

Hospitality sector gears up for khareef season bonanza

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The hospitality sector in Dhofar governorate is gearing up to host a large number of tourists, expecting abundant gains during the three months of khareef season beginning this week.

Industry players anticipate over 90% occupancy in most hotels, and the prospects of tid-ing over the financial crisis that unfolded due to losses incurred during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Khareef season in Dhofar, known for its tropical weather and moderate temperatures, is an ideal time for visitors from both inside and outside Oman to experience mist-covered hill-sides and scores of springs in spate.

According to Ahmed Mo-hammed al Ghassani, Director of



Quality Control at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT), nearly 6,000 hotel rooms are ready to receive visitors, meeting benchmarks based on their ap-proved classification.

To absorb the pressure of the influx of tourists, several licensed tourism facilities have also been lined up this year.

Bilal Mohammed al Sawi, a supervisor at Darbat Hotel in

Dhofar, expects hotel occupancy to reach over 90% during Kha-reef this year, compared to 75% in 2022.

"Visitors are drawn to popular destinations such as Wadi Dar-

bat, one of the most famous and beautiful valleys in Dhofar. This is in addition to a variety of events, activities, and popular markets organised by the min-istry (MHT) to entertain tourists during the season."

Fuel price subsidies at Salalah airport, following Royal Direc-tives, are also expected to further boost the tourist inflow this year, Sawi felt.

Mohammad Jalaluddin, an official at Al Mazar Hotel Apart-ments in Salalah, revealed that almost all the rooms at his hotel got booked for 10 to 15 days post-Eid al Adha period.

"Salalah offers a variety of at-tractions, including fairs, food stalls, children's rides, and more. Tourists frequently visit the mountains, making most of the weather, for barbecues."

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H M appoints Foreign Ministry undersecretary

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq on Thurs-day issued Royal Decree No. 39/2023 appointing the Un-dersecretary of the Foreign Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs. The de-creed reads as follows:

Article 1 appoints Khalid

Hashil al Muselhi as Under-secretary of the Foreign Min-istry for Administrative and Financial Affairs.

Article 2 says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Moon sighting for Dhul Hijjah month today

Muscat - The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs has called on people to look for the crescent moon of the month of Dhul Hijjah on Sun-day evening.

The main committee for sighting the crescent of Dhul-Hijjah for the year 1444 AH will meet on Sunday evening at the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

The ministry called on citi-

zens and residents to report the sighting of the moon to the ministry, or to sub-committees in the offices of the governors.

The meeting on Sunday will chaired by H E Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Af-fairs; along with His Eminence Sheikh Ahmed bin Hamad al Khalili, Grand Mufti of Oman, and three Supreme Court judges.

Oman wins 11 media awards at Arab States Broadcasting Union festival in Tunisia

Muscat - The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Information and private media institutions, achieved outstand-ing success with 11 awards at the 23rd ASBU Radio and TV Festi-val and Convention in Tunisia.

Organised by the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU) under the theme 'Celebrating Arts and Culture', the event

brought together ASBU repre-sentatives, Arab production companies, news agencies, and broadcasters in a vibrant media and cultural gathering.

The Sultanate of Oman Radio secured multiple accolades, in-cluding the first place in the radio podcast category for *From the Womb of Death* and first place in the children's programme for



Safron. It received the second prize in the youth initiatives com-petition for *And Cooperate*.

The Sultanate of Oman Radio also got the gold prize for musi-cal composition with the piece *Wahaj* and the silver prize in the song competition for *Ayyanaak*.

Hala FM Radio's environmen-tal programme - *Hala Box* - re-ceived the second prize, while

Al-Wesal Radio won the second prize for its interactive pro-gramme *Al-Wesal Forum*.

House of Wonders and the Age of Caravans between the Sultanate of Oman and Zanzibar claimed the top spot in the general films and documentaries category.

Oman TV also excelled, win-ning first place in the 'Natural Re-serves in the Arab World'

competition with the programme *Al-Sarb: Wildlife and Natural Re-serves in Dhofar Governorate*. Ad-ditionally, it has been awarded the first prize in the documentary category for the programme *Athar: Engraving Rock Art and Ancient Writings* under the theme 'The Art of Architecture in the Arab World'.

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Aster Al Raffah Hospital Sohar receives approval for Advanced Cathlab Facility and successfully saves expat patient's life by expert team of Cardiac Cath Lab lead by Dr Mohammed Sakib

Aster Al Raffah Hospi-tal Sohar, a leading private healthcare facility received Ap-proval from DGPHE ministry of health for state-of-the-art Cathlab facility, becoming the first private hospital in the Al Batina Region to offer this critical service.

In a recent life-saving incident, an underprivileged expat patient expe-rienced acute chest pain and was rushed to Aster Al Raffah Hospital's Emergency Room. Prompt action was crucial as the patient was di-agnosed with a severe heart attack, specifically an ST elevation myocar-dial infarction (MI), caused by the sudden blockage of a heart artery. Recognizing the urgency of the situ-ation, the hospital's dedicated team swiftly moved into action.

The patient was immediately transferred to the Cath lab, which operates around the clock, along with the Cardiac Care Unit (CCU). The experienced medical profes-sionals swiftly performed an emer-gency angioplasty to identify and unblock the affected heart artery using stent. Thanks to the hospital's efficient response and the expertise of its healthcare providers, the pa-tient's life was saved, and the pa-tient was discharged from the hospital in good health.

The management and staff of Aster Al Raffah Hospital express



From left to right : Athira Anil Kumar(Cath lab In charge), Dr Mohammed Sakib (Interventional Cardiologist), Sarath PM (Cath lab Technician), Eldose George (Cath lab scrub nurse).

their heartfelt gratitude to the KMCC Sohar, the local community association, for their unwavering support throughout the patient's journey. KMCC Sohar played a cru-cial role in providing financial as-sistance and coordinating efforts to ensure the patient received the necessary medical attention. In recognition of their efforts, KMCC Sohar presented a letter of ap-preciation to the hospital's man-agement and doctors for their dedication and life-saving interven-tion.

Aster Al Raffah Hospital's Car-diac Emergency Care Unit, equipped with the Cathlab and CCU, operates round the clock to address critical cases in the Al Batina Region. The hospital is grateful to the Ministry of Health for their guidance and as-sistance in handling emergency cases, ensuring better treatment outcomes and the preservation of precious lives.

With the successful implementa-tion of the Cathlab facility and the hospital's unwavering commitment to providing top-notch medical care, Aster Al Raffah Hospital stands at the forefront of delivering advanced healthcare services in the Al Batina Region. The hospital remains dedi-cated to saving lives, promoting pa-tient well-being, and fostering partnerships with the community to provide inclusive and accessible healthcare solutions.

Our Correspondent

Muscat

As temperatures soar and the scorching heat overwhelms the country, vehicles are facing critical overheating problems, resulting in unexpected breakdowns on the roads. Increasingly, it is becoming commonplace to witness cars stranded on highways, their bonnets raised, and smoke billowing from their engines.

Owners are compelled to spend up to RO300 on engine repairs or even replacement for reasons mostly stated to be negligence in maintenance.

The Wadi Kabir Industrial Area has been buzzing with activity with the onset of summer as car mechanics are working overtime to keep up with the demand.

Faisal Khan, a mechanic, shared his observations, stating, "We're witnessing a significant rise in issues related overheating. Negligence regarding radiator maintenance, such as failure in replenishing water and coolant, is a common cause."

Continuous use of air conditioning further contributes to overheating, he added.

"Additionally, radiators can accumulate debris, rust, and mineral deposits over time, impairing their performance and re-



FAISAL KHAN

sulting in inefficient heat transfer and engine overheating."

The combination of intense heat, lack of coolant, and prolonged vehicle usage places a tremendous strain on car engines, specifically on their cooling systems.

Often, people don't even open their car bonnets for months to timely check for coolant, and engine or power steering oils, leading to severe consequences.

Salim al Khabouri, a company PRO, shared his experience, saying, "My car broke down five

work-related errands.

The financial burden of repairing an overheated engine is an added challenge for car owners.

Mohammad al Kindi, a sales executive, shared his perspective, stating, "With the repair costs averaging RO300, these unexpected expenses strain household budgets and compound the financial pressures faced by individuals."

"I had to spend RO360 on various engine components, including coils, pistons, radiators, and pipes as advised by my mechanic."

A pick-up driver from AAA 24-hour road side assistance said of late, he has been transporting up to 10 cars daily, with the majority of them breaking down due to overheating.

To prevent such predicaments, here are some essential preventive measures:

- ▶ Check the radiator and cooling system regularly
- ▶ Make sure the engine oil is at its proper level
- ▶ Never ignore the dashboard warning lights and indicators
- ▶ Be aware of the signs of overheating, such as a smoke from the engine
- ▶ Pull over and let the car cool down if you see any sign of overheating



Our Correspondent

Muscat

Buraimi Governor's Office and Oman Development Bank (ODB) recently organised an investment forum with primary focus on investments in development projects and tourist sites in the governorate.

The Investment Opportunities Forum - in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 - showcased a range of projects aimed at developing tourist sites, preserving heritage monuments, revitalising traditional and commercial markets in Buraimi governorate.

Under the patronage of Dr Hamad bin Ahmed al Busaidi, Governor of Buraimi, the forum commenced with a commitment to attract investments and enhance public facilities within the governorate.

The Buraimi Governor's Office has assigned 105 projects worth approximately RO16mn, Busaidi informed. Additionally, he said, financing agreements were signed for projects exceeding RO5mn, accompanied by three memoranda of cooperation and eight assignment agreements.

"The forum extensively explored over 884 investment opportunities."

Highlighting specific initiatives, Governor Busaidi mentioned the upcoming implementation of the Buraimi Oasis project in downtown Buraimi.

"This project encompasses a mini-mall, a hotel, pedestrian-friendly areas, public squares, a mini-museum, and a captivating reflective fountain. Another significant undertaking is the artificial lake project, set to elevate the tourism sector in the governorate. The lake will feature various water attractions, children's play areas, a conference centre, and a theatre."

Separately, in collaboration with Omran, the governorate plans to develop the Al Abila Tourist Park in the wilayat of Mahda. It will have picnic areas, outdoor swimming pools, recreational zones, and comprehensive tourist and service facilities.

Oman Development Bank, which is one of the main financial institutions engaged in various development projects in the sultanate, is also greatly involved in smooth financing of the projects in Buraimi.

The bank has short-term operational plan to achieve a total financing target of RO20mn for the projects in Buraimi by 2025.

In the context of development, Eng Hamed bin Salim al Harthy, chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Development Bank, underlined the crucial role of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in driving economic development, growth, and sustainability.

“SMEs have the potential to generate employment, and fuel larger industries, thereby positively impacting the GDP.”

Oman Airports, Istanbul Airport sign MoU for enhanced aerial training

Muscat - Oman Airports, represented by its institute, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Istanbul Airport's IGA Academy to foster greater cooperation and elevate the quality of aerial training.

The MoU was signed by Hamood bin Salim al Hagri, senior training manager at Oman Airports, and the director of IGA Academy's Human Resources department.

The primary objective of the agreement is to strengthen the friendly relations between the two parties, both renowned as global pioneers in aerial training within the aviation industry, a press release stated.

The MoU aims to enhance co-operation in aerial training and

explore opportunities for collaboration that can benefit the global aviation sector, while facilitating the exchange of experiences between the two organisations.

The agreement reinforces the distinguished relationship and constructive cooperation between the Oman Airports Training Institute and IGA Academy, promoting the growth and development of their respective human resources.

Notably, the training institution of Oman Airports recently obtained official accreditation from the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Oman wins 11 awards in Tunisia

Continued from Page 01

H E Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, expressed pride in Oman's remarkable achievements at the festival. He lauded Oman media's high calibre and diverse content for showcasing the

He also commended the tireless efforts of public and private media institutions, as well as media professionals, who have been consistently striving to create valuable contents that reflect Oman's ancient heritage.

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Shark Tank-inspired TV show comes to Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) has entered into an agreement with a Bahrain-based group to telecast an entrepreneurship-themed reality television show in the sultanate.

Through this agreement, Hope Ventures will expand the Season 3 of *Beban* to Oman that it expected to encourage and guide Omani entrepreneurs to be successful in their business endeavours.

Hope Ventures was established with the vision to foster a generation of Bahraini youth with an entrepreneurial mindset, skill, and outlook.

The show's expansion also aligns with ASMED's mission to

cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset and support Oman's small and medium enterprises to accelerate their business growth and succeed locally and internationally.

Beban, inspired from the famous American TV series *Shark Tank*, is centred around entrepreneurs and business owners as they pitch their businesses before a panel of regional investors for equity investment and business opportunities.

The show aired for two seasons, through which it featured a total of 62 businesses of various sizes and resulted in successful co-investments by the private and public sectors exceeding US\$6mn in GCC-based startups.

This collaboration between ASMED and *Beban* TV show will contribute to the ease of access

for Omani businesses to a diversified pool of investors and strategic partners, who will fast-track their businesses' growth into regional markets, stated a press release.

Entrepreneurs will benefit from the intensive training bootcamp they will undergo as part of the *Beban* journey to develop their businesses in various aspects like expansion planning, financial modelling, and pitching in front of a panel of regional investors on a televised show.

'It will also provide Omani-based entrepreneurs with tools and resources to develop their businesses while giving them added regional exposure through the show, all while promoting cross-border knowledge exchange between entrepreneurs of the region,' ASMED stated.

'We encourage and invite entrepreneurs based in Oman to apply for *Beban* Season 3 and reap the show's benefits,' the producers urged.

Entrepreneurs will be selected through an evaluation process comprising five stages, starting with screening businesses for viability based on certain criteria, followed by an evaluation stage led by experts and specialists in the business sector.

Candidates will then be nominated to participate in an intensive training bootcamp stage. The last stage will announce the eligible finalists, who will then go on to film the production's episodes.

Oman-based entrepreneurs are invited to apply for the forthcoming season through the link hopefund.bh/beban by July 6.

UNWTO launches startup competition for women

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has launched a new startup competition to support women tourism tech entrepreneurs and innovators across the Middle East.

The Women in Tech Startup Competition: Middle East will further advance UNWTO's work to make tourism a pillar of women's empowerment, stated the UN body.

The initiative gives innovators the chance to compete for enhanced capacity building and visibility. Finalists in each category will join the UNWTO Innovation Network, giving them access to the UNWTO Member States network, mentorship programmes and to UNWTO scholarship opportunities.

"Tourism startups have the power and agility to transform the sector in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. Tourism startups are also leading the way in advancing women empowerment, in the Middle East and globally, and UNWTO is delighted to support the region's best innovators and digital entrepreneurs," said UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili.

Elaborating on the conditions for this competition, the UN body stated that the startups must be led, owned or managed by women residing in any of the following countries: Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Libya and



Tourism startups have the power and agility to transform the sector in line with the Sustainable Development Goals

ZURAB POLOLIKASHVILI

Yemen.

A startup could be at an 'Idea Stage' or at an 'Early Stage', or a 'Series A' startup with a minimum viable product or idea that is ready to be developed and funded.

An applicant (startup) must have a full-time team, a tested pilot and business plan; and should be scalable with potential for international growth.

Startups must also belong to at least one of the following categories:

Social Impact: For startups that focus on technology in well-

ness, health, urban development, rural development, sustainability, and education with cross-cutting benefits with tourism.

Tourism and Travel Experience: Startups focusing on the food and beverage, transportation and accommodation, travel, and retail industries to participate.

Future Tech: Startups that leverage fintech, AI, AR/VR, cryptocurrency, Internet of Things, blockchain technology, digital twinning and the Metaverse.

Events and Community: Startups focused on social and messaging platforms, e-sports and gaming platforms, community-based applications, events-related platforms, and education technology.

Submission for this competition will close by the end of July and the winners will be announced at the Tourism Tech Adventure (TTA) forum to be held on the World Tourism Day (September 27) Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Register for Ammar Award to support people with disabilities

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) is urging citizens and residents to register for the Ammar Award, a humanitarian initiative aimed at empowering and integrating people with disabilities into society.

The award recognises community members and non-profit entities excelling in supporting individuals with disabilities.

Launched in Saudi Arabia in 2014, the Ammar Award expanded to all GCC countries in 2021. Now, in its seventh edition this year, the award has been extended to include all Arab countries and even the world.

Talented individuals with disabilities can compete for various awards, with a total prize pool of



over SAR250,000.

To register for the Ammar Award, citizens and residents can visit www.ammmar.sa.

Oman's Ministry of Social Development is dedicated to empowering and caring for persons with disabilities. Its efforts include providing care programmes and social services through the Vocational Assessment and Rehabilitation Centre.

The centre offers vocational opportunities and rehabilitation to individuals with disabilities. Fifty-eight participants - 31 male and 27 female - benefitted from its programmes till the end of 2021.

Additionally, the Al Aman Rehabilitation Centre offers social, health, rehabilitative, psychological, and therapeutic services to its members. The center had 315 children - 204 boys and 111 girls - enrolled till the end of 2021.

The ministry funds special rehabilitation centres that cater to persons with disabilities. In 2021, these centres served 1,498 members - 1,077 male and 421 female.

MoSD also provides prosthetic and other supportive services to individuals with disabilities.

Head of Angel investment reviews startups opportunities

Muscat - H E Ali Amer al Shidhani, Undersecretary for Communications and Information Technology in the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, received at his office Baybars Altuntas, executive chairman of the World Business Angels Investment Forum (WBAF), and explored avenues of cooperation between WBAF and the departments lending support to Omani technology startups, notably in the field of investment.

Altuntas was briefed about incentives provided by the government in the field. As part of his visit, which included meetings with investment enterprises in Oman, Altuntas also toured the Youth Centre and the Innovation Lab of Omantel.

Hospitality sector gears up for khareef season bonanza

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Mohammed Omran, a supervisor at the Nile Hotel in Dhofar, echoed similar views as that of the Darbat Hotel supervisor on occupancy. "We expect an occupancy rate of over 90% and we are fully ready to host them."

Asrar Ahmed, a receptionist at Intercity Hotel Salalah, also indicated that all rooms in their

property would be reserved for the months of July and August.

Ahmed said apart from the hotels, other parties too are ready - with numerous activities, specially designed gardens for children and food trucks - to welcome visitors.

However, Ahmed is of the opinion that hosting bigger international festivals could be an effective way to attract a larger crowd to Oman.

Khalid al Abri, Director General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar, highlighted the ministry's efforts to attract tourists during the khareef season.

"Attractive promotional packages will be offered in collaboration with airlines and hotels. Salalah Airport expects over 160

weekly flights from regional and international destinations during the season."

The ministry is implementing an active programme to promote khareef season, which include hosting of influential social media personalities from the Arab region and conducting a joint promotional campaign with airlines and hotel establishments.

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MOH No: 558/2023

POSCO-led consortium to build major green hydrogen plant in Duqm: Report

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A consortium led by South Korean steelmaker POSCO Group has won a \$6.7bn deal to build a major green hydrogen plant in Duqm, according to a report published by *The Korea Economic Daily*.

'The Omani authorities will hold a signing ceremony on June 21 (for the signing of agreement for the project),' the report said, citing sources familiar with the matter. It added that the consortium's six companies are discussing details of the project in Oman.

As per the report, the consortium consists of four South Korean companies, a French firm and a Thai corporate. POSCO holds a 28% equity in the group, followed by Samsung Engineering's 12% and the two Korean state-run power companies' 24%. French energy services group Engie holds 25% and Thailand's PTT Exploration and Production Public Company (PTTEP) takes up the remaining 11%.

POSCO has been building its competitive edge in the hydrogen business. The steel giant develops hydrogen production facilities, storage tanks, and pipelines; builds terminals; and



trades the chemical element.

The group aims to produce carbon-neutral steel using hydrogen instead of fossil fuels such as coal and natural gas, with an annual capacity of 300,000 tonnes, at its pilot facility at the Pohang steel complex starting in 2026.

According to *The Korea Economic Daily* report, POSCO Holdings, the steelmaker's investment holding firm, will lead the project and manage the plant-building processes in Oman. Samsung Engineering, a construction unit of Samsung Group, will take charge of the engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) of the facilities. The other firms in the con-

sortium will either produce or sell the green hydrogen generated by the factory.

Recently, the sultanate's state-owned Hydrogen Oman (Hydrom) signed three agreements granting the first green hydrogen blocks in Oman with a total investment exceeding \$20bn. The three projects were signed with the consortia of Amnah, Green Energy Oman (GEO) and BP Oman.

These contracts are expected to yield a total production capacity of 0.5mn tonnes of green hydrogen per annum from more than 12GW of installed renewable energy capacity at three sites, each covering an area of 320sqkm in Al Wusta govern-

orate.

Last week, the International Energy Agency (IEA) pointed out that Oman's high-quality renewable energy resources and vast tracts of available land make it well placed to produce large quantities of green hydrogen.

The sultanate aims to produce at least 1mn tonnes of renewable hydrogen a year by 2030, 3.75mn tonnes by 2040 – and up to 8.5mn tonnes by 2050.

According to the IEA, Oman is on track to become one of the biggest green hydrogen exporters in the world and the largest in the Middle East by 2030.



CBO pauses rate hikes

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) on Thursday decided to keep its repo rate for local banks fixed at 5.75%, following the US Federal Reserve's decision to leave its key policy rate unchanged in the range of 5.0% – 5.25%.

The repo rate is the CBO's policy rate that allows commercial banks to acquire short-term liquidity from the central bank as the lender of last resort.

Oman follows a fixed exchange-rate regime, and consequently its interest rates are closely aligned with US policy rates. The CBO's repo rate generally moves in tandem with the Fed's policy rate.

The US Federal Reserve voted Wednesday to pause its aggressive campaign of interest rate hikes despite 'elevated' US inflation, while indicating a sharp in-

crease could be needed before the end of the year.

"It allows the economy a little more time to adapt as we make our decisions going forward," Fed chair Jerome Powell said in a press conference after the decision was announced.

Omani central bank's decision followed the US Federal Reserve's announcement to keep policy rate unchanged

After 10 straight increases, the Fed's rate-setting committee voted to hold its benchmark lending rate between 5.0% – 5.25%, the US central bank said in a

statement.

The widely-expected decision gives policymakers on the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) time 'to assess additional information and its implications for monetary policy,' the Fed said.

Following the lead of the Fed, Oman has raised its key policy rate to 5.75% in ten successive rate revisions since March 2022.

The CBO in a statement said that its monetary policy target is to sustain and maintain its fixed exchange rate. This policy is aligned with the structure and nature of the Omani economy.

'There are a number of advantages for Oman that are derived from this policy, namely ensuring the stability of the Omani rial, mitigating capital outflow and promoting certainty among investors by removing exchange rate risk,' the sultanate's central bank said.

Russian oil revenues down nearly 50% on price cap: US

Washington, US – Russian government oil revenues plunged nearly 50% in the first five months this year, US Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo said, six months since a price ceiling was enacted.

To restrict Moscow's revenue after its invasion of Ukraine while making sure it keeps supplying the global market, a coalition involving the Group of Seven leading economies, European Union and Australia set a price cap of \$60 per barrel of Russian crude in December.

This decline in oil revenue from a year ago "has occurred despite the fact that Russia is exporting more crude oil today than it did at the onset of the war," Adeyemo said in prepared remarks at an event at the Center for a New American Security in Washington.

"Despite higher exports, Russia is making less money because its oil now trades at a discount of 25% relative to other global oil," he added.



Asked how Washington assesses Russian revenues, a Treasury official who spoke on condition of anonymity said the United States has several tools – including observing the market prices that Russian exporters are receiving for oil.

Russian officials have also cited pressure from dwindling oil revenues, the official added, although noting there is no plan for when the price cap would be abolished.

For now, Russia is considering putting a floor on its revenue losses by moving away from taxation based on the market price of Urals – its dominant blend of oil.

Instead, Russian authorities would calculate taxes by assuming a price that is a "fixed significant discount to Brent, the global benchmark," Adeyemo said in his prepared remarks.

While this suggests Russian oil firms will see their taxes rise even as the price cap drags on revenues, Adeyemo added that the change effectively "locks in a massive discount because of the impact of the price cap."

Sanctions and export controls have made it tough for Russia to replace more than 10,000 pieces of equipment it has lost amid the war, according to Adeyemo.

AFP

Sohar Freezone, Nasim Chemicals sign deal to set up chemical plant

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sohar Freezone has announced a strategic partnership with Nasim Chemicals, a prominent player in the chemical industry, to set up a \$10.4mn chemical manufacturing plant.

This collaboration will witness the establishment of diocetyl phthalate and diocetyl terephthalate plant within Sohar Freezone, aimed at catering to the growing demand for high-quality chemical products in the GCC, India, and African markets.

With a total investment of \$10.4mn, the proposed plant will cover an area of 5,000 sqm and will boast a production capacity of 30,000 tonnes, reinforcing the region's industrial capabilities. The partnership will significantly boost the logistics movement and elevate the throughput levels with more than 2,000 TEUs annually.

In a press statement, Fayaz



The new chemical plant at Sohar Freezone will cover an area of 5,000 sqm and boast a production capacity of 30,000 tonnes (Supplied photo)

Hameedi, co-shareholder of Nasim Chemicals, said, "We are excited about this joint venture with Sohar Freezone and the opportunities it presents. Our partnership signifies our confidence in the region's potential and our commitment to providing high-quality chemical products to the market. By leveraging the strategic advantages offered by Sohar

Freezone and its proximity to key markets, we aim to establish ourselves as a leading player in the industry."

Omar al Mahrizi, CEO of Sohar Freezone, said, "We are thrilled to partner with Nasim Chemicals in this significant agreement. The establishment of the diocetyl phthalate and diocetyl terephthalate plant further

strengthens Sohar Freezone's position as a key industrial player for business and innovation in the region. This collaboration aligns perfectly with our vision of fostering economic growth and attracting strategic investments to Oman."

The plant will create downstream opportunities including the production of PVC products as plastic film and sheets, wire and cable insulation, and flooring and wall coverings. It will be developed in two phases, with construction commencing by the end of this year. Production is estimated to commence by the end of 2024.

Sohar Freezone reaffirms its position as an integrated logistics and industrial hub, leveraging the latest global technologies and adhering to the highest sustainability standards across its diverse activities. The collaboration aligns with the objectives outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

European leaders host Elon Musk, chase Tesla investment

Paris, France – Billionaire Elon Musk swept into Paris on Friday to hold court at an event with thousands of spectators hours after meeting the leaders of Italy and France, as European capitals jostle for investment from his electric car firm Tesla.

He told the audience at the huge VivaTech trade fair his ambition was to put neurone implants in a human brain this year and defended his controversial decision not to censor Twitter.

The maverick tech titan took to the stage to shouts of "we love you Elon", defended his record since he bought Twitter and repeated his warnings that artificial intelligence could go

terribly wrong.

"My strong recommendation is to have some strong regulation for AI," he said, without specifying.

On Thursday he met Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who tweeted later that their talks had been "fruitful" and they had discussed "innovation and opportunities".

A day later he was talking to French President Macron, who had earlier promised to "tout the attractiveness of France and Europe" as an investment destination.

Musk and Macron met a month ago and afterwards the maverick boss of SpaceX and



Elon Musk (left) speaks during his visit at the Vivattech technology startups and innovation fair in Paris, on Friday (AFP)

brain implant firm Neuralink said he was considering big investments in France.

The country's technology minister Jean-Noel Barrot fu-

elled speculation earlier this week by telling US broadcaster CNBC that "a lot of effort and energy" had been expended to secure a Tesla factory for

France.

But reports from Spain say Tesla is planning to build a factory there and Italy now appears to be waging a charm offensive.

The electric carmaker's European footprint is relatively small, having opened its first manufacturing plant in Germany last year.

Awkward interviewee

Europe's leaders and plutocrats are desperate to get some face time with Musk – in Paris he had lunch with French magnate Bernard Arnault, with whom he regularly trades the title of "world's richest man".

But despite the breadth of Musk's business empire, it is his acquisition of social media network Twitter that continues to fascinate and baffle observers.

He bought the platform for \$44bn, sacked much of its staff, allowed right-wing conspiracy theorists to return and introduced all sorts of fees and charges.

Advertisers fled the platform and he has admitted the firm is no longer worth anywhere near the amount he paid.

But he told interviewer Maurice Levy, founder of VivaTech, that he was moving Twitter in a "good direction" and claimed to have got rid of 90% of "bots and

scams" and similar things and 95% of child-exploitation material. "Almost all the advertisers have come back or said they'll come back," he said.

"I feel optimistic about the future."

Musk is a notoriously tricky interviewee, prone to lengthy pauses, off-topic rambles and making coded references to sex and drugs.

On the stage in Paris, he opened with customary giggles and jokes and when asked what the secret to his drive was, he replied "crystal meth", before quickly adding that he was joking.

AFP

ECB hikes rates to 22-year high and says not done yet

Frankfurt, Germany – The European Central Bank hiked interest rates to a 22-year high Thursday and said another increase in July was "very likely", as it pushed ahead with its fight against inflation despite a darkening euro-zone economy.

The ECB's governing council increased rates by a further 25 basis points, taking the closely-watched deposit rate to 3.5% - its highest level since 2001.

"Inflation has been coming down but is projected to remain too high for too long," ECB president Christine Lagarde said.

The move comes a day after the US Federal Reserve held off from raising rates after 10 straight increases.

"We're not thinking about pausing," Lagarde said, adding that the ECB still has "ground to cover" on rates after the Frankfurt institution lifted its inflation outlook for 2023-2025 in fresh forecasts on Thursday.

"Barring a material change to our baseline, it is very likely the case that we will continue to increase rates in July," she told reporters.

The ECB has lifted borrowing costs at the fastest rate ever to combat red-hot inflation after Russia's war in Ukraine sent food and energy prices soaring, raising its key rates by 4.00 percentage points since July.

Eurozone inflation slowed to 6.1% in May year-on-year, down from a peak of 10.6% in October,



Christine Lagarde attends a press conference following the meeting of the governing council of ECB in Frankfurt, Germany, on Thursday (AFP)

mainly thanks to rapidly falling energy costs.

The ECB said its inflation-busting efforts were "gradually having an impact", with loan demand slowing sharply as higher borrowing costs take their toll on eurozone households and firms.

But inflation remains three times above the ECB's target while core inflation - which strips out volatile food and energy prices - eased only slightly to 5.3% in May, after 5.6% in April.

Lagarde reiterated on Thursday that the ECB will "follow a data-dependent approach" as it charts the way forward.

"The ECB simply cannot afford to be wrong on inflation,"

said ING bank economist Carsten Brzeski.

"The bank wants and has to be sure that it has slayed the inflation dragon before considering a policy change."

Like all central banks, the ECB has to walk a fine line in raising interest rates sufficiently to dampen demand and contain inflation, without provoking a sharp economic slowdown in the process.

But the eurozone economy has proved less resilient than initially thought.

Revised data last week showed that the economy in the 20-nation currency union shrank by 0.1% for two straight quarters

at the end of 2022 and the start of 2023, meeting the technical definition of a recession.

Eurozone economy to grow 0.9%

While still mild, the surprise winter slump has cast doubt on more optimistic economic forecasts for 2023.

In updated forecasts, the ECB now sees the eurozone economy growing by 0.9% in 2023 - down from 1.0% previously.

Lagarde said the economy would "strengthen in the course of the year" as inflation slows, supply chains ease and the service sector remains resilient.

But she stressed that the out-

look remained "highly uncertain", citing Russia's war in Ukraine and potentially weak global growth among the risk factors.

Thursday's updated projections also showed inflation reaching 5.4% in 2023, 3.0% in 2024 and 2.2% in 2025 - a 0.1-percentage-point increase for each year from its last forecasts in March.

With the ECB's two-percent target still out of reach by 2025, Lagarde called the outlook "not satisfactory".

Wage pressures were becoming an "increasingly important source" of inflation, she said, as workers - boosted by record-low eurozone unemployment - push for pay rises to help compensate for the higher cost of living.

She also expressed concern about high corporate profits, urging companies and employees to avoid a "tit-for-tat" where both sides sought full compensation for inflation -- potentially creating an unwanted spiral of price rises.

The ECB was watching the discussions and developments between the different parties in the labour market closely, Lagarde said.

The central bank "will take all necessary measures to return inflation to two percent. That they can count on," she said.

"And we are confident that we will get there."

AFP



The People's Bank of China building in Beijing, China

China cuts key interest rate to boost economy

Beijing, China - China's central bank cut a key interest rate and pumped billions into financial markets Friday, as fresh data showed the world's second-largest economy was flagging.

The moves are the most significant by leaders to try to invigorate growth after indicators in recent months showed a hoped-for strong recovery following years of Covid lockdown-induced slowing was quickly running out of steam.

China's efforts contrast with those in the United States and other Western countries, which have been forced into a series of interest rate hikes while reducing money supply to tame inflation.

Officials lowered the medium-term lending facility (MLF) rate - the interest for one-year loans to financial institutions - 10 basis points to 2.65%, the People's Bank of China said in a statement.

The PBOC also said it was offering 237bn yuan (\$33bn) of funds to banks through the medium-term lending facility, "to maintain reasonable and sufficient liquidity in the banking system". The announcement comes two days after unveiling a surprise cut in a short-term interest rate this week, which analysts said reflected growing concern about the state of the economy among Chinese policymakers.

The MLF rate guides the benchmark lending rate for households, businesses and mortgages, which is set to be announced next week.

A lower MLF rate reduces commercial banks' financing costs, in turn encouraging them to lend more and potentially boosting domestic consumption.

A number of lacklustre economic indicators in recent weeks have signalled the country's post-Covid recovery is running out of steam.

Inflation rose only 0.2 percent on-year in May, while factory activity contracted for the second consecutive month.

In another sign of weakness Thursday, figures showed youth unemployment rose to a record 20.8% in May.

Meanwhile, industrial production growth slowed to 3.5% as

factories gradually returned to full capacity, while retail sales, the main indicator of household consumption, rose 12.7% 18.4% April. Retail sales are currently "the only functioning engine of Chinese growth", Rob Carnell, Asia-Pacific head researcher at ING, said in a note.

Thursday's data "equates to a seasonally adjusted decrease in month-on-month sales and shows that the re-opening momentum is falling", Carnell said.

Exports also sank in May for the first time since February, breaking a two-month growth streak. Beijing has kept interest rates low compared with other major economies, but the near-zero inflation highlights challenges faced by policymakers in trying to stimulate growth.

Top economist and government adviser Liu Yuanchun this month called for regulators to cut borrowing costs further to ease the financing burden of small and medium-sized private businesses.

Reports have in recent days said Beijing is lining up a series of measures targeting areas of the economy, particularly the real estate sector, which makes up a huge portion of gross domestic product.

China's six largest state-owned commercial banks cut interest rates for savers on Thursday to boost spending, according to announcements on their websites, after being asked by the central bank.

The Chinese economy is also weighed down by a debt-laden property sector and a global economic slowdown.

"All the data points so far sent consistent signals that the economic momentum is weakening," Zhiwei Zhang, president of Pinpoint Asset Management, said in a note on Thursday.

"We expect Beijing to ramp up transfers to local governments via an increase in the quota for special local government bonds, more lending quota for policy banks, and some direct funding from the PBOC," Ting Lu, Chief China Economist at Nomura, said in a note earlier this week.

AFP

Japan sticks to ultra-loose monetary policy to boost economic growth

Tokyo, Japan - The Bank of Japan said Friday it would maintain its long-standing, ultra-loose monetary policy as it looks to boost economic growth.

The central bank has gone against the grain as its global peers hike interest rates to tackle inflation, pushing down the value of the yen against the dollar.

Officials had been widely expected to keep policies unchanged after the second two-day meeting chaired by new Governor Kazuo Ueda.

It left its negative interest rate in place and did not adjust the band in which rates for 10-year government bonds fluctuate, a scheme known as yield curve control.



People walk in front of the Bank of Japan headquarters in Tokyo

The announcement prompted the Japanese currency to sink to around 140.73 yen per dollar, from around 140.20 yen earlier.

The US Federal Reserve on

Wednesday decided against lifting interest rates, as expected, but signalled plans for additional increases.

The euro also got a boost after the European Central Bank

raised interest rates to a 22-year high. Katsutoshi Inadome, senior strategist at SuMi TRUST, said ahead of Friday's decision there was no reason to expect Ueda would do anything other than continue with the ultra-easy monetary policies in the short term.

"We believe the BoJ will maintain its current accommodative monetary policy, as its inflation forecast for 2024 is still above its two-percent target," he wrote in a commentary.

"Given uncertainty about price increases next year, the BoJ will stay vigilant and avoid making hasty changes to the policy in the foreseeable future."

In April, the bank announced a broad review of its "non-tradi-

tional" attempts to banish the deflation that has plagued Japan since the 1990s, following the bubble era.

Moving away from monetary easing will be a tricky balancing act for Ueda, who faces pressure to normalise policy while minimising any shock to the economy.

In the January-March quarter, Japan's economy expanded 0.7%, up from an initial estimate of 0.4%, government data showed earlier this month.

A recovery in inbound tourism and household spending after pandemic border restrictions were lifted helped the world's third-largest economy, analysts said at the time.

AFP

US adds Switzerland to currency monitoring list, eyeing China

Washington, US - None of the United States' major trading partners has been designated as manipulating its currency - including China - the Treasury Department said Friday, although Switzerland was added to a "monitoring list."

China also warrants close observation, the Treasury added in a biannual report to Congress, over its failure to publish information on foreign exchange interventions and a "broader lack of transparency around key features of its exchange rate mechanism."

The report looks at countries with big trade surpluses that actively intervene in foreign exchange markets to gain trade advantages.

"Most foreign exchange inter-



vention by US trading partners last year was in the form of selling dollars, actions that served to strengthen their currencies," said Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen in a statement.

She added that although the

global economy has been more resilient than many expected, Russia's war on Ukraine weighs on the outlook and has increased energy and food insecurity.

In the latest report, seven economies are on the Treasury's monitoring list of key trading partners that merit close attention to their currency practices and policies.

These are China, South Korea, Germany, Malaysia, Singapore, Switzerland and Taiwan.

Switzerland was declared a currency manipulator in December 2020 and became the subject of "enhanced" discussions, although it was removed from the monitoring list last year.

A Treasury official noted that there remain concerns with its current account balance, adding

that both sides continue to discuss ways to address this.

China's trade imbalance with the United States was another factor keeping it on the list, the official added. But Japan was removed in the latest report.

Beijing has long faced scrutiny, with Washington frequently accusing the government of keeping the exchange rate artificially low via its massive stockpile of US dollars, undermining US manufacturers and workers.

The criteria considered by the Treasury are a large trade surplus with the United States, a significant current account surplus and evidence of "persistent, one-sided intervention" in foreign exchange markets.

AFP

Cash-strapped Sri Lanka's economy shrinks 11.5%

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Crisis-hit Sri Lanka's economy shrank by 11.5% in the first quarter just before an IMF bailout kicked in, official figures showed.

The contraction in the first three months compared with shrinkage of 0.5% in the corresponding period of 2022, and a decline of 12.4% in last year's final quarter.

A currency crisis from late 2021 led to severe shortages of food, fuel and medicines and triggered months of protests that led to the toppling of former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa 11 months ago.

Sri Lanka defaulted on its \$46bn external debt in April last year, and is still negotiating with its bilateral and private creditors

on repayments.

Thursday's figures confirmed that economic challenges persist.

"Industry and services activities declined by 23.4% and 5.0% respectively in the first quarter of 2023," the statistics office said in a statement.

It said only the agricultural sector had shown growth, but that was a modest 0.8 percent, and followed the lifting of a ban on agrochemicals and easier access to fertiliser than late last year. The International Monetary Fund released the first \$330mn of a \$2.9bn bailout in late March.

It forecasts Sri Lanka's economy will contract by 3.1% this year. The World Bank is more

pessimistic, predicting a 4.2% contraction.

The IMF warned earlier this month that Sri Lanka's recovery remained challenging, despite "tentative signs of improvement".

Inflation, which peaked at nearly 70% in September, moderated to 25.2% last month. Foreign debt restructuring was previously held up as the country's main bilateral creditor, China, was initially reluctant to take a haircut and instead offered more loans to pay old debts.

Just over \$14bn of the total foreign credit is bilateral debt to foreign governments, 52% of which is owed to China.

AFP

Bank Muscat hosts seminar for Najahi customers

In line with the growing importance of Micro, Small and Medium-sized (MSME) businesses in contributing to Oman's economic growth and development, Bank Muscat, recently organised a seminar titled 'How to grow your own business'.

The seminar focused on ways to develop business projects and was presented by Butrus Said, a corporate consultant and certified guide in e-commerce. Several customers of the Bank, including entrepreneurs, and representatives of MSMEs attended the seminar, which was held in the presence of Abdulnasser N Al Raisi, general manager - Personal Banking, Bank Muscat, and a number of bank officials, a press release said.

Raisi said, "We are pleased to organise these events continuously for our Najahi customers. MSMEs have always been an



area of focus for Bank Muscat, which is keen to provide these businesses with various financial services and facilities. In addition, the bank ensures that it keeps organising such training and seminars on topics relevant to the requirements of MSMEs. I would like to extend our sincere thanks to all the bank's customers for their confidence in the services and facilities provided by Bank Muscat. The bank will continue to organise such events to provide the best options for customers."

Raya Habib al Shukaili, senior regional manager, Bank Muscat said, "The current phase requires all of us to work hand in hand to enhance the role of this important sector and invest in the development of various services that will provide incentives, benefits and facilities for entrepreneurs. I take this opportunity to

extend my appreciation to all the attendees for their participation in the success of today's seminar. I wish all success to entrepreneurs in the development of their own respective businesses."

Bank Muscat's Najahi has received excellent customer praise for the financial services and facilities it provides as it enables MSMEs to develop and expand their businesses in line with the development goals of the sultanate in order to contribute to diversifying income sources, and supporting Omani youth.

Najahi was designed to meet the requirements of entrepreneurs and MSMEs by providing the necessary support during their initial stages. It offers a range of benefits like POS devices, debit and credit cards, online banking services and collateral-free financial facilities.

Oman cricketers unite to support each other

The cricketers of Oman have got together to form the biggest cricketing community of Oman. This free to join community includes players, umpires, business owners, team managers/owners, youngsters, parents and cricket enthusiasts/lovers.

The main objective of this community is to help and support the less privileged by sharing the burden with many shoulders. In case of major accident or medical emergency or sudden death of an individual, the community will together arrange for funds to reduce the financial impact coming to a single person or his/her family, a press release said.

The community will provide services like free mental support and medical advice by senior doctors. The community will also look to support talented youngsters to stay in Oman by sharing a part of the burden on his parents.

The community will also back and help business owners by marketing their product and services within the community, so that they can get further stronger to help the community back. The community will be organising a series of soft ball and hard ball cricketing tournament, along with few other entertainment events to generate funds for this noble cause.

The community is in its initial phase and has announced its core committee that will include Abdul Gaffar Turabi, Adnan Ahmad Klair, Ahmed Khan, Dipak Thanki, Manoj B Jangid, Omar Sarfraz, Rajkiran D'Souza, Rehmat Ali Surve, Sachin More, Ammar Mustafa, Mohamed Ayjaz, Taranath, Hancy Hanson, Rajat Dewan, Shehbaz Nasar, M Shakeel Khan, Zulqarnain and Pranav S Mehta.

(Currently the community has over 3000 members associated to it now and should you be interested in joining this cause then you could do so by messaging "ADD ME" to 92470544 and you would be added to the group.)

Health undersecretary examines Nizwa Hospital expansion plans

H E Dr Saeed Harib al Lamki, Ministry of Health's Undersecretary for Health Affairs visited Nizwa Hospital in Dakhliyah Governorate to follow up expansion works and ensure its readiness for opening in the nearest term.

The undersecretary viewed the completed buildings of the departments and units within the expansion process which have already started offering services to patients and beneficiaries - namely, outpatient clinics, training, part of the emergency unit, and the MRI unit, a press release said.

Dr Lamki also visited the completed departments and units that will be operated within the upcoming weeks - Cardiac Catheter Unit, laparoscopy, Cardiac Intensive



Care Ward, Post- Cardiac Intensive Care Ward, part of Radiology department that consists of CT Scan and two rooms for Ultrasound, in addition to Bone

Densitometer.

Dr Lamki and the accompanying delegates met the hospital's administration and those in charge of the expansion project.

He was briefed on the stages the project had gone through, the challenges facing the project, and means to solve them in preparation for its opening.



LuLu Exchange opens 39th branch in Oman

LuLu Exchange, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, opened its 39th branch in the country at Al Khoud 6 on Wednesday.

The branch was inaugurated in a hybrid event in the presence of Aadeb Ahamed, managing director, LuLu Financial Holdings, Sheikh Mohammed Hamed Ali al Ghazali, director, LuLu Exchange, and other senior management joining from various parts of the world, a press release said.

The new branch also marks the 281st global branch of LuLu Financial Holdings, and Ahamed congratulated his team on the milestone.

"Our expansion is in sync with the growth of the Omani economy and reflects our ambition to

bridge the gap between our services and the people of this great nation. The new branch at Al Khoud 6 will help us reach out to more customers while also promoting the use of digital payments in line with the country's financial inclusion goals. We are fully committed to the growth prospects of the Omani economy, and are actively driving the future of the payments ecosystem by putting technology and innovation at the heart of all things new."

LuLu Exchange presently provides cross-border payments, currency exchange and value-added services in a timely, transparent and reliable manner through its network of branches and mobile payments app, LuLu Money.

Idealz offers cash bonanza for Dubai Summer Surprises

Idealz, the trailblazing online shopping platform, has returned with yet another heart-pounding campaign which is sure to blow minds with its whopping AED2.5mn cash prize — the biggest cash prize ever seen in Idealz's history.

As Dubai Summer Surprises heats up the city, the new Idealz campaign is all set to ignite the skies with excitement and redefine what it means to be a true winner by promising one fortunate winner an unforgettable opportunity of a lifetime, a press release said.

Being part of the campaign is easy. All customers need to do is download the Idealz App, purchase an 'idealzbasics' shopping

card worth AED60 from the AED2,500,000 cash campaign and wait for the big win. As the maximum draw date approaches on September 30, participants can expect an extraordinary spectacle, with a live broadcast that will captivate viewers.

'idealzbasics' shopping cards are a new addition to the world of Idealz to further personalise the users' shopping experience. Upon purchasing shopping cards of various denominations on Idealz to enter exciting prize campaigns, the shopping cards are converted to in-store credit on the 'idealzbasics' platform. This credit can then be used to buy a variety of chic products on the 'idealzbasics' platform.

OPPO launches A98 5G camera

The OPPO A98 5G allows users to capture precious moments spent with family and friends this summer. Boasting an outstanding camera system and innovative features, the OPPO A98 5G empowers users to unleash their creativity and create everlasting memories.

At the heart of the OPPO A98 5G lies an advanced camera system, featuring a 64MP AI Camera, 32MP Selfie Camera, 2MP Depth Camera, and 2MP Micro-lens. This powerful setup ensures that photography enthusiasts can effortlessly capture stunning, high-quality images in various situations, be it breathtaking landscapes or candid portraits. With the OPPO A98 5G, every moment becomes an opportunity to capture the essence of summer adventures, a press release said.

The OPPO A98 5G offers an



array of impressive features designed to enhance users' photography experience. The Portrait Mode enables users to create professional-looking, vivid cinematic portrait shots that truly stand out, while AI Portrait Retouching intelligently removes blemishes and imperfections from selfies and por-

traits, ensuring picture-perfect results that still retain a natural look. Undoubtedly, one of the standout features of the smartphone is the Microlens, which unlocks a whole new world of possibilities, allowing users to explore the microscopic details that often go unnoticed by the naked eye.

MoE takes stock of 'Individual Performance'

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Administrative Affairs, held a meeting with the counterparts of the Individual Performance System Management Office, targeting fifty employees of the Ministry's General Diwan and the Directorates-General of Education in the governorate.

The meeting was headed by Dr Salwa al Qassabi, director of the Individual Performance System Management Office, Dr



Ahmed al Hadrami, head of the Awareness and Performance Data Department, and Dr Fatima al Hammadi, head of the Individual Plans Department, a press release said.

The meeting included presentation of three papers - 'Job Rotation Initiative among the Units of the State's Administrative Apparatus', 'Improving Main Objectives and Results', and 'Annual Evaluation of Staff Performance for the Year 2022'.

Bank Nizwa supports UTAS Nizwa student felicitation

Bank Nizwa sponsored a ceremony to honour over 200 outstanding students at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), Nizwa, held under the patronage of H H Syidah Wisam al Said, head of marketing and corporate communication.

This demonstrates the bank's commitment to its social responsibility and the importance it places on supporting and enhancing the education sector in the sultanate. The bank aims to make a positive impact on society by contributing to the promotion and empowerment of the community's aspirations for significant progress in education, aligning with Oman Vision 2040, which aims to cultivate a highly competent generation of learners capable of meeting the diverse and increasing demands of our modern world, a press release said.

Bank Nizwa's sponsorship is a testament to its commitment to remaining at the forefront of educational advancements and addressing the evolving needs of the sector. It also exemplifies the bank's steadfast support of talented students, inspiring them to



actively engage in the pursuit of knowledge and innovation. This valuable contribution not only strengthens the local and global economy through their remarkable achievements but also aligns perfectly with Oman's visionary approach, recognising

education as a fundamental pillar for sustainable development.

Syyidah Wisam said, "At Bank Nizwa, we always prioritise caring for and supporting the education sector at different levels. Our aim is to enhance the quality of education and its outcomes.

Sponsoring the ceremony honouring outstanding students exemplifies the bank's dedication to fulfilling its responsibilities towards the community and contributing to the journey of building and development, particularly in the field of

education."

In the spirit of sponsoring the ceremony, Bank Nizwa underscores the dedication of its team to actively engage and make positive contributions to the community through diverse educational initiatives.

MHD-ITICS launches Honor phones

As the joyous Eid celebrations approach, it's a time when people exchange gifts and a new smartphone can be an ideal gift. With its range of cutting-edge features, Honor, the renowned mobile phone brand, has made a remarkable contribution to the Omani mobile arena.

To establish a strong presence and ensure the seamless availability of its devices in Oman, Honor has appointed Mohsin Haider Darwish - ITICS as its exclusive distributor in the region. This strategic partnership has created waves in the market garnering attention from tech-savvy individuals eager to experience the latest innovations from Honor, a press release said.

Here is an overview of the latest Honor phones available in the local market.

Honor 70 - The phone won the EISA award for 'Best Buy Smartphone' and is renowned as the best vlog phone. It features a 54MP IMX800 Super Sensing Main Camera and a solo cut vlog mode for content creators.

Honor X9a - This stands out as a smartphone with a strong screen and a brilliant AMOLED curved display. It boasts a 64MP triple-lens camera that captures precise details in close-up shots. With its sleek 7.9mm body, it combines style and performance.

Honor X8a - The elegant Honor X8a offers a timeless design with a 6.7-inch Honor Edgeless Display that maximises screen area for an enhanced viewing experience. It features a 100MP ultra camera for vivid images and a 16MP selfie camera that captures perfect skin tones.

Honor X7a - Experience the legendary performance of the Honor X7a with its ultra-large battery and smart energy-saving engine. With the 22.5W Honor SuperCharge, you can enjoy 3 hours of watch time with just 10 minutes of charging.

Honor X6 - The ultra-chic and modern Honor X6 is a stylish and comfortable state-of-the-art phone. With its 50MP camera, users can unleash their creativity in photography, while the 6.5-inch Honor Full View Display provides an unparalleled visual experience.

MHD-ITICS leverages its power of collaboration to create exceptional value for all stakeholders involved. Its understanding of customer preferences allows it to go beyond expectations, delivering products that truly captivate the market. The partnership with Honor exemplifies the Company's commitment to providing unparalleled experiences to the customers.

60 Saudi designers to exhibit in Paris

For the first time, the Saudi 100 Brands initiative is bringing a curated selection of emerging Saudi designers to Paris Fashion Week and Haute Couture Week.

The 'Paris Intervention' will host two dedicated state-of-the-art showrooms, as well as a series of celebratory events showcasing the most exciting Saudi creative talent to a global audience. Designers will be in attendance throughout the events to welcome new friends from around the world.

From June 24 to 27, the 'Paris Intervention' Ready-to-Wear showroom, sponsored by the

Saudi Coffee Company, will be held at the Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine with luxurious views of the Eiffel Tower just across the river.

The Ready-to-wear showroom will focus on women's, men's and unisex clothes and accessories, exhibiting everything from streetwear to eveningwear from Saudi's robust fashion scene.

Burak Cakmak, CEO of the Fashion Commission, said, "The 'Paris Intervention' is our latest initiative to connect in-demand Saudi fashion talent with fashion lovers, buyers and decision-makers globally. The success of the

Saudi 100 Brands program since its launch in 2021 has shown Saudi has a strong pipeline of unique and inventive brands. They have proved their worth time and time again, showcasing their designs on the global stage, wowing international audiences and dressing A-list celebrities - and they are very excited to share their latest work in Paris."

Saudi 100 Brands is a professional development program led by the Fashion Commission which helps emerging local talent achieve their full potential by accelerating growth and reaching new audiences.

Joyalukkas Exchange opens 6 new branches across Oman

Joyalukkas Exchange announced the inauguration of six new branches, further expanding its presence in Oman.

As a leading money exchange in the country, Joyalukkas Exchange has strategically opened these branches in prominent locations, including Amerat 5 and Amerat 6, Saham, Ibri, Al Khoud, and Ruwi, a press release said.

With the addition of these six branches, Joyalukkas Exchange has reached an impressive milestone of 39 branches within a span of 10 years. This remarkable growth reflects the commitment to providing exceptional experiences to customers and offering the best services and products in the money exchange industry.

The official inauguration ceremonies were graced by Joyalukkas Group chairman, Joy Alukkas, and Joyalukkas Exchange managing director, Antony Jos. Their presence highlighted the significance of this achievement and reaffirmed the company's dedication to continued expansion.

During the press conference, Joy Alukkas emphasised the



paramount importance of delivering unique customer experiences, while Antony Jos shared the exciting news of upcoming expansion plans, anticipating the opening of two or more branches this year. This success can be attributed to the unwavering support of both local residents and

expatriates, who have been instrumental in the Joyalukkas Exchange's journey over the past decade.

The branch opening ceremonies captivated audiences with local and international traditional music. Notably, the press conference also featured the esteemed

presence of John Paul, Joyalukkas Jewellery managing director, Justin Sunny, Joyalukkas Jewellery International Operations general manager, Nixon Baby, Joyalukkas Exchange Oman general manager, and Ansar Shenthur, Joyalukkas Exchange Oman operations manager.

Ooredoo offers new Passport Roaming for Hajj pilgrims in KSA

With Eid Al Adha fast approaching and as part of its commitment to give back, Ooredoo has launched a special offer for customers wanting to travel to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) to perform Hajj.

For RO10 and valid for at least 14 days, Ooredoo customers will get access to unlimited data plus

30 minutes of calls to mobile numbers in Oman and Saudi Arabia as well as receiving calls. The offer is available during the Hajj period, from June 15 for one month, a press release said.

Ooredoo's Hajj Passport allows customers to stay connected with their loved ones back home, so they can focus on what is

important during this significant journey.

Giving customers peace of mind to experience a special pilgrimage without having to worry about paying extra charges for any calls to Omani numbers they make or receive is yet another way Ooredoo is upgrading every customer's world.

Khimji Ramdas presents 20 Years' Service Awards for staff

Khimji Ramdas (KR), one of Oman's leading business conglomerates recently recognised 64 employees for their remarkable dedication and service, as they completed 20 years with the company.

The grand event to felicitate long-service employees has been upheld for over 25 years. The event took place at the Inter-Continental Muscat in the presence of KR's directors and the management team, a press release said.

Showcasing KR Group's commitment to fostering talent and nurturing their growth within the organisation, the long-service award reflects KR Group's people-centric policies, and acknowledging and appreciating employees for their contribu-



tions to the company's success and continued growth.

Emphasising the company's

steadfast belief in the importance of its people, Anil Khimji, director of Khimji Ramdas

Group, stated, "Our people are our greatest assets. We are grateful to our employees who

have served the company with loyalty and commitment over the last two decades. We be-

lieve in fostering a culture of learning, which gives our employees opportunities to build

and improve their skills and knowledge. This process ensures mutual growth and helps build a competitive work environment. At KR, we remain committed to establishing an inclusive workplace that supports and empowers employees to thrive both, personally and professionally."

By nurturing a culture of continuous learning and development, the KR Group enables its workforce to enhance their capabilities, contribute to the company's success, and succeed in an ever-evolving business landscape. The annual Long-Service Awards ceremony is a testament to Khimji Ramdas' dedication towards its employees and its core values of Trust, Care, Commitment, and Learning.

IN BRIEF

Spanish rocket launch aborted due to last-minute glitch

Madrid, Spain - The maiden flight of Spain's first rocket was aborted on Saturday after countdown ended because of a last-minute technical problem, the start up PLD Space said.

The launch of the Miura 1 in the southwestern province of Huelva was 'automatically aborted' as some of the umbilicals - which are used to provide power and fuel to rockets - did not release as it should, Raul Torres, a co-founder of PLD Space, tweeted.

"We will analyse the data to have more information," he added.

The launch of the Miura 1, named after a breed of fighting bulls, had initially been scheduled for May 31 but was postponed due to high winds. Standing just 12 metres (40 feet) tall, the small reusable rocket was to fly 100km (62 miles) above Earth.

Uruguay to melt Nazi bronze eagle

Montevideo, Uruguay - Uruguay will melt down a bronze eagle found on a sunken World War II-era German destroyer off its coast 13 years ago, and recast it as a dove of peace, the South American country's president said on Friday.

The 350kg (770-pound) 'symbol of violence and war' will be turned into a 'symbol of peace and union', President Luis Lacalle Pou told journalists in the capital Montevideo.

The two-metre (6.5-foot)-tall bird with a Nazi swastika gripped in its talons adorned the stern of the *Admiral Graf Spee*, a battleship involved in one of the first naval skirmishes of World War II. The *Graf Spee*'s captain, Hans Langsdorff, scuttled the battleship - one of the Third Reich's largest - on December 17, 1939 following the Battle of the River Plate.

Eight people die in Mexico heatwave

Mexico City, Mexico - Eight people have died in the third heatwave to hit Mexico since mid-April, the country's health ministry said on Friday.

Temperatures reached a record high of 35 degrees Celsius (95 Fahrenheit) in the capital Mexico City this week.

Seven of the victims died of heatstroke and one of dehydration between April 14 and June 12, the ministry said in a statement.

In the northeastern city of Monterrey, temperatures exceeded 40C, while water pressure was reduced in homes and an increased demand for electricity including air conditioning led to power cuts.

AFP

Blinken: Trip to China aims at 'avoiding miscalculations'

Washington, US - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday that his coming visit to China aims to open up better communications 'by addressing misperceptions and avoiding miscalculations'.

"Intense competition requires sustained diplomacy to ensure that competition does not veer into confrontation or conflict," Blinken said. "That is what the world expects of both the United States and China."

Blinken will hold talks on Sunday and Monday in Beijing on the first trip by a top US diplomat in nearly five years.

The trip was rescheduled after the United States cancelled a planned Beijing visit by Blinken in February after Washington said it detected - and later shot down - a Chinese spy balloon.

The first goal of the trip to China, Blinken said in a press conference, is 'to establish open and empowered communications, so that our two countries responsibly manage our relationship'. He said the aim was also to set the record clear on US interests and values, and to explore areas of possible cooperation, including on global economic stability, fighting drug trafficking, and climate and health issues.

He added he would raise the issue of US citizens detained by China.

China has detained a number of US citizens on various charges, including Kai Li, a businessman accused of spying in 2016, and David Lin, an America pastor held since 2006. Blinken was speaking in a joint press conference with



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (right) meets with Singaporean Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan at the US Department of State in Washington, DC, on Friday (AFP)

Intense competition requires sustained diplomacy to ensure that competition does not veer into confrontation or conflict

ANTHONY BLINKEN

visiting Singapore Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan.

Balakrishnan said the Asian region had its eye on US-China relations, calling it 'the challenge of the century'. "This is a very important and critical moment, not

just for the United States and China," he said.

"The rest of the world will be watching. So we hope and believe that you will be able to manage the differences," he said.

The visit comes as relations between the two superpowers have been particularly strained, on the issue of Taiwan, on China's ambitions to expand its political and security influence around the globe, and on economic relations. Washington officials recently said China has set up intelligence operations in Cuba, just off the southeastern US coast.

And on Thursday a major US cybersecurity firm, Mandiant, said online attackers with clear links to China are behind a vast cyber espionage campaign targeting US government agencies.

Earlier this week Daniel Kritenbrink, the top State Department official for East Asia, stressed that the United States was 'realistic' about what Blinken could achieve in China. "We're not going to Beijing with the intent of having some sort of breakthrough or transformation," Kritenbrink told reporters.

In Beijing on Friday, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said the United States needs to work together with China to improve relations, Xinhua reported.

"The United States views China as its 'primary rival' and 'the most consequential geopolitical challenge.' This is a major strategic misjudgement," said Wang in a press briefing.

AFP

Singapore says 'premature' for ASEAN talks with Myanmar junta

Washington, US - Singapore Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan said on Friday that conditions were not yet right for ASEAN to open high-level talks with Myanmar on the country's political situation.

"We believe it would be premature to re-engage with the junta at a summit level or even at a foreign minister level," Balakrishnan said when asked about a news report that Thailand had proposed talks.

Speaking in a joint press conference in Washington with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Balakrishnan said the leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations had recently reaffirmed their stance.

"We condemned the coup, and the ongoing violence against civilians, the instability in the country, the setback to national reconciliation, and the enormous impact on the economy," he said of the 2021 military takeover in Myanmar.

"Unfortunately, it's now more than two years. We haven't seen any signs of improvement," Balakrishnan did not reject all engagement with the Myanmar junta.

"The key point is this. You do need everyone ultimately to sit down and negotiate," he said. "I don't know how long it

will take. The last time it took 25 years for some form of democratic transition to occur in Myanmar. I hope it won't take that long."

Blinken said the United States backs ASEAN efforts to resolve the crisis.

"It's very important that we continue, all of us, to sustain the appropriate pressure on the junta and look for ways of course to engage the opposition" in Myanmar, he said.

Thailand has proposed to host an informal ministerial meeting of some ASEAN members with Myanmar on Sunday and Monday.

"It is time for ASEAN to fully re-engage Myanmar at the leaders' level," according to a Thai government letter, seen by AFP. "In consideration of several pressing factors, the time for dialogues is sooner rather than later."

A Myanmar junta spokesman did not respond to a request for comment on the proposal. A Southeast Asian official familiar with the matter told AFP on condition of anonymity that Malaysia would not attend the proposed meeting.

But the Cambodian government said its foreign minister will attend the two-day informal discussions in Bangkok.

AFP

Chile: Remains of new species of duck-billed dinosaur found

Santiago, Chile - Remains of a species of herbivorous dinosaur previously unknown in the southern hemisphere have been discovered in Chile, challenging long-held beliefs about the range of duck-billed dinosaurs, scientists said on Friday.

Measuring up to four metres (13 feet) in length and weighing a ton, Gonkoken nanoi lived 72mn years ago in the extreme south of what is now Chilean Patagonia.

"These were slender-looking dinosaurs, which could easily adopt a bipedal and quadrupedal posture to reach the vegetation at height and at ground level," said Alexander Vargas, director of the paleontological network of



Chilean scientist Escarlet Zapata working on a dinosaur fossil in Santiago

the University of Chile and one of the authors of the study published by the journal Science Advances and presented in Santiago.

The discovery demonstrated that Chilean Patagonia served as

a refuge for very ancient species of hadrosaurs, a type of duck-billed dinosaur common in North America, Asia and Europe during the Cretaceous period, from 145 to 66mn years ago.

AFP

SEEING OFF THE EMPEROR



Japanese PM Fumio Kishida, his wife Yuko Kishida, Crown Prince Akishino and Crown Princess Kiko see off the plane transporting the Japanese emperor and empress to Indonesia for a visit, in Tokyo on Saturday (AFP)

Racism routine in police force that killed George Floyd: US probe

Minneapolis, US - Police in the city where patrol officers murdered African American George Floyd routinely resort to violent and racist practices, the US Justice Department said on Friday in findings of a review three years after his death.

The report detailed multiple cases of police in Minneapolis, Minnesota shooting unarmed and unthreatening people, before and after Floyd's May 25, 2020 death.

The Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) 'uses excessive force, including unjustified deadly force' and 'unlawfully discriminates against Black and Native American people when enforcing the law', the department concluded.

The cases in the report included the killing of a woman who had called 911 to report a possible sexual assault, and a man already in custody who was

stabbing himself.

The report also cited frequent cases of police using excessive force, often with fatal consequences.

Floyd died after white police officer Derek Chauvin held his knee to the 46-year-old's neck for nearly 10 minutes while three other officers looked on.

He had been detained on suspicion of trying to pass off a counterfeit US\$20 bill.

His death set off nationwide protests over police abuse and discrimination against African Americans, raising the pressure on police departments around the country.

US Attorney General Merrick Garland announced that Minneapolis had agreed to accept a programme of tough oversight from the Justice Department that will impose reforms.

He said the study showed a pattern of Minneapolis police vi-



US Attorney General Merrick B Garland addresses the findings of a Justice Department investigation into the Minneapolis Police Department during a press conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota on Friday (AFP)

olating locals' constitutional rights, and that Floyd's death brought this to broader attention.

It 'has had an irrevocable impact on the Minneapolis com-

munity and our country and around the world', Garland told a news conference.

"This loss is still felt deeply by those who loved and knew him

and by many who did not," he added.

'I can't breathe'

George Floyd's case became

notorious after a bystander filmed his detention and death, with Floyd audibly telling Chauvin 'I can't breathe' before losing consciousness.

Garland said the probe had found 'numerous incidents' of Minneapolis police responding to detainees' complaints of being unable to breathe with comments like, "You can breathe, you're talking now."

Minneapolis police regularly declined to intervene when colleagues were using excessive force, despite being required to do so, Garland added.

"Years before he killed George Floyd, Derek Chauvin used excessive force on other occasions in which multiple MPD officers stood by and did not stop him," he told reporters.

Garland said data showed police stopped, searched and used force against minorities at a far greater rate than against white

people.

Minneapolis police 'stopped Black and Native American people nearly six times more often than white people in situations that did not result in arrest or citation, given their shares of the population', he said.

"Such conduct is deeply disturbing, and it erodes the community's trust in law enforcement."

The study also found that Minneapolis police regularly violated the rights of peaceful protesters and journalists covering protests, Garland said - especially those that followed Floyd's death.

President Joe Biden said the 'disturbing' findings underscored the urgent need for Congress to pass common sense reforms to increase public trust in policing and combat racial discrimination.

AFP

Macron, Saudi’s MBS call for end to ‘political vacuum’ in Lebanon

Paris, France - French President Emmanuel Macron and Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman called for a ‘rapid end to the institutional political vacuum in Lebanon’, the Elysee said on Friday.

It came after Macron hosted Saudi Arabia’s de facto leader for talks in Paris, where he had been expected to seek support from MBS, as he is widely known, to find a solution to Lebanon’s leadership crisis.

Lebanese lawmakers on Wednesday failed for a 12th time to elect a new president, as bitter divisions between Iran-

backed Hezbollah and its opponents risk miring the country in a protracted power vacuum.

The prolonged absence of a president ‘remains the major obstacle to resolving the country’s severe socio-economic crisis’, the French presidency said.

The pair also discussed the war in Ukraine. Macron expressed his ‘profound concern in the face of Russia’s war of aggression... its disastrous impact on the civilian populations and its repercussions on food security’, his office said.

Macron and MBS ‘also reiterated their shared commitment



France’s President Emmanuel Macron greets Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Paris, on Friday (AFP)

to security and stability in the Near and Middle East and expressed their desire to pursue their joint efforts to bring about

a lasting easing of tensions’.

They intended to ‘develop and deepen the partnership between the two countries’, said the Elysee.

France was also prepared ‘to support Saudi Arabia in strengthening its defence capabilities’, the statement said.

Cautious on Ukraine

The 37-year-old crown prince’s trip came less than a year after his last visit to the Elysee Palace and underlines the warm relationship between Paris and Riyadh that has irked rights activists in the wake of the 2018

killing of Saudi critic Jamal Khashoggi. His stay in France appears set to be a long one, with MBS due to attend a Paris summit on a New Global Financing Pact hosted by Macron on June 22-23.

On Monday, he will also attend an official Saudi reception for Riyadh’s candidacy to host Expo 2030, a bid for which Saudi Arabia wants strong French support.

Marcon’s entourage had made it clear he would try to persuade his guest to take a stand on Ukraine.

But Saudi Arabia has main-

tained a cautious stance, stopping short of condemning the assault while emphasising the importance of Kyiv’s territorial integrity.

MBS hosted President Volodymyr Zelensky last month in Jeddah during an Arab League summit, the Ukrainian leader’s first visit to the Middle East since the invasion began.

But Saudi Arabia also retains close ties with Russia, particularly through Moscow’s involvement in the expanded OPEC+ format of the oil cartel that includes 10 non-OPEC members.

AFP

Death toll from militant attack on school in Uganda hits 37

Mpondwe, Uganda - Militants linked to the Islamic State group hacked and burned 37 students to death in western Uganda in the country’s worst such attack in over a decade, army and police officials said on Saturday.

The army said it was pursuing militants from the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) after the cross-border raid late on Friday on a secondary school in Mpondwe in Kasese district near the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Investigators said dormitories were set alight and students cut down with knives in a brutal late-night assault by ADF, which is one of the deadliest groups active in DR Congo’s strife-torn east.

“Unfortunately, 37 bodies have been discovered and conveyed to Bwera hospital mortuary,” Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (UPDF) spokesman Felix Kulayigye said in a statement, referring to a town near where the attack occurred.

Eight people were injured while six others were kidnapped and taken by the attackers toward Virunga National Park, which straddles the DR Congo border, he added.

“UPDF embarked on pursuing the perpetrators to rescue the abducted students.”

The Resident Commissioner for Kasese, Joe Walusimbi, told AFP that at least 25 of the deceased were ‘confirmed to be students at the school’.

It is the deadliest attack in



Residents are seen at the premises of an attack in Mpondwe, Uganda, on Saturday (AFP)

We have called for more firepower, planes to help in the rescue operation of those abducted, and locating the rebel hideouts for military action

DICK OLUM

Uganda since twin bombings in Kampala in 2010 killed 76 in a strike claimed by the Somalia-based Al-Shabaab group.

‘Big attack’

According to a police report seen by AFP, police and military units were alerted to a ‘big attack’ at Lhubirha Secondary School in Mpondwe at around 11pm (2000 GMT) on Friday evening.

“On arrival the school was found burning and the dead bod-

ies of students were found lying in the compound and the school’s food store broken into’ with items missing, the report stated.

The school is less than two kilometres (1.2 miles) from the border of DR Congo, where ADF is primarily active and has been accused of killing thousands of civilians since the 1990s.

Major General Dick Olum told AFP intelligence suggested the presence of the ADF in the area

at least two days before the attack, and an investigation would be needed to establish what went wrong.

He said it appeared the attackers had detailed information about the school.

“They knew where the boys and girls’ dormitories resided,” said Olum from Mpondwe.

“This is why the rebels locked the boys’ dormitory and set it on fire. The rebels did not lock girls’ section and the girls managed to get out, but they were cut with machetes as they ran for safety, and others shot”.

He said some of the bodies were burned beyond recognition and DNA testing would be required to identify them.

“We have called for more firepower, planes to help in the res-

cue operation of those abducted, and locating the rebel hideouts for military action,” he said.

Rare attack

The rebels fled toward Virunga, a vast expanse on the border with Uganda and Rwanda and a globally renowned sanctuary for rare species, including mountain gorillas. But militias - of which dozens are active in the mineral-rich eastern DR Congo - also the use the park as a hideout.

Originally made up of mainly Muslim Ugandan rebels, ADF gained a foothold in eastern DR Congo in the 1990s.

Since 2019, some ADF attacks in eastern DR Congo have been claimed by the Islamic State group, which describes the fighters as a local offshoot, the Islamic State Central Africa Province.

ADF attacks in Uganda are less common and the toll from Friday’s attack is the worst in many years by any group.

It is not ADF’s first attack on a school in Uganda.

In June 1998, 80 students were burnt to death in their dormitories in an ADF attack on Kichwamba Technical Institute near the border of DR Congo. More than 100 students were abducted.

Uganda and DR Congo launched a joint offensive in 2021 to drive the ADF out of their Congolese strongholds, but the measures have so far failed to end the group’s attacks.

AFP

German Greens in doldrums over compromises

Berlin, Germany - When Germany’s ecologist Greens hold a mini-party congress on Saturday, members of the junior coalition party are expected to vent their fury over tradeoffs that have sent the party’s popularity plunging.

From concessions on coal to clashes with climate protesters, the party has repeatedly found itself on the defensive since entering Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s government.

Matters have come to a head in recent weeks, with a painful compromise on European Union migration measures and a row over gas boilers. “The situation for the party has not been as dangerous for many years as it is this summer,” the NTV broadcaster said in a recent report.

The German Greens scored their best-ever election result in 2021, becoming the third-largest party in parliament and entering the government for the first time since 2005.

But critics in the party say it has sacrificed its founding principles to govern in an awkward coalition with Scholz’s centre-left SPD and the pro-business FDP.

Ahead of the congress, opinion polls put the Greens in fourth place behind the resurgent far-right AfD.

Anger boiled over when EU nations last week reached agreement on a long-stalled revision of their rules on migration. They included plans to introduce fast-track asylum procedures on the bloc’s external borders.

The deal was a crushing blow for the Greens, who had been



German FM Annalena Baerbock

pushing for more lenient rules for families with children, among other things.

Green Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock defended voting for the changes. “If Germany had rejected the reform or abstained, it would have meant more suffering, not less,” she argued.

But many party members remain furious.

“It was the wrong decision and we should admit that at the weekend,” Greta Garlich, leader of the Greens in Lower Saxony, told Stern magazine on Friday.

The mood among the party’s grassroots supporters is ‘pretty dire’, she said.

The Greens have also run into trouble over a controversial heating law championed by vice-chancellor Robert Habeck, of the Greens.

The law, finally introduced in parliament this week after months of infighting within the coalition government, effectively bans new oil and gas boilers from 2028 in favour of more climate-friendly but expensive solutions.

AFP

Mali calls for immediate end of UN mission

United Nations, US - Mali’s foreign minister called on Friday for the UN Security Council to withdraw the peacekeeping mission in his country ‘without delay’, denouncing its ‘failure’ to respond to security challenges.

The country’s military rulers have increasingly imposed operational restrictions on peacekeepers and also broke Mali’s longstanding alliance with former colonial power France.

“The government of Mali calls for the withdrawal without delay of Minusma,” the name of the United Nations force in Mali, said Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop.

“However, the government is willing to cooperate with the United Nations on this issue,” Diop said, rejecting all options for changing the mandate of the mission as proposed by the

UN secretary-general.

“Minusma seems to have become part of the problem by fueling community tensions exacerbated by extremely serious allegations which are highly detrimental to peace, reconciliation and national cohesion in Mali,” said the minister. “This situation generates a feeling of distrust among the populations with regard to Minusma,” he added, noting a recent damning report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on the behaviour of Malian government troops and foreign allies in an anti-militant operation in Moura in March 2022.

UN chief Antonio Guterres in January put forward three options for amending the mission, from an increase in personnel to a withdrawal of troops.

AFP

‘Sudan war drives one million children from homes’

Khartoum, Sudan - The conflict in Sudan has displaced more than one million children, 270,000 of them in the Darfur region, the UN children’s agency (UNICEF) has said, warning more were at ‘grave risk’.

Fighting has raged in Sudan since mid-April between army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). As well as the more than one million displaced, at least 330 children have been killed and more than 1,900 wounded, UNICEF said in a statement on Thursday.

“Many more are at grave risk”.

The United Nations agency said an estimated 13mn children were in ‘dire need’ of humanitarian assistance.

“Children are trapped in an unrelenting nightmare, bearing the heaviest burden of a violent crisis they had no hand in creating - caught in the crossfire, injured, abused, displaced and



Children cycle along a street in Khartoum on June 14 (AFP)

subjected to disease and malnutrition,” said UNICEF Sudan representative Mandeep O’Brien.

It said the situation in Darfur, already scarred by a two-decade war that left hundreds of thousands dead and more than two million displaced, was especially concerning.

“The situation in West and Central Darfur, in particular, is

humanity.

Its paramilitaries have been accused of carrying out the Wednesday killing of West Darfur state governor Khamis Abdullah Abakar hours after he made remarks critical of the paramilitaries in a telephone interview with a Saudi TV channel. The RSF has denied any responsibility. The United Nations said ‘compelling eyewitness accounts attribute this act to Arab militias and the RSF’, while the Darfur Lawyers Association condemned the act of ‘barbarism, brutality and cruelty’.

“All those responsible for this killing must be held to account including those who bear command responsibility,” Jeremy Laurence, spokesman for the UN rights office, told reporters in Geneva.

‘Ominous reminder’

The US State Department said the atrocities unfolding in West Darfur were ‘primarily’ the work of the RSF and provided an ‘omi-

nous reminder’ of the region’s previous genocide.

“The United States condemns in the strongest terms the ongoing human rights violations and abuses and horrific violence in Sudan, especially reports of widespread sexual violence and killings based on ethnicity in West Darfur by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and allied militias,” State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said.

“The atrocities occurring today in West Darfur and other areas are an ominous reminder of the horrific events that led the United States to determine in 2004 that genocide had been committed in Darfur.”

Miller said up to 1,100 civilians had been killed in the West Darfur state capital, El Geneina, alone. “While the atrocities taking place in Darfur are primarily attributable to the RSF and affiliated militia, both sides have been responsible for abuses.”

AFP

INDIA

'India would not have been partitioned'

NSA Ajit Doval says the partition happened due to the absence of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose

New Delhi - National Security Advisor Ajit Doval on Saturday said that India wouldn't have been partitioned if Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was there at that time.

Delivering the first Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Memorial lecture in the national capital, Doval said there were very few parallels to the 'genius' of Subhas Bose. "I am not saying good or bad but there are very few parallels in the Indian history or the global history of people who had the audacity to sail against the current - and not an easy current the current of the British empire," Doval said.

The NSA pointed out that Pakistan founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah had said that he could accept only one leader and that is Subhas Chandra Bose.

"The idea has come to his mind that I will fight for freedom and I will not beg for freedom because it's my right and if I beg it will be conditional. India would not have been partitioned if Subhas Bose was alive, Jinnah said I can accept only one leader that is Subhas Bose," said Ajit Doval.

"His leadership was of a different style", said Doval recalling that Bose had emphasised that 'India was a reality, India is a reality and India will be a reality'. "Netaji (Subhas Chandra Bose) said I will not compromise for anything less than full independence and freedom. He said that he not only wants to free this country from political subjugation but there is a need to change the political, social and cultural mindset of the people and they should feel like free birds in the sky," the NSA said.



National Security Advisor chief Ajit Doval at the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Memorial Lecture organised by ASSOCHAM, in New Delhi on Saturday. ASSOCHAM chairman Ajay Singh also seen (ANI)

ing that Bose had emphasised that 'India was a reality, India is a reality and India will be a reality'. "Netaji (Subhas Chandra Bose) said I will not compromise for anything less than full inde-

pendence and freedom. He said that he not only wants to free this country from political subjugation but there is a need to change the political, social and cultural mindset of the people

and they should feel like free birds in the sky," the NSA said. The NSA, further said that history has been unkind to Bose while adding that he was happy that Prime Narendra Modi is

somebody who has been very keen to resurrect it.

Doval said that Subhas Chandra Bose's legacy was unparalleled and his audacity, and tenacity were the two qualities

that were unmatched. The NSA said that Bose's leadership was of a different style was the only one who was audacious enough to challenge Mahatma Gandhi and refused to beg for freedom from the British."

"The thing which Subhas Bose has different from other leaders is audacity, he was a very audacious person and that can be seen when he was in Presidency college. He had the audacity to challenge Mahatma Gandhi when Gandhi was at his prime. When he resigned from Congress, he started his struggle afresh and was jailed and while in detention he thought let me escape from India that too in an attire of an Afghan," added Doval further.

"Getting into the attire of an Afghan was difficult for a Bengali to do, he left for Kabul and then goes to Russia, goes to Germany where he meets Hitler.... He then comes to Japan and then to Singapore and then forms the Indian National Army," Doval said.

"Look at his courage.... The real force of might of conviction will really able to catapult you into positions where nobody can think of it," Doval said.

By and large, Doval said, that Netaji was a lonely person, and except for Japan he had no other country supporting him.

Doval said that when former British Prime Minister Clement Atlee came to India in 1956 and was asked by the then Calcutta Governor why the British had agreed to Independence in 1947 when there was no pressure to vacate, Atlee said that it was because of Netaji. "He (Atlee) said that even though Netaji was thought to have died in 1945 in a plane crash in Taipei, even after his death they were afraid of the ideas of nationalism that (Netaji) had created, many Indians would have gone down that path," Doval said.

Delivering the lecture organised by the Association of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASSOCHAM) in India, Doval also called on Indian business to focus on preparing a skilled workforce and bringing in technological innovation to make its workforce globally competitive.

The NSA said, highly motivated and committed human resources are the biggest strength of the country. ANI

Modi to flag off 5 new Vande Bharat trains on June 27

New Delhi - Prime Minister Narendra Modi will unveil five new Vande Bharat Express trains simultaneously on June 27 this year.

These semi-high-speed trains, manufactured in accordance with the Make in India policy by ICF, will connect various cities across the country. According to the official sources of Ministry of Railways, these trains will operate on routes including Goa-Mumbai, Patna-Ranchi, Bhopal-Indore, Bhopal-Jabalpur, and Bangalore-Hubli-Dharwad.

With the introduction of these new trains, the total number of Vande Bharat trains running on the country's rail network will reach on 23. The addition of these trains will provide greater conven-

With the introduction of these new trains, the total number of Vande Bharat trains running on the country's rail network will reach on 23

ience to the residents of these cities, offering them a comfortable and modern mode of rail travel.

The Vande Bharat Express trains are known for their state-of-the-art amenities, including comfortable seating, advanced safety features, and enhanced passenger services. These trains are designed to

operate at semi-high speeds, ensuring faster connectivity and reducing travel time between cities. The Indian Railways initiative to unveil these five new Vande Bharat Express trains signifies the government's commitment to strengthening the railway infrastructure and enhancing travel options for the citizens.

The introduction of these new Vande Bharat Express trains on additional routes is expected to boost tourism, trade, and economic development in the regions they serve. It will also provide a significant impetus to the 'Make in India' initiative, as these trains are manufactured domestically, contributing to the growth of the country's manufacturing sector.

ANI

Brij Bhushan dodges queries on chargesheet, says 'Modi wave' will prevail in 2024 LS polls

Gonda, Uttar Pradesh - Addressing the media for the first time since Delhi Police filed a chargesheet against him in connection with allegations of sexual harassment by women grapplers, Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief and BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh on Saturday made a strong pitch for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his return to power in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Singh said the 'Modi wave' was still holding sway in the country, adding that the BJP will form the government at the Centre next year under the leadership of PM Modi. The BJP MP, who was at Gonda in Uttar Pradesh on Saturday to attend an event and had claimed earlier that he would contest the next Lok Sabha polls, told reporters that his party will win all the 80 Lok Sabha seats in the



Police personnel stand guard outside the residence of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, in New Delhi on Friday (ANI)

state.

Dodging questions on the wrestlers' protest and the chargesheet against him over allegations of sexual harassment, Brij Bhushan said: "A Modi wave is prevailing in the country as the people can see the strides the country is mak-

ing under the leadership of the PM as opposed to the dire economic state in neighbouring Sri Lanka, Pakistan and the United States."

He added that people of all communities are aware that while the rest of the world was under fiscal stress, PM Modi

has kept India from slipping into a similar state.

On ongoing attempts to bring all Opposition forces in a grand alliance against the NDA government at the Centre, the BJP MP said even a united Opposition won't be a thorn in the BJP's flesh as it is united in the same way as it was in 2014 and 2019.

"No one can stop PM Modi's juggernaut in 2024 as it is being driven by the people," he claimed.

Delhi Police on Thursday filed a chargesheet on the FIR filed against the WFI chief over complaints of sexual harassment. The chargesheet has been filed under sections 354, 354D, 345A & 506 (1) of the IPC. However, Delhi Police recommended the withdrawal of the POCSO case against him.

ANI

UK royal family unite for King Charles III's birthday parade

London, UK - Britain's royal family rounded off King Charles III's inaugural birthday parade on Saturday with a balcony appearance at Buckingham Palace to watch a spectacular fly-past.

Three of the king's young grandchildren - future king Prince George, nine, Prince Louis, five, and Princess Charlotte, eight - joined the rest of the family on the balcony with the princes sporting red ties and blue blazers and Charlotte in a sailor suit with red trim.

They were cheered by the crowds who gathered outside the palace and in The Mall, the avenue leading up to it.

The air display of some 70 military aircraft, following a 41-gun salute from nearby Green Park in central London, came after bad weather cut short a planned fly-past at Charles's coronation on May 6.

It ended with the Red Arrows, the Royal Air Force's aerobatic display team, trailing red, white



King Charles III and Queen Camilla, along with other members of Britain's royal family wave from the balcony of Buckingham Palace after attending the King's Birthday Parade, in London on Saturday (AFP)

and blue vapours.

Earlier, Charles saddled up for the annual Trooping the Colour parade that marks the British sovereign's official birthday.

It was the first time the

monarch has ridden at the ceremony since his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, in 1986.

Charles, who also took the royal salute, was followed on horseback as he inspected the

troops by his eldest son and heir, Prince William, Charles' brother Edward, the Duke of Edinburgh, and sister Anne, the Princess Royal.

Queen Camilla in a military-in-

spired red outfit, and William's wife Catherine, the Princess of Wales, who was dressed in green, followed in a carriage.

The colourful display of regimental precision and pageantry was the first of 74-year-old Charles's reign.

Charles's actual birthday is on November 14 but British sovereigns celebrate twice - once in private and again in public.

Colourful display

The June parade tradition began in 1748 under King George II, who wanted a celebration in better summer weather, as his own birthday was on October 30.

The televised event kicked off with a procession from Buckingham Palace to Horse Guards Parade. Some 1,400 soldiers, 400 musicians and 200 horses took part, led in the parade by Juno, a 10-year-old shire mare, alongside three other Drum Horses - Perseus, Atlas and Apollo.

Drum Horses are the most

senior animals in the army and hold the rank of major. They are traditionally named after figures from Greek mythology.

The minutely choreographed event has its origins in the display of colours or flags of different regiments to allow their soldiers to identify them in battle.

The 1st Battalion Welsh Guards trooped their colour up and down the ranks this year.

The UK is currently experiencing a hot spell which would have made it difficult for the troops in their ceremonial black bearskin hats and thick red tunics.

Unlike last weekend, however, when William inspected troops from the Household Division group of senior regiments, none of the soldiers appeared to faint.

As Prince of Wales, William is honorary colonel of the Welsh Guards. Charles - who as head of state is commander-in-chief of the armed forces - later led the soldiers back to the palace.

AFP

Bangladesh: Politician held over murder

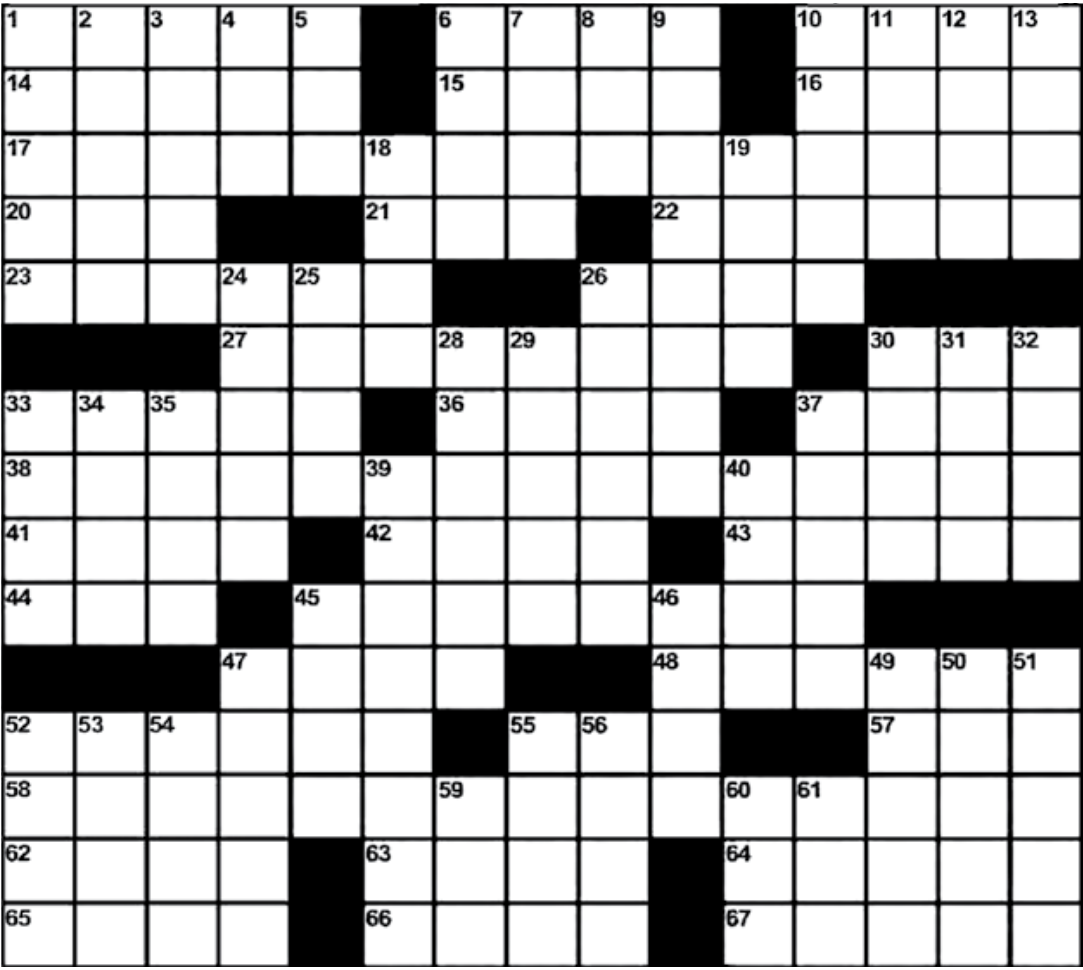
Dhaka, Bangladesh - Bangladesh police on Saturday arrested a politician accused of masterminding the murder of a journalist who had written stories about his family.

Mahmudul Alam Babu was arrested near the Indian border after a nationwide manhunt, the country's elite Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) said in a statement.

The 50-year-old is accused of organising Wednesday's murder of Golam Rabbani Nadim, who was beaten by a gang of men near his home in Jamalpur district and later died in hospital. Babu was retaliating for a series of stories on a custody dispute involving a child following his recent divorce.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Go into
- 6) Tubular pasta
- 10) Brit's elevator
- 14) Code name?
- 15) 2015 nuke deal country
- 16) Woody's son
- 17) Bummed-out vampire?
- 20) Aliens, for short
- 21) Rustic stopover
- 22) Already programmed
- 23) Step down
- 26) Skedaddles
- 27) Game-winning shots, e.g.
- 30) Kiltie's cap
- 33) De-grease, say
- 36) Brooding spot
- 37) Make do, somehow
- 38) Communist in charge of a private school?
- 41) Frozen waffle brand
- 42) Bird on a Canadian dol-lar
- 43) Helping hands
- 44) Hand-wringer's word
- 45) Grows, as a romance
- 47) Active sort
- 48) _ up (enlivened)

DOWN

- 52) "Aja" band _ Dan
- 55) Intimate apparel
- 57) Gardner of "On the Beach"
- 58) Cowardly partier in a stadium parking lot?
- 62) Canaveral org.
- 63) Belt-makers' tools
- 64) Sharpener's creation
- 65) Modeler's medium
- 66) Farm team's harness
- 67) Symbol of laziness
- 1) Feature of a fading flame
- 2) Nick of "A Walk in the Woods"
- 3) Supporting frame
- 4) Legal conclusion?
- 5) Ole Miss athlete, famil-iarly
- 6) Jerusalem's Mount _
- 7) Press a suit, say?
- 8) Smidgen
- 9) Sporadically
- 10) Alternative to Velcro, on shoes
- 11) Is vexing to
- 12) Skedaddle
- 13) Basis for pressing a suit,

- maybe
- 18) Town Car, for short
- 19) Pottery class projects
- 24) Kind of potato
- 25) Simmons of KISS
- 26) Frankincense and amber, for two
- 28) Not al fresco
- 29) Deliveries to record execs
- 30) Open_ shoes
- 31) Recess at St. Paul's
- 32) Sloppy state
- 33) Shell team
- 34) K'NEX alternative
- 35) Slight lead
- 37) Like new dollar bills
- 39) Passage between build-ings
- 40) Not at all ferocious
- 45) Tie for a Texan
- 46) Gemstone of silica
- 47) Airport annoyance
- 49) Spot for a grill
- 50) Decathlon part
- 51) _ Vader of "Star Wars"
- 52) Match up
- 53) Eurasian duck
- 54) "Frozen" character
- 55) Pitcher's flub
- 56) Climb the corporate

- ladder
- 59) Tango necessity

- 60) Navigation aid, for short
- 61) Net giant, briefly

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Get ready for an unexpected ally to show up when you get into a disagreement with a coworker. Someone you rarely agree with is actually going to see things your way. In fact, they may even come to your defense and help you win this debate. You two are more compatible than you ever realized, and it's time you discovered just how much. The two of you have the possibility for a very bright future, so spend some social time with them soon. Get to know their other side!



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Some criticism could be coming your way today, but don't worry. Your ego can handle it. In fact, your drive for success sort of demands this type of honest feedback from others, so it's good to build a reputation for being open to it. Thank the people who are giving you constructive criticism, and ignore the people who are just trying to cut you down to make themselves feel better. The difference will be obvious, so you won't have to worry about who you should listen to.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Don't be afraid to ask a few penetrating questions today. Whenever you're looking for real insight into someone, you have to do more than just ask what their favorite color is! Challenge someone's opinions. Get the behind-the-scenes scoop. You've got the charm and energy to encourage people to open up and share more of who they really are. This is a wonderful day to go on a date. You two might be able to connect like never before.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Weird is in the eye of the beholder, so don't get worried if you hear that someone thinks you are the definition of the word. Own it instead! Chances are this person simply doesn't know how to peg you or figure you out. Your unique qualities intimidate them because they don't have the courage to march to the beat of their own drummer. They're too busy following orders and doing what other people are doing. You can't let their jealousy bug you. They deserve



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Today, conflict could lead to some very important realizations for you, especially if you offer constructive criticism to your opponent instead of just dismissing what they think or do. It's time for you to fully understand that when someone causes a bit of friction in your life, they're not trying to make you mad. In fact, they could be doing you a huge favor by forcing you to articulate why you believe what you believe. It's essential to know how to answer that question!



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

If your career is your main focus right now, that's as it should be. You have all the clarity you need to fully understand the opportunities in front of you right now, so take a moment today to make some plans for your future. You don't have to schedule everything down to the minute. Just give yourself a general idea of where you want things to go. Where do you want to be living? What kind of job environment do you want to be in? Answering these questions will help you see a new path.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Don't be surprised if you're in a more introspective mood today. This is a very good time for deep thought and contemplation about where you are now and where you should be headed next. Your subconscious has been mulling things over for a while, and today you should get your conscious mind involved. A recent social invitation could lead to more than you think, so make sure you have the time you require before saying yes. Make sure you don't overload yourself now.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

There could be a lot of game playing today. Fortunately, it will be the fun kind! You're in a great position to win every contest as long as you keep things light and mellow. Now is not the time to take yourself too seriously. Get all of your competitive energy out of your system early in the day and leave the rest of your time open for unexpected invitations. Someone is finally working up the courage to ask if they can spend more time with you.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Whether you like it or not, you're going to be thrown into the center of the action today, so get ready for a lot of attention. Polish up your image with the right outfit and practice a few ice-breakers. You need to get ready to charm a few folks and make some new connections. Lucky for you, you're looking very attractive to others right now in every sense of the word. Suddenly, folks who've known you for ages are seeing you in a new light.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

There is an exciting surprise coming your way, and it's going to run a few of your carefully laid plans way off the track. But no matter what happens to your daily routine, you'll be absolutely delighted by the result. This wrench could be just the thing to mix up your day and infuse some new energy into it. You need to learn to be more flexible more often, and this is the first lesson. Gain appreciation for the unknown and you will find more opportunities.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Despite the fact that you're feeling great and all of your friends are too, this isn't a good time to indulge in any expensive celebratory dinners or nights out. Not only will paring down your expenses help flesh out your increasingly skimpy rainy day fund, but it will also give you a more accurate idea about what you really need to be happy. Skip all of your regular splurges and stay close to home where there is harmony (and plenty of free entertainment).



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Today, you'll want to help lots of people, but in order to do that you have to be efficient and fast. So leave out irrelevant topics when you're talking to people today. You will need to have focused communication if you want to get anything accomplished. It's wonderful that you're in such a giving mood right now, because that friend who always needs your help needs your help in a very big way, but this time there will be something in it for you.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. What indicates the legal limit to which a ship may be loaded?

- A. Sneaker line
- B. Plimsoll line
- C. Trainer line
- D. Pumps line

02. Which legendary character is the subject of musical settings of his adventures, notably by Purcell, Glöck and Mozart?

- A. Flick the Little Fire Engine
- B. Don Juan
- C. The Barber of Seville
- D. Barry Manilow

03. Where is the term "brinelling" used?

- A. In coastal waters
- B. Suspension bridges
- C. In cooking, when food is soaked in brine
- D. When measuring a surface's hardness

Answers: 1. B 2. B 3. D

KIDS COLOURING

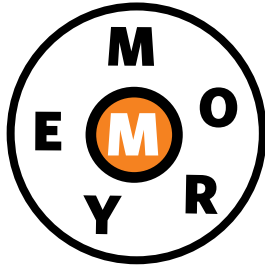


BOGGLER

Y	S	O	C
O	P	H	P
O	O	K	I
R	L	P	I

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

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

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

FINAL HURDLE

Modric’s Croatia aiming for first trophy against boosted Spain

Rotterdam, Netherlands - Luka Modric has been Croatia’s driving force on the way to Sunday’s Nations League final, where they could earn their first ever major trophy against a Spain team he knows inside out.

Questions surround the veteran midfielder, 37, over his future both in international football and at club level with Real Madrid, with his contract set to end this month.

Before resolving them, Croatia captain Modric is aiming to lead his country, with a population of only four million people, to glory in Rotterdam at De Kuip.

ing that despite all our problems, we have quality and character,” said Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic.

“Now we need to stay calm and smart, not rush anywhere, towards that gold. That’s my great wish ... bronze, silver and gold.”

Modric, who made his international debut in 2006, earned his 165th international cap against the Netherlands on Thursday.

He converted a penalty to help fire Croatia into the Nations League final with a 4-2 extra-time triumph, one step closer towards that elusive “gold”.

We have once again become a powerhouse in football, showing that despite all our problems, we have quality and character. Now we need to stay calm and smart

ZLATKO DALIC



Croatia’s Luka Modric celebrates with team-mates after winning the UEFA Nations League semi final against the Netherlands in Rotterdam on Wednesday (AFP)

The Balkan nation has consistently over-performed on the world stage over the past 25 years, starting with their third place finish at the 1998 World Cup.

They followed that up by reaching the 2018 World Cup final, where they were beaten by France, and again finished third in Qatar last year, eliminating favourites Brazil along the way.

“We have once again become a powerhouse in football, show-

The midfield maestro pulled the strings for his country, getting the better of Barcelona’s Frenkie de Jong, but Manchester City’s Rodri will provide an even sterner test. City’s Champions League final hero is the key piece in Luis de la Fuente’s La Roja, who are still finding their footing.

Joselu’s later winner to help them beat Italy in Enschede calmed the storm around Spain and they can end a trophy drought of over a decade, with

their last triumph coming in Euro 2012.

With Luis Enrique at the helm they lost in the 2021 Nations League final against France, a couple of months after they defeated Croatia in a thrilling 5-3 triumph to reach the Euro 2020 semi-finals.

‘Never tired’

Despite having the richer history on paper, thanks to their 2008 and 2012 Euros wins and lifting

the 2010 World Cup, as well as having a greater player pool to draw from, Spain will not underestimate Croatia or Modric.

“Luka Modric is another example of a sportsman, a player that at his age still has that hunger and ambition to win things, he’s never tired of it,” said Joselu.

“He’s an example for all kids out there and another sign that age means nothing.”

There are some reports Mod-

ric may retire from international duty after the Nations League but the player said he would decide his future after the tournament.

“I always enjoy playing for the national team, it’s not because it could be my last competition or my last match,” said Modric.

“Every single match, every training session is a joy. As long as I feel I can help, there’s no reason for me not to be here.”

Nations League victory could provide a triumphant moment to

bow out on or prove the springboard for an assault on Euro 2024 next summer.

Modric has proved relentlessly he still has the legs to compete at the top level, playing 119 minutes against the Netherlands in the semi-finals.

“Luka is unique, unrepeatable in the whole world, he is an icon wherever he goes,” said Dalic.

“When he was substituted he received an ovation from the whole stadium.”

Croatia triumphed in extra time, just as they did against Brazil and Japan in Qatar, and England, Russia and Denmark in 2018. Spain have had plenty of 120-minute plus games themselves in recent years, but avoided it on Thursday thanks to Joselu’s strike.

De la Fuente hoped his players would recover in time for Sunday’s final after having a day fewer rest than Croatia.

AFP

Rodri Hernandez aiming to bring back Spain’s ‘winning culture’

Rotterdam, Netherlands - Spain midfielder Rodri Hernandez hopes to restore his team’s “winning culture” by beating Croatia on Sunday and winning the Nations League.

Manchester City’s goal-scoring hero in their Champions League final triumph over Inter Milan last weekend noted only two players in Spain’s squad had won trophies with the national team - Jordi Alba and Jesus Navas. Sevilla wing-back Navas lifted the 2010 World Cup with La Roja, while Alba was part of the side which won Spain’s last trophy at Euro 2012, over a decade ago.

“It will be very important to win again, after all this time, bringing Spain back to the highest point,” Rodri told a news conference Saturday, ahead of the final in Rotterdam.

“We only have two players who know what it’s like to win. It’s not just important to win but to create a winning culture, we have to understand that we have a unique opportunity.

“We had the chance to win



Spain’s Rodri Hernandez attempts an acrobatic shot at goal during their UEFA Nations League semi-final against Italy on Thursday (AFP)

against France in the (2021) final but we couldn’t do it. This will allow us to recover that winning culture.”

Spain also reached the Euro 2020 semi-finals but were beaten by Italy on penalties.

Rodri has become a key figure for coach Luis de la Fuente in midfield and the Man City player

believes he is at a career level high.

“I think I am, in terms of maturity, winning titles, it’s a moment I want to extend in the national team,” continued Rodri.

“We have to make it clear how important winning a title is, it would crown a very special season for me.”

Rodri will come face-to-face with Croatian midfield maestro Luka Modric, who shone in his team’s semi-final victory over hosts the Netherlands.

Spain coach De la Fuente highlighted the pair’s quality.

“They seem two extraordinary players to me,” the coach told reporters.



France’s Kylian Mbappe controls the ball ahead of Gibraltar’s Niels Hartman during their UEFA Euro 2024 qualifier on Friday (AFP)

Mbappe among scorers as France see off Gibraltar in Euro 2024 qualifying

Faro, Portugal - Kylian Mbappe netted from a penalty as France eased to a 3-0 win over minnows Gibraltar on Friday to maintain their 100 percent record in Euro 2024 qualifying.

Olivier Giroud gave last year’s World Cup runners-up an early lead in Faro, in Portugal’s Algarve, and Mbappe made it 2-0 from the spot in first-half stoppage time.

The France captain then forced an own-goal from Aymen Mouelhi to complete the scoring after the break, although Les

Bleus also hit the woodwork four times. The result follows wins over the Netherlands and the Republic of Ireland in March and leaves France on a maximum nine points from three games in qualifying Group B.

They are three points better off than Greece, who beat Ireland 2-1 in Athens on Friday and have a game in hand.

France host Greece on Monday, while the Netherlands - currently involved in the Nations League finals - have three points from two games.

Germany lose to Poland as pressure mounts on coach Flick

Warsaw, Poland - Euro 2024 hosts Germany lost 1-0 to Poland in a friendly in Warsaw on Friday, with Jakub Kiwior’s first-half goal piling more pressure on coach Hansi Flick.

Poland’s victory was just their second over their neighbours in 22 games dating back to 1933, and left Germany with a single win in four games since their disastrous World Cup campaign in Qatar.

Kiwior headed in a corner midway through the first half to give his side the lead against a disorganised Germany defence, adding to Flick’s problems ahead of next year’s Euro on home soil.

Despite the “totally disappointing result”, Flick said his side had time to get things right.

“We’re in a process and we’re trying things out” Flick explained.

“There’s a long way to go until we’ll get there.”

“In June next year, we’ll have a team that functions together.”

Wingback Robin Gosens, who just six days ago played for Inter Milan as they lost the Champions League final to Man City 1-0, said his side wanted to get Germany “into a spirit of optimism and to get the country behind us.”

“We know this can only be done through results, through victories.”

Poland captain Robert Lewandowski, who won the Champions League with Bayern Munich under Flick in 2020, said “it wasn’t perfect... we tried to make Germany’s day difficult.”

Under fire for continued experimentation with the team stuttering, Flick made nine changes from the team which drew 3-3 with Ukraine on Monday in Bremen.

AFP

Alexander-Arnold stars as England rout Malta in Euro qualifier

Trent Alexander-Arnold starred in an unexpected midfield role as England thrashed Malta 4-0 to extend their perfect start to the Euro 2024 qualifying campaign on Friday.

England boss Gareth Southgate sprang a surprise as he deployed Liverpool right-back Alexander-Arnold in central midfield at the Ta’Qali National Stadium.

Alexander-Arnold responded to Southgate’s show of faith by helping set up England’s opener -- a Ferdinando Apap own goal -

- before scoring only his second international goal with a long-range rocket.

Harry Kane’s penalty took him to 56 goals for England as the Three Lions’ record scorer reached 50 competitive goals for his country.

Callum Wilson converted a late penalty for his second England goal to ensure the margin of victory more accurately reflected his side’s dominance.

“Of course we know we have the quality to win the game and then it’s about the mentality. I

thought that was excellent from the start,” Southgate said.

England sit top of Group C after a third successive victory following their wins against Italy and Ukraine in March.

While Italy are currently involved in the Nations League finals, Ukraine got their first points with a stunning comeback to win 3-2 in North Macedonia.

An Enis Bardhi penalty and a brilliant curling strike from Napoli’s Eljif Elmas had North Macedonia -- who qualified for Euro 2020 -- two goals up.



England’s defender Trent Alexander-Arnold in action against Malta in their UEFA Euro 2024 Group C qualifier on Friday (AFP)

Bournemouth defender Illia Zabarnyi pulled one back for Ukraine just after the hour mark and they then equalised through Yukhym Konoplia.

North Macedonia, who visit England on Monday, were reduced to 10 men before Viktor Tsygankov headed in a cross from Chelsea’s Mykhailo Mudryk with seven minutes left to complete the comeback.

Wales’s chances of making Euro 2024 are in the balance after going down to Armenia in Cardiff.

KHAWAJA DEFIES ENGLAND

Left-handed opener hits century to help Australia recover after shaky start

ENGLAND VS AUSTRALIA
Birmingham, United Kingdom - Australia's Usman Khawaja completed his first Test hundred in England as he continued to defy the hosts at Edgbaston on Saturday.

The left-handed opener completed a patient 199-ball century shortly after tea on the second day of the first Ashes Test when he late cut England captain Ben Stokes for four, with the 36-year-old Khawaja joyously shouting to acclaim the achievement before

Australia were 78-3 at lunch on the second day, still a huge 315 runs behind England's first-innings score a total built on Joe Root's unbeaten 118 - the former skipper's first Ashes hundred in eight years.

Root received excellent support from Yorkshire team-mate Jonny Bairstow, who made a run-a-ball 78 during a sixth-wicket partnership of 121.

Broad reduced Australia to 29-2 in the seventh over of Saturday's play after removing both

I think once Joe got his hundred and they were playing a few shots, I sensed it was coming, that's sort of the way they (England) are playing their cricket at the moment

JOSH HAZLEWOOD

throwing his bat in celebration.

His 15th Test century was particularly valuable given Australia had earlier collapsed to 67-3 in response to England's 393-8 declared.

Khawaja, however, led Australia past the follow-on target with what was his seventh hundred in 18 Tests since he was recalled to the side last year.

Earlier England captain Ben Stokes captured the prize wicket of Australia star batsman Steve Smith after Stuart Broad struck twice in two balls.

David Warner and Marnus Labuschagne, the world's top-ranked Test batsman, with successive deliveries.

In the drawn 2019 Ashes in England, left-handed Warner had averaged a meagre 9.50 in 10 innings and was dismissed seven times by Broad.

Stokes had said before this match that Broad's record against Warner had been a factor in his selection for the first of this five-match series and the 36-year-old seamer yet again proved to be the opener's



Australia's Usman Khawaja hits a boundary during the second day of their Ashes Test at Edgbaston in Birmingham on Saturday (AFP)

nemesis. Warner had fought hard for a score of nine on an overcast morning favouring England's quicks when he contributed to his own dismissal by chasing a wide ball outside off from Broad and inside edged into his stumps.

The roars that greeted Warner's exit became deafening next ball when Labuschagne fell for a golden duck.

He edged a sharp Broad outswinger that was brilliantly caught one-handed by wicket-keeper Jonny Bairstow, diving low to his right in front of Root at first slip. There had been much debate ahead of the Ashes over whether Bairstow should keep wicket instead of Ben Foakes.

But having made a run-a-ball 78 in England's first innings, this catch also highlighted Bairstow's quality behind the stumps.

Smith survived the hat-trick delivery and it seemed both he and opener Usman Khawaja (40 not out) would get through to lunch despite Stokes ringing the changes in his attack.

Stokes's bowling fitness had been called into question by a longstanding left knee injury, but the lively all-rounder struck when he rapped Smith on the back foot with a nip-back ball.

Marais Erasmus took his time before giving Smith out lbw and the batsman, unsurprisingly, called for a review.

But replays upheld the experienced South African umpire's decision and Smith, whose twin centuries in the corresponding Ashes opener at Edgbaston four years ago powered Australia to a 251-run win, was out for 16 to the raucous delight of the crowd.



Shaheen Shah Afridi

Shaheen back in Pakistan squad

Karachi, Pakistan - Lanky pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi was named Saturday in Pakistan's 16-man squad to play two Tests in Sri Lanka next month - his first outing in the long form of the game in a year.

The 23-year-old injured a knee in Sri Lanka last July and missed Pakistan's home Test series against Australia, England and New Zealand.

Shaheen, who has 99 wickets in 25 Tests, featured in the Twenty20 World Cup in Australia last year, but injured the same knee in the final.

He is back to full fitness, however, and played in the Pakistan Super League as well as featuring in the T20I and ODI series against New Zealand earlier this year.

"I am very excited to be returning to the Pakistan Test side after a year," Shaheen said, according to a Pakistan Cricket Board statement.

"I dearly missed Test cricket and it was tough for me to be away from this format. I am eager to make an impactful comeback."

Prolific young batter Mohammad Huraيرا and all-

rounder Aamer Jamal have been picked for the first time.

Huraيرا, 21, scored 986 runs in his first domestic season in 2021 and during the course became the second youngest Pakistani behind Javed Mian-dad to hit a triple hundred. He again topped the chart last year with a tally of 1,024.

The two-match Sri Lanka series will be Pakistan's first assignment in the new World Test Championship cycle, which runs from 2023 to 2025. The squad will assemble in Karachi on July 3 for a camp before departing for Sri Lanka on July 9.

The itinerary of the tour has not been announced yet.

SQUAD

Babar Azam (captain), Mohammad Rizwan, Aamer Jamal, Abdullah Shafique, Abrar Ahmed, Hasan Ali, Imam-ul-Haq, Mohammad Huraيرا, Mohammad Nawaz, Naseem Shah, Noman Ali, Agha Salman, Sarfaraz Ahmed, Saud Shakeel, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shan Masood

AFP

Axelsen beats Prannoy to reach Indonesia Open final

Jakarta, Indonesia - Badminton world number one Viktor Axelsen beat H.S. Prannoy on Saturday to secure his spot in the Indonesia Open final, but South Korea's rising star An Se-young crashed out.

Danish star Axelsen, who has won the tournament two years running, will have a chance to add another to his trophy case in Sunday's final after overcoming India's Prannoy 21-15, 21-15 in 46 minutes. "To be able to play final at Istora was one of my biggest, you know, dreams as a teenager," the 29-year-old told reporters after the match.

"So to be here now, in the final again, it's just unbelievable."

Axelsen will face either world number two and hometown hero Anthony Sinisuka Ginting or China's Li Shi Feng, who were scheduled to play their semi-final later Saturday.

The hot streak of South Korea's An Se Young was brought to a stunning halt by China's Chen Yu Fei, ranked fourth in the world, who beat the in-form world number two in two



Denmark's Viktor Axelsen hits a return against India's Prannoy HS during their semifinal at Indonesia Open in Jakarta on Saturday (AFP)

straight games. Chen rushed out of the gates, taking the first game 21-8 -- the lowest An has scored in a game all year -- before securing her ticket to the final by winning the second 21-17.

"In the first game I played more patiently, and I think my opponent might be tired as her tempo was a bit slow," Chen told reporters.

She will face Spain's Carolina Marin, who overcame Thailand's

Ratchanok Intanon 21-12, 21-11.

"I'm really, really happy to reach a final after a long time," the 29-year-old Spanish star told reporters. "As I said yesterday, it's just to keep the focus in the right way. This is what I'm doing and I feel really happy."

Marin returned to the court in May after suffering a horror knee injury that kept her out of action for over a year and forced her to miss the Tokyo Olympics.



Ducati Pramac Racing Team's Jorge Martin celebrates after winning the Sprint race ahead of the German MotoGP on Saturday (AFP)

Martin holds off world champion Bagnaia in German MotoGP sprint

Sachsenring, Germany - Jorge Martin thwarted world champion Francesco Bagnaia to land Saturday's German MotoGP sprint race.

Jack Miller for KTM completed the podium. Bagnaia's second at the Sachsenring kept him atop the world championships standings ahead of Sunday's seventh race of the season.

Martin, whose only previous victory in the premier class came at the Styrian Grand Prix in his rookie 2021 season, was rewarded for his efforts by

leapfrogging Marco Bezzecchi into second in the riders standings, 21 points adrift.

Pole-sitter Bagnaia fought off Miller to keep the lead at the start but a mistake under pressure let the Australian through to take command on the factory KTM.

Around the tight and narrow circuit Martin then nipped past Miller and Bagnaia to take control on lap four of 15, the Ducati-Pramac rider pulling well clear to coast home by 2.468 seconds.

AFP



Dustin Johnson of the United States plays his shot from the 12th tee during the second round of the US Open on Friday (AFP)

Dustin Johnson in US Open hunt despite quadruple bogey

Los Angeles, United States - Two-time major winner Dustin Johnson clawed back from a calamitous quadruple bogey to card an even-par 70 and stay in the hunt in the second round of the US Open on Friday.

Johnson, the 2016 Masters and 2020 US Open winner, had seven birdies in a six-under par 64 on Thursday that put him two off the lead shared by Rickie Fowler and Xander Schauffele --

who both broke the previous record for a low round at the US Open. But Johnson said Thursday that there was plenty of trouble lurking at Los Angeles Country Club, and he found it at the second hole.

In a fairway bunker off the tee, Johnson hit out to the rough left of the fairway. From there he was in the barranca, taking a penalty drop on the way to an eight at the par-four hole.

"Didn't really hit that bad of a drive. Just hit it a little on the top so it didn't quite cut enough," he said. "Caught the corner of the bunker and then chunked my bunker shot and then chunked the next one, skulled the next one. Everything that you could do wrong I did wrong."

"It happens sometimes, but just battled back and played a really good round of golf."

AFP



Bangladesh's Taskin Ahmed (2L) celebrates with team-mates after the dismissal of Afghanistan's Rahmat Shah during the fourth day of their one off Test against Afghanistan in Dhaka on Saturday (AFP)

TIGERS ON THE PROWL

Taskin shines in Bangladesh's record 546-run Test win

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Bangladesh crushed Afghanistan by 546 runs Saturday to secure the biggest Test victory margin by runs in nearly 90 years, with Taskin Ahmed grabbing a career-best 4-37.

The match ended in the extended opening session of the fourth day in Dhaka after a Taskin bouncer hit Zahir Khan, forcing the final batsman to retire hurt.

The visitors barely made a dent in the mammoth target of 662, giving the hosts the biggest Test win by runs since Australia's 562-run victory over England in 1934.

"This win is obviously very satisfying," skipper Liton Das told reporters.

"The batsmen should be given

some credit because the wicket was not that easy," he added. "You cannot ask for more after winning by this kind of margin."

It was more than double Bangladesh's previous record win - by 226 runs over Zimbabwe at Chittagong in 2005.

The Bangladesh triumph was all but guaranteed after they declared their second innings at 425-4 in Friday's final session.

Afghanistan stumbled quickly, losing Ibrahim Zadran for a duck off the first ball of the innings and resuming on Saturday at a precarious 45-2.

The tourists showed little improvement on the fourth day and lost wickets at regular intervals, with Taskin and Shoriful Islam leading the Bangladesh attack.

'Very disappointing'

Afghanistan coach Jonathan Trott lamented a "very disappointing" defeat to mark his side's first Test in more than two years.

"There were some slight moments of good cricket from us, but not enough and not consistent enough," he said.

Trott said the tourists were "lacking in all three disciplines" and needed to improve their mentality.

"It's always good to have a Test match and play well, but not when you perform like that," he added.

Taskin was denied his maiden five-wicket haul when he bowled last man Zahir Khan in the 33rd over of the innings, only for the umpire to signal a no ball.

Afghanistan lost a wicket in the third over of the morning when Nasir Jamal edged Ebadot Hossain to the keeper.

Shoriful, who claimed 3-28, forced Afsar Zazai to give a catch to Mehidy Hasan at gully five overs later.

It brought Bahir Shah to the crease as a concussion sub for skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi, who retired hurt after he was hit by a Taskin bouncer on the third day. But Bahir also failed to survive long as Taskin forced him to give a catch to Taijul Islam at slip for seven.

Liton brought an end to Rahmat Shah's dogged innings of 30 from 73 balls with a catch behind the stumps off Taskin.

AFP

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A gallery assistant studies a forgery 'Virgin and Child, called the Madonna of the Veil' created by Umberto Giunti, in the manner of Sandro Botticelli

FAKE TAKE

ART & ARTIFICE

THE 'CAT-AND-MOUSE' WORLD OF ART FRAUD HAS COME TO LIGHT AT A NEW LONDON SHOW WHICH INDICATES THE DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN GENUINE AND FAKE ARTWORKS



A gallery assistant studies a work 'The Raising of Lazarus' created in the style of Peter Paul Rubens at a press view for 'Art and Artifice: Fakes from the Collection' at The Courtauld Gallery in central London

Some of the most notorious art forgeries form the centre-piece of a new London show which reveals a 'cat-and-mouse' world of intrigue, deception and painstaking detective work.

The exhibition - Art and Artifice: Fakes from the Collection - which opened at the Courtauld in Somerset House yesterday, features around 25 drawings and seven paintings, as well as sculpture and decorative art from the renowned gallery's collection.

Armed with magnifying glasses, visitors can scrutinise purported mas-

terpieces by Sandro Botticelli, John Constable, and Auguste Rodin.

Visitors will learn how they were created, the methods of the most infamous forgers and the increasingly sophisticated methods used to detect them.

"Forgeries have always existed in the history of art and have a place in our study," Rachel Hapoienu, drawings cataloguer at the gallery, told AFP. She highlighted one work thought to be by English artist Constable, which came from a sale from his daughter Isabel.

"We thought we had a straight line back to the artist," said Hapoienu, but a shock discovery proved them

wrong. Shining a torch through the work revealed a watermark on the paper that dated it to the 1840s - after Constable had died.

"There is a sizeable group of paintings and drawings that came from John Constable's children and grandchildren which were probably made by one of his sons," said Hapoienu. "Whether they were trying to perpetrate fraud...is up for debate."

National hero

The show also highlights the infamous tale of British forger Eric Hebborn, who operated from 1950s until he was exposed in the 1970s.

Hebborn was classically trained at

the prestigious Royal Academy, winning many awards while a student. He struck up a close relationship with dealers and earned their trust by supplying them with genuine works, but mixed in his own forgeries.

"He was really meticulous, and would make his own inks and chalks in the manner of Renaissance artists and make sure he got the right paper," said Hapoienu.

"He made a mistake when he had one piece of paper cut in half; one side he did a drawing by one artist, on the other side he did a drawing by an artist who lived a 100 years later," she added.

"Both sheets ended up in the same collection... the curator happened to be looking at them next to each other and thought, 'How can this artist and this artist be working on the same sheet of paper?'"

Hebborn, who was never convicted of a crime, claimed to have produced thousands of other forgeries, and was murdered in Rome in 1996.

Also on show is a fake Vermeer created by Dutch forger Han van Meegeren, whose works often ended up in the hands of leading Nazis, including Hermann Goering.

He was tried for collaborating with the enemy, "but got out of it by saying he had been tricking the enemy and therefore became a national hero," explained Karen Serres, curator of paintings at the gallery.

Rusty nails and bakelite

Serres also revealed some of the tricks of the trade used by leading forgers.

Van Meegeren used bakelite to give his paintings an aged appearance, while another fraudster used a fine brush to paint 'cracks' onto his works.

One renowned deceiver painted on a woodworm-riddled piece of wood to date his work and recommended using rusty nails to hold together panels.

Serres, however, also highlighted some of the tools used by investigators in their game of 'cat-and-mouse'.

One painting, supposedly by Botticelli, aroused suspicion when one expert noted the similarity of its Madonna to the silent movie stars of the 1920s.

Analysis of pigments can also flag up fakes, and close scrutiny of brush strokes can reveal whether the creator was left- or right-handed.

One fake was identified by bushes meticulously drawn outside a castle, which researchers realised weren't planted until after the work was purportedly created.

Alongside old-school detective work, the gallery also uses the latest technology, such as a machine that performs ultraviolet and infrared scans of works.

"It's satisfying, you have found out the truth," Hapoienu said of the moment when a case is cracked. "If you are a dealer obviously it's a whole different story."

AFP

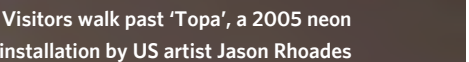


A work by the Dutch forger Han van Meegeren, a copy of 17th century artist Dirck van Baburen's work

“

There is a sizeable group of paintings and drawings that came from John Constable's children and grandchildren which were probably made by one of his sons

HAPOIENU



ICONIC

FAIR

Every year, the first two and a half days are reserved for wealthy collectors, before the doors open to the public from Thursday to Sunday.

While the first half of 2022 was marked by strong sales, and a number of record

