29sec.

Three-time Olympic medallist and 2011 world champion Kirani James of Grenada claimed silver with 44.68sec, while Briton

Matthew Hudson-Smith took bronze (44.66).

World record holder Wayde van Niekerk of South Africa, who set the record of 43.04sec when winning gold at the Rio Olympics, finished fifth in 44.97sec.

Australian Kelsey-Lee Barber retained her javelin title, the current Olympic bronze medallist throwing a best of 66.91 metres.

There was drama in the battle for silver and bronze, however, as American Kara Winger (64.05m) and Japan's Haruka Kitaguchi (63.27) snatched the respective medals with their sixth and final throws.

Sweden's Mondo Duplantis made first appearance at Hayward Field, easily qualifying for Sunday's pole vault final.

The US-born world record holder and Olympic champion, seeking to improve on his world silver from Doha, was faultless up to his 5.75m qualifying mark.

"I didn't want to take too many jumps," said Duplantis, who set a world outdoor record of 6.16m in Stockholm last month.

AFP

Berrettini crushes Thiem to meet top seed Ruud in Gstaad final

Gstaad, Switzerland - Matteo Berrettini put the brakes on Dominic Thiem's impressive return to the courts on Saturday crushing him 6-1, 6-4 to set up a clash with top seed Casper Ruud in the final of the Gstaad ATP tournament.

The Italian world number 15, playing his first event since having to withdraw from Wimbledon with Covid, made short work of the 2020 US Open champion, putting him away in just 77 minutes.

Defending champion Ruud also looked impressive as he swept past fourth-seeded

Spaniard Albert Ramos 6-2, 6-0 in just over an hour to set up a clash of the top two seeds on Sunday.

"I'm really happy with my performance," said Berrettini, the 2018 champion in Gstaad.

"I don't think I gave him the time to play his game and that was the key today."

It has still been a good week for the Austrian who has slipped to 274 in the ATP rankings after a year of setbacks, including a wrist injury, depression and Covid. This was his first semi-final in 14 months.

Berrettini goes forward to his

eleventh career final and is bidding for a third straight title after wins on grass at Queen's and in Stuttgart.

The four (semi-finalists) all won here, so we definitely like to play (in Gstaad). We like the altitude. I won 2018, Albert in 2019, and Casper in 2021, so I guess we like it here

MATTEO BERRETTINI

In a battle of the past two champions at the clay-court event in Switzerland, Ruud was dominant throughout as the

French Open finalist reached his fifth final of the year.

The Norwegian broke Ramos' serve five times and did not face

the Swiss mountains, with Berrettini winning of his debut in 2018 and Ruud lifting the trophy on his first appearance a year ago.

"It's going to be tough," said Berrettini. "The four (semi-finalists) all won here, so we definitely like to play (in Gstaad). We like the altitude. I won 2018, Albert in 2019, and Casper in 2021, so I guess we like it here."

Berrettini and Ruud are tied 2-2 in their head-to-head record, with the Italian winning their most recent clash in the Madrid semi-finals last year.

AFP

a single break point, as he also targets a second Gstaad title and third this year.

Both finalists are unbeaten in



Defending champion Casper Ruud gave Albert Ramos no chance