

State Council, shura debate draft laws

Muscat - The State Council and Majlis A'Shura on Tuesday discussed in detail draft versions of the Labour Law, the Social Protection Law and the biometric fingerprints bill. The two councils reached agreements on all debated items, barring a few articles in the biometrics bill draft.

The State Council and Majlis A'Shura held the first joint session of the fourth regular session of Oman Council's seventh term on Tuesday.

The meeting was chaired by H E Sheikh Abdulmalik Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of State Council. He informed that the session dealt with reports of joint committees, including reports on draft versions the two laws and the bill. This session follows the formation of joint committees by Oman Council to discuss the divergent views on the draft laws.

The meeting was attended by H E Khalid Hilal al Ma'awali, Chairman of Majlis A'Shura, and the two councils' members and secretary-generals.

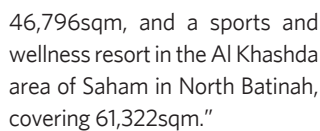
Our Correspondent

Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is paving the way for recreational, adventure and eco-tourism developments by offering a range of investment opportunities. As part of the efforts to this end, the ministry aims to establish seven tourist resorts and a visitor centre spread across the sultanate.

An official from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism informed that these eight investment opportunities are being presented to invigorate the tourism sector.

Providing project specifics, he stated, "The ministry invites investors to build an eco-resort in the Ghab Ali area of Khasab, Musandam, spanning an area of



The Iraqi region of Rustaq in South Batinah will see the development of a mountain resort spread over 43,744sqm.

Two of the seven resorts are planned in Dakhliyah, both in the wilayat of Al Hamra - a family recreational resort in Jabal Shams

spread over 21,647sqm, and an adventure centre and resort in Jabal a'Sharqi covering 82,888sqm.

Dakhliyah will also get a visitor centre in the Hail al Yemen area of Jabal Akhdar spread over an area of 10,000sqm.

A tourist resort in Bimmah Beach in Quriyat is proposed on a vast expanse of land measuring 538,835sqm.

In Dhofar, a 487,486sqm historical and cultural resort is planned in Salalah.

Interested parties can obtain the tender documents until June 1. As per the public tender notice, the last date for bid submission is June 29.

The ministry is also actively working on over 40 projects to develop the adventure tourism sector. An executive plan to stim-

ulate adventure tourism was launched in 2022 and will continue beyond 2025.

The ministry official highlighted ongoing projects, stating, "We are currently developing a cable car project in Oman Botanic Garden, constructing zip lines in various locations in Dhofar, including Wadi Darbat for the khareef season, and a suspension bridge in Wadi Shab in South Sharqiyah. A zip line in Musandam was opened recently."

Among the significant projects outlined in the National Tourism Strategy is the Oman Botanic Garden, set to open its first phase by the end of 2023. Spanning 430 hectares in Al Khoudh, it is described as one of the world's largest botanical gardens.

Our Correspondent

The Governorate of Dakhliyah has unveiled plans for projects valued at over RO21mn. Sheikh Hilal Said al Hajri, Governor of Dakhliyah, signed agreements totalling RO11mn on Tuesday, marking a crucial step towards the governorate's development.

Among the agreements, key projects include paving internal roads in the wilayats of Al Hamra, Bahla and Samail. Additionally, substantial improvements will be made to the entrance of Nizwa. In a bid to enhance community spaces, plans also involve establishing a feed

market in Adam and developing a park in Bidbid. The commercial areas in Bidbid, Bahla, Nizwa and Manah are set to undergo extensive development.

An official in the Dakhliyah Governor's Office emphasised the overarching goal of these projects, stating, "Our aim is to invigorate commercial and tourism activities while creating vibrant spaces for families across all the wilayats in the governorate."

Currently, the governorate is actively implementing 48 projects with a budget exceeding RO9.9mn as part of the Governorate's Development Programme.

Continued on Page 02

Muscat - National billiards player Mubarak al Wahaibi won a gold medal in a ten-ball billiards competition at the recently concluded Arab Federation Cup for Billiards and Snooker in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.



Mubarak al Wahaibi

cup and the prestigious gold medal with an impressive score of 9-5 against Lebanon's Mazen al Bariawi.

to the final by overpowering Saudi player Khaled al Otaibi.

In a highly anticipated showdown, Wahaibi emerged as the worthy champion, clinching the

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Our Correspondent

Muscat

According to MHUP data, the government allotted 12,273 res-



idential plots of land to citizens in 2022 till the month of August compared to 1,762 in the same

period in 2021, accounting for an increase of 597 per cent.

The National Centre for Sta-

tistics and Information's figures indicate that in the first eight months of 2022, 1,721 plots were allotted in South Batinah, followed by 1,692 in Dakhliyah, 1,680 in North Batinah, and 1,562 in Dhofar.

In North Sharqiyah, 1,392 residential plots were allotted, 1,228 in Muscat, 602 in Buraimi, 230 in Musandam and 36 in Al Wusta.

Our Correspondent

Muscat

More than 100 individuals, including mountaineers, travel agents, diplomats and representatives of Oman-based Nepali organisations, gathered at Nepal House in Muscat to commemorate International Everest Day on Monday.

The event was graced by Jamal al Moosawi, Secretary-General of The National Museum of Oman.

Coinciding with the country's Republic Day, the International Everest Day celebrations aimed to showcase the allure of Nepal and shed light on trade and investment opportunities in the country.

H E Dornath Aryal, Ambassador of Nepal to Oman, took the opportunity to focus on the country's tourism attractions and discuss the impact of climate change on its mountains.

"The majestic mountains face immense challenges due to rising temperatures and extreme weather conditions. These mountains not only possess breathtaking beauty and provide fresh water sources, but they also play a significant role in maintaining the ecological balance of the oceans," H E Aryal stated.

The occasion also served as a platform to honour several guests, including Nadira al-



Harthi, the first Omani woman to climb Mount Everest; Fatiyah al Zadjali, a traveller and social media influencer who has visited Nepal over ten times; Dr Chithra Narayan, former goodwill ambassador of Nepal and dedicated social worker; and Akshaj Udiwal, a student of Indian School Dhule who reached the base camp of Mount Everest at the age of six.

Reflecting on her experience, Nadira said, "Nepal instils a sense of fearlessness; everyone

is courageous. Scaling the highest mountain brings about a feeling of peace and courage. The mountains have taught us that as human beings, we share universal thoughts and needs."

She added, "I realised that the material things and superficial concerns we often fight for in our daily lives are ultimately meaningless."

She also saluted the brave sherpas who stood by her throughout her endeavour.

An additional attraction to the event was the popular Omani singer Haitham Mohammed Rafi who enthralled the audience with Nepali and Arabic melodies.

Dr Amer bin Saif al Hinai, Associate Professor in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering and Vice-Chancellor of SQU for Postgraduate Studies and Research, informed that the research team has also em-

barked on developing a simulation model for the smart grid. This forward-thinking project aims to identify any weaknesses within the system and devise appropriate solutions to address these effectively.

According to Hinai, Oman's connection with other GCC states through the Gulf Cooperation Council Interconnection Authority underscores the significance of the smart grid technology. By implementing this advanced technology, homes and establishments across Oman will have access to reliable and sustainable energy, meeting evolving needs in an efficient manner.

Continued from Page 01

These projects include 21 initiatives dedicated to development of commercial areas, and paving and maintenance of roads, totalling over R08mn. Additionally, five projects focus on establishing and maintaining markets, amounting to approximately R0500,000.

Three projects prioritise the enhancement of gardens, road landscaping and development of wilayat entrances, costing RO319,000. The remaining 19 projects are estimated to cost approximately RO700,000.

The wilayat of Bahla witnessed remarkable progress, including paving 31km of internal roads.

Our Correspondent

Muscat

With the blazing sun beating down on the city, animals find themselves in desperate need of shelter and sustenance. Empathetic and compassionate residents of Muscat are stepping forward to lend a hand to feathered friends, cats, dogs, and even plants.

With temperatures hovering over 40°C, it's not uncommon to come across lifeless birds in and around wadis, while cries of hungry puppies and kittens can be heard at night. Much needed help is provided by the kind-hearted in the form of water and relocating animals to cooler environments.

Sameera Masoud, an animal lover who works in the hospitality industry, is pained to see the challenges faced by birds, cats and dogs during the summer months. "My friends and I often venture into wadis after work, searching for distressed souls and offering them shelter and water for rejuvenation."

Dr Emily Shotter, a communications professional and an animal lover, said, "This weather may feel hot to us, but



to animals without food, water and shelter, it's incredibly tough."

She keeps bowls of food and

This weather may feel hot to us, but to animals without food, water and shelter, it's incredibly tough

DR EMILY SHOTTER

water in her car which she leaves for cats she encounters while driving. "I also leave dishes of water outside my house for

thirsty birds and animals. My carport serves as a shaded respite from the scorching sun for animals."

She urged the city's residents to consider the well-being of animals throughout the year, not just during extreme summers. Caring for stray animals is a year-round necessity, Emily emphasised.

"Perhaps this heat and this article will make people stop and think, and encourage some positive behaviour when it comes to caring for animals."

Plants suffer a similar fate in the summer heat, for which Muscat Municipality increases watering.

A Muscat Municipality worker, while watering the grass and hedge in Ruwi roundabout, said, "The intensity of heat has taken its toll on the plants exposed to the direct sun. I have witnessed plants withering away in a matter of days. To ensure their survival, our office has issued instructions to increase the frequency of watering the grass, plants and shrubs during the summer months."

Piya Pawani, a model and an animal lover, expressed her anguish of witnessing thirsty animals on the streets. Alongside like-minded friends, she tirelessly works to ensure the welfare of birds. "Summer poses critical challenges for avian species as they navigate migration, nesting and raising their young. Dogs and cats face dehydration, heatstroke and paw pad injuries."

In the evenings, Piya often rescue animals and provides them water. She appealed to all in the city to be kind and "if possible, adopt abandoned or stray animals".

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13,855 pilgrims complete all requirements for hajj: MERA

Our Correspondent
Muscat

All together 13,855 pilgrims have so far completed all travel requirements for hajj, according to the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MERA).

This figure accounts for 99 per cent of the total quota of 14,000 that Oman enjoys, while the rest are undergoing medical examinations.

Sultan bin Saeed al Hinai, Director-General of Administrative and Financial Affairs at the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs and the Head of the Omani Hajj Mission for 1444AH, shared key details regarding hajj during a press conference on Tuesday.

He also spoke about the implementation of an electronic management mechanism for hajj pilgrimage.

Additionally, the conference shed light on the comprehensive service package provided at the Mina and Arafat camps, as well as the meticulous selection process for delegation members from the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

Oman's quota for hajj has been set at 14,000 pilgrims, which include 13,500 Omanis, 250 Arab residents, and 250 non-Arab residents, Hinai informed.

Furthermore, it was revealed that the majority of the pilgrims fall under the category of obligatory hajj, accounting for 86.9% of the total.

Other categories include



Total value of contracts between pilgrims and hajj companies reached over RO24mn this year. The Omani Hajj Mission recorded a total of 2,657 cancellations, maximum coming from Dhofar governorate

those performing hajj on behalf of deceased individuals (1.8%), on behalf of incapable individuals

(1.8%), and voluntary pilgrims, including women relatives and companions (9.5%).

Among the pilgrims, women constitute 49.3%.

In the age category, individuals aged between 30 and 45 represent 43% of the total pilgrims this year, while those in 46-60 year category accounted for 35.1%, followed by individuals above 60 years at 16.6%.

Young pilgrims between 18 and 30 years represent 5.3% of the pilgrims, the head of the

Omani Hajj Mission informed.

Regarding the costs associated with the pilgrimage, the average price for air travel stands at RO2,054, reflecting a decrease of 7.5% compared to the previous year (1443 AH).

Similarly, the average cost for overland travel amounts to RO1,367, indicating a decrease of 7.1%.

Notably, the total value of

contracts between pilgrims and hajj companies reached over RO24mn (RO24,191,480).

The Omani Hajj Mission recorded a total of 2,657 cancellations, signalling the necessity to review and reconsider the application process for hajj.

Dhofar governorate had the highest 669 cancellations, followed closely by Muscat governorate with 573 cases.



MoCIIP calls on people to abide by online marketing rules

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has called on people to adhere to the regulations on marketing and promotion on websites and social media.

'The ministry has noted that some companies that have obtained a licence for marketing and promotional activities on websites and social media do not meet the conditions for automatic licence,' MoCIIP stated.

It stressed that marketing or promotion should not be exaggerated. 'The companies should also comply with Article No 9 of the regulations, including licence number.'

It warned that an administrative fine of RO1,000 will be imposed on violators.

The ministry began implementing the regulations on marketing and promotion on websites and social media on March 24. It stressed that the implementation of regulations aims 'to protect merchants and consumers, provide the necessary safeguards for e-commerce transactions and preserve the rights of dealers'.

Charity exhibition to support 400 children with disabilities

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Association for Children with Disabilities - a prominent organisation dedicated to the cause of children with different types of disabilities - is organising a charity event in Fraser Suites Muscat from June 1 to 3.

The ninth edition of the Unity Charity Exhibition, being held to support children with disabilities, will be inaugurated by H E Dr Mona al Jardani, Undersecretary of the Vocational Training at the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation.

Khadija bint Nasser al Saati, chairperson of the board of directors of the Association for Children with Disabilities, said, "The three-day exhibition, open daily from 10am to 10pm, aims to raise funds to support children with disabilities. A total of 200 entrepreneurs will participate in the exhibition."

The exhibition will feature multiple pavilions offering a diverse range of products, including perfumes, incense, men's and women's clothing, and accessories.

Proceeds from the exhibition, including space rental fees for SMEs and a RO1 entry fee for visitors, will be directed to the association.

The participating SMEs will, however, retain their sales earnings, Khadija informed.

The association currently serves around 400 children, aged five to 14, across nine centres located in the wilayats of



The three-day exhibition aims to raise funds to support children with disabilities. A total of 200 entrepreneurs will participate in the exhibition

KHADIJA AL SAATI

Seeb, Barka, Musannah, Azaiba, Quriyat, Jalan Bani Bu Hasan, Dhank, Yanqul, and Saham.

The association has been actively promoting - among various segments of society, private sector entities, and institutions - human values and a culture of 'donating and providing voluntary support to children'.

"We invite everyone to participate in the exhibition and support this cause," Khadija urged.

Oman participates in 13th Conference of Arab Education Ministers in Morocco

Rabat, Morocco - The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Education, is participating in the 13th Conference of the Arab Education Ministers, which began in Morocco's capital Rabat on Tuesday.

The two-day conference, themed 'Future of Education in Arab World in the Digital Transformation Era', is being organised by the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO).

The ministers on the first day discussed several issues including means of promoting education systems suitable for this digital era, formulating direction and vision for schools and help the existing manpower in the educational field hone their skills in the context of digital transformation, in addition to developing digital infrastructure and educational administration.

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Tender Number	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/23/028 2023/MM/QS-36	Design and Construction of Storm Water Drainage in Al Ansab	30	19/06/2023	09/07/2023	First
PRE/23/063 2022/MM/QS-37	Construction of Proposed Solution to Resolve Water Stagnation at Boshier (35)	25	19/06/2023	09/07/2023	First
PRE/23/100 2023/MM/HQ-21	Consultancy Services for Upgrading Al Amirat Street	125	19/06/2023	09/07/2023	First
PRE/23/109 2023/MM/HQ-22	Supply and Installation of Virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI)	25	19/06/2023	09/07/2023	Excellent & First
PRE/23/114 2023/MM/HQ-23	Consultancy Services for Upgrading Al Shabab, Al Mazun, and Al Khoudh streets	75	19/06/2023	09/07/2023	First
PRE/23/115 2023/MM/QS-38	Supply of Fertilizers to Al Mubailah Park	25	19/06/2023	09/07/2023	Specialist

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Philippines	146.26
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BRIEFS

US inflation guage accelerated in April

The US inflation measure most closely watched by the Federal Reserve accelerated in April, official figures showed, reversing a recent slowdown and raising the chance of another interest rate hike in June.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell has said the US central bank is taking a "data-dependent approach" to its next decision, where it will mull if another rate hike is needed to bring inflation back down to its long-term target of two percent.

The personal consumption expenditures (PCE) index rose 4.4 per cent year-on-year in April, up from 4.2 per cent a month earlier, the Commerce Department said in a statement.

It was the first rise in the annual figure since January, and came as a result of sharp annual increases in prices for services, food and goods.

Price rises also accelerated on a monthly basis, the Commerce Department said.

Inflation excluding volatile food and energy prices also accelerated last month to 4.7 per cent.

Sohar International, HSBC Oman boards approve merger



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sohar International Bank and HSBC Bank Oman on Tuesday announced that their respective boards of directors have approved the proposed merger between two banks.

Both banks' boards have called for extraordinary general meetings (EGMs) of their respective shareholders to consider the merger.

In November 2022, Sohar International and HSBC Oman entered into a binding merger agreement, under which the two banks agreed to take necessary steps to implement the merger by incorporation. The merger discussions between two banks initially started in June 2022.

As per the binding agreement, all the assets and liabilities of HSBC Oman will be transferred to Sohar International and HSBC Oman will be dissolved upon

completion of the merger.

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) approved the proposed merger between Sohar International Bank and HSBC Bank Oman in February this year.

'Both boards of directors (Sohar International and HSBC Oman) believe that the merger is in the best interests of their respective shareholders.

At the forthcoming EGMs, explanatory statements encompassing the terms of the merger will be presented, along with a recommendation that shareholders vote in favour of the merger and each of the EGM resolutions,' the two banks said in a press statement released on Tuesday.

While the merger is subject to the approval of the relevant regulatory bodies, the immediate impact on banks' customers will be unaffected by Tuesday's announcement, the statement said.

Both banks will continue to

operate independently, providing a business as usual service until the merger is completed.

Further details regarding the date, time, and agenda of the EGM will be announced separately in due course, in accordance with applicable regulation, the banks said.

Sohar International and HSBC Oman said they remain committed to transparency and will continue to update shareholders, customers, and stakeholders as the merger progresses.

In addition to the approval of the respective shareholders of HSBC Oman and Sohar International, the merger remains subject to the approval of relevant regulatory bodies.

Total assets of Sohar International stood at RO4.632bn as of March 31, 2023, while HSBC Oman's total assets were at RO2.435bn at the end of the first quarter, according to banks' financial reports.



Photo for illustrative purpose only

Oman to sign green hydrogen project deals on Thursday

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of Oman's efforts to be a worldwide hub for the production and export of green hydrogen, Hydrogen Oman (Hydrom) - a subsidiary of Energy Development Oman (EDO) - will sign the first green hydrogen project agreements in Oman on Thursday.

These agreements fall within the Phase A Round 1 auction process that was kicked off in November 2022, Hydrom said in a press statement.

Building upon the progress achieved since the announcement of the Oman Green Hydrogen Strategy in October, as well as the subsequent announcement of the first public auction bidding process, the issuance of Royal Decree 10/2023, and the

signing of Commercial Terms with six Legacy Initiatives earlier this year, Hydrom will now proceed to sign its first project-related agreements, marking the commencement of the development stage for these projects.

H E Eng Salim bin Nasser al-Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals and chairman of Hydrom, will sign these agreements with the developers in a special event at Grand Millennium Muscat. The occasion will also witness the signing of a head usufruct agreement between the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, and Hydrom, as well as other memorandums of understanding (MoUs) between various prominent entities related to the green economy.

The signing of these agreements is in line with Oman's con-

stant efforts to stimulate the growth of its hydrogen sector by strategically creating attractive investment opportunities in this promising sector. These efforts are also aligned with Oman Vision 2040, which aims to create a bright future for renewable and sustainable energy to achieve Net-Zero emissions by 2050.

Regulated by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Hydrom is the orchestrator and overall master planner of Oman's green hydrogen sector. Its mandate includes the delineation of government-owned land areas, the structuring of associated large-scale green hydrogen projects, managing the process for their allocation to developers, as well as facilitating the development of common infrastructure and connected ecosystem industries and hubs.



MEM signs three mining concession agreements

Muscat - The Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MEM) on Tuesday signed three agreements in the mining sector for exploring potash and lithium ore in Dhahira and Al Wusta governorates.

These agreements are in pursuit of a new methodology for the development of the mining sector, notably through the preparation of a concession agreement that covers legal,

technical and financial instruments to be agreed by the Ministry and investors.

The pacts will spearhead the management of mineral ores' extraction from the specific concession areas.

The agreements were signed by H E Eng Salim bin Nasser al-Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and the representatives of the companies con-

cerned, as follows: Mohammed Ali al Barwani, chairman of Mawarid Potash Mining Company (for concession area No 53-B); Mohit Khimji's, CEO of Tasnim Projects Company (for concession area No 53-C); and Al Zubair Mohammed Al Zubair, chairman of Ara Natural Resources Company (for concession area No 51-C).

ONA

Asyad partners with mamun to bring vendors new crowdfunding solutions

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Asyad Group, Oman's global integrated logistics provider, has partnered with mamun, a leading financial technology (fintech) company in Oman, to introduce the latest supply chain financing solutions aimed at empowering Asyad's vendor ecosystem.

Aligned with its strategy to support the private sector, Asyad took this proactive step to unlock new prospects for vendors and create a growth-promoting vendor ecosystem that fully utilises innovative payment technologies and crowdfunding solutions powered by mamun.

Through this collaboration, Asyad Group will endorse invoices financed through mamun's Shariah-compliant crowdfunding platform, thereby granting vendors operating in Asyad's ecosystem better liq-



Asyad Group will endorse invoices financed through mamun's Shariah-compliant crowdfunding platform

uidity and enabling them to overcome financial obstacles and accelerate growth.

"Our partnership with mamun aims to provide our vendors with efficient payment tools, alternative financing options, and improved access to working capital that they can leverage to pursue growth and prosperous ventures," said Muhsin al Rustom, chief financial officer at Asyad Group.

He said, "This initiative is proof of our commitment to strengthen our private sector partners and vendors, ultimately creating a robust network of vendors for Asyad Group and contributing to economic growth across all sectors of Oman's economy."

Commenting on their promising partnership with Oman's logistics powerhouse, Saleh al Tamami, co-founder and CEO at

mamun, said, "This partnership, a true win-win-win scenario for Asyad, its suppliers, and the investors in mamun's crowdfund, highlights Asyad's proactive approach to enhancing its business and treasury functions.

We look forward to onboarding and working with other companies in the ecosystem that want to improve their relationship with their supplier network while reaping the benefits of the arrangement as well."

mamun is a leading fintech firm in Oman that offers innovative solutions in the domestic and global markets. Under this collaboration, Asyad Group will combine its extensive network and industry expertise with mamun's technological prowess to optimise conditions and financial services available to vendors, thereby expanding their capacity to play an active role in the sultanate's logistics sector.

Oil majors go slow on green transition despite pressure

Paris, France - Most oil majors are stepping up investments in green energy but they are facing a barrage of recriminations and protests from activists for their refusal to completely forsake fossil fuels.

Campaigners again used a series of shareholder meetings in the past month to make their anger known and push energy firms to do more to shift towards solar, wind and other cleaner projects.

In the latest action, hundreds of protesters tried to block the gathering of France's TotalEnergies in Paris on Friday, prompting police to use tear gas to disperse some who sat in front of the venue.

Earlier this week in London, protesters demonstrated outside Shell's annual general meeting. Inside, activists interrupted the opening remarks of CEO Wael Sawan while others tried to take the stage.

Late last month, activists from Fossil Free London disrupted the speeches of BP's chairman and CEO.

Groups of investors are also demanding change - even the Church of England's pensions board has weighed in, deciding to join others in voting against Shell's "green" transition plan and demanding more ambitious carbon-cutting targets.

Since 2021 the International Energy Agency (IEA) has called

for a stop to new oil projects so the world meets the goal of keeping global temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

But new oil fields are still opening as energy firms say they must meet the unabated demand for the fossil fuel.

"Climate is at the heart of our concerns," TotalEnergies CEO Patrick Pouyanné told shareholder meeting as he spoke behind a plexiglass that was put up for the occasion.

He said his group has done more than others to invest in renewables but that world oil demand is growing and "if TotalEnergies doesn't respond to this demand, others will do it for



us".

Shareholders later voted overwhelmingly in favour of the company's climate strategy, tough 30 per cent backed a non-binding resolution from activist investors calling for more ambitious emissions targets.

Oil and gas groups - which

posted huge profits last year - have set objectives to reduce emissions but their investments in renewable energy and carbon capture remain a marginal amount of their overall spending.

According to the IEA, such spending rose from one percent in 2020 to five percent of total expenditures by last year, still only representing a quarter of what energy firms paid out to shareholders.

European firms such as TotalEnergies and Equinor are doing better than their peers, but "their investment in clean energy is tiny compared to their capital expenditure on oil and gas expansion", said David Tong, global industry campaign manager at Oil

Change International.

Other than renewables and carbon capture, energy firms also have expertise that could be put to use in the production of hydrogen, biogas, ethanol and low-carbon fuels, said Christophe McGlade, head of the IEA's energy supply unit.

"If they can direct more of their spending towards those technologies, that could really move the needle in terms of getting them to scale up, and getting the deployment levels we need to get on track with net zero," he said.

Reaching net zero

The emissions reduction efforts made by energy majors have

concerned mostly their own operations, which represent only about 15 per cent of their overall carbon footprint.

They have in particular been battling against methane leaks and reduced the burning of unwanted natural gas at oil fields.

Such measures have helped BP reduce its emissions by 41 per cent from 2019 to 2022, and it has upped its 2030 target to a 50 per cent reduction.

Even US oil majors, which have long resisted recognising the need to reduce emissions, have begun to do so. ExxonMobil plans to cut its proper emissions by a fifth by 2030, from 2016 levels.

AFP

US Congress in race against time to approve debt deal

Washington, US - The bill hammered out by US leaders to prevent the country from a catastrophic default on its debts will face one final and potentially perilous hurdle this week: Passing a divided Congress.

Lawmakers return Tuesday from a holiday weekend with precious few days to review, debate and ultimately greenlight a measure intended to extend US borrowing authority in exchange for White House policy concessions, notably caps on federal spending.

Top Republicans and Democrats have scrambled to secure congressional support for the measure, with President Joe Biden saying Monday he feels "very good" about its prospects despite having just days left before the government starts running out of money.

The weekend deal, reached by Biden and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy after weeks of frantic negotiations, faces opposition from the progressive and hard-right wings of their respective parties.

Ultra-conservative Republicans feel McCarthy should have secured far deeper spending cuts in exchange for raising the debt ceiling and allowing the government to keep borrowing money.

The left wing of the Democratic Party is equally unhappy that Biden agreed to any spend-



The US Capitol building is seen from the base of Washington Monument in Washington, DC, on May 28 (AFP)

ing limits at all.

The House Rules Committee meets Tuesday, a crucial test to see whether McCarthy's own party, which controls the panel, can agree on a full chamber vote on the bill, now anticipated on Wednesday.

Biden and McCarthy both say they believe the bill will pass the House and then move swiftly to the Senate.

"I never say I'm confident what the Congress is going to do. But I feel very good about it," Biden said Monday, adding that he had spoken to lawmakers.

Any organized dissent could force some nerve-shredding delays.

The key deadline is June 5 - when, according to Treasury es-

timates, the government will no longer have the funds required to pay all its debts and bills.

If that scenario morphs into a full-fledged default, the repercussions would be disastrous for the US and wider global economy.

The basic framework of the deal lifts the federal debt ceiling, which is currently US\$31.4tn, for two years - enough to get past the next presidential election in 2024.

In return, the Republicans secured some limits on federal spending over the same period.

As they finalized the text Sunday, Biden and McCarthy both went into hard-sell mode to shore up support in their parties.

Biden's message to dissident

Democrats, he said Monday: "Talk to me."

Biden and McCarthy were backed by vocal spin operations, both insisting the agreement represented a victory for their side.

"You want to try to make it look like I made some compromise on the debt ceiling - I didn't," Biden told reporters.

McCarthy, for his part, touted the agreement as a "historic series of wins."

But like Biden, McCarthy will have to quell members of his own party who aren't keen on the bill.

"I want to raise the debt ceiling. It'd be irresponsible not to do it," Senator Lindsey Graham told Fox News Sunday.

"But what I will not do is adopt the Biden defense budget and call it a success," Graham said, calling for bigger increases to the Pentagon's budget than currently agreed.

"I will not be intimidated by June 5."

Chip Roy, a House Rules Committee member, also foreshadowed a pitched battle over the bill, saying he and some fellow Republicans oppose it.

"There's going to be a block of us that are a no," Roy told a Fox News reporter, in quotes that were reposted by the congressman's office. "We should kill this."

Another Republican tweeted out a vomit emoji in response to the deal.

In reality, the agreement represents a mutual climb down of sorts from Democratic and Republican negotiators.

Biden had initially refused to negotiate over spending issues as a condition for raising the debt ceiling, accusing the Republicans of taking the economy hostage. And the big cuts that Republicans wanted are not there, although non-defense spending will remain effectively flat next year, and only rise nominally in 2025.

McCarthy's wafer-thin House majority will require significant Democratic backing to balance out Republican dissent.

AFP



Oil prices drop on demand woes due to pending US debt deal

Muscat - Oil prices fell on Tuesday over demand worries in the US due to the debt ceiling crisis, ambiguity about the US Federal Reserve's interest rate policy and recessionary fears.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at US\$76.58 per barrel in early morning trade in London, a 0.67 per cent fall from the closing price of US\$77.10 a barrel in the previous trading session on Friday, according to an Anadolu Agency report.

The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at the same time at US\$72.37 per barrel, down 0.41 per cent from the previous session's close of US\$72.67 per barrel.

Following discussions last week between US President Joe Biden and Speaker of the House of Representatives Kevin McCarthy regarding the debt limit crisis, both announced on Sunday that they would rule out a default, easing market sales pressure.

Meanwhile, as markets wait for the Fed's next interest rate decision, persistent recessionary fears continue to hold down oil

prices.

Analysts predict that US inflation will not slow down at the desired pace amid strong economic activity, raising the possibility of interest rate hikes.

On the supply side, traders are keeping tabs on the production decisions of major producers in the OPEC+ group despite the two largest members' divergent messages.

Expectations of further production cuts increased after Saudi Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman warned oil traders last week to "watch out."

However, Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak hinted that the group's present production strategy would continue when he declared on Thursday that energy prices were approaching "economically justified" levels.

Earlier in April, some OPEC+ countries decided to cut output by 1.6mn barrels per day (bpd) on top of their existing cuts of 2mn bpd. Russia quickly followed suit, announcing that it would extend the existing 700,000 bpd output cuts until the end of the year.

Agencies

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Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) Announce the following Tenders:

Sr.No	Tender No.	Tender Name	Last date for obtaining the documents	Bid Submission Date	Requirements from participants	Tender Document's Fees (Including VAT) (RO)
1	46/2023	Reinforcement of Fiber Optic and OPGW	14/06/2023	11/07/2023	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration	105/000
2	47/2023	Construction of the Shaleem Switching Station 400kV and Extension of the Dhofar 400kV Grid Station	14/06/2023	11/07/2023	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration and OETC Registration Category (A + B) Certificate.	2,625/-
3	48/2023	Construction of 400kV Overhead Transmission Line from Shaleem Grid Station to Dhofar Grid Station	14/06/2023	11/07/2023	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration and OETC Registration Category (A + B) Certificate.	2,625/-
4	49/2023	Construction of 400kV Overhead Transmission Line from Duqm Industrial Grid Station to Shaleem Grid Station.	14/06/2023	11/07/2023	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration and OETC Registration Category (A + B) Certificate.	2,625/-

Participation:	Interested Companies may obtain Tender Document with the necessity Apply on E-tendering
Buying the Tender:	By E-Tendering System.
Fees:	Against non-refundable payment as mentioned above against each set of document. (Payment Through Bank Transfer) , SMEs are exempted from tender's fees.
The deadline for clarification:	Before (21) Days from bid submission date.
Submission:	The submission of hard copy will be only for Bid Bond & other documents by E-Tendering
Terms and conditions:	- No other writing or any reference thereto should be mentioned on the envelope. - The bid should be valid for not less than (90) days from bid submission date. - The Tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the bid value and should be valid for (90) days from bid submission date, addressed to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC). Small & Medium Enterprises are exempted from the submission of 1% of the bid bond. - Any bid not comply with the required guarantee, will not be accepted. - OETC is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offers.
Offer:	The bid bond should be submitted in Tender Box No. (1) at the company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission of the Tenders.
Company Address:	Muscat - Al Mawaleh Road No: 2153 - Building No. 423 O Block No: 321 - Contact Details: 93515198, 91777378, 92217856
Email:	tenders@omangrid.com
Website:	www.omangrid.com / link of E-Tendering System https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx



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إعلان طرح مناقصات

تعلن الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء عن طرح المناقصات التالية :

م	رقم المناقصة	عنوان المناقصة	آخر موعد للحصول على مستندات المناقصة	آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات	الدرجة	لمن الوثيقة تشمل ضريبة القيمة المضافة (أر)
1	٢٠٢٣/٤٦	تعزيز خطوط الألياف البصرية	٢٠٢٣/٠٦/١٤	٢٠٢٣/٠٧/١١	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال ولديها سجل تجاري ساري المفعول	١٠٥/٠٠٠
٢	٢٠٢٣/٤٧	إنشاء محطة شليم جهد 400 ك.ف. وتوسعة محطة ظفار جهد 400 ك.ف	٢٠٢٣/٠٦/١٤	٢٠٢٣/٠٧/١١	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال ولديها سجل تجاري ساري المفعول. ومسجلة لدى الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء (الفئة أ + ب).	٢,٦٢٥/-
٣	٢٠٢٣/٤٨	إنشاء خط كهربائي بجهد 400 ك.ف. من محطة شليم إلى محطة ظفار	٢٠٢٣/٠٦/١٤	٢٠٢٣/٠٧/١١	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال ولديها سجل تجاري ساري المفعول. ومسجلة لدى الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء (الفئة أ + ب).	٢,٦٢٥/-
٤	٢٠٢٣/٤٩	إنشاء خط كهربائي بجهد 400 ك.ف. من محطة الدقم الصناعية إلى محطة شليم	٢٠٢٣/٠٦/١٤	٢٠٢٣/٠٧/١١	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال ولديها سجل تجاري ساري المفعول. ومسجلة لدى الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء (الفئة أ + ب).	٢,٦٢٥/-

الاشتراك	يمكن للشركات والمؤسسات المتخصصة الحصول على مستندات المناقصة بعد تقديم الطلب عن طريق نظام المناقص الإلكتروني
طريقة الشراء	من خلال نظام المناقص الإلكتروني
الرسوم	مقابل دفع المبلغ المحدد أعلاه للنسخة الواحدة - لا ترد - الدفع عن طريق التحويل البنكي . تُعفى المؤسسات الصغيرة والمتوسطة من دفع ثمن الوثيقة.
آخر موعد للإستفسارات	قبل (٢١) يوم من تاريخ آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات
تقديم العروض	يتم تسليم النسخة الأصلية فقط من الضمان البنكي للعطاء في الصندوق . أما العرض فيتم تسليمه من خلال نظام المناقص الإلكتروني.
الشروط و الضمانات	- عدم تحديد اسم صاحب العطاء أو ما يشير إليه على المظروف. - أن تكون العروض سارية المفعول لمدة لا تقل عن (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء . - إرفاق تأميناً في صورة ضمان مصرفي من أحد البنوك العاملة في البلاد قدره (٢٪) من قيمة العطاء ساري لمدة (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء . ومعنوياً بإسم الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء . تُعفى المؤسسات الصغيرة والمتوسطة من تسليم الضمان المصرفي . - كل عطاء لا يستوفي التأمين المطلوب لن ينظر فيه . - الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء غير مقيدة بقبول أقل العروض أو أي عطاء آخر .
العرض المقدم	يجب وضع الضمان البنكي للعطاء فقط في صندوق المناقصات رقم (١) بمبنى الشركة قبل الساعة ١١ صباحاً من التاريخ المحدد لتقديم العطاءات
عنوان الشركة	عنوان الشركة: محافظة مسقط - الموالج رقم السكة ٢١٥٣ - مبنى رقم ٤٢٣٠ تفاصيل التواصل: ٩٣٥١٥١٩٨, ٩١٧٧٧٣٧٨, ٩٢٢١٧٨٥١
البريد الإلكتروني	tenders@omangrid.com
الموقع الإلكتروني	www.omangrid.com link of E-Tendering System https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx



الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء ش. م. ع. م
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MHD-ITICS: A partner for smart office innovation

Modern workplaces are all about providing a conducive work environment for those who inhabit them. While elements like open spaces, greenery, and natural lighting are all said to contribute to making the place more uplifting and, thereby, boosting productivity, there is a new and more quantifiable component that a number of companies are now turning to - transforming a regular workplace to a Smart Office.

Technology forms the heart of a smart office, and the same technology is primarily geared at enhancing employee experiences, helping them work smarter, quicker and better. The hybrid environment also leads to the best utilisation of management tools and other creative resources while streamlining processes to reduce redundancy, repetition, or inaccuracies.

On a global level, the smart office market was valued at US\$31.37bn in 2020 and is expected to reach US\$90.63bn by 2030, growing at an 11.1% CAGR between 2021 and 2030, according to Allied Market Research. The company also highlighted that one of the main factors driving this trend is the increased focus on energy efficiency and the attention to adhering to industry standards and regulations.

Locally, Oman Vision 2040 outlines the country's path to transitioning to a green, circular economy with sustainability at its core. In line with the same, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning has announced the launch of an innovative initiative to develop three smart cities in Sohar, Nizwa, and Salalah.

Keeping with the country's vision, private developers have also announced plans to promote smart cities that will position themselves as thriving commercial and residential destinations. With business parks seeing a strong boom, smart of-



fices will make up an integral part of these smart cities and will incorporate different elements from smart buildings to smart security and communication.

Just like companies prioritise customers and evolve with changing market demands, it has also become quintessential to embrace technology to drive efficiency at workplaces.

As a pioneer in introducing the latest developments in the realm of technology to the local market, Mohsin Haider Darwish Infrastructure, Technology, Industrial and Consumer Solutions (MHD-ITICS) provides integrated IoT-based solutions and high-end softwares designed to enhance collaboration, satisfaction, and productivity in any workplace.

Detecting employee occupancy on desk

Desk or occupancy sensors are non-intrusive monitoring devices that are used to assess office space usage. They reduce the time spent on finding free desks or meeting rooms and generate insightful data on spaces that are most or infrequently used to better manage office layouts. These sensors are ideal for large, multi-

level office areas and can be automated with other softwares to help conserve energy when desks are not in use.

Smart meeting room booking systems

These systems ensure that meetings are scheduled accurately, communicated to the concerned executives, and free from disruptions. A well-integrated system also gives individuals greater flexibility to manage bookings while reducing administrative workloads.

Smart AC and electricity control solutions

Electricity wastage is one of the most common problems at workplaces. With the use of smart technologies, it is possible to significantly improve energy efficiency. ACs, lights, and other electricals can be automatically or remotely turned off when not in use. In addition, lights and indoor temperatures can also be customised according to the changing outdoor environments.

Integrated visitor management systems

With security being a critical component of all organisations,

Visitor Management Systems combined with various access controls have proven to be increasingly helpful in tracking and monitoring visitors while reducing the need for physical escorts. It can also be customised to limit access to restricted areas or beyond predetermined timings.

Zero-touch employee attendance systems

While the focus of such systems is safety by minimising contact, Zero-Touch Employee Attendance Systems also deliver precise results by eliminating overlapping and accurately identifying employees. With the growing popularity of such systems, MHD-ITICS has implemented Time and Attendance Solutions for leading manufacturing companies and retail chains in Oman.

This has also helped automate processes through seamless integration with payroll and other IT systems. Timely and error-free reports of work hours clocked in by employees are not only vital to assessing performance, addressing challenges of absenteeism, and preparing payrolls but have also proven to inject higher efficiency in overall business operations while instilling a greater sense of discipline amongst employees.

Software solutions

These significantly enhance employee productivity and are an essential imperative. These solutions range from Unified Communication and Collaboration suites to Service Management and Helpdesk solutions that cater to a variety of end-users ranging from IT teams to HR departments.

With expertise in delivering and deploying such solutions to large enterprises, MHD-ITICS brings not just credibility but also knowledge of best practices that can be replicated effectively.

AMBASSADOR OF BAHRAIN CALLS ON HEALTH MINISTER



H E Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, on Tuesday received in his office H E Dr Juma bin Ahmed al Kaabi, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain. The meeting witnessed cordial conversations and discussed matters of common concern and ways of developing cooperation between the two countries in the health fields

Madayn engages retirees to share expertise, knowledge

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates 'Madayn', in cooperation with the Industrial Innovation Academy, has launched 'Khabrat Madayn' initiative to integrate its retirees' expertise and effectively utilise their knowledge into Madayn's projects and programmes.

This initiative was announced during the annual gathering of Madayn retirees, held under the patronage of H E Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, and in the presence of Eng Dawood bin Salim al Hadabi, CEO of Madayn, and more than 50 retirees.

Speaking at the event, Ahmed bin Ali al Hinai, Director of Social Responsibility Department at Madayn, said, "This initiative falls under Madayn's social responsibility initiatives and its concept revolves around utilising the expertise of retired individuals who have served at Madayn."

The initiative aims to establish



Ahmed al Hinai

a database of retired 'Madayn' experts according to their specialties, reduce reliance on external parties for implementing services required by Madayn projects and the subsidiary companies under Mubadrah Company, and achieve this by offering training programmes in specialised fields and providing direct services based on expertise, Hinai explained.

"The initial focus of the initiative will be on human resources, administrative affairs, information technology, Industry 4.0, finance, accounting, and investment."

Hinai emphasised that the annual gathering of Madayn retirees embodies its profound belief in the value of its work and employees, while also expressing genuine appreciation for the collective efforts that have contributed to Madayn's success and growth over the years.

"The widespread presence of industrial cities in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, spanning a total area exceeding 122,000sqkm, and the value of investments surpassing RO7.2bn, are clear indicators of Madayn's achievements and the efficiency of its workforce," he said, adding, "in recent years, Madayn has launched numerous activities and initiatives related to social responsibility, driven by its commitment to actively pursue the policies and goals set for Madayn in this regard. Madayn continues this approach through this annual gathering, announcing a new initiative in the field of social responsibility, aimed at connecting its retirees with current employees."



Indian school board organises 'Synergy 2023'

'Synergy' is an annual event in which the board along with the members of the management committees of all Indian schools across Oman collaborate and synthesise their thoughts for taking Indian schools to the next level of educating for excellence.

The service rendered by the directors on the board and the members of the school management committees is absolutely voluntary; they are either parents or experts from the community who possess expertise in diverse domains - academic, finance, marketing, health and safety, technology, engineering - and this helps in giving the right directions and guidance for giving the best educational service to the children of Indian diaspora in Oman.

The ideas transpired on the occasion would acquaint the newly inducted members with

their roles and responsibilities and enable them to be effective social leaders in the cause of education. As for the existing members, 'Synergy' would give them an opportunity to rededicate themselves in their commitment to the voluntary service in the over-all development of the schools.

Synergy 2023 has witnessed the inauguration of the board's initiative in implementing virtual learning environment (VLE) in Indian schools. This is to ensure that students from all schools will be in a position to access learning through interconnectivity. This will enhance the technical competence of teachers with greater flexibility and efficiency. The directors-in-charge have handed over the VLE Credentials to the Presidents and Principals of their respective schools.

In his welcome address,

Shameer P T K, vice chairman, Board of Directors, Indian Schools Oman applauded the phenomenal growth of Indian Schooling system in Oman and thanked the yeomen services rendered by the management committees of the past and the present.

"The board is committed to providing transformative learning experience to every child and thereby equipping him/her with the knowledge, skills and well-being to find his/her identity and purpose in life," he said.

Dr Sivakumar Manickam, chairman of the board of directors, Indian Schools Oman underscored the concept of community schooling system in his presidential address. He expatiated on the roles and responsibilities of both the board and the school management committees.

While elaborating on the strategic plan of development for Indian Schools in the upcoming years, the chairman has proposed five high-level pillars which require critical attention; they are, academic excellence, joy and wellness, engagement and collaboration, operational effectiveness and financial sustainability, and investing in staff.

The chairman lauded the selfless voluntary service rendered by the school management committees. "Let's be responsible and accountable by providing essential guidance and advice without any bias or personal interest. Let's leave an imprint to make our schools more effective to serve the next generation," he exhorted.

Finance director Ashwini Sawrikar elaborated on how schools can attain financial sustainability through financial dis-

cipline and proper auditing.

"Parents are the real stakeholders of the Indian schooling system as the fees paid by them is the only source of income for the operational and developmental activities of the schools. So there should be absolute transparency and accountability for every penny spent," the finance director reminded the management committees of the schools.

Members of the school management committees were divided into different groups for brainstorming on topics pertinent to the strategic development of Indian schools. The topics included financial management, SMC governance, academic excellence, extra-curricular excellence, staff wellbeing, parent engagement, technical development, and health, safety and environment in schools.

OPAZ holds workshop on advantages of SEZs, industrial cities

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), represented by the investment development sector, organised a workshop highlighting the existing investments in different sectors and the competitive advantages of the special economic zones, free zones, and industrial cities that are affiliated with OPAZ.

The workshop attracted a group of commercial affairs employees in the zones.

The two-day workshop was held to familiarise employees and participants of the key investment projects in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), Sohar Free Zone, Salalah Free Zone, Al Mazunah Free Zone and the industrial cities, operated by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates 'Madayn'.

The workshop also aimed at exchanging expertise and knowledge between OPAZ employees and other zones.

Moreover, the workshop touched on the procedures related to regulating the investment environment and managing investment opportunities, as well as the possibility of reforming the procedures for land leasing service and its digital transformation plan as the land selection e-service, implemented in the Special Economic Zone at



Duqm.

Furthermore, the workshop included discussion sessions to develop a joint business plan aimed at promoting and ensuring integration between the zones affiliated with OPAZ. This serves providing a flexible and attractive work environment for employees of commercial affairs and specialised departments in the different zones.

Accordingly, it will be contributing to achieving the target objectives of the plans and initiatives developed to improve the business environment and services provided to investors.

It is worth noting that the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) is executing a number of initiatives that will enhance the relative advantages of the special economic zones, free zones and industrial cities that are supervised by OPAZ.

MoE honours participants of certificate programme for resource centre workers

The Ministry of Education (MoE) on Tuesday honoured the participants of a programme for the 'specialised certificate for learning resource centres workers', which was held with the co-operation of the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU).

The honouring ceremony was held under the patronage of H E Majid bin Said al Bahri, Under-secretary of the Ministry of Education for Administrative and Financial Affairs.

SQU was represented by the Community Service Centre, the Department of Information Studies, while MoE was represented by the Directorate-General of Curriculum Development.

The ceremony took place in the SQU conference hall in the presence of Dr Salem bin Hamoud al Harthy, vice chairman for Academic Affairs and Community Service, directors general of the Ministry of Education and their assistants, supervisors and learning resources specialists.

The ceremony began with the SQU's speech delivered by Dr Ali bin Hussain al Belushi, Director of the Community Service Center.

"The aim of this specialised vocational training program is to



enhance the professional training of learning resource center specialists and raise their professional competencies, integrate modern technologies in developing the services of learning resource centres, and provide the participants with skills of information and technical awareness to employ them to serve the educational process," he said.

The programme was launched in 2014 and continued until the end of 2019 and consisted of 100 training hours for

each group, divided into two levels, each level consisting of 50 hours, he informed.

"The first level focused on many topics, such as recent trends in managing learning resource centers, information awareness, research strategies, and electronic publishing. The second level focused on managing change and development in learning resource centers, cloud computing and its applications in specialisation, and the skills of preparing education studies and

documentation controls," Dr Belushi added.

"Approximately 290 learning resources specialists participated in the training program, in which they implemented many projects, most of which were distinguished, touching on the reality of the educational environment in schools. A distinguished group of supervisors also participated in the supervision providing hands of support to their colleagues during the implementation of their specialised projects."

centres must have, and from this

standpoint the 'specialised certificate for learning resource centre workers' programme emerged in joint cooperation between SQU and MoE," Dr Sana said.

"It is a specialised professional programme that combines in its themes the various technical, professional, and administrative skills needed by the cadres working in the centers to activate and accomplish their main role in the educational

process," she noted.

According to Dr Sana, the Ministry of Education sought to achieve the future vision of learning resource centers to enhance their ability to keep pace with modern technological developments, to be a major source of support for curricula and an environment that encourages research and cognitive exploration to achieve sustainable learning among workers in the educational field.

"This ceremony comes out of belief in the efforts that have been made for the success of this programme and in appreciation of the cadres working in the learning resource centres from various categories, which have contributed to the advancement of the learning resource centres to reach what it is now."

After that, Maymouna al Shabibi gave the participants' speech, followed by a visual presentation on the programme.

Patron of the ceremony H E Majid bin Said al Bahri, Under-secretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs in the Ministry of Education, handed out certificates of honour to the participants as the programme came to an end.

Bank Muscat, Metlife introduce critical illness insurance plans

In line with its customer-centric vision, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has joined forces with MetLife to introduce an insurance solution benefit giving you financial peace of mind in case you are diagnosed with a serious illness.

Critical Illness and Critical Care plans aim to protect customers and their families by providing them with immediate financial relief should anything unexpected happen.

Abdullah Tamman al Maashani, general manager - Products, Bank Muscat, expressed his enthusiasm for the collaboration, stating, "Bank Muscat is delighted to offer the Critical Care and Critical Illness Insurance plans in partnership with MetLife, a global leader in providing financial and wellness protection to millions of customers globally."

"The bank's partnership with MetLife highlights our commitment to delivering innovative and



value-added insurance solutions to our customers and will help in advancing the insurance market in Oman. We thank all our customers for their strong confidence in Bank Muscat and promise to continue launching new and globally innovative solutions for their benefit."

Raed Dawood, country manager at MetLife Oman, commented, "We are excited to partner with Bank Muscat in bringing innovative insurance so-

lutions to the people living in Oman. The Critical Illness and Critical Care plans are designed to expand coverage options, providing peace of mind during challenging health events. This partnership aligns with our mission to deliver accessible and affordable health and financial protection services. These plans directly address real challenges faced by many, and we anticipate they will make a significant positive impact."

Omantel, Thawani Technologies, National Finance sign MoU

Omantel, National Finance and Thawani fintech company signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for a partnership to finance Omantel customers keen to buy smart devices.

The MoU will bring to the doorstep of eligible consumers the Buy Now, Pay Later (BNPL) option - an emerging global finance solution for purchasing smart devices, stated a press release.

As per the MoU, purchasers of smart devices at Omantel can avail of finance under the BNPL plan and pay back National Finance in installments for an agreed tenure.

Omantel is integrating the financing platform with its sales portal. Once a customer opts for the BNPL option, the request will be processed through the financing platform, with relevant customer details necessary to process KYC, along with the selected product details.

"We are pleased to bring on-the-spot financing to our valued



consumers in collaboration with two major players in the finance and digital payment space," said Omantel CEO Talal al Mamari.

"We are putting together a simplified and secure system to enable our customers to buy the latest and most advanced devices in the market without feeling the pinch of doling out huge sums upfront."

National Finance is Oman's largest leasing and finance company that provides a wide array

of financial products. Thawani is a fintech company specialised in offering a fully integrated digital end-to-end KYC experience for availing of the financing option.

"We at National Finance believe that BNPL is a convenient and attractive option for many smart devices' buyers. We are therefore delighted to partner with Omantel and Thawani to put together a streamlined financing system that will bring relief and ease of payment for

smart devices buyers," National Finance CEO Tariq al Farsi said.

Eng Majid bin Fayil al Amri, founder and CEO of Thawani Technologies, said, "The rapid development of the financial services and retail sector calls for pioneering solutions. Thawani Technologies, with the back-end service support provided by National Finance, has tapped into a new sector to support even more customers when it comes to purchases."

Range Rover Sport SV to be unveiled

New Range Rover Sport SV - stated to be the fastest, most dynamic and technologically advanced Range Rover Sport ever - will be unveiled on Wednesday, a release stated.

Exemplifying Range Rover's modern luxury philosophy, it will initially be offered by invitation only, with a limited-edition specification, the company stated.

"The new performance champion will introduce a number of innovative world-first, sector-first and Range Rover-first technologies that unlock the assertive model's full performance potential", it added.

'Khedmah Pay' platform launched for improved e-collection processes

Oman Investment and Finance Company's Khedmah announced the launch of its new platform 'Khedmah Pay' during its participation in COMEX 2023.

Aimed at facilitating customer services with digital solutions for e-payments, the platform allows customers at shops to make instant and secure payments using QR codes linked to the Khedmah app. In addition, business owners can develop their own collection processes through the platform.

The launch of this service aims to assist sellers, traders, and owners of small and medium-sized enterprises in providing an advanced and easy-to-use platform for collecting sales amounts from customers through the Khedmah app, which is presently used by more than 800,000 subscribers.

This service also provides the



feature of receiving and tracking collection operations easily and securely in accordance with a decision (No 386/2022) of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion re-

garding the provision of electronic payment services for consumers.

Said bin Ahmed Safrar, CEO of Oman Investment and Finance Company 'Khedmah', com-

mented on the occasion of the service's launch, saying, "as one of the sultanate's top collection companies for more than 40 years, Khedmah is keen on developing its customer services by

implementing the best digital solutions that keep up with people's changing needs and lifestyles".

"We anticipate that the 'Khedmah Pay' platform will persuade storeowners and other business owners to switch to more practical, cost-efficient, and secure solutions, which will benefit them in the long-term, particularly with the rising demand from customers for quick and simple payment options."

Through its 'Khedmah Pay' platform, Khedmah aims to empower merchants and businesses to achieve the best results from digital payments and overcome traditional challenges they face when it comes to conducting transactions and maintaining payment records.

This service includes a range of benefits for business owners who have multiple sales outlets,

such as the ability to make instant payments and compliance with government regulatory regulations. With the contactless payment feature, the service ensures safe and convenient payments through scanning the QR code and activating the transfer process.

Additionally, it guarantees appropriate fees for digital collection operations and allows for transaction recording and tracking, contributing to improving the overall customer experience.

To benefit from 'Khedmah pay' platform, merchants, sellers, and small to medium-sized enterprise owners can contact 'Khedmah' through its branches located throughout the sultanate or the company's call centre to sign the agreement for providing this service, and provide the necessary data to prepare their QR code.

First Chinese civilian reaches space station

China puts a civilian into orbit as it pursues plans to send a crewed mission to the Moon by 2030

Jiuquan, China - China sent three astronauts to its Tiangong space station on Tuesday, putting a civilian into orbit for the first time as it pursues plans to send a crewed mission to the Moon by 2030.

The world's second-largest economy has invested billions of dollars in its military-run space programme in a push to catch up with the United States and Russia. The *Shenzhou-16* crew took off atop a Long March 2F rocket from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in northwest China at 9:31am (0131 GMT), AFP journalists saw.

They docked at the space station's Tianhe core module on Tuesday afternoon, more than six hours after taking off, state broadcaster CCTV said.

The launch was a 'complete success' and the 'astronauts are in good condition', said Zou Lipeng, director of the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center.

Dozens of employees from the space programme, many of whom live year-round on the huge site, attended the launch, snapping selfies with the rocket in the background.

Children played as they waited for the launch, some waving Chinese flags as they sat



Long March-2F rocket, carrying the Shenzhou-16 Manned Space Flight Mission, lifts off from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in China's northwestern Gansu province, on Tuesday, heading to the Tiangong space station (AFP)

on their parents' shoulders.

Spectators let out a loud 'wow', shouting 'good luck' and waving as the rocket took off in a cloud of ochre smoke.

Leading its crew is commander Jing Haipeng on his fourth mission, as well as engineer Zhu Yangzhu and Beihang University professor Gui

Haichao, the first Chinese civilian in space. China was the third country to put humans in orbit and Tiangong is the crown jewel of its space programme, which has also landed robotic rovers on Mars and the Moon.

Shenzhou-16 is the first mission to Tiangong since it entered its 'application and develop-

ment' stage, authorities said.

The crew will meet their three colleagues from the *Shenzhou-15* flight, who have been at the station for six months and who will return to Earth in the coming days. *Shenzhou-16's* crew will carry out a number of experiments during the mission, including in 'high-precision space

time-frequency systems', general relativity, and into the origin of life, China Manned Space Agency (CMSA) spokesperson Lin Xiqiang told reporters on Monday. The space station was resupplied with drinking water, clothing, food and propellant this month in preparation for *Shenzhou-16's* arrival.

One expert told AFP that Tuesday's mission represented 'a regular crew rotation flight', but even that was significant.

"Accumulating depth of experience in human spaceflight operations is important and doesn't involve new spectacular milestones all the time," said Jonathan McDowell, an astronomer and astrophysicist at the Harvard-Smithsonian Cen-

ter for Astrophysics. The Moon by 2030 and carry out lunar scientific exploration and related technological experiments," the CMSA's Lin said.

The final module of Tiangong - which means 'heavenly palace' - successfully docked with the core structure last year.

The station carries several pieces of cutting-edge scientific equipment, state news agency Xinhua reported, including 'the world's first space-based cold atomic clock system'.

Tiangong is expected to remain in low Earth orbit at an altitude between 400 and 450km (250 and 280 miles) for at least 10 years.

It is constantly crewed by rotating teams of three astronauts.

China has been effectively excluded from the International Space Station since 2011, when the United States banned NASA from engaging with the country - pushing Beijing to develop its own orbital outpost.

China's space agency reiterated on Monday it is actively seeking international cooperation in the project. China plans to send two crewed space missions to Tiangong every year, according to the CMSA. AFP

The overall goal is to achieve China's first crewed landing on the Moon by 2030 and carry out lunar scientific exploration

LIN XIQIANG

ter for Astrophysics.

'Heavenly palace'

China's 'space dream' has been put into overdrive under President Xi Jinping, and the construction of a moon base is planned.

"The overall goal is to achieve China's first crewed landing on



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un this month inspected the country's first military spy satellite and gave the green light for its 'future action plan' (AFP)

North Korea confirms launch of military spy satellite in June

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea said on Tuesday that it would launch a spy satellite in June, claiming it was necessary to monitor the 'dangerous' military movements of the United States and its allies.

Criticising US-South Korea joint military exercises, including the ongoing large-scale live-fire drills, a top North Korean military official confirmed that 'military reconnaissance satellite No. 1' would be launched next month.

The announcement came a day after Japan said it was informed by North Korea that a satellite launch could happen imminently, with Tokyo warning it would likely violate United Nations sanctions.

Satellite launch technology overlaps significantly with that used in ballistic missiles, which Pyongyang is explicitly prohibited from using under UN sanctions. The official Korean Central News Agency cited Ri Pyong Chol, vice-chairman of the ruling party's central military commission, saying the satellite was 'indispensable to tracking, monitoring... and coping with in advance in real time the dangerous military acts of the US and its vassal forces'.

Citing 'reckless' acts by Washington and Seoul, Ri said North Korea felt 'the need to expand reconnaissance and information means and improve various defensive and offensive

weapons'. The official also accused the United States of conducting 'hostile air espionage activities on the Korean peninsula and in its vicinity', according to the KCNA dispatch.

Pyongyang, which typically does not give advanced warning of missile launches, has been known to inform international bodies of purportedly peaceful satellite launch plans.

It told Japan on Monday it would launch a rocket between May 31 and June 11.

'Even if it's described as a satellite, a launch using ballistic missile technology would be a violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions' and would threaten people's safety, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said.

In 2012 and 2016, Pyongyang tested ballistic missiles that it called satellite launches. Both flew over Japan's southern Okinawa region. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un this month inspected the country's first military spy satellite and gave the green light for its 'future action plan'.

In 2021, Kim had identified the development of such satellites as a key defence project for the North Korean military.

Japan's defence ministry issued an order to shoot down any ballistic missile confirmed to be on course to fall into its territory. AFP

Lula hosts South American leaders' summit in Brazil

Brasília, Brazil - Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is hosting his fellow South American leaders on Tuesday for a 'retreat' aimed at strengthening ties in a region where left-wing governments are newly back in style.

Eleven of the continent's 12 heads of state are due to attend the summit in Brasilia - the first of its kind in nearly a decade - with only Peruvian President Dina Boluarte expected to miss it. Veteran leftist Lula kicked things off on Monday by meeting with Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, hailing the 'historic' restoration of a relationship that was severed under his predecessor, far-right ex-president Jair Bolsonaro.

Brazil had cut diplomatic ties with Maduro's government under Bolsonaro (2019-2022), who labeled the socialist leader a 'dictator'.

"This is the start of Maduro's return, and (Tuesday's) meeting will be the return of South American integration," Lula told a news conference, after greeting his Venezuelan counterpart at



Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro and Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva greet each other in Brasilia on Monday (AFP)

the presidential palace with a hug and a back-slap.

'New pink tide'

Lula, who previously led Brazil from 2003 to 2010, is a self-declared fan of international cooperation and 'regional integration', which featured prominently in his first presidency, and is keen to reboot stalled South American ties.

This is the first summit of regional leaders since 2014 in Quito, Ecuador, at a gathering of

UNASUR, a continental bloc launched in 2008 by Lula and late Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez.

That was the moment of Latin America's so-called 'pink tide', when a wave of left-wing governments led the region.

Now, some political analysts are talking of a 'new pink tide' in South America, with the recent election of Lula in Brazil, Gabriel Boric in Chili and Gustavo Petro in Colombia. AFP

'China declines meeting with US defence chief'

Washington, US - Beijing has declined a US invitation for a meeting in Singapore between Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin and his Chinese counterpart Li Shangfu, the Pentagon said.

"Overnight, the PRC informed the US that they have declined our early May invitation for Secretary Austin to meet with PRC Minister of National Defence Li Shangfu in Singapore this week," Pentagon spokesman Brigadier General Pat Ryder said Monday in a statement, referring to the People's Republic of China.

"The PRC's concerning unwillingness to engage in meaningful military-to-military discussions will not diminish (the Defence Department's) commitment to seeking open lines of communication with the People's Liberation Army," he said.

When asked about the meeting, the Chinese foreign ministry would not confirm that Beijing had declined the

invitation. "The US knows clearly why there are currently difficulties in military communication between China and the US," spokeswoman Mao Ning told a regular press conference on Tuesday.

"The US should earnestly respect China's concerns of sovereignty, security and interests, immediately correct its incorrect actions, show sincerity, and create the atmosphere and conditions for China-US military dialogue," she said.

A senior US defence official described the declined invitation as 'just the latest in a litany of excuses', saying that since 2021, China has 'declined or failed to respond to over a dozen requests from the Department of Defence for key leader engagements, multiple requests for standing dialogues, and nearly ten working-level engagements'.

Li was sanctioned by the US government in 2018 for buying Russian weapons. AFP

Kids missing in Colombian Amazon could still be alive

Bogotá, Colombia - Four Indigenous children lost in the Colombian Amazon since a plane crash almost a month ago are believed to still be alive, the military said as the search continued on Monday in treacherous terrain.

The children - who were aged 13, 9, 4 and 11 months when they went missing - have wandered in the jungle since a light aircraft crash in Colombia's southeast on May 1 claimed the lives of the three adults on board: their mother Magdalena Mucutui Valencia, the pilot, and an Indigenous leader.

Of the kids, there was no sign. Satellite images have since revealed a path the kids took from the plane wreck, and rescuers have come across some of their belongings, a makeshift shelter and a half-eaten fruit.

Last week, they found a pair of shoes and a diaper. "Based on the evidence, we



Manuel Ranoque, father of the four missing children, shaking hands with a member of the Colombian Army at the Colombian Amazon forest (AFP)

concluded that the children are alive," rescue team leader General Pedro Sanchez told W Radio on Monday.

"If they were dead, it would be easy to find them because they would be still" and the sniffer dogs would find them, he added.

On the morning of May 1, a Cessna 206 airplane left a jungle

area known as Araracuara heading for the town of San Jose del Guaviare in the Colombian Amazon. Minutes after starting the 350km (217-mile) journey, the pilot reported problems with the engine and the plane disappeared from radars.

Between May 15 and 16, soldiers found the bodies of the

three adults and the debris of the plane stuck vertically in the thick vegetation, its nose destroyed.

But the children - Lesly (13), Soleiny (9), Tien Noriel (4) and baby Cristin were missing.

Some 200 soldiers and Indigenous people with knowledge of the terrain were combing a dense jungle area of some 320sqkm (124 square miles) - about double the size of Washington, DC.

The air force had dumped 10,000 flyers into the forest with instructions in Spanish and the children's own Indigenous Huitoto language, telling them to stay put.

The leaflets also included survival tips, and the military has dropped food parcels and bottled water for the children.

Jaguars, pumas, snakes

On Sunday, the army placed

powerful searchlights with a range of up to three kilometres in the area 'so that the minors can approach us', search team member Colonel Fausto Avellaneda told the Noticias Caracol TV show.

Rescuers have also been broadcasting a message recorded by the children's grandmother, urging them to stay put so the soldiers can find them.

The general said the search team believed it had come to within 100 metres (328 feet) of the children, but storms, thick vegetation and marshy terrain prevented them from reaching the kids.

Air force helicopters and satellite images are being used in the search in an area home to jaguars, pumas, snakes and other predators, as well as armed groups that smuggle drugs and terrorise local populations. AFP

IN BRIEF

Lebanon army frees kidnapped Saudi

Beirut, Lebanon - A Saudi national who had been kidnapped in Beirut has been freed in a 'special operation' by the Lebanese army near the Syrian border, it said in a statement on Tuesday.

"An army intelligence patrol managed to free kidnapped Saudi national Mashari al-Mutairi during a special operation on the Syrian border," the army said.

"A number of those involved in the kidnapping were also arrested," it added.

A senior Lebanese security source had told AFP on Monday that, based on preliminary information, the Saudi was kidnapped by unidentified assailants dressed as security personnel in a four-wheel drive vehicle on the Beirut seafont, where he had been in a restaurant.

Israeli shot dead at West Bank settlement

Jerusalem - An Israeli civilian was shot dead on Tuesday at the entrance to a Jewish settlement in the occupied West Bank, medics and military officials said.

The unidentified man was taken to Hillel Yaffe hospital in Israel after being shot by a resident at the Hermesh settlement in the northern West Bank. "The wounded person arrived in critical condition and we had to pronounce his death, despite the efforts of medical personnel," a statement from the hospital said.

The Shomron Regional Council, the Israeli body which administers settlements in the area, said the man shot was a resident of Hermesh.

The Israeli military said troops 'began pursuing the terrorists' behind the shooting at the settlement entrance, without identifying the alleged assailants.

Iran 'resolves' one of IAEA's concerns

Tehran, Iran - Iran has 'resolved' one of three cases raised by the UN watchdog as possible evidence it had not declared all its past nuclear activities, Iranian media reported on Tuesday.

The reports came just days before the board of governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency is due to meet to review progress in addressing the watchdog's remaining concerns.

The IAEA had reported the discovery of traces of radioactive material at three sites not declared by Iran as having hosted past nuclear activity in a blow to efforts to restore a landmark 2015 deal. "With the improvement of interactions... the case related to one of the agency's alleged sites - Abadeh - has been resolved," said Fars news agency.

AFP

Drones hit Moscow high-rises as Kyiv struck for third day



A rescuer evacuates a local resident woman from a multi-storey residential building partially destroyed after night drone attacks in Kyiv on Tuesday (AFP)

Moscow, Russia - A swarm of drones hit Moscow on Tuesday in an unprecedented attack, while Russian drones struck Kyiv for a third straight day as Ukraine gears up for a major offensive against Russian forces.

The Russian defence ministry blamed Kyiv for the attacks that saw three drones crash into residential buildings in Moscow.

Officials said no one was seriously injured and there was only 'minor' damage to buildings.

The Russian defence ministry said that eight drones were used in the attack, adding that five of them were downed and three disabled.

Of the three that hit residential buildings, two crashed into high-rises located in Moscow's affluent southwest, while a third damaged a residential building in a suburb of the capital.

The other drones fell outside Moscow. Some of the debris was found around 15km from President Vladimir Putin's Novo-Ogaryovo residence.

One video shared on social media showed an explosion followed by a column of smoke rising into the sky.

Two drones were intercepted over the Kremlin earlier this month but Tuesday's attack was the first time unmanned aerial vehicles hit residential areas of Moscow, hundreds of kilometres from the front lines in Ukraine.

The raids are likely to be seen as a psychological blow and a major embarrassment for the Kremlin, which has gone to great

lengths to say the protracted conflict in Ukraine does not pose a threat to Russians.

The Kremlin insisted that there was no 'threat' to Russians, adding that Putin was being informed of the attacks in 'real time'.

'No fear'

Moscow also said it believed the attack was a 'response' by Kyiv to a recent Russian hit in Ukraine.

"It is completely clear that we are talking about response acts by the Kyiv regime to very effective strikes on a command centre

The residents of buildings damaged in the strikes were briefly evacuated.

On Profsoyuznaya Street, a residential building with a blown-out window was cordoned off by police but the atmosphere was calm, with children playing outside and locals walking their dogs, an AFP correspondent saw.

Some of the residents were moved to a nearby school, where they drank tea and watched a Soviet-era movie.

Valentin Yemelyanov, a 50-year-old IT worker, who lives on the same street but closer towards the centre of Moscow, said there was 'no fear or panic'.

"The damage is minimal," he told AFP. He said he was 'not surprised' by the drone attack, given the escalation of the conflict. "It is obvious that things are going this way."

Muscovites told Russian journalists that a drone had also crashed into an apartment on the 14th floor of a high-rise on Leninsky Prospekt but did not explode.

Explosions

Andrei Vorobyov, the governor of the Moscow region, said several drones had also been downed near the capital.

"This morning the residents of certain districts in the Moscow region could hear explosions. It was our anti-air missile defence system," he wrote.

"Several drones were shot down while approaching Moscow," he added.

Since the start of Russia's as-

sault on Ukraine, drone attacks have hit targets outside Moscow, including military installations located far from the front.

Yevgeny Prigozhin - the head of mercenary group Wagner, whose forces are fighting in Ukraine - accused the defence ministry of inaction, releasing a new statement peppered with swear words. Also on Tuesday, Ukraine said it had downed 29 out of 31 drones, mainly over Kyiv and the Kyiv region in the latest Russian barrage - the third on the Ukrainian capital in 24 hours.

On Monday, Russia fired a barrage of missiles at Kyiv, sending panicked residents running for shelter in an unusual daytime attack following overnight strikes.

The latest barrages landed as the Ukrainian capital was still recovering from a drone attack at the weekend, the biggest since Russia began its campaign in Ukraine in February last year.

Kyiv received its first shipments of US-made Patriot surface-to-air missile system in April and US President Joe Biden on Monday suggested more aid was to come.

Asked about Russia's barrage of attacks on Kyiv, Biden told reporters, "It's not unexpected."

"That's why we've got to continue to give Ukraine all that it needs."

Kyiv has been preparing a counter-offensive, although its timing and focus have been the subject of months of speculation.

AFP

ICC's Khan calls for 'new way' to tackle war crimes in DR Congo

Bukavu, DR Congo - The International Criminal Court chief prosecutor Karim Khan called on Monday for 'a new way of working' to tackle war crimes in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Armed groups have plagued much of mineral-rich eastern DRC for three decades, a legacy of regional wars that flared in the 1990s and 2000s, and under-reported conflicts simmer elsewhere in the vast central African nation.

The ICC, operating since 2002, launched its first investigations in the northeastern Ituri region in 2004.

The court since handed down three final sentences for crimes committed in the DRC.

"We've had cases, we've had convictions - but there is a truth staring at us in the face... the rapes have not stopped, the crimes have not stopped," Khan told reporters after meeting Denis Mukwege.

Mukwege won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018 for his work on behalf of rape victims, and the two met at his hospital in Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province.

The ICC prosecutor, who also planned to visit Ituri, will complete his stay in the DRC in Kinshasa where he will meet with the authorities.

"The message is: we need to find a new way of working in my view, not in the same way that we've been doing since 2004," the prosecutor said.



International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor Karim Khan (AFP)

He called for 'stronger partnership' between the government, provincial governors, civil society, the African Union, the European Union and the United Nations to show a common will to put an end to crimes.

Mukwege did not speak publicly during the visit, but has consistently called for an end to impunity and for 'transitional justice' to stop the spiral of violence that has plagued eastern DRC since the 1990s.

In the courtyard of his hospital, representatives of victims had gathered to welcome the ICC prosecutor, holding banners calling for justice.

"SOS Justice - we mourn our innocent brothers and sisters massacred en masse during the so-called liberation wars," read one of the signs.

"At the ICC, we are only asking for justice," Felix Bafulwa, 63, whose father and brother were killed on October 28, 1996, told AFP.

AFP

ROYAL HONOUR



Britain's King Charles III presents Royal Victorian Order honours to Royal Naval personnel who took part in the funeral procession of late Queen Elizabeth II at Windsor Castle, in Windsor, on Tuesday (AFP)

New truce, new battles in Sudan as civilians remain trapped

Khartoum, Sudan - Fighting flared again in Sudan on Tuesday despite the latest ceasefire pledges of the two warring generals that are meant to allow desperately needed aid to reach besieged civilians.

Both the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces formally agreed late on Monday to extend by five days a US and Saudi-brokered humanitarian truce that was frequently violated over the past week.

Since the extension was announced, more fighting was reported by residents, including 'clashes with various kinds of weapons in southern Khartoum' and fighting in Nyala in the state of South Darfur.

The army leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his former deputy, paramilitary RSF commander

Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, again accused each other of violating the truce and claimed to only be responding to enemy aggression.

The war has killed at least 1,800 people, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project. More than a million have been displaced and nearly 350,000 have fled to other countries, the UN says.

Residents have been hiding from street combat and roaming looters in the capital city of more than five million, nearly 700,000 of whom have fled, according to the United Nations.

Since the fighting broke out on April 15, both generals have committed to a series of truces. Although some Sudanese have used relative lulls in the fighting to escape, aid has only been allowed to trickle in.



People fleeing violence wait for their buses before departure from al-Sittin (sixty) road in the south of Khartoum on Tuesday (AFP)

The United Nations warned on Monday that Sudan has become one of the highest alert areas for food insecurity, requiring 'urgent' action from the international community.

The rainy season is set to start soon, threatening to make parts of the vast northeast African country inaccessible and raising the risks of malaria, cholera and water-borne diseases.

Malnourished children

Sudan was already poverty-stricken before the war, with a third of its 45mn-strong population relying on aid. Long power cuts were a daily reality and the healthcare system already on the verge of collapse.

After more than six weeks of brutal warfare, over half the population - 25mn people - are in need of aid, according to the United Nations.

Among them are 13.6mn children, including 620,000 suffering from severe acute malnutrition, 'half of whom may die if not helped in time'.

Entire districts of Khartoum no longer have running water, electricity is only available for a few hours a week, and three quarters of hospitals in combat

zones are out of service.

What few health facilities still operate have practically run out of medicines and equipment and have to purchase fuel at up to 20 times its pre-war price to keep generators running.

Humanitarian aid workers have been pleading for weeks for access to worst-hit Khartoum and Darfur to replenish depleted and looted supplies. But with staff and transport blocked by fighting and shipments stuck in customs, aid agencies have so far only managed to deliver small quantities of food and medicine to conflict areas.

Forced to flee

The situation is particularly dire in Darfur, the vast western region already ravaged by two decades of war and civil strife, where

about a quarter of Sudan's population lives.

Activists and observers warn that Darfur civilians continue to be attacked, entire districts have been burned to the ground, and tens of thousands have been forced to flee into neighbouring Chad.

Amid the chaos, the region has been all but cut off from the world, with only sporadic access to power and the internet.

The UN has warned for weeks that fighting in Darfur's major cities between the army and the RSF has also drawn in local militias, tribal fighters and armed civilians.

Darfur's governor Mini Minawi, a former rebel leader, has urged citizens to 'take up arms' to defend their property.

AFP

INDIA

Congress seeks judicial probe into ethnic violence in Manipur

New Delhi - The Congress on Tuesday alleged there has been 'a serious deficit' in the efforts of the BJP government in Manipur to contain 'arson and violence' and sought a high-level inquiry commission headed by a serving or retired judge of the Supreme Court into the ethnic violence in the state.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, along with a delegation of party leaders, called on President Droupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan and submitted a memorandum. The party said nearly 100 people have died due to ethnic violence and many more have gone missing.

"More than 2000 houses have been either burned or destroyed. Some 10000 people, including women and children, are still living in relief camps and safer places without proper health and sanitation facilities. Thousands of people are rendered homeless and displaced. Almost all educational institutions are closed, denying education to students," the memorandum said.

The party made 12 demands including firm and sustained efforts to control violence in every



Armed villagers stand guard in Dolaithabi village some 27km from Imphal on Tuesday (AFP)

part of the state and immediate restoration of peace, harmony and normalcy.

"A high-level inquiry commission should be constituted headed by a serving or retired Supreme Court judge. The Union government must immediately take all possible measures to control and confine all militant groups and ensure that all armed civilian groups be stopped forthwith by taking appropriate action," the party said.

Congress said that villages

near the foothills of both communities must be covered with adequate security so that armed militants do not intrude and disturb peace.

"The Union government should take steps for the rehabilitation of all displaced persons at their original place or in safer areas with suitable security arrangements. Payment of dignified and reasonable compensation for loss of life, property, and all other things concerned to all the victims and affected per-

sons," the party said.

The Congress said that a special drive must be carried out to trace many numbers of missing people.

"There is a need for immediate identification of those who have lost their lives and handing their bodies over to the bereaved families for the last rites. A special drive must be carried out to trace many numbers of missing people. A large number of children are living in the relief camps and special arrange-

ments for the education of the students of the displaced families must be made."

The party said that the state government must immediately take over the management and maintenance of all relief camps and provide proper health and sanitation facilities for all.

"Disruption of transportation of goods and essential commodities through the National Highways and district headquarters must be stopped.

"The letter and spirit of the existing Constitutional provisions related to the state of Manipur must be protected, and the trust between communities should be restored through reconciliation and dialogue," the party said.

The Congress said that thousands of 'people dwelling in peripheral areas near hills and valleys are living under fear psychosis and facing sleepless nights'.

"Agricultural land and paddy fields are deserted, with no cultivators in sight before the onset of the monsoon. Daily wage earners are living in extreme agony," the party said.

ANI

Excise Case: HC dismisses Manish Sisodia's bail plea

New Delhi - The Delhi High Court on Tuesday dismissed the bail plea of Manish Sisodia, the former Deputy Chief Minister of Delhi, in a CBI case related to alleged corruption in the implementation of the previous liquor policy in the national capital.

The bench of Justice Dinesh Kumar Sharma denied bail to Sisodia and said that the applicant (Sisodia) being a powerful person, there is the possibility of him influencing the witnesses.

During arguments, the CBI had opposed the bail plea moved by Sisodia and stated, "The applicant (Sisodia) enjoys close nexus with the executive, offices and bureaucrats and his influence and clout is evident. His party colleagues holding high ranks continue to make factually wrong claims in order to influence the investigation and also claiming the applicant to be a victim of a political vendetta."

A perusal of the said statements by this political leader (s) during the press conferences would reveal how the entire efforts of not only the applicant but his party colleagues as a whole

are to shield the accused, stated CBI in its reply opposing bail plea.

The statements also undermine the authority of the Special Judge (CBI), having already taken cognizance of the offences, and are being made to adversely impact the investigation by levelling unwarranted and unsubstantiated allegations against the CBI, thereby influencing and deterring the witnesses of the case, said the CBI.

CBI stated that any release of the applicant on bail shall gravely prejudice the investigation herein, more specifically when the applicant fails to meet the 'triple test' for bail.

While personal liberty is paramount, the same is not absolute but subject to reasonable restrictions, including the interest of the state and the public.

During the arguments earlier, Sisodia through senior advocate Dayan Krishnan submitted that the CBI has no evidence to show his involvement in the alleged irregularities in the framing and implementation of the excise policy.

ANI

CAGED BIRD



An activist of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) takes part in an awareness campaign against the caging of birds, in Hyderabad on Tuesday (AFP)

Death toll in Jammu bus accident mounts to 10

Jammu and Kashmir - At least ten people were killed and around 55 injured when a bus fell into a deep gorge on the Jammu-Srinagar national highway on Tuesday morning.

According to officials, the bus was on its way to Katra from Amritsar when the incident took place near Jhajjar Kotli - about 15km from Katra in Jammu district. Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Jammu, Chandan Kohli said that all the passengers have been evacuated and the rescue operation was almost complete. "10 people died and around 55 are injured. All have been evacuated. The rescue operation is almost complete. The SDRF team is also present on the spot," said the SSP.

Kohli said that the injured were shifted to the hospital. He said that paramilitary teams and State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) were engaged in evacu-



At least ten people were killed and around 55 injured when a bus fell into a deep gorge on Jammu-Srinagar national highway on Tuesday (ANI)

ation and rescue operations.

The SSP further added that the bus was carrying more passengers than the prescribed limit, which will be probed.

Assistant Commandant Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) Ashok Choudhary said that a crane was brought to check if someone is trapped under the bus.

"CRPF, Police and other teams are also here. Ambulances were called and the injured were immediately rushed to hospital. Bodies have also been taken to the hospital. A crane is being brought here to see if someone is trapped under the bus. A rescue operation is underway. We are being told that the bus was coming from Amritsar and that people from Bihar were on board. They perhaps lost their way to Katra and reached here," said Choudhary.

ANI

Europe stages summit to warn Moscow that Moldova is not alone

Brussels, Belgium - There may not be much time to discuss security strategy in detail, but a summit of up to 47 European leaders just outside Moldova's capital Chisinau should send Russia a powerful message.

Moldova's fragile democracy lives under the shadow of Moscow's invasion of neighbouring Ukraine and efforts by Russian-backed agents to undermine its ambitions towards European integration.

It will already be a logistical and political feat if the European Political Community (EPC) manages to gather dozens of heads of state and government on Thursday for a summit group photo in solidarity with Moldova's pro-Western government.

The EPC is a forum for European leaders inside and outside the EU to discuss common strategic threats, and EU candidates like Moldova - an economically weak former Soviet republic of less than three million - see membership as a staging post on the road to Brussels.

"There has never been such a mega-event in the history of Moldova," said Felix Hett, an expert on Ukraine and Moldova at Germany's Friedrich Ebert Foundation. "If all goes well, the summit will be a promotional event for Moldova, a proof of what the small country can achieve," he told AFP.

Moldova is divided between a breakaway region occupied by Russian 'peacekeepers' and its politics have been undermined by corruption and foreign provocateurs. It has fallen behind neighbours to the west and north in the quest to join the European project, but the increased attention being paid by Western nations to the region since Russia's all-out invasion of Ukraine has shaken up the political picture.

"Moldovan politicians are aware that they owe EU candidate status to the war in Ukraine," Hett said.

To ensure the safe and orderly organisation of the summit a vast air traffic operation has been set up to accommodate



Moldovan graduates pose for a photo session in front their high school in Chisinau on Monday. On June 1 Moldova will hold its first major summit of wider Europe, bringing together leaders of all 27 EU countries (AFP)

leaders' planes at Moldova's small airport.

More than 2,000 delegates are expected to attend the talks in Mimi Castle, a wine estate 35km (20 miles) outside Chisinau and about the same distance from Tiraspol, capital of the separatist region of Transnistria.

France's President Emmanuel Macron, who promoted the idea of the EPC as a European strategic vehicle that would embrace countries outside the European Union - but exclude Russia and its ally Belarus - is due to attend.

In addition to the 27 EU members, 20 more leaders have been invited from countries with as

varied strategic interests as the United Kingdom, Turkey, Switzerland, Iceland, Serbia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The first EPC summit in Prague in October last year gathered 44 leaders, and since then the microstates of Andorra, Monaco and San Marino have joined.

The second meeting may also see an appearance by President Volodymyr Zelensky - fresh from a diplomatic tour to the Arab League in Saudi Arabia and the G7 summit in Japan - although the Ukrainian leader's travel plans are never revealed in advance.

"We'll need to see who is in the photo, but also who isn't there," said Sebastien Maillard, Director of the Jacques Delors Institute, a Brussels-based think tank.

"It's also an opportunity to show that the Europeans can discuss their strategic interests among themselves, without the Americans."

'Moldova is not alone'

For Moldova itself, the stakes are more straightforward than a debate about where the balance of power lies in Western leadership circles: The summit is a stage to promote its EU ambition and to surround itself with friends in the face of Russian manoeuvres.

Earlier this month, President Maia Sandu told AFP that Moldova wants to join the European Union 'as soon as possible' and to begin formal accession talks within months.

"Of course, nothing compares to what is happening in Ukraine, but we see the risks and we do believe that we can save our democracy only as part of the EU," she said.

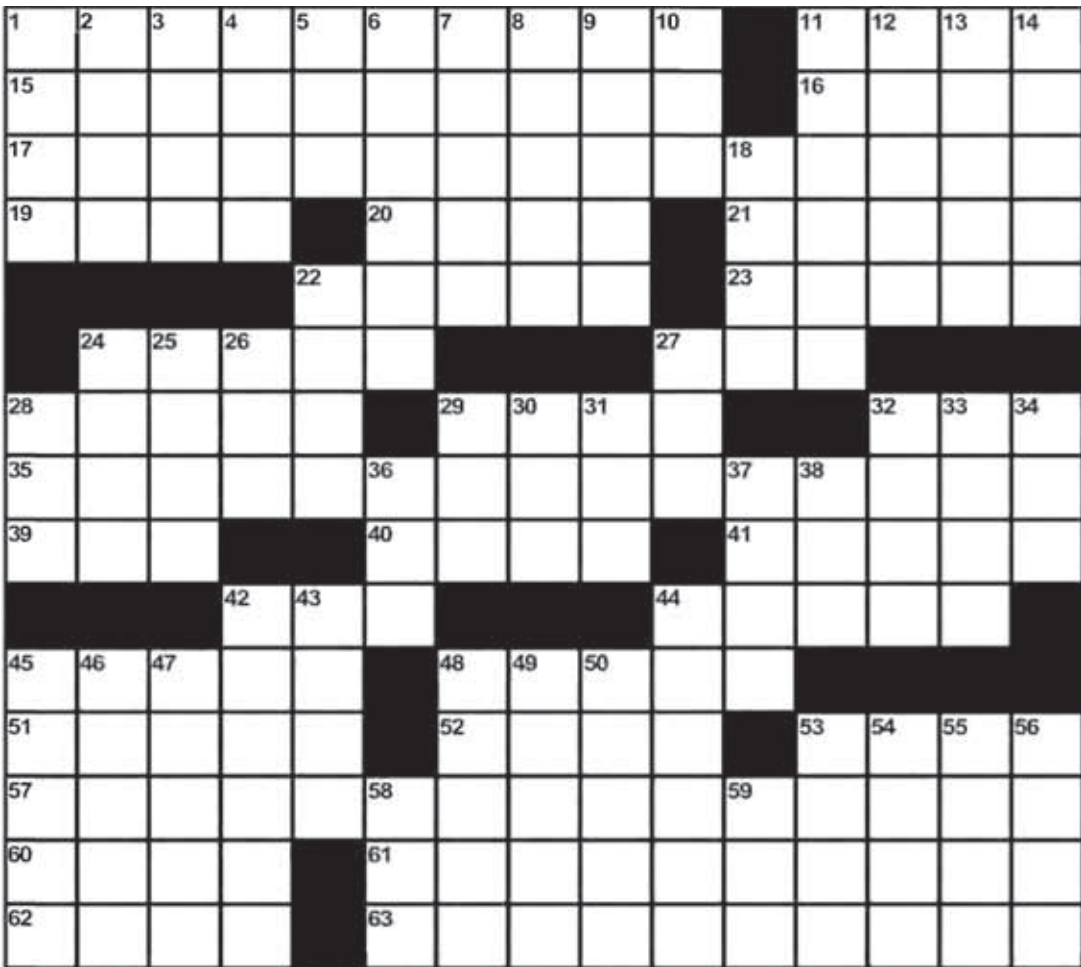
"We do believe that Russia will continue to be a big source of instability for the years to come and we need to protect ourselves."

In the run up to the summit, European leaders have been posting short videos of support for Moldova linked by the hashtag: 'MoldovalsNotAlone'.

In June 2022, less than four months after Russia unleashed an all-out invasion, the EU member states granted Ukraine and Moldova official candidate status. In the months to come, they will have to decide when to begin negotiating membership terms.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**

 - 1) Removes paint, in a way
 - 11) Jest
 - 15) Some short films
 - 16) Japanese sashes
 - 17) Things for losers only?
 - 19) React to a horror film
 - 20) Adjusts, as a clock
 - 21) Type of influence
 - 22) Fatty foods, to dieters
 - 23) Pac-Man noises
 - 24) Thanksgiving pie
 - 27) Possessed
 - 28) Silo contents
 - 29) Tardy
 - 32) Lamb's lament
 - 35) "Don't worry"
 - 39) "Bleah!"
 - 40) Bad emotion to have
 - 41) Follows a recipe direction
 - 42) Legendary singer Charles
 - 44) With tongue in cheek
 - 45) Used the + key
 - 48) Have...in the matter
 - 51) Persona non _ (unwelcome one)
 - 52) Ornamental pitcher
- 53) Radar image
 - 57) Exactly
 - 60) "... happily _ after"
 - 61) Bathing places for some
 - 62) Compass direction
 - 63) Trumpeter

DOWN

 - 1) Musical number
 - 2) Wild ox of puzzledom
 - 3) It's hot off the presses
 - 4) Plumbing problem
 - 5) Franklin or Kingsley
 - 6) Class exercise
 - 7) Lacking citizenship
 - 8) Small altercation
 - 9) Bridge support
 - 10) Govt. check issuer
 - 11) Bound together
 - 12) Domicile
 - 13) Bathing beauty
 - 14) Gossip center?
 - 18) Oompah band need
 - 22) When doubled, Mork's goodbye
 - 24) Rock genre, briefly
 - 25) A head
 - 26) OSS replacement
 - 27) "Rings on... fingers ..."
 - 28) Bearded antelope
 - 29) Grassland
 - 30) Back of the boat
 - 31) Digit that gets soaked
 - 32) Crumbly soil
 - 33) It'll fight for you
 - 34) Wake-up times, typically
 - 36) Socially challenged?
 - 37) Not straight
 - 38) Produce, as an egg
 - 42) Witty comeback
 - 43) Month in the Jewish calendar
 - 44) "No surprises, please"
 - 45) Discredited veep
 - 46) Took the wheel
 - 47) Female equivalents of knights
 - 48) "Cool!" old-style
 - 49) Dog tag datum
 - 50) Automobile type
 - 53) Smudge
 - 54) Sainted pope called "the Great"
 - 55) Doctrines
 - 56) "Check this out!"
 - 58) Bailout key
 - 59) Crumb

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
Someone you usually consider to be mellow and agreeable could start acting kind of feisty, which is going to be quite amusing to you! They have turned over a new leaf and are no longer hesitant to act out or say what's on their mind, and they have you to thank for it. Get ready for a boatload of their gratitude, which will give you a wonderful feeling of camaraderie. This ordinary day will become quite emotional once the two of you start singing each other's praises.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
You need to be very sensitive to the feelings of other people right now. You're usually good at reading people's moods, but they could be acting less predictably than normal today. There are many emotions zooming around just beneath the surface, and they could pop up at any time and place. Everyone you talk to will be capable of bursting into tears or laughter at the slightest provocation, so be prepared. Don't avoid people. Just don't take their reactions personally.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
If you see the world through an idealist's eyes, it looks like a great big bunch of happy people who want only the best for each other. But if you look at it through grumpy glasses, it's quite a different picture. Which viewpoint are you going to take today? How the knot of your day unravels is completely up to you, so get in touch with your more positive mood and follow it. If you wake up on the wrong side of the bed, break the funk by treating yourself to an extra-special coffee drink.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
If you need to have a difficult conversation with someone, today is the day to get some alone time with them and broach that touchy subject. But before you call them up and jump right into it, consider creating a softer, gentler environment, one that is much less confrontational. Why not invite them over for a quiet dinner or luncheon? Good food and a relaxing atmosphere will create a perfect environment for open communication. They won't feel put on the spot. They'll feel cared for.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Right now, there is way too much socializing to be done -- and the big questions about your life are just not important. This is a good thing for you, because until now you've been using up a lot of energy wondering about where you're headed. Pondering this type of imponderable question is a waste of time, so it's a good thing that your day will be filled with friends and laughter. You need to lighten up a bit, and these people will serve as the helium in your mood balloon.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
Today, you could get some extremely good news that sends your mood skyrocketing to the heavens! You should enjoy the buoyancy, but don't make any big decisions based on it. There is a slight chance that things could dramatically change in the coming days, so try to keep your enthusiasm in check. You don't want your extreme happiness to plummet to extreme regret, do you? You're capable of some amazing wins today, but first you have to show the Universe that you're grounded in reality.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
The problems in your life right now are nowhere near as big as they feel. In fact, if you take another look at them today, you'll see that most of them are fairly simple to solve. All you need to do is get a little bit more organized about finding a solution and then you will! Make up some lists of what is wrong and what is right in your life. You'll notice right away that the list of "right" things is a lot longer than the list of "wrong" things.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Today could start off deceptively calm, but it's only the calm before the storm! When that storm hits, get the heck out of the way. Keep your head down and avoid getting involved. Your input won't be received warmly, so why bother offering it? You might think you have the solution to the conflict, but the people who are arguing don't want solutions. They just want to fight, so let them. Stick your nose into their business and it could get bruised.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
Someone in your life says they're making big changes, but are they really? You haven't really seen any results yet, and your patience might be wearing thin. There's nothing wrong with asking them about their progress, and today is the day to do it. They might appreciate your prodding. It's a sign that you're a very good friend. You should encourage them to make the choices that aren't so easy. Let them know that you'll be there to support them however long it takes.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
A conversation you have with a coworker or collaborator will have a double meaning, although one of you might not realize it until it's too late. Speaking in code might be a great way of avoiding the wrath of nosy eavesdroppers, but it is a risky move. After all, unless both of you know the code, you can't have effective communication! Opt for crystal-clear communications today. And if you need to keep a secret, just make sure you're talking in private.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Today, you need to be more proactive about getting what you want. Go right to the source, right to the person or people who can help you get where you need to go, meet that person you want to meet, or invest in that resource you need so badly. Making more aggressive moves might be hard for you at first, but once you get a hang of it, you'll find that it brings some impressive results. People are receptive to what you have to say, and they'll respect your forthrightness.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
You have every right to your feelings, no matter what they are -- and you have every right to express them. Plus, you know how to express them better than most. You have the great ability to put things in a very tactful way, so say what you mean -- you don't have to worry about how people react. That's not your responsibility, anyway. If their feelings get hurt or they take issue with things, that's because of some issue or unresolved problem they need to deal with.

01. A group of young early 20th century composers working in Montparnasse who became known as Les Six, included Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Francis Poulenc, Germaine Tailleferre and which other?

A. Béla Bartók
B. Maurice Ravel
C. John Cage
D. Darius Milhaud

2.What was the name of the Liverpool club where the Beatles played in the early 1960s?

A. Abyss
B. Trench
C. Hole
D. Cavern

3. What London establishment was created in 1753 by Sir Harris Sloane?

A. London Zoo, Regents Park
B. The British Museum
C. The National Portrait Gallery
D. The Royal Society

Answers: 1.D 2.D 3.B

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

R	I	I	P
O	K	O	Y
I	N	L	L
B	A	S	L

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

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



Stan Wawrinka celebrates after winning a point against Albert Ramos-Vinolas on Monday

'IT'S WHY I KEEP PLAYING'

Swiss veteran Wawrinka rolls back years in French Open marathon win

Paris, France - Former champion Stan Wawrinka shrugged off his 38 years to reach the French Open second round on Monday, winning a five-set marathon against Albert Ramos-Vinolas which stretched to four hours and 35 minutes and said: "It's why I keep playing".

Wawrinka, ranked 89 in the world, came through 7-6 (7/5), 6-4, 6-7 (2/7), 1-6, 6-4 and will next face Australia's world number 108 Thanasi Kokkinakis after

winning a match at Roland Garros for the first time since 2020.

Playing out on the semi-sunken Court 14 arena, the Swiss veteran fired 76 winners and committed 79 unforced errors in an all-out attacking performance which brought back memories of his 2015 title triumph in Paris.

"It's one of the big reasons why I keep playing is to relive those emotions," said Wawrinka.

"I think it was special today again to be here, a lot of support,

a lot of fans here. It helped me a lot to stay in the match and to keep fighting for it.

"I always try to make it special, try to have a connection with the people, with the fans, because as I say, it's one of the main reasons why I keep playing and I want to enjoy it as much as possible."

With 14-time champion Rafael Nadal sidelined from the tournament for the first time since 2004 through injury, Wawrinka is one of only two champions in the draw - the other is Novak Djokovic, the title winner in 2016 and 2021.

"I won here many years ago, a long time ago. I was much younger and playing different tennis," said Wawrinka. "But it's always going to be special to be

back here and always have that memory about 2015."

Wawrinka, a three-time major winner, has been battling a series of knee injuries in recent years.

The former world number three missed four successive majors after the 2021 Australian Open before returning in Paris last year.

However, he was defeated in the first round at the French Open and then at Wimbledon, the US Open and this year's Australian Open.

Wawrinka and Kokkinakis, a player who has waged his own injury battles in recent years, have never met.

"When he's healthy, like he's been this year, he's always a dangerous player," said Wawrinka.

Medvedev stunned, Djokovic defiant after controversy

Paris, France - World number two Daniil Medvedev was knocked out of the French Open in the first round on Tuesday, losing in five sets to 172nd-ranked Thiago Seyboth Wild as Roland Garros attempted to move on from Novak Djokovic's Kosovo controversy.

Seyboth Wild, who came through the qualifiers and had never previously won a Grand Slam match, triumphed 7-6 (7/5), 6-7 (6/8), 2-6, 6-3, 6-4.

It was Medvedev's fifth loss in the opening round at Roland Garros in seven appearances.

Seyboth Wild, without a win on the main tour since February 2022, held his nerve in the conclusion of the four-hour 15-minute match on Court Philippe Chatrier.

Djokovic will return to Court Philippe Chatrier on Wednesday night for his second round match with the controversy over his "Kosovo is the heart of Serbia" message still raging.

The Belgrade-born superstar, chasing a record 23rd Grand Slam title in Paris, wrote the message in Serbian after his opening round victory over Aleksandar Kovacevic on Monday.

"Kosovo is our cradle, our stronghold, centre of the most important things for our country," 36-year-old Djokovic told Serb media. His comments came amid heightened ethnic tensions in northern Kosovo where demonstrators and NATO soldiers have been injured.

Russian qualifier Mirra Andreeva, 16, marked her Grand Slam debut with a quickfire 6-2, 6-1 victory over Alison Riske-Amritraj of the United States.

Andreeva, the youngest player in the tournament, has reached 143 in the world from 312 in April and hit the headlines at the Madrid Open earlier this month



Novak Djokovic

As a public figure but also a son of a man who was born in Kosovo I feel additional responsibility to express my support to our people and Serbia as a whole

NOVAK DJOKOVIC

dreeva, 16, marked her Grand Slam debut with a quickfire 6-2, 6-1 victory over Alison Riske-Amritraj of the United States.

Andreeva, the youngest player in the tournament, has reached 143 in the world from 312 in April and hit the headlines at the Madrid Open earlier this month

where she reached the last 16.

Wimbledon and US Open runner-up Ons Jabeur eased past Italy's Lucia Bronzetti, who won her maiden WTA title in Rabat on Saturday, 6-4, 6-1.

Jabeur, a first round loser 12 months ago, is idolised by Andreeva, 12 years her junior.

Svitolina hoping to 'bring joy' to Ukraine with tennis return

Paris, France - Elina Svitolina said she wanted to "bring joy" to people in Ukraine after she marked her comeback to Grand Slam tennis with a first-round victory at the French Open on Monday.

The former world number three beat last year's semi-finalist Martina Trevisan 6-2, 6-2 in her first match at a major tournament since the 2022 Australian Open.

Svitolina recently returned to the tour following maternity leave, having previously taken a break from the sport citing health problems and mental exhaustion following Russia's invasion of her home country Ukraine.

The 28-year-old also won her 17th WTA title in Strasbourg last weekend.

"I want to do it for myself. I have some goals that I want to complete before I retire completely," she said when asked what motivated her to return to the WTA Tour in April.

"Of course, for my country, as well, to bring these little mo-



Ukraine's Elina Svitolina celebrates after beating Italy's Martina Trevisan on Monday (AFP)

ments like, for example, winning Strasbourg, starting well here, as well.

"These kind of moments, these little wins... on a level, which is very low, but these moments bring joy to people of Ukraine, to the kids as well -- the kids who loved to play tennis before the war and now maybe they don't have the opportunity.

"These moments that can motivate them to look on the bright side and see these good moments and enjoy themselves as much as they can in this horrible situation."

Svitolina has reached two Grand Slam semi-finals and six quarter-finals, including three times at Roland Garros.



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz Garfia plays a backhand return to Italy's Flavio Cobolli during their first-round match on Sunday (AFP)

Alcaraz says he felt 'invincible' in French Open win

Paris, France - World number one Carlos Alcaraz admitted he felt "invincible" at times during his straight-sets win over Italian qualifier Flavio Cobolli in the French Open first round on Monday.

The 20-year-old, the youngest top seed at Roland Garros since Bjorn Borg in 1976, swept to a 6-0, 6-2, 7-5 win over his 159th-ranked opponent.

U.S. Open champion Alcaraz won the first eight games of Monday's match and was com-

fortably two sets up in just 52 minutes.

In the first set alone, he allowed his overwhelmed opponent a meagre 10 points.

"I felt I couldn't lose a game. I thought that I was able to win easier than I did, but a match can turn around in each game. But at the start of the match, I felt invincible," he said.

Cobolli, making his Grand Slam debut, rallied briefly in the third set but was unable to take advantage of two break points in

the sixth game.

Alcaraz then saw four match points slip away as the Italian hung on to level at 5-5.

However, the Spaniard wrapped up the tie on a fifth match point in the 12th game.

Next up for Alcaraz is a clash with Japan's Taro Daniel for a place in the last 32.

New York-born Daniel, ranked 112, enjoyed his best Slam at the Australian Open in 2022 where he went to the third round from qualifying and de-

feated former world number one Andy Murray in the round of 64.

His best run in Paris was a second round appearance in 2017.

Daniel has flourished on hard courts this year -- reaching the quarter-finals in Acapulco and second round from qualifying at Indian Wells and Miami.

"I know the level of Taro, so it's going to be a really tough second round, really tough match," added Alcaraz.

AFP

REIGN OF CAPTAIN COOL

'Amazing' Dhoni hailed as one of a kind after thrilling win

Chennai Super Kings captain MS Dhoni sets the field during their IPL final against Gujarat Titans on Monday (AFP)

Ahmedabad, India - MS Dhoni was hailed as a superhero Tuesday after the 41-year-old's tactical acumen, cool demeanour and a crucial stumping helped Chennai Super Kings win a record-equalling fifth IPL title.

Chennai edged out 2022 champions Gujarat Titans by five wickets in a last-ball thriller that started on Monday and ended past 1:30am Tuesday.

Fans of Dhoni and his team celebrated on the streets all night.

The final in Ahmedabad was played on the reserve day after a washout on Sunday and, after more wet weather, Chennai chased down a rain-revised target of 171 in 15 overs. Ravindra Jadeja scored 10 runs off the final two balls in front of 80,000 fans at the world's largest cricket stadium.

Former India skipper Dhoni, who looks set to play on despite earlier suggestions that this might be his last hurrah, was out first ball in Chennai's

reply.

But the wicketkeeper-batsman also pulled off a masterful stumping of Gujarat's danger man Shubman Gill and his experience, calm and sheer presence helped see Chennai home.

He has now equalled Rohit

This stage of his career to win another IPL and lead a team like he has, I think it is great credit to him

STEPHEN FLEMING

Sharma's record of five titles as captain - Rohit for Mumbai Indians - but pundits believe Dhoni is in a league of his own.

"If you are comparing on titles you

have got a discussion," former Australia batsman and ex-IPL coach Tom Moody said on ESPNcricinfo.

"But if you are talking about captaincy, there is no grand final."

Former India batsman Sanjay Manjrekar agreed, saying: "This kind of leadership will rarely be seen."

Dhoni is India's most successful Test captain and has had a glittering career that included winning two World Cups. He retired from international duty in 2020 but continued with the IPL, albeit with a bad knee and some lacklustre batting performances this term.

Having previously hinted this might be his last IPL, he suggested after the final that he will return for one more crack in 2024.

"The way (fans have) shown their love and affection, I think that's something I need to do for them," he said.

Rain halted play on Monday as a

brief but torrential downpour left one of the side pitches soaked. Ground staff needed over two hours to get the game restarted after midnight. Fans kept patient for the second straight day, with chants of "Dhoni, Dhoni" reverberating through the night air, before Jadeja brought the house down with a six and four to seal victory.

Videos of "Captain Cool" during the nerve-jangling final moments showed him somehow keeping calm - outwardly at least.

It appeared that he closed his eyes for the last ball when Jadeja needed a boundary to win.

Dhoni then hugged Jadeja and lifted him off his feet.

"As calm as he is and cool as he is, (still) it means a lot," Chennai coach Stephen Fleming told reporters. "This stage of his career to win another IPL and lead a team like he has, I think it is great credit to him," Fleming said.



Jimmy Butler of Miami Heat dribbles the ball during Game Seven of the Eastern Conference Finals against Boston Celtics on Monday (AFP)

Miami get the better of Boston to book NBA title clash with Denver

Boston, US - The Miami Heat advanced to the NBA Finals on Monday by routing Boston 103-84 and denying the Celtics a historic comeback from down 3-0 in the series.

Jimmy Butler had 28 points, seven rebounds and six assists while Caleb Martin added 26 points and 10 rebounds to spark Miami, which will visit Denver on Thursday to begin the best-of-seven championship final.

Taking full advantage of an injury to Boston star Jayson Tatum in the opening seconds and a cold-shooting start by the host Celtics, the Heat avoided becoming the first team in NBA history to lose a playoff series after taking a 3-0 lead.

Miami recovered from a gut-punch of a game-six defeat, falling on a last-second tip-in, to win the Eastern Conference final

4-3, silencing a loud Boston crowd after the opening minutes.

"We stayed together as a group and as a team," Butler said. "We talked about going to get a tough one on the road and we did just that."

"But we're not satisfied. We're happy. We're ecstatic. But we've got one more to get."

The Heat, seeking a fourth NBA title and first since 2013, last reached the NBA Finals in 2020, losing to the Lakers.

The Nuggets, into the NBA Finals for the first time, swept the Los Angeles Lakers in the Western Conference final and have not played since May 22.

Miami stretched the lead as high as 17 points in the second quarter - a margin the Heat hadn't squandered to lose a game all season - but Boston pulled within 52-41 at half-time.

With Tatum hurting, Derrick White scored eight straight points to lift the Celtics within 59-51.

But Caleb Martin sank a baseline jumper just before the third-quarter buzzer, giving him nine in the period, to put Miami ahead 76-66 entering the fourth.

Martin sank a three-pointer to ignite a 7-0 Miami run to open the fourth quarter for an 83-66 edge, matching the Heat's largest lead to that point.

The Celtics went nearly four minutes without scoring and never again threatened, finishing a woeful 9-of-42 from three-point range.

"We shot 21 percent from three," Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla said. "The defense was still there. They gave it everything they had. That's the most important thing to take from this."

Mourinho targets sixth European title as Sevilla seek to stay perfect

Budapest, Hungary - Roma manager Jose Mourinho has never lost a European final while Sevilla is six from six in Europa League finals. Something has to give in Budapest on Wednesday.

Portugal's Mourinho has five major continental titles to his name - two Champions League wins, two Europa League trophies and last year's triumph in the inaugural Europa Conference League with the Italian side.

The 60-year-old announced himself on the big stage in 2003 when he led Porto to the UEFA Cup, the Europa League's precursor, and the following year he won the Champions League.

Inter Milan became champion of Europe on his watch for the first time in 45 years in 2010 and he celebrated his fourth continental trophy during his spell at Manchester United in 2017, win-



Jose Mourinho

ning the Europa League. Twenty years on he is defying the naysayers who said his career was on the wane after a disappointing spell at Tottenham.

If Roma lifts the trophy in Hungary, Mourinho will pull clear of Giovanni Trapattoni, who also won five major European trophies in his coaching career.

The much-travelled Mourinho

is in no doubt he is improving with age and experience.

"Better coach, better person, same DNA," said the Portuguese. "The DNA is motivation, is happiness. Desire for these big moments, and these are the feelings that I try to pass to the boys."

"I think you can be better and better with your experiences. I think your brain becomes

sharper and the accumulation of knowledge is better with the years. "I think you stop when you lose motivation. My motivation grows up every day. I think I am better now."

Roma, who edged past Bayer Leverkusen in the semi-finals, finished sixth in Serie A but victory against their Spanish opponents this week would be a passport into the Champions League.

Mourinho's future beyond this season is uncertain but he says for now his only focus is on Wednesday's match at the Puskas Arena.

In order to achieve his target, Mourinho must get past Sevilla, who are kings of Europe's second-tier competition - their tally of six wins is double that of Inter Milan, Liverpool, Juventus and Atletico Madrid.

AFP

'Tired' Spalletti confirms his Napoli exit after making history

Milan, Italy - Luciano Spalletti confirmed Monday that he will leave Napoli at the end of the Serie A season after winning their first league title since the days of Diego Maradona.

Speaking at an event at the Italian national team's Coverciano training centre, Spalletti said that he would take time away from football and would not be immediately moving to coach another team.

"I need to take some time to rest because I'm pretty tired," Spalletti said.

"I don't know if you can call it a year's sabbatical but I won't be working. I won't be coaching Napoli or any other team."



Luciano Spalletti

The 64-year-old guided Napoli to their third Scudetto - their first since 1990 - with five matches to play after a magical campaign in which his team played some of the most thrilling football in Europe.

Napoli's title triumph was the crowning glory of Spalletti's long

and eventful coaching career which had brought plenty of plaudits but few trophies.

It was his first Italian league crown and first trophy of any sort in Italy since the Italian Cup won at Roma in 2008.

He did win league titles in Russia with Zenit Saint Petersburg in 2010 and 2012.

Spalletti will bow out as Napoli coach on Sunday evening when the newly-crowned champions host relegated Sampdoria at the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona.

Italian media report that former Barcelona and Spain coach Luis Enrique is the favourite to replace Spalletti next season.

Mancini picks 26-man squad for Nations League finals

Milan, Italy - Roberto Mancini picked on Monday a provisional 26-man squad for the upcoming Nations League finals in the Netherlands next month.

European champions Italy face Spain in the competition's last four on June 15 with either Croatia or the Dutch hosts awaiting in the final should the Azzurri win.

Mancini has not picked anyone from Inter Milan or Fiorentina, who have the Champions League and Conference League finals next week, including midfielder Nicolò Barella who has been a fixture in Mancini's Italy.

BLOCKBUSTER FINISH

Jadeja hits six and four off final two balls as Chennai win fifth IPL crown

Ahmedabad, India - Indian cricket superstar MS Dhoni said he will look to return for the next IPL season after he led Chennai Super Kings to a record-equalling fifth title over Gujarat Titans in what many believed to be his last match.

Ravindra Jadeja hit a six and four off the final two balls as Chennai chased down their revised target of 171 in 15 overs with five wickets to spare in a rain-hit final which went past 1.30 am local time Tuesday on a

reserve day in Ahmedabad following a washout on Sunday.

New Zealand's Devon Conway led the chase with his 25-ball 47 before cameos from Ajinkya Rahane (27) and Shivam Dube, who hit an unbeaten 32, set the stage for Jadeja's heroics.

Needing 13 off the final over, Mohit Sharma bowled four good balls before Jadeja hit the winning runs to trigger wild celebrations at the world's biggest cricket stadium.

"This is the best time to an-



Chennai Super Kings' players celebrate with the trophy after their victory against Gujarat Titans in the IPL final in Ahmedabad on Monday (AFP)

nounce my retirement. But the amount of love I have received all over. The easy thing would be to

walk away from here, but the harder thing would be working hard for nine months and try to

play another IPL," said the 41-year-old Dhoni.

"It would be a gift from me,

won't be easy on the body. You do get emotional, the first game at CSK everyone was chanting

my name. My eyes were full of water, I needed to take some time off in the dugout."

Chennai won the title for the fifth time to go level with Mumbai Indians.

Dhoni kept attracting huge crowds across venues this season and over 80,000 fans cheered the veteran, who had recently said he would take a call on his future later this year, in the final. Playing his 250th IPL match, Dhoni got out for a first-ball duck as he went back to a stunned silence, but he had the last laugh in his 10th appearance in the final as Chennai captain.

Ambati Rayudu also hit a key 19 off eight balls in his last match after he announced his retirement ahead of the final.

Rain forced players off the ground when Chennai were four without loss after three balls of their innings.

The downpour lasted for about 15 minutes but covers came off from one of the pitches which got damp and the ground-staff worked for over two hours to get the field ready for play.

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QUEEN OF ROCK

TEARS AND PRAYERS AROUND OUTSIDE TINA TURNER'S TRANQUIL SWISS HOME FOLLOWING HER DEATH LAST WEEK



Tina Turner during a performance at the Macy's Passport '97 fundraiser and fashion show in San Francisco, CA

"Someone like this should live forever," said one of Tina Turner's neighbours as she laid flowers outside the rock legend's lakeside home in Switzerland on Thursday.

Barbara Burkhalter was among a steady stream of people who left cards and messages outside Turner's chateau, where the 83-year-old queen of rock had lived for nearly three decades.

Turner's death on Wednesday sparked tributes from world leaders and fellow rock icons - but also from her neighbours in the plush Zurich suburb of Kuesnacht, where the star lived a quiet, untroubled life.

"I brought flowers and a little card. I really had to come," said Burkhalter, 69. "She was my favourite... We loved that she was here but we would never have bothered her. We don't hear your voice any more but it's still inside my heart."

Antonella Carrera wept as she reflected on the role Turner's songs played in her life from childhood onwards.

"Going through hard times, music is what always pulls one back and where you find yourself, and Tina gave me many, many moments where I needed to feel good again," the 53-year-old

South African told AFP.

"I know she's gone and the legend lives on forever, but it's just the pain knowing that this beautiful woman with this gift from God has finally gone to rest."

Rest in power

Large bouquets and individual flowers were building up by the chateau gates, along with candles, cards and handwritten messages to the US-born superstar, including one saying 'Rest in power'.

Besides her soaring vocals and magnetic stage presence, Turner's overcoming of domestic violence touched many around the world. Well-wisher Guia Greaves said she was known locally as a kind person and a good neighbour.

"I don't know how many times I passed here while listening to her songs and said 'Hey, Tina!'," Greaves told AFP. "And I really admire what she symbolised for domestic violence: the way she blossomed with no hate. We have now the treasure of her music and we have to keep listening to it."

She was so strong

Turner had moved to Switzerland in 1995 with her longtime



Music lovers have been laying flowers outside the entrance to the estate of the late singer, in Kuesnacht (Switzerland), following the news

She was my favourite... We loved that she was here but we would never have bothered her. We don't hear your voice any more but it's still inside my heart

BARBARA BURKHALTER

partner Erwin Bach. Some also left flowers of condolence for the 67-year-old German producer.

The grounds of their chateau have immaculately-manicured hedges and huge colourful bushes in pink and blue hues.

The turreted three-storey white mansion, which backs onto Lake Zurich, is shielded from the road by towering trees.

"Her music became part of my life as a teenager and got me thinking about what we make of this life," said Bryan Mackie, 29, among those paying their respects. "My girlfriend is an even bigger fan than me. She's so sad; I brought the flowers for her."

One man knelt and blew three kisses towards the chateau; a woman tenderly touched the

gates after laying flowers, while another woman said prayers in Italian.

Turner's music blasted out in tribute from the cocktail bar across the road.

Beautiful soul

Andrea Brunetti, 47, an Italian IT worker who lives in Lucerne, left a rose with a love heart.

"She's the most beautiful woman in the last 200 years. She's really a treasure. She's more than an artist: she's a beautiful soul," he said.

"She always gave 110 per cent until the end. Some people will never die. Thank-you Tina, for everything you gave to the people."

Jerika Seiler, 48, who met Turner many times in local restaurants over the past 20 years, lit a candle.

The fashion designer said, "One time, while driving into her chateau, Turner opened the window and said 'Hi!' and smiled. I was shouting for happiness!"

She further said, "I went to three (of her) concerts. Any time I see her film I always cry. She was so strong, and her message for life, I will miss it. She was great in every way and will always be simply the best."

AFP

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Louis Vuitton valiantly battled pounding rain on an Italian island paradise while presenting its cruise collection last Wednesday night, the weather sending celebrity guests underneath umbrellas and dampening a hairdo or two.

But when you're the flagship brand within the powerhouse LVMH portfolio, with a guest list that includes Catherine Deneuve, Cate Blanchett and Emma Stone, what's a little rain?

Bad weather was likely not top of mind when the storied luxury label, led by Nicolas Ghesquiere chose the tiny Isola Bella, a jewel of an island in the azure waters of Lake Maggiore, as an appropriately jaw-dropping venue for its Cruise 2024 collection.

The rain arrived nonetheless, forcing the show originally planned for the island's formal terraced gardens to take place within the baroque Palazzo Borromeo, still owned by the family of the same name whose noble ancestry dates to the 13th century.

"It's the one thing Nicolas can't control - the weather," the editor-in-chief of Vogue Thailand, Ford Laosuksri, told AFP after the show, as guests lingered to sip bubbly while hoping (in vain) for the rain to stop.

Laosuksri was wearing a crocheted floral top and sandals - an endearing if not foolhardy gesture amid the steady rain. "I didn't want to ruin my velvet shoes," he confided.

Ghesquiere, Louis Vuitton's artistic director since 2013, sent models through the ornate, high-ceilinged rooms of the 17th-century palazzo in eclectic, futuristic creations for which he is celebrated. Some looks recalled scuba gear adorned with avant garde ruffling, while others felt like fencers' uniforms, protective with thick quilting over the chest.

Fabric was cinched tight like an accordion at the bodice of a sleeveless dress with colour blocks in royal blue and yellow gold, imparting texture and movement, while a shiny black dress came with a

drawstring neckline that called to mind a popular handbag by the brand.

Sweaters became more airy with a translucent stripe at the midriff, while three chiffon gowns cut on the bias - in dusty pink, sea green and baby blue - sported exaggerated puffy sleeves worthy of the Edwardian age.

"It was beautiful, it was flowy but still powerful," said Philippine actress Heart Evangelista.

From fishing to fashion

Louis Vuitton's event was the first-ever fashion show allowed on Isola Bella, a former fishing village transformed by the Borromeos into a sumptuous paradise fit for royalty.

Kings, queens and emperors have been guests at Palazzo Borromeo over the years, including Queen Victoria, Napoleon and Josephine, and even Prince Charles and Princess Diana in 1985.

On Wednesday celebrities and influencers from around the world - including US actress Jennifer Connelly and Felix from K-Pop's Stray Kids - descended on the island.

Trying not to slip, guests took cover under the transparent umbrellas provided by the brand before escaping into the palazzo.

Following the show, some guests stood on benches and posed for pictures under the watchful gaze of centuries of Borromeo elders whose portraits line the walls.

Cruise collections are designed to offer warm-weather wardrobes for jet-setters lucky enough to escape to sunny locales during the drab winter months. In recent years, they have become destination events, with brands choosing more and more exotic spots to backdrop their luxury looks.

Louis Vuitton's show comes on the heels of Dior's, which showed a Frida Kahlo-inspired cruise collection in Mexico City on Saturday, and Chanel's earlier this month at Hollywood's Paramount Studios.

AFP

CRUISE COLLECTION

Futuristic fashion

LOUIS VUITTON BRAVES RAIN ON ITS ITALIAN ISLAND PARADISE ISOLA BELLA FOR ITS CRUISE 2024 COLLECTION

