



HM announces measures for economic alleviation

- **Stimulus of RO130mn to mitigate economic impact**
- **Write off housing loans of people receiving RO450 salary**

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik presided over a meeting of the Council of Ministers at Al Barakah Palace on Tuesday.

His Majesty the Sultan commended the efforts undertaken by the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. He lauded the committee's good planning and mechanisms that, he said, helped curb the pandemic.

His Majesty the Sultan gave directives to end the mission of the committee and instructed the Ministry of Health to take appropriate measures to address the lingering disease in coordination with the authorities concerned.

In this context, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his deep appreciation for the selflessness shown by medical and paramedical teams, as well as all health workers and staff of other establishments (including civil, military and security establishments), public institutions, private sector establish-

ments and media establishments.

His Majesty the Sultan valued the cooperation of citizens and residents and their prompt response to health instructions and precautionary measures to address the pandemic. In particular, he praised citizens' and residents' fortitude as they endured the "exceptional conditions", noting that "this stance played a great role in the success of disease containment procedures and in the stability of the health situation".

Then, His Majesty the Sultan reviewed local conditions. As per His Majesty the Sultan's Royal directives to alleviate the direct impact on citizens from financial policies undertaken to run the State's Fiscal Sustainability Scheme and in pursuance of support for small and medium enterprises and entrepreneurs to mitigate the economic impacts of COVID-19, the Council of Ministers presented a number of initiatives and economic and social procedures to the tune of RO130mn to meet the following objectives:

- Provide RO70mn to enhance financial allocations earmarked for the Housing Assistance Programme of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning during the current Five-Year Plan.
- Write off outstanding dues of all beneficiaries of the Housing Loans Programme who receive less than RO450 monthly salary (waiver applicable to Omani citizens).
- Provide 15 per cent additional electricity consumption subsidy for subscribers who have two or less accounts during the summer months from May to August 2022.

- **15% additional electricity subsidy from May to August**
- **RO70mn allocated for housing assistance programme**

► Extend the dispensation of the Occupational Security Benefit till the end of December 2022 for citizens whose services are terminated within the sultanate.

► Provide an additional package of subsidies in support of small and medium enterprises, entrepreneurs and insolvent individuals.

To alleviate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, a package, including a number of subsidies and payment of dues of entrepreneurs, provides:

- Waivers for borrowers from Oman Housing Bank's Emergency Loans Portfolio
- Waivers for entrepreneurs who are holders of Riyada Card - for beneficiaries of Emergency Loans - issued by the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development
- Waivers for SMEs from fees and fines payable against delays in loans payable to the Lender Portfolio (Al Rafd Fund earlier) until the end of 2022
- Waiver for all vehicles (private and commercial) from payment of fines and renewal fees for the years 2020 and 2021
- Payment of dues of entrepreneurs and owners of SMEs who face prison charges, following prosecution on account of bad cheques (cheques drawn on insufficient funds)
- Postponement of lawsuits against individuals/establishments not abiding by provisions of loan agreements signed with the Lenders Portfolio (Al Rafd Fund earlier) until the end of 2022

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CBO to develop digital currency

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Central Bank of Oman (CBO) is working to develop its own digital currency and Open Banking services, its executive president said on Tuesday.

Speaking at the inauguration of the New Age Banking Summit 2022, H E Tahir al Amri stated that work is underway on CBO's digital currency and Open Banking application programming interfaces (APIs). He also highlighted CBO's new initiative for a financial technologies (Fintech) regulatory sandbox, Oman News Agency reported. The summit discussed transformations in the financial sector, developments in financial technology, and achieving financial inclusion.

H E Amri stressed that CBO is committed to supporting innovation and modernisation in the financial sector in line with ensuring financial stability. He also stressed the importance of investing in cybersecurity techniques and investing in human capital to overcome cybersecurity challenges.

Central banks in several countries are looking to develop digital currencies amid growing popularity and acceptance of digital assets and cryptocurrencies.



H E Tahir al Amri

However, development of Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) is still in an introductory stage in the world. This week, India's central bank - Reserve Bank of India - stated that it is engaged in the introduction of a CBDC.

The key benefits of retail CBDCs, according to Fitch Ratings, lie in their potential to enhance authority-backed cashless payments with innovations in step with the wider digitalisation of society.

For central banks in some emerging markets, a key driver for researching CBDCs is the opportunity to bring underbanked communities into the financial system, and improve the cost, speed and resilience of payments, Fitch said in a note.

Open Banking refers to the use of open APIs that enable third-party developers to build applications and services around the financial institution.

Bank Muscat launches special customer offer to win 51 hospitality packages to FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™, courtesy of Visa

MUSCAT- In line with its customer-centric vision to serve its customers better every day, and commitment to providing top of the line features, services and rewards, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider has announced that it is giving away 51 match packages to visit FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™, courtesy of Visa, as part of the run up to one of the biggest sporting spectacles on the planet. All Bank Muscat Visa Credit and Prepaid Cardholders will be automatically entered into raffle draws to select the winners once they use their Bank Muscat Visa Credit or Prepaid Card to make a minimum cumulative spend of RO 50 or more during the promotional period which will extend till 31 August 2022. For every RO 50 spent, customers get one chance in the draw, the more they spend the higher their chances of winning. All transactions will be included except for ATM withdrawals and Government spends.

Each winner will receive a Hospitality Package for two to the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™, courtesy of Visa. The packages, which include airline tickets, hotel accommodation and tickets for a number of matches during the month-long football carnival have been reserved exclusively for different card segments. As many as 10 packages (1 Opening Match,



1 Final and 8 Quarter Final matches) have been reserved for Bank Muscat Private Banking Visa Infinite and Asalah Priority Banking Visa Signature credit cardholders. Nine packages featuring Quarter final matches have been reserved for Al Jawhar Visa Platinum credit cardholders, while Visa Prepaid cardholders can win one of the 8 Group Stage match packages reserved for them.

Holders of Bank Muscat-Cobranded Visa Platinum credit cards, Visa Gold credit cards and Visa Classic credit cards are eligible to be entered into draws for one of the 24 Group Stage match packages reserved especially for them.

On this exciting occasion, Abdulnasir Al Raisi, General Manager - Personal Banking, Bank Muscat, said: "In line with its commitment to offering the largest range of ben-

efits, and also recognising the great passion with which football is followed in Oman, Bank Muscat is delighted to offer a large number of football enthusiasts a great opportunity to win Hospitality Packages to FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™, courtesy of Visa. Launching this offer comes within the bank's strategy of offering the best features and benefits to our customers, including Asalah and Al Jawhar customers. With a number of prizes reserved for different segments, we invite everyone to participate enthusiastically and benefit from this offer by using their Visa credit cards and prepaid cards.

On his part, Abdullah Tamman Al Mashaani, General Manager - Products, Bank Muscat, said: "We thank Visa for their continuous cooperation and partnership with Bank Muscat, which helps the bank provide the best offers and services to our customers. As the leading financial services provider in Oman, the bank is always working to further develop and launch new products and offers. We hope that our customers will wholeheartedly participate in this promotion for a chance to win one of these exciting 51 hospitality packages to attend FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™, courtesy of Visa. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all our customers for their strong

confidence in the bank and its cutting-edge products and services."

Bank Muscat has also launched an exclusive limited edition Visa Prepaid Card to celebrate FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ courtesy of Visa. Customers can easily apply for this Visa Prepaid card, which has been designed as a collector's item via their Bank Muscat Mobile Banking app or Internet Banking only.

It is important to note that the Bank Muscat Visa Prepaid Card features contactless payment technology and can be managed easily through the Mobile Banking app or Internet Banking. Customers can apply for a personalised card with its unique design, load funds and top it up instantly, and also review transactions to manage their expenses. In addition, the cards can be used for secure online payments apart from PoS payments and ATM withdrawals.

Bank Muscat contactless cards feature best-in-class security for PoS and online transactions. In case of any loss or misplacement of the card, it can be blocked immediately by calling the Bank Muscat Contact Centre on 24795555. For more details on the bank's Visa Prepaid cards, please go to <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/bm-cards/Pages/cards.aspx>.



IFJ congress kicks off in Muscat with 350 delegates



GCC economies to expand by 5.9% in 2022: World Bank

PDO supports new social initiatives



We will thrive only if the communities in which we work prosper, and these initiatives will undoubtedly empower residents and contribute to the sustainable development of Omani communities

STEVE PHIMISTER



Muscat - Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has committed to support a host of new initiatives which will benefit communities and boost sustainable development across the sultanate.

The initiatives include commitments in the key areas of health, safety and environment (HSE), community infrastructure development as well as sponsor-

ing several programmes in education, culture and sports.

Twelve memoranda of collaboration confirming these commitments were signed at an official ceremony held under the patronage of Sheikh Nasser bin Hilal al Mawali, chairman of State Audit Institution, on Tuesday at Crowne Plaza Muscat.

To support the provision of the

best health services, PDO is funding the procurement of new medical equipment, which will be distributed by the Ministry of Health among local hospitals and health centres.

In addition, to support the company's goals towards HSE excellence, PDO is sponsoring the installation of solar powered streetlights on the Adam-Haima

road as well as Hamra Ad' Duru road junctions, which will benefit more than a hundred villages in the surrounding areas.

Other projects include the construction of a Camel Race-track in Maqshan, a walkway in Thamrait, and an air-conditioned passage in Izki Hospital that will link the emergency building with the health centre.

Steve Phimister, managing director, who signed several of these agreements on behalf of PDO with high-ranking government officials, said, "We continue to expand our social investment programme to support the communities in which we operate."

He added that PDO's dedication and support are aimed at meeting community needs by

providing critical facilities and services in areas such as HSE and cultural preservation. "We will thrive only if the communities in which we work prosper, and these initiatives will undoubtedly empower residents and contribute to the sustainable development of Omani communities."

One of the agreements signed at the event is for sponsorship of

a study of a pilot project targeting Wadi al Hawasinah that will help in understanding the impact of climate change.

PDO has also signed an agreement to sponsor programmes and activities of the Cultural Club and Geological Society Oman. Additionally, it will sponsor Oman's Paralympics team at Asian Games 2022.

Emergency exercise at Salalah Airport today

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman Airports will carry out an emergency exercise at Salalah Airport on Wednesday.

In a statement, Oman Airports said the exercise will be staged between 8am to 11am. 'It will be executed by our strategic partners Royal Oman Police (represented by General Administration of Operations and General Airport Security), Civil Defence

and Ambulance Authority, Civil Aviation Authority, Oman Air and Transom Handling.'

Due to the exercise, there will be heavy movement of ambulances, and emergency and police cars to and from the airport, according to the statement.

'Oman Airports confirms that all necessary preparations have been taken to ensure that airport operations and traffic in the area are not affected.'

MAFWR offers subsidies to wheat farmers

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has announced availability of wheat kernel for the 2022/2023 season at a subsidised rate it its efforts to support farmers and to achieve self-sufficiency in food.

A statement issued by MAFWR said, 'The ministry will provide one tonne of wheat seeds for RO300 for the new season.'

It urged farmers to buy from designated centres.

The ministry's criteria for sale



of seeds include nationality (only Omanis), a farm suitable for wheat cultivation, salinity of water in the farm should not exceed 1,500mg, and installation of a permanent irrigation system.

The last date for application to receive seeds at the subsidised rate is June end.

According to MAFWR, wheat production grew by 19 per cent in the 2020/2021 agricultural season to 2,649 tonnes.

The total area of wheat cultivation in 2020/2021 was 2,449 acres, constituting a 19.6 per cent rise over the last season. The number of wheat farmers also rose by 5.5 per cent.

Rains to hit parts of Oman today

Muscat - Isolated rains will hit parts of Oman starting Wednesday, according to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

A statement issued by CAA said the rains will continue till Friday. There are chances of convective rain clouds forming over the Al Hajar mountain range and adjacent areas, as well as over the mountains of Dhofar governorate.

'Clouds and scattered rain will lash the coasts of Al Wusta and Dhofar. Additionally, there is possibility of low clouds and fog on the coasts of North and South Batinah governorates.'

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2-day drama fest concludes

Our Correspondent Muscat

Ten intense dramas competed in a festival on the weekend at Al Falaj Hotel. Addressing themes of family, race, womanhood, longing, isolation and love, the one-act plays were staged to a packed house both on Friday and Saturday.

Rehearsals and preparations started four months prior to the event featuring well known as well as new and original plays.

Organised by Talent Space International and Theatre Oman, actors and actresses from across the sultanate took part in a remarkable show of stagecraft.

"As a fine arts institution, we have always gone an extra mile to create a space for talented artistes," said M Jayan, managing director of Talent Space International.

"Ten dramas competed for the top honours. More than 100 artistes from different parts of Oman participated. Our competition received encouraging support and enormous cooperation from many



Winners

- Best drama: Naam
- Best director: Praveen Kumar (Naam)
- Best actor: Srijit (Naam)
- Best actress: Dhanya Manoj (Aval), Shaima Dinesh (Naam)

SEND YOUR COMMENTS TO	WEATHER WATCH		PRAYER TIMINGS	
	Max	Min		
muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om	Abu Dhabi	40 28	Fajr	3.54am
	Doha	34 26	Sunrise	5.20am
	Kuwait City	40 28	Duhr	12.10pm
	Manama	35 26	Asr	3.29pm
	Muscat	35 27	Maghrib	6.54pm
	Riyadh	41 24	Isha	8.15pm

Four-day IFJ congress kicks off in Muscat with 350 delegates



Muscat - The 31st congress of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), hosted by Oman Journalists Association, kicked off at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Tuesday.

The triennial congress was opened by Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan.

Sayyid Asaad welcomed the participants and praised the efforts of Oman Journalists Association in hosting "this great

The media in Oman has witnessed a great transformation and has been able keep pace with developments and changes around the world

SAYYID ASAAD BIN TARIK AL SAID

international press and media gathering", stressing the sultanate's pride in hosting the congress. He described it as an opportunity for the participants to learn about the renaissance of Oman in all fields, and the belief of the sultanate in the media and its role in the progress of nations.

He added that the media in Oman has witnessed a great transformation and has been able, with the support and care provided to it, keep pace with the developments and changes around the world.

The four-day meet's agenda includes a wide spectrum of topics, particularly discussions on the impact of media of society, and a meeting of the Federation of Asia-Pacific Journalists (FAPAJ).

The sultanate proposed the establishment of the federation for journalists representing unions of the Asian and Pacific countries to IFJ in 2019.

During the congress, FAPAJ elected Sabina Inderjit from India as its president and Oman's Salim Hamad al Jahwari as vice-president. Several presentations were made by regional representatives on affects of the COVID-

19 pandemic on journalism and newsrooms. The IFJ Gender Council also held a meeting on Tuesday. The meeting reviewed the council's work in the last three years.

The opening of the congress received wide international coverage owing to the fact that 350 journalists, representing associations from over 100 countries, are taking part.

The congress paid tributes to Shireen Abu Akleh of Al Jazeera who was recently killed in the Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank.



(Supplied photo)

OCCI launches 3 projects to support SMEs in N Batinah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The North Batinah branch of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) launched three projects on Tuesday as part of its efforts to support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and businessmen.

The event was presided over by Redha bin Juma al Saleh, chairman of the Board of Directors of OCCI, and attended by several officials from government and private institutions.

Abdullah bin Ali al Shafei, head of OCCI North Batinah, informed that the first project involves a multi-purpose hall to serve and support business owners in the governorate. "The hall will help conduct programmes, training seminars and special entrepre-

neurship and trade events."

The second project will see the establishment of a library for OCCI North Batinah. "It will be electronically linked to the library of Sultan Qaboos University with the aim of giving access to information and services related to commercial and trade activities," said Shafei.

The third project is a permanent exhibition of national products. "This project aims to support and promote Omani products, introduce national industries to various segments of society, and help boost sale of local products."

OCCI is currently working on establishing a business centre that will facilitate organisation of more events and economic programmes to serve the business community in the governorate.

Oman condemns Israel's continuing oppressive actions on Palestinians

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Foreign Ministry of Oman has denounced the illegal and provocative practices of Israeli forces in Palestinian territories.

"The Foreign Ministry condemns the continuing and illegal provocative practices of Israel and its occupying forces in the Palestinian territories, and for enabling extremist Israeli settlers to storm the courtyards of the Al Aqsa Mosque under the protection of the occupying forces," a statement said.

"Their attack on sacred sites is a flagrant violation of international law and a grave provocation for Muslims around the world.

"The international community must shoulder its responsibility by promoting justice and the law, by achieving peace through the



restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people."

Thousands of flag-waving Israelis marched through Jerusalem's Old City on Sunday during a nationalist procession that regularly stokes Palestinian anger.

Jewish crowds, some chanting "Death to Arabs," marched through the streets for an annual flag march on Sunday and Mon-

day marking Israel's 1967 capture of East Jerusalem.

The Israeli provocative march drew sharp reaction from the Arab and Muslim world, according to Middle East Monitor.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh warned of the "dangerous consequences" of the security forces allowing extremist Jews to pray in the Noble Sanctuary of Al Aqsa. He

demanding urgent international intervention to stop Israeli violations of holy sites in the city.

Egypt also condemned the events at Al Aqsa Mosque. Its foreign ministry warned against "the consequences of these developments and provocative practices on the stability of the situation in the (occupied) Palestinian territories".

According to the Qatari foreign ministry, the settlers' storming of Al Aqsa reflected "the occupation's desire to direct the conflict towards a religious war". Qatar called for urgent international action to deter Israel.

Kuwait stressed that what happened at Al Aqsa Mosque "was a provocation of the feelings of Muslims". It too called for international action, as did the Arab League, to stop Israel from "provocations that inflame religious sentiments."

Robotics workshop held for specially abled children

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A robotics workshop based on a NASA programme and curriculum designed for specially abled children, mainly neuro-diverse learners, was held recently.

Facilitated by Oman Down Syndrome Association, Edutech4Space (Dubai) and Prakramika Vocational Institute (India), the workshop was supported by Eshraqa Khimji Ramdas.

The workshop employed materials and instructions developed by NASA's neuro-diversity network.

Speaking at the event, Nailesh Khimji, director of Khimji Ramdas, said, "This workshop showcasing space science is expected to empower children with neuro-diverse ailment and help them lead a dignified life with their counterparts. At Eshraqa, we



As a society, we need to come together and provide the right circumstances and opportunities for them to give their best

DR GAYATRI
NARASIMHAN

strongly believe in supporting charitable organisations, especially those related to children and education. It is an honour for us to be associated with Oman

Down Syndrome Association's robotics workshop."

During the workshop, an environment conducive to encouraging and supporting STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) was created by experts. STEM nurtures students of all abilities.

On the occasion, Dr Gayatri Narasimhan, founder and director of Prakramika Vocational Institute, said, "Every human being has enormous potential to reach the maximum and we all, including the neuro-diverse community, have talents. As a society, we need to come together and provide the right circumstances and opportunities for them to give their best."

Also present at the workshop was Shrisudha Viswanathan, a scientist who earlier worked with Indian Space Research Organisation, and is founder and CEO of Edutech4Space.

HM presides over Council of Ministers meeting

Continued from Page 01

The departments concerned will draft mechanisms regulating the above-mentioned procedures in a manner that reflects positively on citizens.

After reviewing the results of the State Budget over the past four months of this year and the Closing Account of the Fiscal Year 2021, His Majesty the Sultan issued directives to continue channeling the financial surplus (resulting from returns of oil prices) towards growth and economic recovery.

His Majesty the Sultan also hailed the efforts undertaken by the authorities concerned to contain the probable shortage of staple food supplies due to the political situation in the world.

His Majesty the Sultan gave directives to sustain efforts and give priority to all matters of rel-

evance to food security.

In light of results of the Assessment of Performance Indicators for the first quarter of this year (and streamlining of procedures), which covered all government establishments and governorates, His Majesty the Sultan gave directives to government departments to continue the scheme in order to promote performance and achieve high levels of satisfaction among beneficiaries from public services.

After that, His Majesty the Sultan spoke about the role of education and vocational training in supplying the labour market with skilled national workers. In this context, His Majesty the Sultan gave directives to devise an integrated executive plan to develop this sector in cooperation with international institutions. He also called for the development of the technical ed-

ucation sector to help provide the labour market with technical expertise.

His Majesty the Sultan also extolled the role of Omani media and Omani media personnel in raising awareness among segments of society, besides documenting elements of Omani culture. His Majesty the Sultan affirmed his support for the media and media personnel as they perform their noble mission to contribute to the achievement of the supreme national objectives and consolidate the concepts of tolerance and harmony.

At the conclusion of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan touched on other aspects of concern to the sultanate and its citizens, praying to the Almighty Allah to grant success to all and realise further progress and prosperity to this dear homeland. ONA

Small businesses facing increasing Internet attacks

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Cybersecurity solutions and services provider Kaspersky has stated that disregard for IT security is being exploited by cybercriminals to target small businesses in Oman resulting in 134 per cent increase in Internet attacks in 2022.

Kaspersky researchers assessed the dynamics of attacks on small and medium enterprises between January and April 2022 and the same period in 2021 to identify the threats that pose an increasing danger to entrepreneurs.

In 2022, a popular attack tool used on small businesses is Internet attacks, specifically web pages with redirects to exploits, sites containing exploits and



other malicious programmes.

Compared to 33,124 attacks in 2021, the researchers detected 77,562 in the first four months of 2022.

Also notable is the fact that the number of Trojan-PSW (Password Stealing Ware) detections increased by 27 per cent compared to the same pe-

riod in 2021 - 3,165 compared to 4,022.

Trojan-PSW is a malware that steals passwords, along with other account information, which then allows attackers to gain access to the corporate network and steal sensitive information.

With the shift towards remote working, many companies have introduced the Remote Desktop Protocol (RDP), a technology that enables computers on the same corporate network to be linked together and accessed remotely, even when employees are at home.

However, the number of attacks on RDP has slightly decreased and this might be the result of companies steadily welcoming employees back to the office.

In the first trimester of 2021,

there were about 1,184,000 attacks in Oman, whereas for the same period in 2022, the number had decreased to 191,000.

"With the shift to remote working and the introduction of numerous advanced technologies in the daily operations of even small companies, security measures need to evolve to support these sophisticated setups. Cybercriminals are already way ahead of the curve, so much so that virtually every organisation will experience a breach attempt at some point," said Denis Parinov, security researcher at Kaspersky.

"For small companies today, it's not a matter of whether a cybersecurity incident will happen but when. Having trained staff and an educated IT-specialist is no longer a luxury but a must-have part of your business development," he added.

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MSX30	4,115.99
Sensex	55,566.41
FOREX RATES	
(RO1 equals)	
Indian Rs	201.55
Pakistani Rs	519.77
Bangladeshi taka	231.35
Philippines peso	136.35
Sri Lankan Rs	941.52

*Rates as on MAY31
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Russia suspends gas supplies to Netherlands

Russia's Gazprom said Tuesday it had halted gas supplies to the Netherlands after Dutch energy firm GasTerra refused to pay in rubles following the Russian military offensive in Ukraine.

"Gazprom has completely stopped gas supplies to GasTerra due to non-payment in rubles," the Russian gas giant said in a statement, AFP reported.

Moscow has demanded that clients from "unfriendly countries" - including EU member states - pay for its gas in rubles, a way to sidestep Western financial sanctions against its central bank over the Ukraine conflict.

Gazprom said that as of May 30 it had received no payments for Dutch gas supplies in April, despite notifying GasTerra that payments for gas supplied from April 1 needed to be made in rubles.

GCC economies to expand by 5.9% in 2022: World Bank

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The economies of the Gulf Cooperation Council are projected to expand by 5.9 per cent overall in 2022, with this recovery likely to continue in the medium-term, driven by the hydrocarbon and non-hydrocarbon sectors, according to the World Bank.

The latest issue of the World Bank's Gulf Economic Update, 'Achieving Climate Change Pledges,' described the six GCC economies as rebounding robustly from the COVID-19 pandemic in the course of 2021 and at the beginning of 2022.

The World Bank attributed the economic rebound to a broadly successful vaccination rollout across the GCC, the easing of pandemic restrictions, and developments in the hydrocarbon markets.

'As a result, fiscal deficits have markedly improved, with the GCC external balance reaching pre-pandemic levels in 2021 as energy prices and export earnings strengthened,' the Word Bank report said.

As major oil and gas exporters, GCC countries are also benefiting from changes in the energy markets brought about by the war in Ukraine. These countries may see strong fiscal and external surpluses, which



World Bank expects Oman's economic growth to reach 5.6 per cent in 2022, underpinned by more than 8 per cent growth in the hydrocarbon sector

could help spur consumer confidence and investments, the World Bank noted.

'However, the war in Ukraine has also placed energy security

at the top of the agenda of many major oil importers, thereby accelerating their plans for a transition to green growth,' the bank added.

The World Bank's Gulf Economic Update report also focuses on critical steps that need to be taken towards energy subsidies, fiscal consolidation, and the importance of getting prices right to bring about an environment that places the private sector at the forefront of green growth.

"As GCC countries commit to the net-zero objectives laid out in their pledges and strategies, it is important to restructure energy

and water subsidies and address the GCC's challenge of moving to a more sustainable growth model, less hydrocarbon dependent and managing the transition to a global low-carbon economic environment that risk to see their oil revenues reduced in the next few decades," Issam Abousleiman, World Bank's regional director for the GCC, said in a press statement.

The World Bank expects Oman's economic growth to reach 5.6 per cent in 2022, underpinned by more than 8 per cent growth in the hydrocarbon sector. The bank said the sultanate's non-oil economy will

continue to grow by more than two per cent this year as faster vaccine rollout strengthens domestic activity.

Saudi Arabia's growth is expected to accelerate to 7 per cent in 2022, driven by stronger oil output following OPEC+ production cuts and continued growth in non-oil sectors.

The UAE's economic recovery is projected to continue in 2022, with growth anticipated to reach 4.7 per cent driven by oil and non-oil sectors, according to the World Bank.

The bank said Bahrain's economy is expected to accelerate in 2022 to 3.5 per cent, boosted by surging energy prices. Recovery in the non-oil economy will be driven by expansion in the transportation and communication sectors, as well as increased agriculture and fishing.

Kuwait's economic growth in 2022 is expected to reach 5.7 per cent, due to higher oil output as OPEC+ cuts are phased out and domestic demand strengthens.

Qatar's real GDP, as per the World Bank, is estimated to rise in 2022 to 4.9 per cent on the heels of boosted hydrocarbon exports, while growth in private consumption may be slightly lower, at 4.8 per cent, driven by a potential dilution of World Cup proceeds and higher prices.

CBO issues RO30mn treasury bills

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A tender of the government treasury bills (issue number 560) was issued by the Central Bank of Oman this week.

Total value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO30mn, for a maturity period of 91 days, from June 1, 2022 until August 31, 2022.

The average accepted price reached RO99.610 for every RO100 bill, and the minimum accepted price also arrived at RO99.610.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 1.5642 per cent and 1.5704 per cent, respectively.

The interest rate on the repo operations with the CBO is 1.5 per cent while the discount rate on the treasury bills discounting facility with the central bank is 2.0 per cent.

Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds.

The Central Bank of Oman acts as the issue manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (repo).

Al Maha Ceramics to acquire 45% stake in Al Hael Ceramics

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Al Maha Ceramics Company on Tuesday announced that it has signed an agreement to purchase 45 per cent stake in Al Hael Ceramics Company for a value of RO2.1mn.

"The board of directors of Al Maha Ceramics advises that the company has signed a sale and purchase agreement to purchase 45 per cent shares of Al Hael Ceramics, subject to the satisfaction of conditions set out in the agreement. The value of the deal amounted to RO2.1mn," Al Maha Ceramics said in a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange.

The company said it was agreed that Al Maha Ceramics would manage and operate Al Hael's factory for a period of five years. It was also agreed that Al Maha brand will be used in Al



Hael products during the next five years.

Al Hael Ceramics factory is one of the largest tiles factories in the Middle East and is equipped with the latest Italian technologies in tiles manufacturing from SACMI, Al Maha Ceramics noted in its disclosure.

'The production capacity of Al

Hael factory is 55,000 sqm per day of ceramics and porcelain. The factory can also produce large sizes of porcelain plates, and it is hoped that the factory's production will cover a large percentage of the local market's need of high-quality ceramic and porcelain tiles,' Al Maha Ceramics said.

The company pointed out that the completion of the acquisition process is subject to approval of the competent authorities.

'The company shall keep the shareholders apprised of further developments concerning the purchase of Al Hael Ceramics shares through further disclosures,' Al Maha Ceramics added.

India growth slows on inflation

New Delhi, India - India's economic growth slowed further in the first three months of 2022, the National Statistics Office said Tuesday, with inflation and higher oil prices denting a post-pandemic recovery.

Asia's third-largest economy grew 4.1 per cent, year on year, in the last quarter, NSO data showed.

Annual growth for the 12 months to the end of March stood at 8.7 per cent.

Rising global commodity prices have sparked concern among policymakers, with India's central bank announcing its first interest rate hike in nearly four years earlier this month.

The country of 1.4bn people imports more than 80 per cent of its crude oil and the cost of meeting domestic fuel demand has soared since

Russia's February invasion of Ukraine.

India is also the world's largest importer of edible oils, prices of which are at record highs since the conflict began. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government earlier this month announced tax breaks to offset higher food and petrol costs.

The US\$26bn cost of the scheme will likely blow out the government's budget deficit beyond its target for 2022-23, which it put at 6.4 per cent of GDP.

Consumer inflation hit 6.95 per cent in March, according to the Reserve Bank of India, which slashed its own yearly growth forecast to 7.2 per cent.

"Alarmingly, persistent and spreading inflationary pressures are becoming more acute with every passing

day," Reserve Bank of India governor Shaktikanta Das said earlier this month.

India saw a dramatic uptick in economic activity at the end of 2021 after the coronavirus pandemic sparked its worst recession since independence from Britain 75 years ago.

Extended lockdowns hit consumer spending and brought factories to a standstill during the Covid-19 outbreak, which at its peak saw thousands of people dying across the country each day, overwhelming hospitals and crematoriums.

Several Indian states briefly imposed mild restrictions on public gatherings and commercial activity after an outbreak of the highly infectious Omicron variant of the virus.

AFP

Israel signs UAE free trade deal, its first in Arab world

Dubai, UAE - Israel signed a free trade deal with the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday, its first with an Arab country, building on their US-brokered normalisation of diplomatic relations in 2020.

Israel's ambassador to the oil-rich UAE, Amir Hayek, tweeted "mabruk" - congratulations in Arabic - with a photo of Emirati and Israeli officials holding documents at a signing ceremony in Dubai.

The Emirati envoy to Israel, Mohamed al Khaja, hailed as an "unprecedented achievement" the deal that, according to the Israeli side, scraps customs duties on 96 per cent of all products traded.

"Businesses in both countries will benefit from faster access to markets and lower tariffs as our

nations work together to increase trade, create jobs, promote new skills and deepen cooperation," Khaja tweeted.

The 2020 deal was part of the US-brokered Abraham Accords that also saw Israel establish diplomatic ties with Bahrain and Morocco.

Two-way trade between Israel and the UAE last year totalled some US\$900mn dollars, according to Israeli figures.

UAE-Israel Business Council president Dorian Barak predicted that trade would soon multiply between the regional powerhouse economies.

"UAE-Israel trade will exceed US\$2bn in 2022, rising to around US\$5bn in five years, bolstered by collaboration in renewables, consumer goods, tourism and the life sciences



(From left) Economy ministers of Israel and UAE Orna Barbiwai and Abdulla bin Touq al-Marri posing for a photo during a signing ceremony for a free trade deal between Israel and UAE, in Dubai (AFP)

sectors," he said in a statement.

"Dubai is fast becoming a hub for Israeli companies that look to South Asia, the Middle East and the Far East as markets for their goods and services."

Nearly 1,000 Israeli companies will be working in and through the UAE by year's end, he said.

Trade diplomacy

The UAE was the first Gulf country to normalise ties with Israel and only the third Arab nation to do so after Egypt and Jordan.

Talks for a free trade agreement began in November and concluded after four rounds of negotiations.

The latest was held in March in Egypt between Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and

Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, UAE's long-time de facto ruler who became president this month after the death of his half-brother Sheikh Khalifa.

Israel had in March hosted a meeting of the top diplomats from the United States, UAE, Bahrain and Morocco.

Sudan in 2020 also agreed to normalise ties with Israel, but the strife-torn northeast African country has yet to finalise a deal.

Israel has already struck free trade agreements with other countries and blocs, including the United States, European Union, Canada and Mexico.

In February, Israel signed a trade deal with Rabat to designate special industrial zones in Morocco.

AFP

EU's Russian oil ban unlikely to affect OPEC+ decision

London, UK – Saudia Arabia, Russia and their allies are likely to stick to their policy of modest oil output increases when they meet Thursday after the EU banned most imports from Moscow.

European Union leaders agreed on Monday to ban more than two-thirds of Russian oil imports, tightening economic screws on the country over its invasion of its neighbour Ukraine.

This has caused oil prices, which have already hit record highs so far this year, to soar further amid pressure on the 23-member OPEC+ to open tabs more widely and relieve the market.

Brent, the international benchmark, hit a two-month high above US\$124 per barrel while the US contract, WTI, topped US\$119.

But analysts say OPEC+ will stick to its strategy of only slightly increasing output when it holds its monthly videoconference on Thursday as it remains united with Moscow.

"With Russia being one of the two most important members of the alliance (alongside Saudi Arabia), any decision on increasing output has become highly political," Craig Erlam, analyst at trading platform OANDA, told AFP.

"Both because (Russia) cannot sell what it's already produc-



ing as a result of sanctions and perhaps even because it wants prices to be uncomfortably high and maintain pressure on countries it considers 'unfriendly'," he said.

The 13 members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries chaired by Saudi Arabia and their 10 partners led by Russia drastically slashed output in 2020 as demand slumped because of the coronavirus pandemic and worldwide lockdowns.

They have been increasing output modestly to the tune of around 400,000 barrels per day each month since last year and have resisted pressure by top consumers, including the US, to open the tabs wider.

Ipek Ozkardeska, an analyst with Swissquote bank, said Thursday's meeting "looks like a formality". "There is little hope to see OPEC countries announcing anything that would give a relief to the market," she said.

Unable to meet quotas

Analysts have also noted even if the group was willing to increase its output, several of its members have fallen short of the quotas, resulting in a lower supply to the market.

"Ultimately, the group is missing its already modest targets by increasingly large margins every month so you have to question just how impactful any increase would be if countries simply

don't have the capacity to increase further," Erlam said.

In a statement Friday, the Group of Seven wealthy countries noted OPEC's "key role" and once again called on "oil and gas producing countries to act in a responsible manner and to respond to tightening international markets". OPEC was set up in 1960 and joined by the 10 partners through a 2016 declaration. Its mission is to "ensure the stabilisation of oil markets".

But OPEC+ is "expected to push back against calls by the West to speed up its oil output increases, sticking to its existing plans instead," said Victoria Scholar, an analyst at Interactive Investor.

AFP



EU leaders downplay chances of rapid Russian gas ban

Brussels, Belgium – EU leaders on Tuesday played down the prospects of getting a ban on Russian gas in a next round of sanctions, after struggling to secure a watered-down embargo on Moscow's key oil exports.

The 27-nation bloc agreed at a summit Monday to a sixth package of sanctions that will see the majority of Russian oil stopped, but exempted supplies by pipeline in a concession to hold-out Hungary.

The weeks of wrangling over oil rocked European unity in the face of the Kremlin's war on Ukraine, and cutting off major economies like Germany from Russian gas is a far tougher ask.

"I think that the gas has to be in the seventh package but I'm a realist as well, I don't think it will be there," Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas said on the second day of the summit in Brussels.

Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer warned that "it was much easier to compensate for oil."

"With gas it is quite different. Therefore the gas embargo will not be an issue in the next package of sanctions either," he argued.

Belgian premier Alexander De Croo said the bloc "should pause it for now" before moving on to consider a new round of sanctions.

"For gas, it is also way more complicated. So this is an important step. Let's stop there for the moment, let's see what the impact is," he said.

As the European Union stalls on a gas ban, Russia's state giant Gazprom has already begun cutting off European countries that have refused to pay for their gas in rubles.

On Monday, the Netherlands became the latest EU nation to have the taps turned off after Finland, Bulgaria and Poland saw their supplies severed.

Other EU member states have given in to the Kremlin's demands to pay in rubles to secure a flow of deliveries which they in-

sist is vital to their economies.

But the refusal to cut off the vast sums heading daily to fill the Kremlin's coffers has fuelled criticism that the bloc is helping to fund Moscow's war machine.

Instead of sanctions, EU leaders on Tuesday discussed a mammoth investment package put forward by Brussels that should help wean Europe off Russian gas well before the end of the decade.

"Nobody wants to buy energy from Russia, a barbaric country, a country that cannot be relied upon in any way, has turned out to be not only an untrustworthy partner, but also a criminal state," Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said.

"We are discussing how to quickly move away not only from Russian hydrocarbons such as coal or oil, but also, in the longer term, as highlighted by some member states, especially Germany and Austria, in the longer term, also from gas."

AFP

Eurozone inflation soars to new record over Ukraine war

Brussels, Belgium – Eurozone inflation accelerated to another record high in May, data showed Tuesday, as the war in Ukraine stoked energy and food prices and threatened to flatline the economy.

The EU's Eurostat data agency said that the increase in consumer prices in the 19 countries that use the euro reached 8.1 per cent compared to the year before, up from 7.4 per cent in April.

The uninterrupted rise in prices heaped pressure on the European Central Bank to speed up interest rate rises for the first time in over a decade.

The ECB has said it plans to hike interest rates in July in order to cool the pressure on prices and is expected to officially end its bond-buying stimulus policies as early as next week.

By raising rates, the ECB would be playing catch-up with other major central banks that have already made moves to tame inflation that has spread globally.

The US Federal Reserve raised rates by an unusually large 50 basis points at the beginning of May, while the Bank of England sealed its fourth consecutive hike.

The chief economist of the European Central Bank, Philip Lane, indicated on Monday that interest rates in the eurozone will rise more cautiously, going up by 0.25 per cent in July and again in September.

This would lift the ECB's bank deposit rate out of negative territory, meaning lenders would no longer pay to park their excess cash at the central bank.

The ECB had previously argued that sharp leaps in consumer prices, driven also by the



waning effect of Covid-19 pandemic, were likely to let up, downplaying the inflationary threat.

Russia's war in Ukraine disrupted that view, worsening already disrupted supply chains and throwing up new shortages in essential material from wheat to metals.

This remained that case in May with energy prices spiking by a hair-raising 39.2 per cent from a year earlier. Food prices went up by 7.5 per cent.

Energy crunch

Western economies including Germany – the eurozone's biggest – are scrambling to wean themselves off Russian energy, which will also have its effects on inflation.

The EU on Monday agreed to ban two-thirds of its oil dependency by the end of the year – and German and Polish pledges to voluntarily forgo pipeline deliveries could push the cut to 90 per cent – which could put still more upward pressure on prices.

The ban on Russian oil swiftly hit the market price for oil which

means "that risks (to inflation) are skewed once again to the upside", said Oxford Economics in a note.

"We think headline inflation will peak in the second quarter but will slow only gradually throughout 2022," it added.

Policymakers will also be keeping an especially close eye on wages for fear pay increases to help workers meet high prices could stoke inflation further.

Despite the challenges, Lane on Monday stood by the ECB's assessment that inflation in the eurozone would find its way back to its two per cent target in the medium term.

Meanwhile, fears of negative or zero growth in Europe will be fuelled by data showing the French economy contracted 0.2 per cent in the first quarter from the previous three months, in a downward revision.

The European Commission this month sharply cut its eurozone growth forecast for 2022 to 2.7 per cent, but warned the outlook was highly uncertain because of the war in Ukraine.

AFP

From oil to financial assets, Western sanctions target Russian economy

Paris, France – From oil embargoes to asset freezes and bans on new investment, the list of Western sanctions imposed on Russia's economy since it invaded Ukraine keeps growing. Here is an overview:

Energy

European Union leaders agreed Monday to ban most Russian oil imports, following criticism for not acting sooner.

They reached a deal that bans oil imports delivered by tankers but exempts pipeline deliveries – and allows Hungary to keep receiving Russian crude.

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said the accord will cut around 90 per cent of the EU's Russian oil imports by the end of the year.

The EU plans to cut imports of Russian gas by two thirds in the same period and ban European companies from making new investments in the sector. Purchases of Russian coal are set to stop from August.

Another highly symbolic decision was the suspension of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which was due to increase Russian gas supplies to Germany.

The United States and Canada have imposed their own embargoes of Russian oil and gas while Britain will phase them out by the end of the year.

Transportation

The EU has closed its ports to Russian ships, and Russian truckers are also banned from operating in the bloc.

EU members as well as the



Russian President Vladimir Putin

United States, Canada, Switzerland, Norway and Iceland have closed their airspace to Russian aircraft and many Western airlines have halted flights to Russia.

The wider aviation industry is concerned as the export of aircraft, parts and equipment has been banned, as has maintenance work on Russian-registered Airbus and Boeing aircraft. Western insurers cannot provide coverage.

Trade

The EU sanctions include export bans on products such as cars and luxury watches, as well as semiconductors, chemicals and specialised catalysts to target Russia's technology

and industrial sectors.

The list of Russian products banned from the EU has been extended to include steel products, cement, rubber products and wood.

Imports of Russian vodka and caviar have already been banned by the EU and the US.

They have also deprived Russia and Belarus of their "most favoured nation" trade status, imposing punitive tariffs on their exports.

Financial sector

EU leaders agreed Monday that their sixth package of sanctions will include a measure to exclude Russia's Sberbank from the SWIFT financial messaging system.

Sberbank, Russia's biggest bank, said it has not been affected by the measures, designed to make international payments difficult.

"We are working as normal – the main restrictions are already in place," the bank said, referring to earlier US and UK sanctions that have already isolated its financial system.

The US, EU and Britain have frozen foreign currency held by the Russian central bank and banned all transactions with the institution.

US credit card giants Visa, Mastercard and American Express have blocked Russian banks from their payment networks.

The US is also ending an exemption allowing Moscow to pay foreign debt held by American investors with funds held in Russia, a move that could push Vladimir Putin's country closer to default.

Key individuals

Hundreds of Russian individuals have been hit by US and EU sanctions, including the adult daughters of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

On Monday the EU extended its blacklist to some 60 people, including the head of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill.

They are now banned from entering the EU, and have their assets frozen.

Putin and his Belarusian counterpart Alexander Lukashenko have already been targeted by sanctions, as has Igor Sechin, the head of Russian oil firm Rosneft.

AFP

Nissan Ariya on 'Pole to Pole' expedition



Chris Ramsey

Nissan today announced its partnership with British adventurer, Chris Ramsey, to undertake the world's-first all-electric driving adventure from the magnetic North Pole to the South Pole. Departing in March 2023, the daring Pole to Pole expedition will see Ramsey and team in a Nissan Ariya e-4ORCE travel over 27,000km across several regions and continents with predicted temperatures ranging from -30 C to 30 C. Ramsey will be the first person to drive from pole to pole in a vehicle of any type as he makes his way from the Arctic through North, Central and South America, before crossing to Antarctica, a



press release said. The route will negotiate some of the world's most extreme, brutal, and yet beautiful scenery. From snow-covered glacial landscapes to treacherous mountain climbs and vast desert dunes; Pole to Pole driven by the Nissan Ariya will take followers through breath-taking and uncharted territory. "We're proud to announce our partnership with Chris Ramsey and the Pole to Pole expedition team," said Nissan executive

vice president Asako Hoshino, global head of marketing and sales. "The all-new, all-electric Ariya crossover SUV enables you to go further, easier and in comfort. And with e-4ORCE control technology providing enhanced stability and traction on a variety of surfaces, we know it will be the perfect partner for Chris and his team on their challenging all-electric journey." This high-profile, challenging and exhilarating adventure supports Nissan Ambition 2030, the company's long-term vision to empower mobility and beyond with electrification as a central focus. The vision aims to deliver exciting vehicles and technologies that empower customer journeys and society. In preparation for the freezing Arctic and Antarctic conditions, Ramsey's expedition Nissan Ariya e-4ORCE will be modified with a custom rugged exterior fit for the trek across extreme terrain with upgraded wheels, tires and suspension. A second, unmodified Nissan Ariya e-4ORCE will act as a support vehicle throughout the Americas.

Huawei nova Y70 has longest battery life

Huawei has announced their latest entry-level phone with the longest battery life — Huawei nova Y70. The new member to the Huawei nova Y Series gives solid performance with a massive 6000mAh battery that supports 22.5W Huawei SuperCharge and a gorgeous 6.75-inch fullview display to let you enjoy your favourite shows in all their vivid glory. The phone also has a powerful



48MP AI Triple camera system and 128GB of internal storage to boot. It is available in three colours - Pearl White, Crystal Blue, and Midnight Black and is available now for sale in Oman at

a price of RO75.9. With the Huawei nova Y70, you don't have to worry about running out of battery. The 6000mAh battery in the phone can last for three days on a single full charge. Despite being a large battery, it won't take you too long to fill up the battery, thanks to 22.5W Huawei SuperCharge. As a result, you can get three hours of continuous video playback with a short ten-minute charge.



All-new INFINITI QX60 set to arrive in Middle East

INFINITI Middle East will welcome its highly anticipated and all-new INFINITI QX60 three-row premium SUV to showrooms across the region this summer. A cornerstone model for Infiniti, the QX60 has been reimagined from the ground up to deliver luxury that should be lived in. The next generation model ushers in a refined, modern look for Infiniti with an upright stance, bold available colour-contrast roof, and exceptional Japanese-inspired details, including an origami-inspired signature mesh grille, kimono folds in 'digital piano key' lighting

signatures and the aesthetic of ripples on a pond interpreted in the leather-appointed seats, a press release said. With the all-new Infiniti QX60, designers created a new expression for the premium brand by combining powerful athleticism with harmony and simplicity. The combination is a new hallmark in Infiniti's design language, underscored by the available brilliant Moonbow Blue shade that reproduces deep blues and violets that blanket the summer sky at dusk. An understated character line runs the length of the QX60, bisecting its equally appealing, available two-

tone black roof from its lower body. The all-new QX60 features intuitive technology and impressive driveline dynamics with an award-winning, 279-horsepower 3.5ltr V-6 engine, paired with an all-new 9-speed automatic transmission. The powertrain duo delivers a responsive drive that's quiet, confident, and poised. Intelligent All-Wheel Drive is available and significantly enhanced. The all-new, direct coupling all-wheel-drive system almost instantly engages when it detects wheel slip for a confident driving experience.

ROHM opens Exhibition of Musical Arts library

The Royal Opera House Muscat will open the doors of a brand-new Music Library and Exhibition of Musical Arts titled Oman and the World: A Musical Journey on June 1. The opening of this spectacular phase of the Royal Opera House Muscat development celebrates the enduring achievement of the Blessed Renaissance under the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said. This vision holds true to the sultanate's Renewed Renaissance under His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq al Said, in line with Oman Vision 2040 to promote citi-

zenship and Omani identity. The House of Musical Arts aims to provide an extensive resource for educational enrichment. The Exhibition of Musical Arts explores the unique story of music across the world. Told from the perspective of Oman's musical traditions, it has been specially curated as the first of its kind, an incredible immersive and interactive audio and visual experience, a press release said. Visit the exhibition to discover first-hand how music brings people together, how it developed around the world,

and what it means to everyone. Learn about the key moments in the history of music through the six sections of the exhibition - Nature, Science, Instruments, Community, Connections, and Performance. Delve deeper into the unifying language of music and discover more about great artists from Oman and the wider region. Oman and the World reflects how the arts enable us to celebrate our shared heritage to consolidate the principles of love, peace, and tolerance among the world's peoples. It is an exhibition that is built on the

foundation of dialogue, culture, tolerance, understanding, and coexistence among all. The newly created Music Library allows visitors to browse music scores from across the globe. Music and opera are the core of the collection, but information on stage design, costume design and other stagecraft subjects is also available, along with children's books on arts topics. Online audio and video resources include over two million streaming music tracks on Naxos Music Library and over 250 full streaming opera/ballet productions.

MG's Ramadan offers make it best month in Middle East

Customers across the Middle East continued to visit to MG Motor showrooms in record numbers over Ramadan, with the British-Born car brand recording its best-ever month of sales in April. Spurred on by an extremely competitive range of Ramadan offers, MG registered over 5,000 car sales in a single month for the first time in the region. In total, during April MG sold 5,529 units in the Middle East. The best-selling model was the MG ZS crossover, with 1,559 units sold. It was followed by the stylish MG 5 saloon, with sales of 1,246 units and the MG GT - buyers snapped up 1,093 units of the newest 2022 sporty model from the MG line-up, which boasts aggressive sporty looks and 1.5ltr and 1.5ltr Turbo powertrains for optimum power and performance, a press release said.



MG has developed an unbeatable reputation for offering exceptional value of money, with its car line-up acknowledged for its stylish looks, excellent equipment specifications and latest technology offerings, all supported by a market-leading manufacturer's warranty. During Ramadan, these selling points were reinforced by special offers that included free service contracts, free roadside assistance, free insurance and even the opportunity to win back the value of

the car, depending on market. The release of these latest figures once again highlights the remarkable upwards trend enjoyed by MG across the Middle East over recent years. During the first three months of 2022, the brand saw sales rise by 35 per cent when compared to the same period last year. With total sales of 12,604 units in the first quarter, MG recorded a 4.7 per cent market share across nine regional markets, comprising the six GCC countries, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. Tom Lee, managing director of MG Motor Middle East, said, "Ensuring new car buyers receive the very best value for their money is a fundamental part of the MG offering, and has been integral to our success during the holy month of Ramadan. Once again, our customer-centric approach has paid off, as we continue to shake up the region's automotive industry."

INEOS Grenadier 4X4 launched in Oman



Designed, engineered, and built to world-class standards, the Grenadier is a built-on-purpose 4X4 with serious off-road capability that prioritises function over form. It features award-winning engines, a ladder-frame chassis, permanent four-wheel-drive, up to three locking differentials and solid beam axles.

Learning from the best off-roaders of the past and partnering with world-leading suppliers, INEOS Automotive has designed a true utilitarian workhorse that's comfortable, practical, durable and reliable, meeting the expectations of the 21st century 4X4 driver.

A simple model line-up provides the basis for buyers to easily select and configure their perfect Grenadier with a wide range of options and accessories, a press release said.

The Grenadier Station Wagon has five seats and is configured to offer the optimum balance between payload and passenger carrying capability. The standard specification Grenadier is a blank canvas ready to be configured for the exact needs of customers. It is built for those needing a stripped back, no nonsense

workhorse, but still with the comfort, refinement and standard features that today's drivers expect.

In addition to the standard specification Grenadier, INEOS Automotive also offers two pre-configured vehicle editions that reflect Belstaff's and INEOS Automotive's shared philosophy for producing authentic, uncompromising products that are engineered to last. Creating premium outerwear since 1924, Belstaff is known for its iconic waxed cotton jackets and its pioneering and progressive spirit.



The Grenadier Trialmaster and Fieldmaster Editions have both been curated with specific purposes in mind and are built to take on the outdoors.

All versions of the Grenadier

are uncompromising, highly capable 4X4 vehicles. Even the standard Utility Wagon models offer everything most users will need: peerless off-roading capability, refined on-road driveability, and a functional, modern, comfortable interior. But every customer is unique, so every Grenadier can be customised to suit the specific role they will play for their owner.

Turkish firm seeks big share in UAE market

The Mediterranean Aquatic and Animal Products Exporters' Association (ASHiB), has achieved greater levels of awareness among UAE buyers and importers over the past three months, resulting on an increase in demand for different Turkish food products, a recent trade survey reported.

The survey included 50 key players within the UAE exporting industry aimed at measuring product perception and identifying what current and potential buyers think of the newly introduced products to the UAE market.

Commenting on the results of the survey, Ali Can Yamanyilmaz, deputy chairman of Mediterranean Aquatic and Animal Products Exporters' Association (ASHiB), said, "We are so glad to see an increase in demand for our high-quality products and we're anticipating more increase as the year goes on."

"We are capitalising on the fast-growing economic ties and increased bilateral trade between our two countries, and we've been investing in strategic partnerships, physical networking and awareness campaigns to help keep up with growing demand for our gourmet products," Yamanyilmaz added.

According to official sources, the volume of non-oil trade between the UAE and Turkey has reached about AED50.4bn in 2021, growing by 54%.

Bank Muscat continues offer on personal financing

In line with its efforts to improve financial inclusion in the sultanate and customer-centric vision, Bank Muscat has announced the continued availability of reduced interest rates starting at just 4.75% for select customer segments, who are not at present availing any financing facilities from the bank.

New customers can also avail the attractive offer by applying for financing facilities or transferring their existing financing to Bank Muscat, a press release said.

Omani nationals in government and quasi government institutions and selected private sector entities under Tier 1 companies are eligible for this special



offer, which has attractive interest rates for financing up to RO200,000. Customers can also enjoy lower interest rates starting from 4 per cent on short term personal financing. To take advantage of this offer, which is open till June 30, eligible customers may visit their nearest

Bank Muscat branch and submit the required documents including a salary assignment letter and ID card.

As the leading financial services provider in the sultanate for the last four decades, Bank Muscat has the largest banking network in Oman with 146 retail banking branches and over 800 ATMs, CDMs and FFMs. Its range of digital banking channels including Internet Banking and Mobile Banking are helping customers meet the vast majority of their financial needs 24/7. The bank offers various financing options aligned to ever evolving customer needs, with the aim of facilitating a high standard of living for people in Oman.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds announces Sparkling Summer offer in Oman

Malabar Gold & Diamonds, one of the largest jewellery retailers globally with a strong retail network of over 285 outlets spread across the globe has unveiled its Sparkling Summer offer to celebrate the onset of summer. This offer will run at all Malabar Gold & Diamonds outlets located in Oman until June 18.

Through the Sparkling Summer offer, the brand gives its customers an exclusive chance to enjoy free gold coins with the purchase of diamond and precious gem jewellery. Customers get half gram gold coin on every RO300 worth of diamond jewellery purchase and a 1 gram gold coin on every RO500 worth of



diamond jewellery purchase, a press release said.

"With the school vacation fast approaching, many of our cus-

tomers are gearing up to travel to their home country. They will want to gift their loved ones back home or even buy something for

themselves to stand apart during a family function. We wanted to treat them to an array of exclusive designs when they are at our showrooms, which is why we have launched new jewellery collections specifically for this season. And with the exclusive offers, we are sure that we can add an extra value to their purchases," said Shamlal Ahamed, MD - International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

To add more glitter to the season, Malabar Gold & Diamonds has also unveiled the latest collection of jewellery in gold, diamonds and precious gems to suit the tastes of their multicultural and multinational customers.

Omantel wins 'Excellence in Telecom' at COMEX 2022 Awards

Omantel remains leader in telecom and ICT by the virtue of several factors including innovation, creativity, tech-based solutions, savings and productivity. These factors have once again led to Omantel winning the 'Excellence in Telecom' category at the COMEX 2022 Awards held during the recent COMEX Week in Muscat.

The award measures achievements made by contending companies in innovation, customer service, sustainable approaches, vision and strategic manoeuvres that have led to enhanced service delivery, a press release said.

"The award recognises Omantel's expanding coverage, its tech solutions bouquet and its



infrastructural might, which collectively are leading Oman's telecom landscape. Telecom is so much more than just communication and phone connections. It is a constantly evolving ecosystem that needs to be nurtured and expanded.

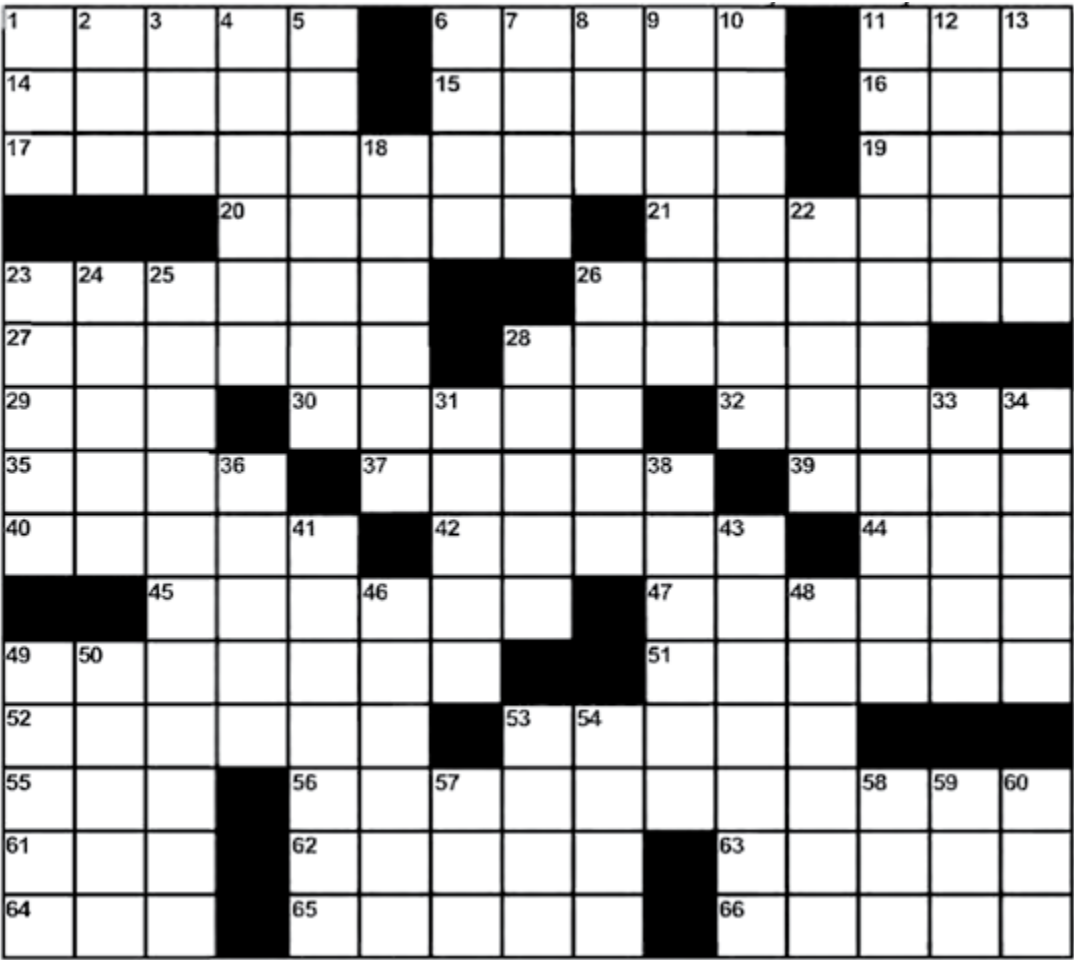
Omantel has been playing this part for years and continues to excel in everything that it stands for - the people and the economy of Oman," said Aladdin Baitfadhil, Omantel's chief commercial officer, who received the award.

Omantel has been bringing competitive pricing, new products and services, market leadership and operational excellence. Omantel's most important

stakeholders, its customers, benefit from the Company's superior service, unmatched coverage, affordable bundles, privacy and much more. It's telecom affiliates benefit from great supply chain management and prudent ICT infrastructure investment.

Omantel was the strongest contender for the award, given its accomplishments, especially in the past two years, which have been difficult due to the pandemic. The Company continued to stride ahead with its evolved offerings as an integrated telecom service provider covering the needs of people and economic sectors and thus, helping them bounce back with more resilience.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Flat-bottomed harbor boats
6) It's a matter of taste
11) Parking place
14) Chicago landing spot
15) Alistair or Sam
16) Words said before a pastor
17) Drives recklessly ...
19)Mauna_
20) Cursed
21) Scenic walking paths
23) Opposite of a crooner
26) Far-off
27) Elevates
28) Beyond ordinary understanding
29) Inquire
30) Evil spirit
32) Casino bandits?
3 5) Average grades
37) Traditional bodies of knowledge
39) Blockhead
40) Creme de la creme
42) Comes up short
44) "Much_ About

Nothing"
45) "The Wizard of Oz" character
4 7) Like the nervous system
49) Any person
51) Bounce on one's knee, as a baby
52) Gathered, as cattle
53) Fund one can't touch?
55) Country hotel
56) Repeat what one hears ...
61) To and_
62) Continent separator
63) Moon-related
64) In great shape
65) Oktoberfest tune
66) About to weep

DOWN

1) Costa del
2) "Tai" follower
3) Common deciduous tree
4) Takes from by force
5) Sushi wrap
6) Surgery evidence
7) Top-notch

8) Finger food of the is-lands
9) Giraffe relatives
10) Hires different actors
11) Runs from a battle ...
12) Classic movie theater name
13) Breakfast staple
18) Tasty crumb
22) Artificial leg?
23) Crutch, essentially
24) Artist's stand
25) A critic's job is to cri-tique ...
26) Force units
28) Definitely not a rocket scientist
31) Grinder in the back
33) Kind of wave
34) Lifted, so to speak
36) Confined to a pig pen
38) Parody
41) Surround completely
43) Chefs sprinkle, sometimes
46) Doc
48) "That's a lie!"
49) Slight smell
50) Artist Matisse

53) Heavy, durable furni-
ture wood
54)_ good race (com-
peted well)
57) Kenan's Nickelodeon
co-star
58) Biochemistry abbr.
59) Propel on water, in a
way
60) "Don't give up!"

NOTE PAD

SKAT TACKS DEAL
LULU ERROL ELBA
ADAR YRALA FLAT
BURNERAWAYTEETH
CLAYS WANES
AGEOLD DUET
SERA AMUSE GPA
EAST OFFROADROOM
ARE GLASS ISLE
SLUR SIPHON
ENSUE CANOE
DOWNDOORCOUNTRY
GOAL FLOURERIE
ANTI FLITE SELL
REST SAXES SEEP

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

As always, it's important that you succeed right now, but it's even more important that you avoid putting too much pressure on yourself. Go easy! Stress and self-doubt are your biggest enemies right now, and they could cause a bit of a landslide if you're not careful. The good news is that you already have all the power you need to conquer anything. It's deep inside of you (whether you believe it or not). When you need it, all you have to do is believe and it will be there.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Right now, you need to ensure that the line between your professional and personal lives is clear. Your emotions are strong, and a sad story might motivate you to take on an unwise strategy. You have a wonderful sense of compassion, but it can set you back more than you realize. Being impersonal or objective doesn't mean the same thing as being unfriendly or rude. You can still be polite and kind, but try to extricate yourself from anything that could get messy.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

There's a lot going on in your life right now that your friends and family don't know about, but they should! Make an effort today to widen your intimacy circle and bring more people into it. This can be easily done with a mass email. Your people could have inspiring words for you, and you might inspire them to open their lives up a bit more. You hold the missing piece in a puzzle someone you love is working on. Today, reconnect with your loved ones and share yourself.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You might be distracted by a sense that something big is coming today, and you might be right. There's a big event on its way, and it could present you with a huge opportunity for growth or a new romance (whichever you're more in need of right now). Talk to others about what you hope will happen. Who knows? They might be able to make it clearer for you. At the very least, saying what you want out loud will give the Universe a clue about how to handle things.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

It's time to evaluate your situation. There's something you've been working on with another person, either a relationship or a work-related project, and it's just not moving forward the way it should be. Usually, the best tactic is to keep on keeping on. The idea is that if you continue to chip away at this obstacle, it will eventually crumble. But there's a time to admit when something is futile and move on, and that time could be today.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Look around today and you'll find some inspiration. There are people in your life who have a lot of valuable things to teach you, and they're eager to move into a mentorship position. In fact, the timing might be perfect to reach out and ask for guidance. These folks exemplify what you want to be, and they're where you want to be. So why not ask them how to get there? You'll add your own spice to things today, so don't worry about becoming a carbon copy of anyone. Your identity won't suffer.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Sure, running around with your friends and painting the town red can be an awful lot of fun, but try not to get too carried away. You have serious priorities to consider, especially today. Ditch the loud parties and decline any wild invitations. Right now you should move toward hibernation mode. A quiet phase of introspection will help you reset your energies and recharge your batteries. Let yourself be quiet and focus inward for a while.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

As soon as you wake up this morning, you'll be looking for ways to help others. In big ways and in small ways, you'll be able to inject your personality into the lives of those around you and add your special brand of sunshine to the world. Whether you just buy a friend a cup of coffee or chip in and help someone move, you'll get a huge charge out of the selflessness you exhibit. You'll truly understand the meaning behind the old notion that generosity is its own reward.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Working on a long-term goal is very exciting. But as you move forward with a current one, the monotony of your game plan could start to get to you. Today, you might be given a choice at a critical point. You can either change your course and go off on a new (more exciting) direction, or you can keep going and play this thing out. There is no wrong decision, but keep in mind that if you go off track, you'll have to start all over again to get back on it.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Today was yesterday's future, and tomorrow is a future that will be here in mere hours. The point of this is that you're constantly moving on your path, and your future isn't going to wait for you to be prepared for it. Plan for what you want and where you want to go. This isn't about setting goals. It's much more about calling on your flexibility and being ready for whatever comes your way. There are thousands of possible directions for your life. Which one do you want to take?

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Reach out and try something new today, and be aware that this task might require shopping or some other expense. You need to shake up your usual routine and remember what it feels like to try to make sense of your surroundings. Put yourself in unfamiliar territory, both literally and figuratively. Try a restaurant in a different part of town. Take a position in a discussion just for the sake of argument. Check out a podcast that's new to you.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Grab that crazy idea that's been simmering in the back of your mind, because today is a day when the impossible is possible! Whatever windfall of money or attention you receive right now will provide the tipping point and pave the way for success. It's in your best interests to get involved with other people. Reach out and put on your best networking personality. Ask the people in power a lot of questions and get yourself noticed. Things are in motion.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Which of these is the name for a small purse or bag, originally of network but later of silk, rayon, etc.?

A. Reticule
B. Canticle
C. Ridicule
D. Particle

02. When is a stirrup cup traditionally served?

A. At the start of a foxhunt
B. After mucking out the stables
C. During a greyhound race
D. At the end of wedding celebrations

03. If the numbers from 1 to 10 are multiplied by each other, which of these numbers is nearest to the result?

A. 3.5 million
B. 350,000
C. 35 million
D. 35,000

Answers: 1.A 2.A 3.A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

L	L	O	E
E	C	A	S
R	L	T	A
A	R	E	C

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Lebanon re-elects Nabih Berri as speaker for 7th consecutive term

Beirut, Lebanon - Lebanese lawmakers re-elected Nabih Berri as parliament speaker on Tuesday for a seventh consecutive term, cementing his reputation as an immovable centrepiece of the country's political landscape.

Berri's candidacy went largely unchallenged but the 84-year-old clinched only the bare minimum number of votes needed for a win - one of his lowest counts since he first rose to the helm of parliament 30 years ago.

Some lawmakers spoil their ballots by writing slogans blaming the ruling class that Berri embodies for the successive crises that have hit Lebanon, from the 2020 Beirut port explosion to political assassinations and an ongoing economic meltdown.

"I will put the insults behind me... and approach blank ballots with a blank heart," Berri said after his victory, in one of his trademark quips.

He said he would extend his hand to all lawmakers so that, together, they can streamline overdue reforms and facilitate the appointment of a prime minister and a new president.

"The Lebanese, and the rest of world, are looking to you as a beacon of hope, possibly the only



Lebanon's parliament speaker Nabih Berri presides over the first session of the newly-elected assembly at its headquarters in the capital Beirut on Tuesday (AFP)

one," Berri told lawmakers. "We all live if Lebanon lives."

Aged 84, the warlord-turned-politician is one of the longest-serving chiefs of any parliament in the world.

Spoilt ballots

An ally of the powerful Shiite

group Hezbollah, Berri has weathered decades of turbulence and shifting political tides, including the current economic crisis and a 2019 protest movement demanding wholesale political reform.

Even after parliamentary elections in May yielded modest but

unprecedented gains for independent candidates, Berri's position remained largely unchallenged.

He clinched a new four-year term during parliament's opening session on Tuesday with the votes of just 65 of parliament's 128 members. That was down

from the 98 votes he secured in 2018.

Opponents spoil their ballots with a variety of political slogans.

"Justice for the victims of the Beirut blast," read one ballot, referring to a 2020 explosion at the capital's port that killed more than 200 people.

"Lokman Slim," read several ballots, referring to a Hezbollah critic who was found murdered in his car last year.

Berri will preside over a deeply fragmented parliament prone to the kind of deadlock that has paralysed Lebanese politics for decades.

Lawmakers will be called upon to push through long-overdue reforms to stem a financial crisis that has plunged most Lebanese into poverty.

Expected results

Berri's Amal Movement and Hezbollah hold all 27 Shiite-allocated seats in parliament but lack an overall parliamentary majority.

Berri's re-election Tuesday was largely expected and held within legal deadlines but intense political horse-trading is expected in the coming months.

Observers have warned of

protracted deadlocks during consultations to name a new prime minister and in the run-up to an election later this year to replace President Michel Aoun.

Ahead of Tuesday's session, independent lawmakers born out of the 2019 protest movement joined relatives of the victims of the Beirut port blast in a symbolic march from the docks to parliament. They chanted 'revolution' as they passed by Martyrs' Square - the focal point of the 2019 protests.

"This square will be our reference," said independent lawmaker Firas Hamdan, who stepped into parliament for the first time on Tuesday.

A lawyer by training, Berri won power as a militia leader during the 1975-1990 civil war and transitioned to politics as the war ended.

He was named minister several times between 1984 and 1992.

That year, in the first polls after the war ended, Berri was simultaneously elected a member and speaker of parliament - the highest post for a Shiite in the country's sectarian political system.

AFP

Yemen's parties urged to renew truce

Dubai, UAE - Aid agencies urged Yemen's warring parties to extend a two-month UN-brokered truce on Tuesday two days before it was set to expire, saying it had 'positive humanitarian impacts'.

A brutal seven-year conflict pitting Yemen's Saudi-backed government against the Iran-aligned Houthi rebels has killed hundreds of thousands of people and left millions on the brink of famine. On April 2, the first nationwide truce since 2016 came into force, but that runs out on Thursday. "As organisations working across Yemen, we have seen the positive humanitarian impacts of the truce," said a joint statement by over 30 aid agencies, including Save The Children, Oxfam and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

Earlier this month, NRC said the number of civilian casualties in Yemen had dropped by more than half since the truce took effect. "We... urge you to extend the truce agreement, build further on the gains you have made possible over the past two months, and work towards peace for the people of Yemen," they added.

AFP

Environment impact of tobacco industry 'devastating': WHO

Geneva, Switzerland - The tobacco industry is a far greater threat than many realise as it is one of the world's biggest polluters, from leaving mountains of waste to driving global warming, the WHO said on Tuesday.

The World Health Organization accused the industry of causing widespread deforestation, diverting badly needed land and water in poor countries away from food production, spewing out plastic and chemical waste as well as emitting millions of tonnes of carbon dioxide.

In its report released on World No Tobacco Day, the UN agency called for the tobacco industry to be held to account and foot the bill for the cleanup.

The report, 'Tobacco: Poisoning our planet', looks at the impacts of the whole cycle, from the growth of plants to the manufacturing of tobacco products, to consumption and waste.

While tobacco's health impacts have been well documented for decades - with smoking still causing more than eight million deaths worldwide every year - the report focuses on its broader environmental consequences. The findings are 'quite devastating', Ruediger Krech, WHO director of health promotion, told AFP, charging that the industry is 'one of the biggest polluters that we know of'.

Poison

He slammed tobacco companies' frequent efforts to rehabilitate their image through beach cleanups and funding environmental and disaster relief organisations as 'green-washing'.

"The tobacco industry dumps toxic waste into communities and depletes natural resources," he told a press conference.

"Tobacco is not only poisoning people, it's poisoning our planet."

The industry is responsible for the loss of some 600mn trees each year - or five per cent of global deforestation - while tobacco growing and production uses 200,000 hectares of land and 22bn tonnes of water annually, the report found.

It also emits around 84mn tonnes of carbon dioxide, it said.

In addition, 'tobacco products are the most littered item on the planet, containing over 7,000 toxic chemicals, which leech into our environment when discarded,' Krech said.

4.5tn cigarette butts a year

He pointed out that each one of the estimated 4.5tn cigarette butts that end up in the oceans, rivers, sidewalks and beaches every year can pollute 100 litres of water.

And up to a quarter of all tobacco farmers contract so-called green tobacco sickness, or poisoning from the nicotine they absorb through the skin.

Farmers who handle tobacco leaves all day consume the equivalent of 50 cigarettes worth of nicotine a day, Krech said.

This is especially worrying for the many children involved in tobacco farming.

"Just imagine a 12-year-old being exposed to 50 cigarettes a day," he said.

Most tobacco is grown in poorer countries, where water and farmland are often in short supply, and where such crops are often grown at the expense of vital food production, the report said.

UN agencies have launched a project to try to help farmers transition to other crops.

AFP

IAEA report on nuclear sites not fair, says Iran

Tehran, Iran - Iran said on Tuesday a report by the UN nuclear watchdog on undeclared nuclear material found at three sites was 'not fair'.

"Unfortunately, this report does not reflect the reality of the negotiations between Iran and the IAEA," foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh told reporters, referring to the Monday report by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

"It's not a fair and balanced report," he said, adding: "We expect this path to be corrected."

The latest report came as talks to revive a landmark 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and major powers remain deadlocked after stalling in March.

In it, the IAEA said it still had questions which were 'not clarified' regarding undeclared nuclear material previously found at three sites - Marivan, Varamin



Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh briefing reporters in Tehran on Tuesday (AFP)

and Turqezabad.

It said its long-running efforts to get Iranian officials to explain the presence of nuclear material had failed to provide the answers it sought.

Iran saw an Israeli hand in the IAEA's findings. "It is feared that the pressure exerted by the

Zionist regime and some other actors has caused the normal path of agency reports to change from technical to political," Khatibzadeh said.

Earlier, Iran's representative to the IAEA, Mohammad Reza Ghaebi, said the report 'does not reflect Iran's extensive coopera-

tion with the agency'.

"Iran considers this approach unconstructive and destructive to the current close relations and cooperation between the country and the IAEA," he said, adding: "The agency should be aware of the destructive consequences of publishing such one-sided reports," he said.

In a separate report published on Monday, the IAEA estimated that Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium had grown to more than 18 times the limit agreed in a troubled 2015 deal between Tehran and major powers.

It 'estimated that, as of May 15, 2022, Iran's total enriched stockpile was 3,809.3kg."

The limit in the 2015 deal was set at 300kg of a specific compound, the equivalent of 202.8kg of uranium.

The twin reports came as talks to revive the 2015 nuclear

deal formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action remain deadlocked after stalling in March.

The agreement gave Iran relief from crippling economic sanctions in exchange for curbs on its nuclear activities designed to prevent it from developing an atomic bomb - an ambition it has always denied.

But the pact was left on life support when then US president Donald Trump pulled out unilaterally in 2018 and reimposed biting sanctions on Tehran, prompting Iran to begin rolling back on its own commitments.

One of the main sticking points is Tehran's demand - rejected by Washington - that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the ideological arm of Iran's military, be removed from a US terrorism blacklist.

AFP

Boards against boredom: Libya rolls out first skatepark

Tripoli, Libya - Libyan Mohamed Abderraouf put a foot on his board and launched himself across Tripoli's first skatepark, a welcome break in the conflict-battered capital with few facilities for bored young people.

"I can't describe the joy," said the 18-year-old, who bought his first skateboard in 2020 and had only been able to practice on street corners - until now. "I'm going to come a couple of times a week."

The free, open-air facility opened over the weekend in central Tripoli, to the delight of young skaters who spent the afternoon sweeping up and down the halfpipes and taking selfies with their friends.

"I'm really happy, because before there wasn't a dedicated place for skating," said Rayan al-Omar, 18, who has been skating for a year.

The United States-funded facility was built by Make Life Skate Life, a charity that has set up 'free-of-charge, community-built concrete skateparks' in Iraq, Bolivia and India.

Australian Wade Trevean,



Skateboarders show off their skills during the inauguration of a skatepark in the capital Tripoli, on Sunday (AFP)

who designed the 800-square-metre Tripoli site, said volunteers had come from far and wide to help build it, a process that took about six weeks.

"There are people from New York, people from Belgium, Germany or Australia," Trevean said. "The happiness and positivity here are amazing," he added.

Built on Gaddafi bodyguard base

Local skaters played a role in the project too, part of a seaside park that also includes a cycling route and five-a-side football pitches.

The rest of the complex was completed a year ago on the site of a former base of the 'Amazons', the entourage of female bodyguards of deposed dictator

Muammer Gaddafi, and seen as a symbol of the tyrant's extravagance. Since he was overthrown and killed in a 2011 revolt, Tripoli has endured successive waves of violence, meaning few resources were put into leisure and cultural facilities - already almost non-existent under Kadhafi.

So almost two years since the guns fell silent following the last

major battle on the edges of the capital, the opening of a skatepark in Tripoli generated a lot of attention.

For young Libyan skateboarders, interest in the sport reflects a yearning for normality, to be like other nations and other young people.

Abderraouf said such a project would have been 'unimaginable' until recently. "Thank God it is here now," he said.

For Make Life Skate Life, the 'overall goal' of the skatepark is 'to create a safe community space where people from different backgrounds can come together and positively interact in a playful way', the organisation said. "Apart from creating immediate local employment, the skatepark aims to contribute to a healthier, more active, more engaged, and happier society," it added.

The group say they will hold free weekly skate classes of 60 girls and boys - split equally - who would otherwise not be able to skate, with boards and safety gear available to use.

AFP

China incursions into Taiwan airspace swell

Taipei, Taiwan - China has made the second largest incursion into Taiwan's air defence zone this year with Taipei reporting 30 jets entering the area, including more than 20 fighters.

Taiwan's defence ministry said late on Monday it had scrambled its own aircraft and deployed air defence missile systems to monitor the latest Chinese activity.

In recent years, Beijing has begun sending large sorties into Taiwan's defence zone to signal dissatisfaction, and to keep Taipei's ageing fighter fleet regularly stressed.

Self-ruled democratic Taiwan lives under the constant threat of invasion by China, which views the island as its territory and has vowed to one day seize it, by force if necessary.

Monday's incursion was the largest since January 23, when 39 planes entered the air defence identification zone, or ADIZ.

The ADIZ is not the same as Taiwan's territorial airspace but includes a far greater area that overlaps with part of China's own air defence identification zone

and even includes some of the mainland.

A flight map provided by the Taiwanese defence ministry showed the planes entering the southwestern corner of the ADIZ before looping back out again.

'Increasingly provocative'

The United States last week accused Beijing of raising tensions over the island, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken specifically mentioning aircraft incursions as an example of 'increasingly provocative rhetoric and activity'.

Blinken's remarks came after US President Joe Biden appeared to break decades of US policy when, in response to a question on a visit to Japan, he said Washington would defend Taiwan militarily if it is attacked by China.

But the White House has since insisted its policy of 'strategic ambiguity' over whether or not it would intervene has not changed.

There is growing bipartisan discussion in Washington over



Local vehicles drive past Taiwan's Presidential Offices in Taipei (AFP)

whether to switch to 'strategic clarity' given Beijing's increasingly aggressive approach to cross-strait relations, epitomised by the air incursions.

US senators have made multiple trips to the island in a show

of support - a group led by Republican Lindsey Graham visited in April, and Democrat Tammy Duckworth landed in Taipei on Monday. Duckworth was one of the main sponsors of the Taiwan Partnership Act, which aims to

deepen security ties between Taipei and Washington. It has yet to be voted on or become law. But after a meeting with Duckworth on Tuesday, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen suggested that some form of

link-up was already happening.

"As a result (of the Act), the US Department of Defence is now actively planning cooperation between the National Guard and Taiwan's defence forces," Tsai said in a statement, without

explaining further.

Constant alert

Last year, Taiwan recorded 969 incursions by Chinese warplanes into its ADIZ, according to an AFP database - more than double the roughly 380 carried out in 2020.

The most number of aircraft China has sent in a single day was 56 on October 4, 2021.

That month saw a record 196 incursions, mostly around China's annual national day celebrations. So far in 2022 Taiwan has reported 465 incursions, a near 50 per cent increase on the same period last year.

The sheer number of sorties has put the air force under immense pressure, and it has suffered a string of fatal accidents in recent years. On Tuesday local media reported that a pilot had died after crashing a trainer jet in southern Kaohsiung.

It is not the first deadly crash this year - in January one of Taiwan's most advanced fighter jets, an F-16V, plunged into the sea.

AFP

UK man convicted of Thai murder

Bangkok, Thailand - A Thai court on Tuesday convicted a British man of the 2014 murder of a woman whose dismembered body was found in a suitcase dumped in a river.

Shane Kenneth Looker was given an eight-year prison sentence for killing 27-year-old sex worker Laxami Manochat in a hotel room and disposing of her body.

Police said the 51-year-old had been photographed with Laxami leaving a Bangkok go-go bar on November 1 2014 before the pair were seen entering a hotel together. Only Looker was seen leaving the premises, with a bellboy reporting his large bag was so heavy it took two people to carry it, and a hotel cleaner saying the room's bed-sheets were bloodstained.

"The defendant is found guilty of charges and sentenced to 16 years in jail but due to his confession, the court reduced his sentence by half to eight years without suspended jail term," an official at the court in the western town of Kanchanaburi said.

Laxami's dismembered corpse was found on November 6, 2014, in a suitcase loaded with stones and tossed into the Mae Klong River.

Looker's DNA was later discovered under her nails.

Kanchanaburi Provincial Court issued an arrest warrant on January 28 2015, but the Briton - who laid low at his holiday home in the Thai seaside resort of Hua Hin for weeks before taking a train over the border to Malaysia - had already hot-footed it to Spain.

Looker was detained in June 2017 on the party island of Ibiza by Spanish authorities acting on an international arrest warrant.

He spent years fighting an exhaustive legal battle against extradition, before being sent to the kingdom to face trial in July.

AFP

All 22 bodies retrieved from Nepal plane crash

Pokhara, Nepal - Nepali rescuers have retrieved the bodies of all 22 people from a plane that crashed in the Himalayas, authorities said on Tuesday as they began identifying the victims.

"All bodies have now been found," Civil Aviation Authority spokesman Deo Chandra Lal Karn told AFP.

Air traffic control lost contact with the Twin Otter plane shortly after it took off from Pokhara in western Nepal on Sunday morning and headed for Jomsom, a popular trekking destination.

The wreckage was found a day later strewn across a mountainside at around 4,420 metres. Ten of the bodies were brought by helicopter to the capital Kathmandu on Monday with the remaining 12 still at the hard-to-reach crash site, with poor weather hampering the operation, officials said.

About 60 people were involved in the search mission, including the army, police, mountain guides and locals, most of whom trekked for miles to get there. Many spent the night camped at the high-altitude site.

On holiday

The cause of the crash has yet to be confirmed, but Pokhara Airport spokesman Dev Raj Subedi said on Monday that the aircraft



Nepali security personnel carry the bodies of plane crash victims, brought to Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu on Monday (AFP)

operated by Nepali carrier Tara Air did not catch fire in the air.

Four Indians and two Germans in their fifties were onboard the twin-prop aircraft, along with 16 Nepalis, including a computer engineer, his wife and their two daughters who had just returned from the United States. The four Indians were a divorced couple and their daughter and son, aged 15 and 22, on a family holiday.

"There was a court order for (the father) to spend time with the family for 10 days every year, so they were taking a trip," Indian police official Uttam Sonawane told AFP.

Poor safety record

According to the Aviation Safety

Network website, the aircraft was made by Canada's de Havilland and took its first flight more than 40 years ago.

Tara Air is a subsidiary of Yeti Airlines, a privately owned domestic carrier that services many remote destinations across Nepal.

It suffered its last fatal accident in 2016 on the same route when a plane with 23 onboard crashed into a mountainside.

Nepal's air industry has boomed in recent years, carrying goods and people between hard-to-reach areas as well as foreign trekkers and climbers.

But it has been plagued by poor safety due to insufficient training and maintenance.

AFP

Shanghai prepares to lift more COVID curbs after lockdown

Shanghai, China - Shanghai authorities said on Tuesday they will lift more restrictions in steps to return the COVID-hit city to normality, after two months of heavy-handed restrictions that throttled businesses and locked down residents.

The commercial hub of 25mn was shuttered in sections from late March, when the spread of the Omicron variant prompted China's worst outbreak since the virus first emerged in the country in late 2019.

China is wedded to a zero-COVID strategy of hard lockdowns, mass testing and long quarantine periods to wipe out clusters.

But after gradually relaxing some rules over past weeks, officials said on Tuesday that residents living in areas deemed low risk will be allowed to move around the city freely, a major step toward ending the curbs.

The easing of restrictions will apply to around 22mn people, deputy mayor Zong Ming told reporters. "From June 1, the city will enter the third stage, that is, the stage of fully restoring the normal production and living order of the city," Zong said.

Malls, convenience stores, pharmacies and beauty salons will be allowed to operate at 75 per cent capacity, while parks and other scenic spots will gradually



Residents stand in their compound during a COVID-19 lockdown in the Jing'an district of Shanghai on Monday (AFP)

ually reopen, she added.

But cinemas and gyms remain closed, and schools - shut since mid-March - will slowly reopen on a voluntary basis.

E-commerce professional Chen Ying said she still planned to work from home but might treat her two-year-old son to a long-awaited walk outside.

"We should have been free to begin with, so don't expect me to be deeply grateful now they've given it back to us," she told AFP.

Caution and barriers

Local media showed photos of orange-clad workers dismantling some of the barriers that had penned in districts across the city for weeks.

Shanghai resident Anita Xu told AFP she was nonplussed about the curbs lifting.

"Even if you can go out, I don't know what you can do,"

the 32-year-old marketing professional said. "I feel a little caught unawares."

Previously, residents in areas without any coronavirus cases had to carry passes that only allowed them to go out for a few hours to buy essentials.

Taxi services and private cars will also be allowed in low-risk areas, permitting people to visit friends and family outside their district.

Buses, subway and ferry services will also resume, transport officials said.

Shanghai residents travelling to other cities in China still need to quarantine, and residents need a negative test taken within 72 hours to enter most public places.

Communities considered 'high risk' will also still have stringent restrictions on movement.

AFP

Graveyard sheds light on Kim's South Korean heritage

Jeju, South Korea - North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un has threatened Seoul with fiery destruction, but as a remote graveyard on a resort island shows, he has closer links to the South than he might like to admit.

At a cemetery in a hard-to-find corner of South Korea's Jeju island, there are 13 tombstones bearing the Ko family name - Kim's relatives through his mother, Ko Yong Hui.

Jong Un is the third member of the Kim family to rule North Korea, following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather - what official hagiography calls the 'Paektu lineage'. But the Jeju graves tell a wider story.

Kim's mother was born in Osaka in 1952 to a native Jeju islander who emigrated to Japan in 1929, when the Korean peninsula was under Tokyo's colonial rule.



A tombstone of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's maternal great grandfather that translates as 'Ko Yong-ok' is seen at a remote area on the resort island of Jeju (AFP)

Many of her family, including Kim's maternal great-grandfather, are buried on Jeju, their overgrown graves a stark contrast to Pyongyang's Kumsusan Palace of the Sun, where the embalmed bodies of Kim's father

and grandfather Kim Il Sung lie in state. After Kim came to power in 2011 following the death of his father Kim Jong Il, many experts highlighted his mother's South Korean and Japanese heritage. Pyongyang has never confirmed

it. The regime 'must have feared confirmation would undermine its legitimacy', Cheong Seong-chang of the Center for North Korea Studies at the Sejong Institute, told AFP. The Kim dynasty bases its claim to power on Kim

Il Sung's role as a guerrilla fighter driving out Japan and winning Korea its independence in 1945.

"Korea-Japan heritage runs directly counter to the North Korean myth of its leadership," Cheong said.

Kim's mother

Kim's mother grew up in the Japanese port city of Osaka, but her family moved to North Korea in the 1960s as part of a decades-long repatriation programme by Pyongyang.

The scheme urged ethnic Koreans living in Japan to move to North Korea, part of a drive to 'claim supremacy' over the South, said Park Chul-hyun, a novelist and columnist in Tokyo.

"The North saw the Korean-Japanese community as a strategic battleground," he said, and managed to convince nearly

100,000 ethnic Koreans to relocate to the 'socialist paradise'.

The Ko family answered the call, and lived a relatively normal life in the North until their eldest daughter caught the eye of the country's heir apparent.

Experts believe that Ko, who was a performer with the Mansudae Art Troupe of musicians and dancers, first met Kim Jong Il in Pyongyang in 1972.

She would become his partner in 1975, experts say, and although there is no official record of their marriage the pair had three children. She died in 2004.

"There has been nothing about Ko Yong Hui in official state media," said Rachel Minyoung Lee, a non-resident fellow with the 38 North Program at the Washington-based Stimson Center.

AFP

Ukraine identifies war crimes in Donbas

The cases in the industrial region are among some 15,000 across Ukraine since the Russian invasion

The Hague, Netherlands - Ukraine has identified several thousand suspected war crimes in the eastern Donbas region where Russian forces are pressing their offensive, Kyiv's chief prosecutor said on Tuesday.

The cases in the industrial region are among some 15,000 across Ukraine since Russian forces invaded on February 24, prosecutor general Iryna Venediktova said.

"Of course we started a few thousand cases about what we see in Donbas," Venediktova told a news conference in The Hague as she met international counterparts. "If we speak about war crimes, it's about possible transfer of people, we started several cases about possible transfer of children, adult people to different parts of the Russian Federation," she said.

"Then, of course, we can speak about torturing people, killing civilians and destroying civilian infrastructure."

Ukrainian authorities did not have access to Russian-held areas of Donbas, but they were interviewing evacuees and prisoners of war, Venediktova told the press conference at the headquarters of EU judicial agency Eu-



A young girl walks by a crater in front of a damaged apartment building in the city of Sloviansk at the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas on Tuesday (AFP)

rojust.

In total, Ukraine had identified 15,000 war crimes cases since the Russian invasion with 200 to 300 more coming in every day,

she added.

Ukraine had identified 600 suspects for the 'anchor' crime of aggression, including 'high level of top military, politicians and

propaganda agents of Russian Federation', the prosecutor general said.

Nearly 80 suspects had been identified for alleged war crimes

that had actually taken place on Ukrainian soil, she added.

Two Russian soldiers were jailed for 11 and a half years by a Ukrainian court on Tuesday for

shelling civilian areas, while another was jailed for life earlier this month for murdering a civilian.

'Momentous day'

Three more European countries - Latvia, Estonia and Slovakia - meanwhile joined an international investigation team probing war crimes in Ukraine on Tuesday. Prosecutors from Poland,

"We can't fly in and fly out," said Khan.

The ICC earlier this month dispatched the largest team of investigators in the court's 20-year history to probe suspected war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine.

Ukraine's Venediktova said she hoped her country would handle '95 percent' of cases but

If we speak about war crimes, it's about possible transfer of children, adult people to different parts of the Russian Federation... about torturing people, killing civilians

IRYNA VENEDIKTOVA

Lithuania and from the Hague-based International Criminal Court are already part of the team.

"Today is a momentous day that the (team) has three new members," ICC prosecutor Karim Khan said at the news conference alongside the Ukrainian prosecutor.

The ICC was 'hopefully' going to open a field office in Kyiv in the next few weeks to have a more permanent base for its investigation in Ukraine, Khan added.

that some larger or more difficult ones could be dealt with by the ICC.

Russia's invasion and the subsequent discovery of hundreds of killings in places such as the Kyiv suburb of Bucha have prompted unprecedented international investigative efforts.

"Never in the history of armed conflict has the legal community responded with such determination," Eurojust President Ladislav Hamran said. AFP

Ex-Tory leader predicts UK PM Johnson to face confidence vote

London, UK - British Prime Minister Boris Johnson could face a vote among his own MPs to end his tenure in power as soon as next week, former Conservative leader William Hague said on Tuesday.

The prediction came after more Tory lawmakers, including two former cabinet ministers, expressed doubts about Johnson's continued leadership in the wake of the 'Partygate' scandal.

Dozens of his MPs have now publicly criticised their embattled leader over the numerous lockdown-breaching parties held in Downing Street in 2020 and last year under his watch.

If 54 of them write a letter of no-confidence in Johnson to a powerful backbench committee of Tory MPs, that will trigger a vote of all 359 Conservatives lawmakers on whether he should continue as leader and thereby prime minister.

Nearly 30 MPs are publicly known to have submitted such a letter but the process is shrouded in secrecy and the real tally is impossible to gauge.

Parliament is not sitting this



British PM Boris Johnson (AFP)

The fuse is getting closer to the dynamite here and it's speeding up... the Conservative party is moving towards a vote

WILLIAM HAGUE

week and with four days of celebrations for Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee beginning on Thursday, any announcement about a possible vote would not come until next week at the earliest. The latest heavyweight Tories to express doubts about

Johnson include former attorney general Jeremy Wright, who on Monday urged him to resign, and ex-cabinet minister Andrea Leadsom.

Hague said Leadsom's intervention - a letter to her constituents on Tuesday in which she criticised 'unacceptable failings of leadership' over 'Partygate' - had lit a 'slow fuse' on a no-confidence vote.

"The fuse is getting closer to the dynamite here and it's speeding up," Hague told Times Radio, adding it was 'just another indication the Conservative Party is moving faster towards a vote'.

"A few more letters like that and it will come next week," the former foreign secretary said.

The 'Partygate' controversy, about Downing Street officials partying while the public was under COVID lockdown or under tight social restrictions, caused outrage. Johnson himself became the first serving UK prime minister found to have broken the law while in office and was fined for attending a birthday party in 2020. AFP

Hurricane Agatha drenches resorts on Mexico's coast

Huatulco, Mexico - Hurricane Agatha, the first of the season, lashed a string of beach resorts on Mexico's Pacific coast as it barreled ashore on Monday, bringing strong winds, heavy rain and flood warnings.

Agatha was the strongest storm to make landfall along Mexico's Pacific coast in May since record keeping began in 1949, the US National Hurricane Center (NHC) said.

The storm had maximum sustained winds of 110km per hour and was moving at 13km an hour.

It made landfall near Puerto Angel in the southern state of Oaxaca as a Category Two hurricane - the second lowest on a scale of five - but later weakened to a Category One storm.

"Further weakening is expected, and Agatha is forecast to dissipate over Mexico by Tuesday afternoon," the NHC said. Small landslides were reported in parts of Oaxaca, civil protection coordinator Oscar Valencia told the Milenio Television channel. Residents along the coast had



Palm trees blow in the wind before hurricane Agatha makes landfall in Huatulco, Mexico on Monday (AFP)

stocked up on food and water and boarded up windows of homes and businesses as Agatha approached.

Seaports in the area closed and airlines canceled flights.

Authorities opened around 200 storm shelters with room for up to 26,800 people, while hotels provided refuge to the es-

timated 5,200 national and foreign tourists in the danger zone.

"We are already on red alert. This is coming and it is coming strong," Roberto Castillo, a civil protection official in Huatulco, told AFP as the storm neared.

A hurricane warning was issued for a stretch of coastline including Puerto Escondido and

other surf towns popular with Mexican and foreign tourists, leaving normally busy beaches deserted.

'Storm surge is expected to produce extremely dangerous coastal flooding' and will be accompanied by 'large and destructive waves', the NHC said. AFP

Funerals to begin for Uvalde victims as Biden vows action on guns

Uvalde, US - Grieving families were to hold the first funerals on Tuesday for Texas shooting victims one week after a school massacre left 19 children and two teachers dead, with President Joe Biden vowing to push for stricter US gun regulation.

Mourners attended wakes in the town of Uvalde on Monday for some of the child victims gunned down by a local 18-year-old man who was then killed by police. At one funeral home - just across the street from Robb Elementary School where the shooting occurred - friends, family and strangers attended a closed-casket visitation for 10-year-old victim Amerie Jo Garza. Pictures of the young girl decorated the space.

Esther Rubio, who described the scene as 'very somber', came from nearby San Antonio with her husband. "I don't know what



This combination of pictures displayed at a makeshift memorial at Robb Elementary school in Uvalde, Texas on Monday, shows 19 children and two teachers who died in the mass shooting (AFP)

else to say, because there's no words to describe (it)," she said.

Remembrances for another slain student, Maite Rodriguez, began just hours later.

In Washington, Biden - who visited the small town about an hour's drive from the Mexico border earlier in the weekend - responded to desperate calls for

weapons reform.

"I've been pretty motivated all along" to act on guns, Biden told reporters on Monday.

"I'm going to continue to

push," he said, adding, "I think things have gotten so bad that everybody is getting more rational about it."

A bipartisan group of US law-

Canada PM Justin Trudeau announces handgun 'freeze'

Ottawa, Canada - Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced on Monday a proposed freeze on handgun ownership in Canada that would effectively ban their importation and sale, following recent mass shootings in the United States.

The bill must still be passed by Parliament, with the ruling Liberals holding only a minority of seats.

"We're introducing legislation to implement a national

freeze on handgun ownership," Trudeau told a news conference, joined by dozens of families and friends of victims of gun violence.

"What this means is that it will no longer be possible to buy, sell, transfer or import handguns anywhere in Canada," he said.

"In other words, we're capping the market for handguns," he added.

AFP

makers worked through the Memorial Day weekend to pursue possible areas of compromise.

They reportedly were focusing on laws to raise the age for gun

purchases or to allow police to remove guns from people deemed at risk - but not on an outright ban on high-powered rifles like the weapon used on Tuesday in Uvalde or the one used 10 days earlier in Buffalo, New York.

Uvalde's first funerals are set for Tuesday, with others scheduled through mid-June. The huge number of victims, many with horrific wounds, has left the town's two funeral homes turning to embalmers and morticians from across Texas for help.

One anonymous donor has pledged US\$175,000 to help cover funeral costs, Texas Governor Greg Abbott said.

The Uvalde massacre came less than two weeks after 10 people died in the attack at a Buffalo grocery store by a young gunman targeting African Americans. AFP

UK FOOD CRISIS



Cost-of-living crisis forces more Brits to foodbanks

On an overcast morning in Bradford, northern England, a steady stream of locals arrive at a foodbank to collect produce parcels described as 'a lifesaver' during the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation.

Bradford Central Foodbank is helping twice as many people compared to pre-pandemic, as spiralling prices for energy, food and other basics leave a growing number of Britons struggling.

"The numbers since I've been a volunteer have only multiplied and I can only see it getting worse," said Karl Carroll, 33, who has relied on the parcels since 2019 and is now volunteering at the foodbank.

"I've barely got £40 (US\$50) by the time I've paid everything out, so I imagine families are struggling in more ways," he told AFP.

Simon Jackson, 43, an unemployed former supermarket worker who is accessing long-term government sickness benefits, has been a foodbank user since February.

"It is a tougher time at the minute... the cost of living's skyrocketed to a point of we're having to use foodbanks a bit more," he said.

Jackson currently gets around £900 a month in various government support payments but, like Carroll, once his bills are paid, there is little left over for food. Rising prices are exacerbating the situation.

"Places like (this) here in Bradford are a lifesaver. They can really help balance your decisions - sometimes between the heating and eating," he said.

Survival

One of the clearest signs of the crisis is the surge in foodbank use.

The Trussell Trust charity says its more than 1,400 affiliated sites handed out 2.1 million parcels in the past year - 830,000 of them to children - in a 14 per cent increase on pre-pandemic levels.

Its central Bradford operation is hosted three days a week by a local church organisation, and can supply people with only three parcels within six months to manage demand.

They contain basics such as cereal, tinned soup, meat and fish, pasta, sauces, vegetables, biscuits, sugar, tea



Volunteers work in the kitchen of Bradford Central Foodbank in Bradford, northern England



It's people that are on the lowest incomes that'll suffer the most... they have to buy the essentials but they're the things that are really going up by a lot

JOSIE BARLOW

and coffee.

Started in 2011, it is one of around 30 free food providers now in the city of just over half a million residents, and currently helps around 1,000 people a month, said manager Josie Barlow.

Greater Bradford's population - the sixth biggest metropolitan area in England - is the fifth most income-deprived and sixth most employment-deprived nationwide, according to the government's last poverty index published

in 2019. That leaves it particularly vulnerable in the current climate.

"It's people that are on the lowest incomes that'll suffer the most... they have to buy the essentials but they're the things that are really going up by a lot," Barlow explained.

She greets arrivals with a warm smile and upbeat energy, directing them to collection tables as well as welfare, housing and other advisors.

"We want to give a food parcel, but we also really want to help people with the root causes of their food crisis," Barlow noted. She said they receive a whole spread of society, which includes working as well as unemployed people.

"You do a budget with people and you're like: 'yeah, you just can't live on that, can you?' And there's no real way out of that. You can't expect people to live like that, in crisis, just trying to survive in the long-term."

Winter fears

The government announced Thursday a new £15bn support package aimed at the most vulnerable, ahead of an expected 42 per cent jump in energy bills in October - which follows a 54 per cent hike last month.

Three-quarters of the money is directed at government benefits recipients, with a £650 'cost-of-living payment' to most alongside £300 for pensioners and an extra £150 for those on disability support.

But in Bradford, as elsewhere, it cannot allay fears that the worst is yet to come. The current nine per cent inflation rate is predicted to surge even higher, which would swamp any additional support.

"I'm quite scared by this winter coming up," admitted Barlow, noting summer allows people to get by without heating. "Come this winter, when you really do need it on... I just don't know how people are going to survive."

Jackson predicted the biggest squeeze could come at Christmas, as families in particular grapple with giving presents as well as putting food on the table.

"It might not be so much for me, because I'm on my own - I'll just put an extra blanket on or something," he said. "But for those with small kids that have Christmas presents and other needs... it's really going to be tough."

Simone Hillhands, 34, is one. She has three children aged 10, 13 and 15. One of them has a disability, which prevents her from working full time.

Her children's school directed her to the foodbank.

Reluctant to reveal too much of her personal circumstances, Hillhands confided that her sister had recently been made homeless and the wider family's situation was really hard with prices rising.

"They've gone through the roof... it's crazy!" she said, adding that despite the pandemic, "last year was a lot easier".

AFP

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LIGHT ON THE TUMMY

Summer

risotto

Risotto is an Italian favourite prepared with rice, aromatics, broth, and butter (also cheese), with toppings and sides of your choice. It is an ideal meal during summer when you want to go light on the tummy



Summer Vegetable Risotto

Ingredients

- 1 cup Carnaroli rice
- 2 ears of corn – kernels chopped
- 2 cloves garlic - minced
- 1 zucchini - diced small
- 1 bunch parsley - chopped
- 1 pinch saffron
- 2tbsp creme fraiche (or sour cream)
- 1 shallot - chopped
- 1tbsp capers
- 1tbsp rice vinegar
- ¼ cup grated pecorino cheese
- ¼ tsp crushed red pepper flakes

Method

In a medium pot, heat 2tsp of olive oil on medium-high until hot. Add the chopped shallot and half the chopped garlic - season with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring frequently, 30 seconds to 1 minute, or until slightly softened. Add the rice and saffron. Cook, stirring frequently, 1 to 2 minutes, or until the rice is lightly browned.

To the pot, add 3½ cups of water, season with salt and pepper, and heat to boiling on high. Once boiling, reduce the heat to medium-high and cook, stirring occasionally, until most of the liquid has been absorbed and the rice is al dente. Turn off the heat and stir in the creme fraiche.

While the risotto cooks, in a non-stick pan, heat 2tsp olive oil on medium-high. Add the corn kernels in an even layer and season with salt and pepper. Cook, without stirring, until lightly browned. Continue to cook, stirring frequently, until softened. Add the vinegar and cook, stirring frequently until combined. Transfer to a bowl and cover with foil to keep warm. Wipe out the pan.

While the risotto continues to cook, in the same pan, heat 2tsp olive oil on medium-high. Add the diced zucchini in an even layer. Cook, without stirring, 2 to 3 minutes, or until lightly browned. Add the capers, remaining chopped garlic, and as much of the red pepper flakes as you'd like. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the zucchini is softened. Turn off the heat. Taste, then season with salt and pepper, if desired. To the pot of finished risotto, add the charred corn and stir to combine. Serve the finished risotto and corn topped with the cooked zucchini. Garnish with the chopped parsley and cheese.

Tomato and Shrimp Risotto

Ingredients

- 400g shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 2 cups Arborio rice
- 150g herbed cream cheese
- 4tbsp olive oil
- 1tbsp unsalted butter
- 4 garlic cloves - minced
- 1 small onion - finely chopped
- 1 celery stalk - finely chopped
- ½ cup white grape juice
- ½ cup pureed tomatoes
- 2tbsp tomato paste
- 4-6 cups warm chicken broth
- 6 fresh basil sprigs

Method

Combine shrimp with 1tbsp olive oil and spices. Toss and set aside for 15 minutes while you mince the garlic, chop the onion and celery.

Set a large non-stick saucepan over medium high heat. Add the remaining olive oil and butter. Place shrimp in a single layer, sear for 1 minute. Turn and sear the other side, 1 minute. Remove from skillet.

Lower the heat, add garlic and onion. Cook until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Add chopped celery, cook for 2 minutes more. Add rice and cook, stirring occasionally, until toasted and fragrant, about 2 minutes. Add white grape juice and cook for at least 2 minutes.

Pour in 1 cup chicken broth at a time, stirring frequently, until the broth has been almost completely absorbed before adding the next cup. Cook until the rice is al dente, about 15 minutes. Add pureed tomatoes and tomato paste, simmer 3-5 minutes more, or until the risotto is ready.

If needed, add more broth, risotto should flow slowly. If you can stand a spoon up in it, this means it needs more broth.

Stir in cream cheese and basil. Season with black pepper and salt. Return shrimp back to the pan and simmer over low heat until warmed through. Serve immediately.



ROASTED VEGETABLES

Roasted vegetables comprise one of the best sides for a risotto. To prepare, chop up a variety of vegetables – potato, carrot, cauliflower/broccoli, green beans, onion, pumpkin – into chunks, season with salt and pepper, drizzle some olive oil, toss, and bake at 220° C in an oven or air-fryer for 12-15 minutes. Stir or toss them once in between. Serve as a topping or a side for risotto.



Chicken Risotto

Ingredients

- 2tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion - diced
- 1 cup Arborio rice
- ½ cup white grape juice
- 4-6 cups chicken stock
- 2 cups steamed, shredded or chopped chicken
- 1 cup Parmesan cheese
- Salt and pepper, as required
- Fresh thyme - for garnish
- 6 cups chicken stock

Method

Heat chicken stock in a large pot until it is steaming hot. In a large skillet over medium heat, add olive oil and onion. Season with a pinch of salt and pepper. Cook onions until they turn translucent, 3-4 minutes. Add rice to the skillet and cook for 1-2 minutes. Add white grape

juice to deglaze the pan and scrape up any bits. Start adding ½ cup amounts of hot chicken stock to the rice, stirring constantly as you add it. Continue to stir the rice slowly as it cooks, and when the skillet is dry, ladle in more stock. Continue cooking the rice this way until you have used about four cups of chicken stock.

Taste the rice. It should have a little bite to it and not be mushy or crunchy. Most likely you will need another cup or two of stock to finish the risotto.

When the rice is tender and there is an almost creamy sauce developing in the skillet from the starch on the rice, stir in the Parmesan and chicken. If at any point the rice seems dry, add more stock to thin it out.

Season the risotto to taste with salt and pepper and serve immediately garnished with fresh thyme.



FIESTA CONTINUES

World Champions France look to defend Nations League crown as they warm up for World Cup

Paris, France - Real Madrid's victory in the Champions League final on Saturday did not quite bring the curtain down on the football season in Europe, with the action continuing into June as France begin their defence of the UEFA Nations League title.

The decision to move the World Cup in Qatar to the end of the year could have provided an opportunity for players to have an extended off-season break, but instead international action will go on until the middle of the month with teams playing up to four matches each.

Concerns about burnout are already high up the agenda, with global players' union FIFPro last week sounding the alarm and saying that professionals should not play more than 55 matches in a season.

Liverpool and Scotland defender Andy Robertson has already played that number before joining up with his country for Wednesday's World Cup qualifying play-off against Ukraine.

If Scotland win that, they will face Wales in Cardiff on Sunday for a place in Qatar, but they are still due to play three more Nations League matches after that, two against Armenia and one versus the Republic of Ireland in Group B1.

"It's a lot after an intense season for everyone," Robertson said recently. "You are asking boys to have eight or nine days' holiday, which I don't think is fair."

Fresh from winning the Champions League, Karim Benzema joins up with the France squad as they prepare to play four matches in League A, Group 1.

The World Cup holders entertain Denmark on Friday before a double-header against Croatia either side of a trip to Austria.

Didier Deschamps' side will be preparing for their defence of the World Cup but they are also



France coach Didier Deschamps (L) with star forward Kylian Mbappe during a training session in Clairefontaine-en-Yvelines on Monday (AFP)

defending the Nations League crown they won last October, when they defeated Spain in the final in Milan.

Benzema scored in that game having recently returned to the international fold after an exile of over five years.

The favourite to win this year's Ballon d'Or, his relationship with Kylian Mbappe in the French attack will be closely monitored.

European champions Italy, Germany and England are all together in Group A3 along with Hungary, and Gareth Southgate's team will play matches away to Germany in Munich and at home to Italy in Wolverhampton. The latter match, on June 11, will be behind closed doors as a punish-

semi-finals and final of the tournament in June next year.

After that there is a possibility that South American teams could join an expanded version of the competition.

"We are discussing it and it's a possibility but for now we are not very concrete," UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin told AFP last week.

"The European coaches of national teams are not happy because they do not play South Americans anymore in friendlies, and South Americans even more.

"It might be an interesting competition but we have to see how we place it, that there are not more matches than now."

The close relationship between UEFA and South Ameri-

The European coaches of national teams are not happy because they do not play South Americans anymore in friendlies, and South Americans even more

ALEKSANDER CEFERIN

ment after the fan unrest that marred last year's European Championship final at Wembley.

Either side of those matches England play two games against Hungary, the first of which will be in Budapest on Saturday.

South American teams to join?

Other notable Nations League matches will include Spain hosting Portugal in Seville in Group A2, and the meeting between neighbours Belgium and the Netherlands in Group A4.

This is the third edition of the Nations League, which was won by Portugal in 2019 after being launched to replace meaningless friendlies.

Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland and Wales have all declared an interest in hosting the

can governing body CONMEBOL has already led to the staging of Wednesday's Finalissima between European champions Italy and Copa America winners Argentina in London.

Reus misses Germany meet-up with illness

Borussia Dortmund captain Marco Reus missed meeting up with the Germany squad Tuesday due to illness, four days before their Nations League game against European champions Italy in Bologna.

Reus, who turned 33 on Tuesday, did not travel to the Germany team base in Herzogenaurach, Bavaria, as he has "signs of an infection", the German FA (DFB) said in a statement.

AFP



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Riot police take up positions in front of the Liverpool fans after the final

Liverpool demand apology to fans after Paris fiasco

Paris, France - Liverpool chairman Tom Werner has demanded an apology over the treatment of the club's fans after the French government blamed "massive" ticket fraud for the chaotic scenes that marred Saturday's Champions League final against Real Madrid in Paris.

The French government has faced a barrage of criticism over policing of the match, which saw thousands of Liverpool fans with tickets struggle to enter the Stade de France.

Kick-off to the match, which Real Madrid won 1-0, was delayed by 36 minutes to allow supporters extra time to access the stadium after being funnelled into overcrowded corridors and hit with tear gas and pepper spray from police.

Werner, part of the US-based Fenway Sports Group that owns

Liverpool, said in a leaked letter sent to French Sports Minister Amelie Oudea-Castera on Monday that he was left in "utter disbelief" at her comments about the chaos.

Oudea-Castera initially blamed Liverpool for helping to cause the mayhem, telling a French radio station that the club failed to properly organise its supporters who went to Paris.

After a crisis meeting at the sports ministry on Monday, French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin defiantly insisted that ticket scams and the behaviour of Liverpool fans was to blame.

European football's governing body has announced that Portuguese politician Tiago Brandao Rodrigues will head up an independent probe.

AFP

Messi tips Benzema for 'deserved' Ballon d'Or

Buenos Aires, Argentina - Real Madrid's France star Karim Benzema deserves to win the Ballon d'Or, according to seven-time laureate Lionel Messi.

Benzema was crucial in Madrid's Champions League victory this season, culminating with a 1-0 win over Liverpool in Paris on Saturday.

Although he did not score in the final, Benzema's back-to-back hat-tricks in the knock-out rounds, starting with a 17-minute treble against Messi's Paris Saint-Germain to overturn a 2-0 aggregate deficit, were crucial to generating the momentum that swept the Spaniards to the title.

"There's no doubt, it's very clear that Benzema has had a spectacular year and has ended it by winning the Champions League," Messi

told Argentine channel TyC Sports.

"He was crucial from the last-16 onwards in every match and I think there's no doubt" that Benzema deserves to win the Ballon d'Or.

Messi was speaking a couple of days ahead of a friendly with Italy at Wembley stadium between two continental champions.

The match between the South American Copa America holders and the European champions, where many Argentines trace their roots, is known as the "Finalissima".

But while Argentina stormed to qualification for the Qatar World Cup later this year with several games to spare, Italy astonishingly missed out after losing to minnows North Macedonia in a play-off.

AFP



Benzema played a crucial role in Real's Champions League triumph

Two girls, two tales, one goal!

Teenager Coco Gauff and late bloomer Martina Trevisan to clash for a place in the French Open final

Paris, France - Teenage star Coco Gauff and Martina Trevisan, a seasoned Italian professional who rebuilt her career after conquering anorexia, reached their maiden Grand Slam semi-finals at the French Open on Tuesday.

Gauff, who burst onto the scene as a 15-year-old history-maker at Wimbledon three years ago, defeated fellow American Sloane Stephens 7-5, 6-2.

Trevisan needed three sets to see off 19-year-old Leylah Fernandez of Canada 6-2, 6-7 (3/7), 6-3.

Victory for Gauff, 18 years old and ranked 23 in the world, avenged her defeat to Stephens at the 2021 US Open and helped erase the memory of her quarter-final defeat last year to eventual champion Barbora Krejickova in Paris.

"I feel so happy," said Gauff. "Last year was a tough loss for me but I believe that match made me stronger. Last time I played Sloane I lost. Today was different. I stayed mentally strong as she is the kind of player who can make shots others can't do."

On Tuesday, Gauff broke in the second game of the match to lead 3-0 before 2018 runner-up Stephens levelled with a break and hold for 5-5.

However, clean, precise hitting allowed Gauff to dominate the 12th game to clinch the opener.

Stephens, playing in her first Slam quarter-final in three years, and Gauff traded breaks at the start of the second set before the teenager again pounced for 3-1.

Gauff held for 5-1, was broken for 5-2 before Stephens dropped serve for the fourth time in the set to hand her compatriot victory.

Gauff was junior champion at



Italy's Martina Trevisan celebrates after her victory over Canada's Leylah Fernandez on Tuesday (AFP)

Roland Garros in 2018 and then rocketed into the public consciousness when she became the youngest woman to qualify for Wimbledon.

Her profile rocketed when she went all the way to the fourth round at the All England Club, knocking out Venus Williams on the way.

While in the French capital,

Gauff has graduated high school, marking the occasion on Instagram with a family photo in front of the Eiffel Tower.

"Getting my diploma meant a lot to me," she said Tuesday.

Italian inspiration

"Lots of players think tennis is the most important thing and it's not."

World number 59 Trevisan, 10 years older than Gauff, was a shock quarter-finalist in 2020.

She arrived at the French Open with a maiden WTA title in Rabat and went into Tuesday's tie on a nine-match winning streak.

She made that 10 when she claimed victory on a second match point having wasted one in



Coco Gauff of the US is all smiles after beating compatriot Sloane Stephens on Tuesday (AFP)

the second set with Fernandez left to rue her 44 unforced errors.

"I was very nervous on that first match point, I thought I was already in the semi-final," said Trevisan, the first Italian woman to make the last four since Sara Errani in 2013.

Trevisan, now guaranteed a place in the top 30 at least, said Grand Slam titles by fellow Ital-

ians Francesca Schiavone in Paris in 2010 and Flavia Pennetta at the 2015 US Open were her influences.

"They are happy for me. They are my biggest inspirations."

Two years ago, Trevisan, then ranked 159, knocked Gauff out in three sets in the second round in Paris. She then revealed how she struggled as a teenager with an

eating disorder after her father was diagnosed with a degenerative disease.

"Thirty grams of cereals and a fruit in the evening. It was enough for me to stand up, and to worry my mother, who ran to pick peaches from the trees just to see me eat something," she wrote in an online blog.

AFP



China's Zheng Qinwen receives medical treatment

'I wish I was a man,' says Zheng as stomach cramps end French Open bid

Paris, France - China's Zheng Qinwen said severe stomach cramps ruined her hopes of completing a shock French Open win against world number one Iga Swiatek on Monday and left her "wishing I was a man".

Zheng, just 19 and playing in her first Roland Garros, took the first set off the top seed before slipping to a 6-7 (5/7), 6-0, 6-2 defeat in their last-16 tie.

The world number 74 had needed a medical timeout to strap her injured right leg early in the second set but she revealed

that was the least of her concerns.

"It's just girl things," Zheng said in reference to her menstrual pain.

"The first day is always so tough and then I have to do sport and I always have so much pain in the first day.

"I couldn't go against my nature. I wish I can be a man so that I don't have to suffer from this. It's tough.

"I really give my best on court, it's just tough," Zheng said.

AFP

Medvedev and Tsitsipas crash out as Swiatek survives huge scare

Paris, France - World number two Daniil Medvedev and fourth-ranked Stefanos Tsitsipas crashed out of the French Open in the fourth round on Monday as women's top seed Iga Swiatek took her winning streak to 32 matches after surviving a huge scare.

US Open champion Medvedev was beaten by 20th seed Marin Cilic 6-2, 6-3, 6-2 in just 1hr 45 min on Court Philippe Chatrier.

Tsitsipas, the 2021 runner-up to Novak Djokovic, was defeated by Danish teenager Holger Rune 7-5, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 earlier in the day.

Cilic will face Russia's Andrey Rublev in his third career Roland Garros quarter-final.

"It's one of the most beautiful matches of my career, it was fantastic from the first to the last point," said Cilic, adding he is playing his "best tennis in recent weeks".

Medvedev had enjoyed his best run in Paris 12 months ago when he reached the quarter-fi-



Russia's Daniil Medvedev looks dejected during his match against Croatia's Marin Cilic in the Fench Open on Monday (AFP)

nals. He hadn't dropped a set at this year's tournament but was completely outplayed by the 33-year-old Cilic who broke serve five times.

Medvedev was unable to carve out a single break point as the Croatian got the better of the Russian for the first time in four meetings.

Rublev made the quarter-fi-

nals for the second time when Italian opponent Jannik Sinner retired with a left knee injury with the Russian 1-6, 6-4, 2-0 ahead.

Rune became the first Danish man to reach the French Open quarter-finals when he shocked Tsitsipas.

Rune, just 19 and ranked 40, swept to a memorable win on the back of 54 winners.

AFP

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Wydad paint Casablanca red

Zouhair El Moutaraji strikes twice as Wydad beat Al Ahly in Casablanca to become African champions

Casablanca, Morocco - Zouhair el Moutaraji was the two-goal star as Wydad Casablanca defeated Egyptian outfit Al Ahly 2-0 on Monday to win the CAF Champions League and complete a Moroccan club double in Africa this season.

Renaissance Berkane won the second-tier CAF Confederation Cup on May 20 and will face Wydad for the CAF Super Cup.

Wydad coach Walid Regragui promoted El Moutaraji from the bench for the title decider and it proved a masterstroke as he netted after 15 minutes with a brilliant strike and again on 48 minutes in Casablanca.

It was the third time Wydad have conquered Africa in the premier competition, lifting the trophy in 1992 and 2017 as well, and the second triumph also came against Ahly.

Record 10-time champions Ahly, seeking a record third straight title, had plenty of possession but were undone by clinical finishing.

It was also a disappointing outcome for South Africa-born Ahly coach Pitso Mosimane, who had hoped to become the first coach to win the premier African club competition three consecutive times.

Both Wydad and Ahly showed one change to the sides that drew semi-final second legs against Petro Luanda of Angola and Entente Setif of Algeria respectively to reach the final.

France-born Regragui preferred El Moutaraji to Badie Aouk in midfield, with the latter among nine substitutes.

A groin injury sidelined Ahly centre-back Mohamed Abdelmonem and Mosimane promoted another Egyptian international, experienced Ayman Ashraf.

Close to 40,000 singing, dancing, cheering, flag-waving



Wydad players celebrate with the CAF Champions League trophy after beating Egypt's Al Ahly in the final in the Moroccan city of Casablanca on Monday (AFP)

It was a disappointing outcome for South Africa-born Ahly coach Pitso Mosimane, who had hoped to become the first coach to win the premier African club competition three consecutive times

Wydad supporters greeted the teams as they entered the pitch, with FIFA president Gianni Infantino among those looking on.

Ahly were allocated 10,000 tickets, but only a couple of thou-

sand supporters flew across north Africa to attend the highlight of the club season.

Controversial venue
The Stade Mohammed V - home

ground of Wydad - was a controversial choice of venue with Ahly making a failed appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) to have it changed to a neutral one.

Morocco were the lone bidders to host the final after Senegal withdrew, and the Confederation of African Football (CAF) said the rules did not permit a change.

Wydad attacked from the kick-off and after rattling the woodwork, went ahead as El Moutaraji justified his promotion.

Earlier, Congo Brazzaville-born Guy Mbenza was foiled by the crossbar after his shot from just outside the box beat Ahly captain and goalkeeper Mohamed el Shenawy.

But the Moroccans went ahead four minutes later as El Moutaraji unleashed a swerving thunderbolt which flew over El Shenawy and into the net.

Ahly clawed their way back into the match and came close to levelling midway through the half when a Yasser Ibrahim header off a corner was just too high.

Ahly were dangerous from set pieces and Hussein el Shahat nodded narrowly wide off another corner.

The visitors came close again with Wydad goalkeeper Ahmed Tagnaouti dashing from his goalmouth to head the ball clear as South African Percy Tau threatened to equalise.

Wydad doubled the lead early in the second half and once again El Moutaraji was the executioner, after a sweeping move.

His first shot from close range was parried by El

Shenawy, but the Moroccan reacted quickest to push the rebound into the net.

Mosimane rang the changes, including introducing leading scorer Mohamed Sherif, but the Cairo club could not find a way through the Wydad defence.

Sherif came tantalisingly close to adding to his six Champions League goals this season with eight minutes remaining, but Tagnaouti parried his close-range poke and the ball was hastily cleared.

AFP

Tottenham sign Perisic from Inter Milan

London, United Kingdom - Tottenham Hotspur have signed Croatia international Ivan Perisic on a free transfer, the Premier League club announced Tuesday.

The 33-year-old will join the north London side when his contract at Inter Milan expires at the end of June after agreeing a two-year deal.

"We are delighted to announce the transfer of Ivan Perisic," said a Spurs statement.

"The vastly experienced Croatia international will join the club on 1 July following the expiration of his contract at Internazionale and has agreed a deal that will run until 2024."

Perisic worked with Totten-



Ivan Perisic

ham manager Antonio Conte in Italy, with the duo winning the 2020/21 Serie A title together at

Inter. But he has turned down a new contract to stay at the San Siro in order to move to England.

Perisic has also won league titles in Germany - with Borussia Dortmund and Bayern Munich - while also scoring in a World Cup final for Croatia.

A versatile player, Perisic can be deployed as a left wing-back, winger, second striker or attacking midfielder.

His arrival marks a change from Tottenham's usual transfer policy of signing younger players with a sell-on value and is a sign of their growing confidence in Conte.

Perisic bid farewell to Inter fans with an Instagram message that acknowledged his time wearing this "glorious jersey" had come to an end.

AFP

Bids invited for new Asian Cup hosts after China withdrawal

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - Asian football's governing body invited bids on Tuesday to stage the 2023 Asian Cup after China withdrew as hosts because of the coronavirus, with Japan a possible replacement.

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) set a deadline of June 30 for member associations to submit new bids, after which officials will make a decision on the host. In May the AFC said that China had pulled out as hosts of the 24-team Asian Cup, due to take place in June-July next year, as the country pursues

a zero-Covid policy - a stance that makes staging sports events a major challenge.

Japan Football Association chairman Kozo Tashima recently told local media that his country had been "sounded out" about holding the tournament next year.

"If Japan were to host it, it would be exciting, no doubt about it," Tashima was quoted as saying.

The Asian Cup is staged every four years, with Qatar winning the last edition in 2019.

AFP



Mominul Haque

Mominul quits as Bangladesh Test captain

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Bangladesh Test captain Mominul Haque said he was stepping down from his position Tuesday to focus on his batting, after a poor run of form. The 30-year-old announced his decision during a meeting with Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) chiefs at the home of board president Nazmul Hassan.

His batting has come under heavy criticism after the country's Test series loss to Sri Lanka earlier this month. There have been calls for his resignation ahead of next month's tour of the West Indies.

"I just told them I am unable to contribute to the side as a captain and failed to motivate the team. So I feel it is better if someone else is given the responsibility," Mominul told reporters after the meeting.

"I feel that if I can concentrate on my batting it will be good for me as well as for the team."

Mominul has scored just one half-century and accumulated 162 runs in six Test matches in 2022.

AFP

Red Bull reward Monaco man Perez with new deal to 2024



Red Bull Racing's Sergio Perez celebrates after winning the Monaco Grand Prix on Sunday (AFP)

Paris, France - Red Bull on Tuesday announced they have rewarded Sergio Perez with a fresh two-year deal until 2024, with the Mexican signing in Monaco last weekend.

The new contract gave Max Verstappen's teammate double cause for celebration after he emerged from all the chaos caused by a pre-race deluge to win the iconic Grand Prix.

"For us, holding onto his pace, race craft and experience was a no-brainer and we are delighted that Checo will continue to race for the team until 2024," said team boss Christian Horner.

Perez, 32, moved to within 15

points of world champion Verstappen in the Formula One drivers' standings after rising above all the mayhem on Sunday, that fine win coming after three second-place finishes.

He joined Red Bull last season, claiming a win on another street circuit in Azerbaijan with four further podiums to finish fourth behind his Dutch colleague.

Perez said: "For me, this has been an incredible week, winning the Monaco Grand Prix is a dream for any driver and then to follow that with announcing I will continue with the team until 2024 just makes me extremely happy."

Horner in his statement noted

the popular Perez had done a "fantastic" job and stepped up a gear in his second year with the team.

"Time and again he has proved himself to not only be a magnificent team player but as his level of comfort has grown he has become a real force to be reckoned with at the sharp end of the grid," Horner remarked.

"This year he has taken another step and the gap to world champion Max has closed significantly, evidenced by his superb pole position in Jeddah earlier this year and by his wonderful win in Monaco just last weekend."

AFP

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