

Oman, Jordan focus on joint investments

Two monarchs support expansion of economic diversification, private sector partnerships and commercial exchange

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan have reiterated their keenness on strengthening joint investments in different spheres. They voiced their support for developing economic diversification, private sector partnership and commercial exchange between the two countries.

This was stated in a joint communique issued on Wednesday between the Sultanate of Oman and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, reading as follows:

'In consolidation of bilateral relations and fraternal ties between the Sultanate of Oman and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and their wise leaderships and, in response to a generous invitation from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, His Majesty King Abdullah II Ibn al Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, made an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman on October 4 and 5, 2022, accompanied by Queen Rania al Abdullah and Prince Al Hussein Ibn Abdullah II.

'The two leaders held in-depth talks, asserting their keenness to continue developing bilateral cooperation in all fields. The aim is to serve the two countries' joint interests in a manner that reflects their deep-rooted fraternal relations, besides augmenting communication and exchanging visits between personnel of the departments concerned to explore further opportunities for



cooperation.

'In their quest to bolster ties of friendship and cooperation, the two monarchs welcomed the signing of memoranda of understanding, agreements and executive programmes in different fields, including industry, mining, labour, competition protection, prohibition of monopoly, archiving, higher education, research, innovation, consumer protection, tourism and insurance.

'The two sides also underscored the significance of joint investments across various sectors. They reiterated the significance of expanding economic relations by organising relevant programmes and activities, intensifying the exchange of trade delegations, cementing communication and partnership at the level of the private sector and making optimum use of the role

Leaders assert their keenness to continue developing bilateral cooperation in all fields

Welcome the signing of MoUs, agreements and executive programmes

Reiterate commitment to goals of United Nations charters

of the Joint Committee.

'The two sides discussed a number of regional and international issues and underlined the need to shore up the march of cooperation and integration among Arab countries. They focused on their two countries' coordination with global organisations - during regional and international events - in a

manner that better serves their common interests and contributes to enhancing joint Arab Action, and supporting the pillars of peace and stability in the region and the world at large. They reaffirmed the constructive role of the two countries in this respect.

'The two sides expressed their commitment to principles and goals of the United Nations charters and the International Law. In this context, they laid emphasis on the genuineness of the Palestinian cause and the need to reach a fair and final settlement to the issue in a manner that meets all legitimate rights of the Palestinian people - based on the Two-State Solution, which provides for the establishment of a sovereign, independent Palestinian State, on the June 4, 1967, lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital - and on

charters of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative. His Majesty Sultan Haitham underscored the Hashemite Custody of Islamic and Christian Sanctities in Al Quds (Jerusalem) and its significant role in protecting those sanctities, their identity and their historical and legal status.

'At the conclusion of the visit, His Majesty King Abdullah II expressed his appreciation and thanks to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the Omani government and people for the warm reception and hospitality. He wished the Sultanate of Oman further progress and prosperity under its wise leadership. He also invited His Majesty the Sultan to visit the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan - an invitation that His Majesty the Sultan welcomed with pleasure.'

ONA

Oman, Jordan sign 7 pacts, boost relations

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Sultanate of Oman and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan signed seven memoranda of understanding (MoU) and two executive programmes on various areas at Al Alam Palace on Wednesday.

The agreements come within the context of the official visit of King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein of Jordan to the Sultanate of Oman.

The agreements were signed by Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, and Ayman Safadi, Jordanian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates.

The first MoU was signed between the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the Jordanian Ministry of Industry, Trade and Supply in the field of industrial



cooperation.

The second MoU was also signed between the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the Jordanian Ministry of Industry, Trade and Supply in the field of competition protection and monopoly prevention.

The third MoU was signed between the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and the Jordanian Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources in the field of mining.

The fourth MoU was signed between the Ministry of Labour and the Jordanian Ministry of Labour. As per the MoU, the two sides will work to enhance and develop cooperation between them on the basis of mutual interests and investing in human capital.

The fifth MoU was signed between the National Records and Archives Authority and the Royal Jordanian Hashemite Documentation Centre in the

field of historical documentation and management of documents and archives.

The sixth MoU was signed between the Capital Market Authority and the Central Bank of Jordan in the field of information exchange and supervision of the insurance sector.

The seventh MoU, signed between the Consumer Protection Authority and the Jordanian Ministry of Industry, Trade and Supply, was in the field of consumer protection.

As for the executive programmes, the first one was signed in the field of higher education, research and innovation for 2023, 2024 and 2025, while the second one was on tourism cooperation from 2023 to 2026.

Ayman Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates in Jordan, said that the signing of the MoUs and executive programmes between Oman and Jordan reflects the keenness of the two countries' leaders on taking practical steps towards consolidating cooperation.

On his turn, Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr underscored "the central role of the private sector in enhancing the economy". This, he told ONA, could be achieved through partnerships in investments, thanks to an abundance of opportunities in both countries.



Oman's first satellite - Aman - gets set for orbit

Our Correspondent Muscat

Aman, the first Omani satellite, has been successfully prepared for launch into low Earth orbit at Newquay, Cornwall, in the UK.

Integrated into a launch vehicle - the LauncherOne rocket - the satellite will be taken on its journey into space later this year. Satellite integration is a major step in meeting the objectives of Oman's first space mission.

The sultanate, represented by ETCO, an Oman-based emerging technology innovator; Virgin Orbit, a leading US-based satellite launch company; SatRev - Polish nanosatellite manufacturer and operator; and TUATARA, specialists in advanced AI, data analytics and cognitive technology solutions, continue to work on Oman's mission to space.

The work undertaken led to the first Omani CubeSat satellite, Aman, being integrated with the spacecraft during a procedure conducted at Newquay Airport. The Virgin Orbit integration team led the event, beginning with final cleaning and checkout of the satellite, ensuring that the Remove Before Flight (RBF) items on the CubeSat were taken away. Once the satellite was prepared, it was placed in the launch dispenser, followed by a series of rigorous checks.

"Satellite integration marks an important milestone in the plan to send the first Omani spacecraft into space this year. It is encouraging to witness this first-of-its-kind project in the country's history unfolding and we are looking forward to see it through to the final stage that will occur later this year when it will be launched into low Earth orbit," explained Abdulaziz Jaafar, CEO of ETCO.

"Integration went as planned and it was a complete success.



It is encouraging to witness this first-of-its-kind project in the country's history unfolding and we are looking forward to see it through to the final stage

ABDULAZIZ JAAFAR

All risk factors have already been minimised due to the Fit-Check event that occurred during the previous month, where the same Virgin Orbit integration team was onsite at SatRev headquarters in Poland to perform a detailed walkthrough of all planned integration steps," said Grzegorz Zwolinski, CEO of SatRev.

"We are excited to have been invited to help analyse data from the Oman space mission. We believe that the Aman project will provide important scientific data and stimulate the development of the STEM industry in the sultanate, and also inspire the world in the further democratisation of space exploration. Our research will enable qualitative analysis of changes caused by climatic situations, natural disasters or other adverse events. It can also, for example, be used to track water polluters, animal movements or even the proliferation of harmful algae in coastal and inland waters. The possibilities are vast and a bright space-based future lies ahead for Oman," said Krzysztof Goworek, CEO of TUATARA.

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On account of Prophet Mohammed's (PBUH) birthday holiday, there will be no edition of Muscat Daily on Sunday, October 9.

OMANI GOODWILL HELPS SECURE US CITIZEN'S RELEASE FROM IRAN



US citizen Mohammed Baqir Namazi arrives in Muscat from Tehran on board an aircraft of Royal Air Force of Oman on Wednesday. Following a Royal Order of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in response to an appeal from the US government, the departments concerned in the sultanate liaised with authorities in Iran for Namazi's release (ONA)

A walk from Oman to Qatar 'Tracing Our Ancestors'

Shaddad al Musalmay
Muscat

As many in the region look forward to making the most of the FIFA World Cup 2022 to be hosted in Qatar, there are individuals looking to spread the message of a social cause during the mega event. One such individual is Hilmi al Kindi who is preparing to walk from Oman to Qatar to promote the oneness of the region and its unique heritage.

Kindi, a history enthusiast who has undertaken numerous gruelling challenges in the past, believes everyone in the GCC needs to support Qatar in organising the World Cup, besides supporting their team taking part in the tournament.

To lend support to Kindi, his friend Nawaf al Sulaimani will join the walk. "Hilmi and I have done similar activities together and I am glad I will be able to be with him this time. Even though we have tried hard for sponsorship, it has been in vain. But we will do the walk, with or without sponsorship," Sulaimani said.

He added that the walk will also help promote Oman as a cultural destination. "We have been promoting culture since 2015. We have walked around Oman and were planning a walk around the world, but then we thought Qatar is a good opportunity since the World Cup tournament is coming to the region for the first time," Sulaimani said.

In an effort to relive GCC history, rediscover its natural won-



As an Omani, it is my duty to promote the country, in whatever way I can. Learning about our forefathers and the structures they made prompted me to start this project

HILMI AL KINDI

ders and find new ones, Kindi - who, according to Sulaimani, has spent most of his life walking in and around the sultanate to spread various social messages - will now be embarking on a

project he calls 'Tracing Our Ancestors'.

"The GCC countries have countless ruins, forts, castles and natural wonders that are still being explored and found today

by the new generation. For a firsthand experience of these and to learn more about the hidden treasures, one doesn't always have to drive but can walk to these locations to understand them better. For this event on the world stage, I plan to walk through the GCC's historical places to highlight them to the world," he added.

Kindi also plans to rope in other walking enthusiasts along the way. "The objective of our project is to spread the message

about preserving and learning from our heritage. Some of our historical structures reveal the best of creativity. Arabs are hard working and even without today's engineering and technologies, they created miracles and for this reason, the world needs to know about these and this is the right time for that," he said.

Kindi, 42, plans to cover most of the GCC countries in his 'Tracing Our Ancestors' walk. Additionally, he is eager to make a documentary about the heritage structures during his walk. "These structures must be highlighted so that authorities maintain them, carrying out restoration works where necessary. These are ancient and need proper care.

"I've walked to all the heritage sites of Oman and have documentaries on these. I now plan to walk around the GCC to showcase them. As an Omani, it is my duty to promote the country, in particular in the GCC, in whatever way I can. Learning about our forefathers and the structures they made prompted me to start this project."

However, Kindi is yet to secure sponsorship for it. "This has been my long-time dream and this coming World Cup event is a great occasion to do so. I am currently in search for sponsors from within GCC. However, with or without sponsors, I am committed to embark on this journey," he said.

@shadadm



S Batinah Governor signs pact to develop Ain al Thawarah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With an aim to stimulate the economy and create recreational facilities, the Governor of South Batinah has signed an agreement to develop Ain al Thawrah.

The agreement was signed by Sheikh Saif bin Hamiar al Malik al Shehhi, Governor of South Batinah, and Saif al Hudhrami, CEO of Nakhal Ahlia Investment Company, in the presence of Sheikh Salim bin Abdullah al Madhani, Wali of Nakhal.

The agreement includes the development of Ain al Thawarah and the establishment of a number of services, such as cafes, shades, a recreation area, and a centre for teaching handicrafts.

"Ain al Thawarah attracts tourists from inside and outside

the sultanate. The development project will add aesthetic elements to the area round Ain al Thawarah and a number of facilities that tourists need," Shehhi said.

Ain al Thawarah, popularly known Nakhal Springs, is surrounded by some of the country's best landscapes. According to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, 'Close to Nakhal Fort, along a winding road framed by palm trees as far as the eye can see, are the Ain al Thawarah hot springs.'

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik raised the amount allocated to the Governorate Development Programme from RO10mn to RO20mn for each governorate for the current Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) starting from 2022.

Diplomatic affairs undersecretary receives Iranian military delegation



Muscat - Sheikh Khalifa Ali al Harthy, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs in the Foreign Ministry received on Wednesday Brigadier Mohammed Ahadi, Head of the Iranian side in the Omani-Iranian Military Friendship Joint Committee.

The two sides discussed several matters of mutual interest

within the framework of the Omani-Iranian Military Friendship Joint Committee mission.

The meeting was attended by Brigadier Abdulaziz Abdullah al Manthari, Assistant Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) for Operations and Planning, Head of the Omani side in the committee. It was also at-

tended by Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Sultanate of Oman, the Military Attaché at Oman's Embassy in Tehran, the Military Attaché at Iran's Embassy in Muscat, several members of the committee and some officials from the Foreign Ministry. ONA

Workshop held on intellectual property protection in Muscat

Muscat - Silverline and CMS Law, in collaboration with the Oman American Business Centre, held a solution-based workshop on intellectual property (IP) protection at Kempinski Hotel Muscat last week. It was the first workshop of its kind in Oman.

About 30 attendees were able to gain a deep and full understanding of how IP can be safely, securely and simply protected through the use of blockchain technology.

In the workshop, specialists in IP protection highlighted the importance of registering and protecting business ideas, trademarks and all types of IP.

Ben Ewing, a senior partner at CMS, spoke about the importance of properly protecting intellectual property, sharing several local and global case studies that



demonstrated the financial loss a business can incur when they don't properly protect their IP.

Abdallah el Chami and Wakim Zeidan, co-founders of Silverline cultural consultancy, made a presentation on blockchain technology that makes IP protection convenient.

Audience engagement at the event was remarkable, with

questions being posed throughout the session. Problems were identified and solutions were offered in an easily accessible manner, even for those who had little prior knowledge of either IP or blockchain technology and how the two together ensure reliable and most importantly, instant protection for copyright, trademarks and business ideas.

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*Rates as on October 05
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Ukraine economy to contract 35% this year: World Bank

The economy of war-torn Ukraine is expected to shrink 35 per cent this year, the World Bank said Tuesday, with Russia's invasion of the country displacing millions.

Following Moscow's invasion, Ukraine's economy has been "scarred by the destruction of productive capacity, damage to agricultural land, and reduced labor supply," the World Bank said in an economic update for Europe and Central Asia.

The global development lender estimates more than 14mn people have been displaced by the war.

Recovery and reconstruction will require at least US\$349bn, or more than 1.5 times the size of Ukraine's pre-war economy, the report said. The US Congress last week approved another US\$12.3bn in aid to help Ukraine battle the invasion as fighting raged on.

Global food and energy prices have surged amid large reductions in Russian supply, and the World Bank said the ongoing war dampens prospects of a post-pandemic recovery for emerging and developing economies in region as well.

"The overlapping crises of the war in Ukraine, the ongoing pandemic and the surge in food and fuel prices are painful reminders that governments need to be prepared to manage massive, unexpected shocks that unravel very quickly," Anna Björde, the World Bank's vice president for Europe and Central Asia, said in a statement.

The report notes that global prices for oil, gas and coal had been picking up since early 2021, but they "skyrocketed" after Russia's invasion and sent inflation "to levels not seen for decades in the region."

OIA invests in leading US battery materials company



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) on Wednesday announced that it has successfully invested in Group14 Technologies, a US-based leading manufacturer of battery materials.

This investment is part of OIA's strategy of seeking opportunities in new fields while partnering with global investors and attracting investment to Oman, OIA said in a press statement.

Group14 specialises in manufacturing innovative lithium-silicon battery materials to replace traditional lithium-ion batteries. The company attracted several leading investors in the battery materials field, including Porsche, SK Materials, and several others.

In recently-issued 5th edition of its quarterly newsletter Enjaz & Ejaz, OIA stated that the technology used by Group14 lowers costs and elevates performance of batteries.

Group14 has built a strong customer pipeline with contracted revenue, including engagements with 90 per cent of the world's battery manufacturers.

Through this investment in Group14, OIA intends to integrate Oman with the company's supply chain.

H E Abdullah al-Murshidi, president of OIA, said that OIA is getting ready to announce the launch of several national projects by OIA companies corre-

sponding with the celebration of Oman's 52nd National Day. He called on employees to start planning their individual and institutional goals for the upcoming year 2023.

Group14 currently operates a commercial-scale Battery Active Materials factory in Washington state in US with two forthcoming factories: one in South Korea as part of a joint venture with SK Group (coming online in 2022) and a second US factory (coming online in 2023).

Tata Steel sells 19% stake in Al Rimal Mining to Tanmia



New Delhi, India - India's Tata Steel on Tuesday said it has offloaded 19 per cent of its stake in Oman-based Al Rimal Mining Company, reducing its stake to 51 per cent from earlier 70 per cent.

"This has reference to our disclosure dated May 9, 2019, with respect to divestment of equity stake in Al Rimal Mining. T S Global Holdings, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Tata Steel, had entered into an agreement with Oman National Invest-

ments Development Company (Tanmia) and the existing shareholders of Al Rimal to transfer its 19 per cent shareholding in Al Rimal to Tanmia," Tata Steel said in a regulatory filing to the stock exchanges.

Tata Steel, through T S Global Holdings, has concluded the divestment of its 19 per cent equity stake in Al Rimal to Tanmia on Monday, thereby reducing its shareholding from 70 per cent to 51 per cent in Al Rimal.

ANI

OSFA Business Forum focuses on innovation and sustainability

Muscat - The Oman Switzerland Friendship Association (OSFA) came back with a successful 2nd edition of its Business Forum focusing on 'Innovation and Sustainability'. The long-awaited event was hosted at the Kempinski Hotel Muscat on Wednesday.

The forum reunited a range of high-level VIP speakers from both Oman and Switzerland, including H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, who delivered the welcome address.

This 2nd Business Forum was a renewed opportunity to de-



H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef speaks at the Business Forum

velop the bonds of friendships and strengthen the relationship between Oman and Switzerland.

Following the success of the 2019 Business Forum held in

Bern (Switzerland), OSFA explored two leading topics for both countries: Innovation and Sustainability.

High-level speakers from

Oman and Switzerland delivered their expert presentations on finance and investment, tourism, environment and digital technology. Throughout the event, guests were encouraged to network, collaborate, exchange ideas and explore new ways of creating investment in both countries.

Hosting this year's event, Hani Muhammad al Zubair, OSFA chairman, said, "This Business Forum was delayed by a few years due to the pandemic. We are delighted with the number of delegates who joined us today. We had such a variety of people, from Oman and Switzerland,

each bringing their own unique skills set, knowledge and networks, and all contributing to making this event so successful."

Speaking of the importance of the Oman Switzerland Friendship Association in bringing both two countries together, H E Sayyid Abdulla al Busaidy, OSFA patron for Oman, said, "Oman is often referred to as the Switzerland of the Middle East, an indication of just how suited these two countries are to join in a friendship association. Hosting events like this Business Forum are an essential part of developing and nurturing the commercial sectors of both countries."

Commenting on the overall Business Forum, OSFA patron for Switzerland, Vincent Maitre rejoiced at the quality of the presentations. He said, "It has been my pleasure to be here today and witness a truly successful Business Forum. The diversity of people attending and their valuable contributions made for an extremely productive day for everyone."

The Oman-Switzerland Friendship Association was established in 2016, to implement sustainable programmes that improve mutual knowledge and understanding between Oman and Switzerland.

Oil prices rise awaiting OPEC+ output cut

London, UK - Oil prices rose to above US\$92 per barrel on Wednesday as OPEC and its allies were preparing to announce a big cut in output.

The main focus has been the oil market. "There will be a lot of attention on just how big this (oil output) cut is by OPEC+," said AJ Bell investment director Russ Mould.

"Speculation they could be double the volume previously flagged... has been behind the recent surge in crude."

Major oil producers led by Saudi Arabia and Russia were on Wednesday expected to announce a large cut in output to prop up prices despite Western concerns over energy-fuelled inflation. Brent North Sea crude rose 0.9 per cent at \$92.57 per barrel, while US benchmark West Texas Intermediate was up 0.7 per cent at US\$87.10 per barrel. The 13-nation OPEC cartel and its 10 Russian-led allies were reportedly considering a reduction of up to two million barrels per day (bpd) at a meeting in Vienna - the biggest cut since 2020.

Such a move could turbocharge crude prices, further aggravating inflation which has reached decades-high levels in



many countries and is contributing to a global economic slowdown. US President Joe Biden personally appealed to Saudi leaders in July to boost production in order to tame prices which soared following Russia's invasion of Ukraine earlier this year.

But crude price have fallen in recent months on concerns over dwindling demand and fears over a possible global recession.

"With consumers only just breathing a sigh of relief after being forced to pay record prices at the pump, today's cut is not going to go down well," said Craig Erlam, an analyst at trading platform OANDA.

Ministers from the Saudi-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its partners were discussing their next move at their first in-person meeting at the group's headquarters in Vienna since March 2020.

AFP

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WTO cuts 2023 global trade forecast as recession looms

Geneva, Switzerland - The World Trade Organization (WTO) on Wednesday dramatically lowered its global trade forecast for 2023, as Russia's war in Ukraine and other shocks take their toll on the world economy.

Presenting a revision of their annual trade forecast, WTO economists said they expected the volume of global merchandise trade to grow 3.5 per cent this year, which is slightly higher than their expectations in April.

But they forecast it would grow by only 1.0 per cent in 2023 - dramatically down from their expectations of 3.4 per cent growth six months ago.

"The picture for 2023 has darkened considerably," WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala told reporters in Geneva.

"Today the global economy faces multi-prong crises. Monetary tightening is weighing on growth across much of the world."

As for the global economy as a whole, WTO economists stuck with their April forecast of 2.8 per cent GDP growth this year, but said growth in 2023 was now expected to be just 2.3 per cent - down a full percentage point from the previous forecast.

By way of comparison, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has maintained its 2022 forecast at three per cent, and expects 2.2 per cent growth next year.

The International Monetary Fund meanwhile forecasts growth at 3.2 per cent this year and 2.9 per cent in 2023.



WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

The WTO pointed out that its April forecasts were presented only weeks into the start of Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine, making them very uncertain.

The estimates for 2023 "now appear overly optimistic, as energy prices have skyrocketed, inflation has become more broad-based, and the war shows no sign of letting up," it said.

The WTO said surging energy prices in Europe, stemming from the war in Ukraine, were expected to squeeze household spending and raise manufacturing costs on the continent.

Meanwhile monetary policy

tightening in the United States was hitting the housing, motor vehicle and fixed investment sectors, and China was still grappling with Covid-19 outbreaks and production disruptions.

Furthermore, the growing import bills for fuel, food and fertiliser risked leading to more food insecurity and debt distress in developing countries, the WTO said.

If its new forecasts pan out, world trade will slow considerably next year, but will still continue to grow.

But the global trade body stressed that it still remained

very unclear how things would pan out.

"There's a great deal of uncertainty in the estimates going forward, simply because of the nature of the conflict" in Ukraine, WTO senior economist Coleman Nee told reporters.

'Huge impact'

If the war "worsens rather than gets better, then that's going to have a huge impact," Okonjo-Iweala agreed, adding though that if the situation in Ukraine improves, that would have a "positive impact" on global trade growth.

Such uncertainty leaves WTO economists with a broad spectrum of possibilities for how global trade will evolve in 2023, ranging from a decline of 2.8 per cent to a hike of as much as 4.6 per cent.

Last week, Okonjo-Iweala warned that Russia's war in Ukraine, the climate crisis, food price and energy shocks plus the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic were creating the conditions for a world recession.

"Now we have to weather what looks like an oncoming recession," she told the opening of the WTO's annual public forum in Geneva.

On Wednesday, she acknowledged that monetary "policy-makers are confronted with unenviable choices as they try to find an optimal balance among tackling inflation, maintaining full employment, and advancing important policy goals such as transitioning to clean energy."

AFP

Elon Musk offers to close \$44bn Twitter buyout deal

San Francisco, US - Elon Musk on Tuesday offered to push through with his buyout of Twitter at the original agreed price of US\$44bn, as a trial over his efforts to withdraw from the deal loomed. The world's richest man said in a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission that he sent Twitter a letter vowing to honor the contract.

The latest twist in the long-running saga came ahead of the high-stakes court battle launched by Twitter in an attempt to hold the Tesla chief to the deal he signed in April.

Musk's potential stewardship of the influential social media site has sparked worry from activists who fear he could open the gates to more abusive and misinformative posts.

"We write to notify you that the Musk Parties intend to proceed to closing of the transaction," read a copy of the letter to Twitter filed with the SEC.

Twitter confirmed to AFP that it received the letter from Musk, and said it intends to close the buyout deal at the agreed-on price of US\$54.20 per share.

Conditions noted in Musk's letter included that the court halt action in the lawsuit against him. He had been slated to be questioned under oath by Twitter attorneys later this week.

The 51-year-old tweeted that buying Twitter "is an accelerant to creating X, the everything app," offering no details.

During an annual shareholders meeting in August, Musk said Twitter could add momentum to a vision he had for the X.com company he founded in 1999.

X.com merged with Confinity,



In this file photo taken on April 14, a phone screen displays the Twitter account of Elon Musk with a photo of him shown in the background (AFP)

whose co-founders include Peter Thiel, and the entity went on to become PayPal.

"I do sort of have a grander vision for what I thought X.com, or X corporation, could have been back in the day," Musk said at the shareholder meeting.

"I think Twitter would help accelerate that by three to five years."

A serial entrepreneur made rich through his success with Tesla electric cars, Musk began to step back from the Twitter deal soon after it was agreed.

But "I think that Musk realized he was not going to win that trial" next week, University of Richmond law professor Carl Tobias told AFP.

"Ever since he had buyer's remorse, the problem has been why, and why had he not done due diligence up front."

Musk said in July he was canceling the purchase because he was misled by Twitter concerning the number of fake "bot" accounts, allegations rejected by the company.

Twitter meanwhile has sought to prove Musk was contriving excuses to walk away because

he changed his mind.

In July, a Delaware judge agreed to fast-track a trial on Twitter's allegations.

Wedbush analyst Dan Ives said in an email that Musk's pivot showed he recognized "this US\$44bn deal was going to be completed one way or another."

Musk made his unsolicited bid to buy Twitter without asking for estimates regarding spam or fake accounts, and even sweetened his offer to the board by withdrawing a diligence condition, the lawsuit said.

Seen by his champions as an iconoclastic genius and by his critics as an erratic megalomaniac, Musk surprised many investors with his pursuit of Twitter. Musk's norm-defying conduct over Twitter came after the Tesla and SpaceX chief's past record of statements that flout or test convention and sometimes provoke a crackdown from regulators.

On Monday he was embroiled in a Twitter spat with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky over his ideas on ending Russia's invasion.

AFP

EU mulls price cap on imported gas

Strasbourg, France - The EU is "ready to discuss" a price cap on imported gas to bring down soaring energy costs, European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said Wednesday.

Her comment, to the European Parliament, signalled a shift in tone in Europe after powerhouse EU country Germany had expressed worries that a broad price cap might divert supplies for Europe.

It comes after 15 EU countries - more than half the bloc - made a joint call for the EU to impose a price ceiling on how much it would pay for gas piped or shipped in, as the northern hemisphere winter bears down.

Europe is facing an energy crunch as the price of electricity generation skyrockets because of a massive surge in the price for gas.

Russia, which used to be Europe's main gas supplier, has turned off the taps after being hit by EU sanctions over the war in



Ursula von der Leyen

Ukraine that, while not touching gas, crimped sales of its more lucrative oil exports.

"We are ready to discuss a cap on the price of gas that is used to generate electricity," von der Leyen told MEPs sitting in Strasbourg, France.

"This cap would also be a first

step on the way to a structural reform and overall reform of our electricity market."

She added that "we also have to look at gas prices beyond the electricity market".

Von der Leyen did not specify whether the mooted price cap would cover all gas imports - not

only the gas that arrives mainly by pipeline from Russia, but also liquefied natural gas (LNG) that can be shipped around the world.

Brussels has been amenable to a cap on pipeline gas to hurt Russia and rob it of cash for its Ukraine invasion.

But it has resisted a cap on LNG, fearing that sellers might simply divert to higher-paying markets, further starving Europe of gas.

Von der Leyen admitted a price cap "entails drawbacks in terms of security of supply of gas".

But she argued that "the situation has critically evolved" and, now, "more member states are open for it and we are better prepared".

She did not detail what had changed, beyond noting that Europe's stockpile of gas for winter had reached 90 per cent of capacity, exceeding a target set.

AFP

Russia to resume gas deliveries to Italy

Moscow, Russia - Russia will resume gas deliveries to Italy after suspending them due to a transport problem in Austria, Russian energy giant Gazprom said in a statement Wednesday.

"Transportation of Russian gas through the territory of Austria is resuming," Gazprom said, adding that a "solution" was found with Italian buyers following regulatory changes in Austria.

Most Russian gas delivered to Italy passes via Ukraine through the Trans Austria Gas Pipeline (TAG), to Tarvisio in northern Italy on the border with Austria.

Italian energy company Eni said Wednesday that "gas sup-

plies from Gazprom resumed today" and welcomed the "resolution by Eni and the parties concerned of the constraints resulting from the new regulations introduced by" Austria.

On Saturday, Gazprom suspended gas deliveries to Italy, blaming a transport problem in Austria. "The reason is related to the regulatory changes that took place in Austria at the end of September," Gazprom said at the time.

The problems were linked to "contractual details" linked to the transit of gas towards Italy, E-Control said on Twitter.

AFP

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Apparel Group brand Ardene launches fall-winter collection

Ardene, a leading Canadian retailer of women’s fashion and accessories, in collaboration with the Cosmopolitan Middle East, launched its fall-winter collection at its flagship store in Dubai Hills Mall. The in-store event featured many exciting and engaging activities for guests and influencers including styling sessions, phone strap customisation, denim customisation, and a braid bar.

As the largest store outside of North America, Ardene’s 7000sqft store at Dubai Hills Mall - under Apparel Group - offers the latest collection to shoppers in the region. Ardene started as an accessories and jewelry retailer in the early 1980s, and today they are on a whole new level, with close to 350+ stores in Canada and US. There are currently 12 stores for the brand in GCC, with more to come. The product line features a range of globally inspired ready-to-wear head-to-toe apparel, footwear, and accessories - all at the best prices.

Apparel Group is a global fashion and lifestyle retail conglomerate at the crossroads of the modern economy - Dubai.

Al Ahlia Insurance scores big at AIWA awards for fifth time



Al Ahlia Insurance Company SAOG, one of Oman’s leading and publicly listed insurers, has won the AIWA (Alam Al-Iktisaad Wal-A’mal) Award for Best Performing Companies on MSM (in the mid-cap category) for the fifth time. The award was announced in a gala ceremony held on September 28 in Muscat.

Awarded by the leading Arabic business magazine - AIWA, this is a based on a survey of best performing listed companies. The criteria for evaluation for the mid-cap category include company’s market capitalization and key financial performance parameters. The evaluation and validation of results are done independently by reputed organisations.

This award reflects Al Ahlia’s commitment to its core philosophy, of putting customers first.

“We are proud to have received this award for the fifth time, this achievement highlights that the execution of our strategy has been clearly defined and well executed.” said Hanaa al Hinai, Chief Executive Officer.



Oman Shell mark start of 2nd batch of Nawafidh Programme

Oman Shell along with its partners, GUtech and Outward Bound Oman, celebrated the launch of the Shell Nawafidh Programme’s second batch of Omani students.

Oman Shell inaugurated the second batch’s six-month long journey of learning with a ceremony that showcased alumni success stories and an icebreaker session to help the participants get acquainted with one another and the programme.

Conducted in partnership with GUtech and Outward Bound Oman, the main objective of Shell Nawafidh is to enable and empower youth to lead the transition into the emerging energy markets through technical training, workshops and networking opportunities with industry professionals. Malak al Shaibani, General Manager - Corporate Relations & ICV, Oman Shell, said, “Our aim is to power progress and adapt to the changing energy markets. Tomorrow’s energy leaders must be provided with the opportunities they need to gain knowledge and skills pertaining to newer and cleaner energy sources and solutions. The focus of the programme is on learning the latest technologies and applications related to these new sources of energy.”



Techno Plastic Industry signs two MoUs with Al Hassan and Muna Noor Manufacturing & Trading

Techno Plastic Industry celebrated the signing of two memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with Al Hassan Company and Muna Noor Manufacturing & Trading LLC, at its headquarters in Ghala recently.

This was a significant step for the Omani manufacturers who will work to increase cooperation in promoting their products in domestic and international markets.

Omar Ahmed Cotton, CEO of Techno Plastic Industry signed the first MoU with Makboul Ali Salman, Chairman of Al Hassan, and the second MOU with Ahmed Khalid al Barwani, CEO of Muna Noor Manufacturing & Trading.

The MoU with Al Hassan was signed on the occasion of their ten-year strategic collaboration, while the MoU with Muna Noor Manufacturing & Trading was signed with the intention of promoting Techno products both inside and outside the sultanate’s markets.

Fostering cooperation

The MoU will work to embody the status of these companies in terms of the quality of their products both internally and externally, according to Omar Ahmed Cotton, CEO of Techno, who emphasised the significance of fostering cooperation between Omani businesses



The MoU with Al Hassan was signed on the occasion of their ten-year strategic collaboration, while the MoU with Muna Noor Manufacturing & Trading was signed with the intention of promoting Techno products both inside and outside the sultanate’s markets

and expanding the marketing of the company’s products in both domestic and international markets.

Ahmed Khalid al Barwani, CEO of Muna Noor, outlined how the MOU aims to strengthen cooperation between the two businesses and increase the effectiveness of marketing their products in local and regional markets. He also emphasised that this agreement ushers in a new stage for the initial cooperation that benefits both parties.

Empowering

Barwani noted that this MoU is the first of its type in Oman because it will

enable the two companies to further their relationship between the two largest and most established factories in the sultanate producing plastic pipes and their accessories.

It is important to note that Techno has extensive experience in the plastic pipe industry and is ISO 9001:2015 certified for the production of pipes and polypropylene pipe joints that serve the industrial markets both inside and outside of Oman. Techno strives to provide quality-guaranteed products with improved durability and reliability while upholding high quality standards.

Al Hassan Group is one of the leading business groups involved in the manufacturing of low and high voltage switchgear panels and trading of electromechanical items across Oman. With their strong workforce of 300+ employees, they are committed to offering high quality products with personalized and excellent services.

Muna Noor Manufacturing & Trading, on the other hand, has been a creative and strategic partner in all public and private projects for more than 47 years and is one of the industry pioneers in the production of plastic pipes and their accessories utilising the most up-to-date technologies.

The company has been exporting its products to many African and Asian countries.

Omanis leave for Jordan MENA Digital Final

Two top ranking Omani digital champions have left for Jordan for a MENA level championship to be held in that Arab nation on Thursday and Friday.

Following their success in the Khareef Digital Championship and Oman Digital Championship, both managed by Oman Automobile Association, Wasif al Kharousy and Mohammed al Barwani came out on top to compete in the Middle East and North African (MENA) Digital Final, said a press release.

The two winners have travelled to Jordan for the competition with a larger number of participants, compared to the previous season.

OAA Digital Motorsports Manager Masoud al Hinai said, “At last year’s event, the atmosphere and preparation in Jordan was perfectly managed and this year’s winners of the national digital championships proved how hard they worked since their performance in the past.”



The final competition in Jordan will have participants from all over the Middle East and North Africa, competing against each other at a professional level.

According to Masoud, the challenges on the simulators are done fairly due to contestants having the same equipment and that all it takes to win is practice and skills.

Talking about the Jordan event, Wasif al Kharousy said each year the competition is getting tougher. “At the same time, the organisation of the events is also getting better.”

“This is my second MENA Digital Championship and I’m really excited and looking forward to it. I will give it my all to make my country proud,” the 17-year-

old added.

Second contestant Mohammed al Barwani said, “This is a great step forward for simulator racing within our region. This isn’t my first time competing in Jordan and from my previous visit, the experience was lovely with the great people who were very welcoming, making it feel like a second home to me.”

The 34-year-old champion very optimistic about his performance in Jordan. “As I have been practicing on the Gran Turismo games every single day, I know I am ready and will perform my best to the end,” Barwani added.

The MENA Digital Final is hosted by Jordan Motorsport (JMS) to attract young racers and video game enthusiasts to attend the event from across the region. Each country is represented by two contestants who are selected either through their national championship qualifiers or as their country nominees.

ahlibank opens a new branch in Madinat al Sultan Qaboos

Supporting its robust digitisation drive and setting a new benchmark in customer convenience, ahlibank has opened an exclusive digital banking branch at a prime location in Madinat al Sultan Qaboos area.

The state-of-the-art facility is designed to enhance customers’ banking experience and expedite everyday banking processes, incorporating the bank’s first multi-functional device - ahliexpress, while offering a brand-new outlet for new-to-bank clients. It will cater to customers in the predominantly upscale residential area with top-notch services that are in tune with global digital trends.

The new branch will redefine ahlibank’s credentials as one of the most preferred banks in Oman, making ‘digital’ the new banking mantra for its internet-savvy customers. It will further augment ahlibank’s growing dig-



ital footprints in the country and leverage its active partnership with the government in realising the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, which has set forth an ambitious national program for the digital economy.

Commenting on the new milestone, Muneer al Balushi, AGM - Head of Retail Distribution, said, “Our remarkable new facility, in the heart of the city, is an affirmation of our intent to create modern banking avenues for our customers who are constantly seeking innovative products and newer and better service modules to conduct their everyday banking chores.

“We will continue to forge ahead by partnering with the government in realising the national digital agenda that will change the course of our country’s economic and social development,” Balushi asserted.

South Korea, US fire missiles in response to North Korea test

Seoul, South Korea - The South Korean and US militaries fired a volley of missiles into the sea in response to North Korea firing a ballistic missile over Japan, Seoul said on Wednesday, as global condemnation mounted over Pyongyang's likely longest-ever test.

Nuclear-armed North Korea fired an Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM) over Japan for the first time in five years on Tuesday, prompting Tokyo to issue evacuation warnings for some residents.

South Korea and the United States staged a drill of their own in response, firing ground-to-ground missiles into the East Sea, also known as the Sea of Japan, Seoul's military said.

Both militaries fired two AT-ACMS short-range ballistic missiles into the water 'to precisely strike a virtual target,' the Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

The military also confirmed that a South Korean missile failed soon after it was launched and crashed, without causing any casualties.

South Korean and US fighter jets had carried out a bombing drill at a virtual target in the Yellow Sea on Tuesday.

The joint drills aim to 'make sure that we have the military capabilities at the ready to respond to provocations by the North if it comes to that,' US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told CNN.

South Korea's military also



This handout photo shows the Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS) firing a missile from an undisclosed location on South Korea's east coast during a South Korea-US joint live-fire exercise on Wednesday (AFP)

announced Wednesday that the nuclear-powered USS Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier would return to the area, having already conducted joint drills with Seoul's navy last month.

Pyongyang's Tuesday launch is part of a record year of sanctions-busting weapons tests by the isolated regime, which recently revised its nuclear laws, with leader Kim Jong Un declaring his country an 'irreversible'

nuclear power.

US President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida decried the launch 'in the strongest terms' while South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol called it a 'provocation'.

The UN Security Council is set to meet on Wednesday to discuss the matter.

The IRBM flew about 4,600km, Seoul and Tokyo said, likely the longest-ever distance

for a North Korean test, which are typically fired on a 'lofted' trajectory to avoid flying over neighbouring countries.

Officials and experts said it was likely a Hwasong-12 IRBM, a nuclear-capable missile that North Korea likely first tested in 2017, which has a range that could put US bases on Guam within reach.

North Korea has not commented on the launch in state

media.

'Ridicule' response

"Regardless of today's missile launch by the US and South Korean military, North Korea's plan to carry out its next nuclear test will not change," Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies, told AFP.

"It's likely that Pyongyang's going to ridicule today's missile launch - especially since one of the launches failed - and proceed with their next nuclear test, given the law changes they made on the nuclear use in September."

The Tuesday test was Pyongyang's fifth missile launch in ten days.

The spate of launches comes as Seoul, Tokyo and Washington have been ramping up joint military drills to counter Pyongyang's growing threats, staging the first trilateral anti-submarine drills in five years on Friday.

That came just days after the US and South Korean navies conducted large-scale exercises.

Such drills infuriate North Korea, which sees them as rehearsals for an invasion.

US Vice President Kamala Harris visited Seoul last week and toured the heavily fortified Demilitarized Zone that divides the Korean peninsula, on a trip to underscore her country's commitment to South Korea's defence. About 28,500 US troops are stationed in South Korea to help protect it from the North.

AFP



People gather during a protest in front of the US Embassy, in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa on Tuesday (AFP)

Ethiopia accepts AU invite to peace talks with rebels

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - Ethiopia's government said Wednesday it has accepted an African Union invitation to hold peace talks with Tigrayan rebels after almost two years of brutal war in the north of the country.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's national security adviser Redwan Hussein said on Twitter that the government had 'accepted this invitation which is in line with our principled position regarding the peaceful resolution of the conflict and the need to have talks without preconditions'.

The Government Communication Service said in a statement that the AU had set 'both the date and the venue' for the talks but did not elaborate.

AU spokeswoman Ebba Kalondo declined to provide information about when and where the talks would take place. "We will communicate details as and when appropriate," Kalondo said, adding that the process remained 'on track'.

There was no immediate response from the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) to the announcement, which comes more than a month after intense fighting resumed in northern Ethiopia, shattering a March truce and dimming hopes of ending the war.

The deepening conflict has raised international alarm, with the United States this week announcing that its special envoy to the region, Mike Hammer, would be making his second visit to Ethiopia in as many months to seek a halt to the fighting.

The latest upsurge has also drawn Eritrean troops back on to the battlefield in support of Ethiopia's federal and regional forces, which are fighting the TPLF on multiple fronts in the country's north.

Tigrayan authorities said last

month they were ready to participate in talks mediated by the African Union, removing an obstacle to negotiations with the government in Addis Ababa.

But fighting has only escalated in the weeks since.

'Troika of negotiators'

A diplomatic source told AFP that the AU talks would be mediated by 'a troika of negotiators' including the bloc's Horn of Africa envoy Olusegun Obasanjo

We will communicate details as and when appropriate. The process remains on track

EBBA KALONDO

and former Kenyan president Uhuru Kenyatta.

Another diplomatic source said South Africa's former deputy president Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka would serve as the third negotiator.

The warring sides were previously at odds over who should mediate negotiations, with Abiy's government pushing for Obasanjo and the TPLF wanting Kenyatta to broker dialogue.

They have also sparred over the restoration of basic services such as electricity, communications and banking in Tigray - a key precondition for dialogue according to the TPLF.

The region of 6mn people has been facing desperate shortages of food, fuel, medicines and other emergency supplies, with the UN's World Food Programme warning of rising malnutrition.

AFP

Azerbaijan says discovered mass grave in Karabakh

Edilli, Azerbaijan - Azerbaijan said on Wednesday it has discovered what it claims is a mass grave of its soldiers allegedly executed by Armenian separatist forces during the 1990s war over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Baku and Yerevan fought two wars - in 2020 and in the 1990s - over the contested mountainous region of Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian-populated enclave of Azerbaijan.

'A mass grave of Azerbaijani servicemen tortured and executed during the first Karabakh war was discovered in the village of Edilli,' Hikmet Hajiyev, the foreign policy advisor to President



The site of a mass grave discovered in the village of Edilli (AFP)

Ilham Aliyev, said on Twitter.

He said '4,000 Azerbaijani troops and civilians remain missing since the (1990s) war and Armenia refuses to disclose the locations of mass graves.'

Namig Efendiyev of the state commission for prisoners of war told AFP that '25 human remains were discovered since February at the mass grave'.

Baku's announcement came days after Armenia accused Azerbaijani troops of war crimes committed during deadly border clashes last month.

In September, at least 286 people were killed on both sides before a US-brokered truce ended the worst clashes since

the neighbours' 2020 war.

On Sunday, Armenia's foreign ministry said 'numerous videos regularly (published) by Azerbaijani users on social media demonstrate the war crimes', including extrajudicial killings and torture of Armenian POWs and desecration of corpses. Azerbaijan said on the same day that its military prosecutor's office had launched a probe into alleged war crimes committed by Baku forces.

On Tuesday, Azerbaijan freed 17 Armenian prisoners of war following US mediation. The six-week war in 2020 claimed the lives of more than 6,500 troops from both sides.

AFP

Uganda health worker dies of Ebola, raising toll to 10

Kampala, Uganda - Uganda on Wednesday confirmed the death of a health worker from Ebola, bringing the total number of fatalities from the highly contagious virus to ten.

The latest death comes two weeks after the government declared an outbreak.

Health Minister Jane Ruth Aceng Otero said that a 58-year-old anaesthetic officer had died of Ebola early on Wednesday.

'The late Margaret is the fourth health worker we have lost in the current Ebola outbreak,' the minister said on Twitter, following the deaths of a Tanzanian doctor, a health assistant and a midwife.

According to the health ministry's last update on Monday, the total number of cases identified in the East African nation stood at 43.

Since the initial outbreak was discovered in the central district of Mubende, infections

have been found in Kassanda, Kyegegwa and Kagadi.

But President Yoweri Museveni has vowed not to impose any lockdowns to tackle the disease, saying last week that there was 'no need for anxiety'. Museveni said some 19 others classified as probable Ebola cases had also died, but said they were buried before they could be tested for infection.

Ebola is an often-fatal viral haemorrhagic fever named after a river in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) where it was discovered in 1976.

Human transmission is through bodily fluids, with the main symptoms being fever, vomiting, bleeding and diarrhoea. Outbreaks are difficult to contain, especially in urban environments. People who are infected do not become contagious until symptoms appear.

AFP

Myanmar junta leader not invited to ASEAN summit, says host Cambodia

Phnom Penh, Cambodia - Myanmar's junta leader has not been invited to a regional summit next month, host Cambodia said on Wednesday, in a fresh diplomatic snub for the isolated military regime.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has led diplomatic efforts to resolve the turmoil that has gripped Myanmar since the military seized power last year.

But there has been little progress on a 'five-point consensus' agreed with the junta, and its leader and ministers have been shut out of recent meetings of the ten-member regional bloc.

Linking the invitation to 'progress in the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus', a Cambodian foreign ministry spokesman said the junta had been invited to 'nominate a non-political representative for the upcoming ASEAN Summits'.

This means junta chief Min



Myanmar's junta chief Min Aung Hlaing

Aung Hlaing would not be allowed to attend, just as his top diplomat was barred from foreign ministers' gatherings in Phnom Penh in February and August.

The five-point plan, agreed in April last year, calls for an immediate end to violence and dia-

logue between the military and the anti-coup movement.

There is growing dissatisfaction within ASEAN - sometimes criticised as a toothless talking shop - at the Myanmar generals' stonewalling.

The junta's execution of four prisoners in July, in defiance of

widespread international calls for clemency, caused further anger.

August's meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers ended with a rare condemnation from the bloc for the junta's actions.

The ministers said they were 'deeply disappointed by the limited progress in and lack of commitment of the Naypyidaw authorities to the timely and complete implementation of the five point consensus'.

ASEAN's own envoy tasked with brokering peace has admitted the scale of the task, saying 'even Superman cannot solve' the crisis.

US pressure

The regional bloc's snub comes as Washington attempts to exert more pressure on the junta through the United Nations, following outrage over an air strike that killed 11 schoolchildren last month.

US State Department coun-

sellor Derek Chollet held talks with other governments and with representatives of the self-declared National Unity Government - dominated by ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi's party - during the UN General Assembly earlier this month.

Myanmar is planning fresh elections in August next year, but Chollet warned there was 'no chance' they could be free and fair.

The junta has justified its power grab pointing to alleged fraud in the 2020 elections, which Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party won easily.

A military crackdown on dissent in the wake of the coup has left more than 2,300 civilians dead, according to a local monitoring group.

The junta, meanwhile, says the uprising against its rule has left almost 3,900 of its supporters dead.

AFP

US duo and Dane win Nobel for ‘click chemistry’

The award marks the second Nobel for 81-year-old Barry Sharpless, who won the chemistry Nobel in 2001

Stockholm, Sweden - A trio of chemists from the United States and Denmark who laid the foundation for a more functional form of chemistry where molecules are snapped together on Wednesday won the Nobel Chemistry Prize.

Americans Carolyn Bertozzi and Barry Sharpless, together with Denmark’s Morten Meldal, were honoured ‘for the development of click chemistry and bioorthogonal chemistry’, the jury said.

Bertozzi is the only woman among the seven Nobel laureates honoured so far this year, with women vastly under-represented in the history of the prizes, especially in the science disciplines.

The award marks the second Nobel for 81-year-old Sharpless, who won the chemistry Nobel in 2001.

Only four other individuals have achieved the feat of winning two Nobel Prizes, including Polish-born Frenchwoman Marie Curie, who won the chemistry prize in 1911 after first winning the physics prize in 1903.



Members of the Nobel Committee for Chemistry (Bottom L-R) Chair Professor of Theoretical Chemistry Johan Aqvist, Secretary General of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences Hans Ellegren and Professor in Chemistry Olof Ramstrom at a press conference to announce the winners (on display)

She was followed by American Linus Pauling who won for chemistry in 1954 and peace in 1962. American John Bardeen won the physics prize in 1956 and 1972, and Britain’s Frederick Sanger won the chemistry prize in 1958 and 1980.

Click chemistry ‘is an elegant and efficient chemical reaction that is now in widespread use,’

the jury said in a statement.

‘Among many other uses, it is utilised in the development of pharmaceuticals, for mapping DNA and creating materials that are more fit for purpose,’ it added.

Sharpless, a professor at Scripps Research in California, ‘started the ball rolling’ and ‘coined the concept of click chemistry’ around 2000, the jury

said. Afterwards, Sharpless and Meldal, a professor of chemistry at the University of Copenhagen, ‘independently of each other, presented what is now the crown jewel of click chemistry: the copper catalysed azide-alkyne cycloaddition’.

The process allows chemists to ‘snap’ molecules together ‘with the help of some copper

ions,’ which among other things allows for the production of new materials.

‘If a manufacturer adds a clickable azide to a plastic or fibre, changing the material at a later stage is straightforward,’ the Nobel Foundation explained.

It is possible to click in substances that conduct electricity, capture sunlight, are antibacter-

ial, protect from ultraviolet radiation or have other desirable properties, it said.

While there is widespread application of his research, Meldal said he was ‘very surprised and very proud’ to receive the honour.

‘There are so many good discoveries and developments in the world, it’s incredible to be in this situation,’ Meldal told Swedish public radio.

‘A new level’

Bertozzi, 55, a professor at Stanford in the United States, was highlighted for then taking ‘click chemistry to a new level’.

‘She developed click reactions that work inside living organisms. Her bioorthogonal reactions take place without disrupting the normal chemistry of the cell,’ the jury said.

Her research is now being used to investigate how these reactions can be used to diagnose and treat cancer.

‘I’m absolutely stunned, I’m sitting here and I can hardly breathe,’ Bertozzi told reporters, minutes after the announcement.

The trio will share the Nobel

award sum of 10mn Swedish kronor (US\$910,000), and will receive the prize from King Carl XVI Gustaf at a formal ceremony in Stockholm on December 10, the anniversary of the 1896 death of scientist Alfred Nobel who created the prizes in his last will and testament.

Last year, the academy honoured Germany’s Benjamin List and US-British dual national David MacMillan for their development of a precise tool for molecular construction known as asymmetric organocatalysis.

On Monday, the medicine prize went to Swedish paleogeneticist Svante Paabo for his discoveries on the genomes of extinct hominins and human evolution.

Then on Tuesday, physicists Alain Aspect of France, John Clauser of the United States and Austria’s Anton Zeilinger were given the physics prize for developing experimental tools that helped prove quantum entanglement - a phenomenon Albert Einstein dismissed as ‘spooky action at a distance’.

AFP

Detained American leaves Iran removing one hurdle

Tehran, Iran - Baquer Namazi, one of four US citizens whose release Washington had demanded in the context of any revived nuclear deal with Tehran, left for neutral Oman Wednesday, Iranian state television said.

Namazi, a former Unicef official, was detained in February 2016 when the 85-year-old travelled to Iran to press for the release of his son Siamak, who had been arrested in October of the previous year.

‘Mohammad Baquer Namazi, who had been released from prison a few days ago, left Iran today (Wednesday),’ the state broadcaster said, posting footage of Namazi boarding a plane in Iran.

The United States has been pressing for the release of the Namazis and two other Americans amid efforts to revive the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and major powers.

“Wrongfully detained US citizen Baquer Namazi has been permitted to depart Iran, and his son Siamak, also wrongfully detained, has been granted furlough from prison,” a State Department

spokesperson told AFP.

The spokesperson said that previously the older Namazi was ‘not permitted to leave the county after serving his sentence, despite his repeated requirement for urgent medical attention.’

The United Nations said last week that the pair had been allowed to leave Iran, after an appeal from Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

Both were convicted of espionage in October 2016 and sentenced to ten years in prison.

Baquer Namazi was released on medical leave in 2018 and had been serving his sentence under house arrest.

At least two other American citizens are currently held in Iran.

Businessman Emad Sharqi was sentenced last year to ten years in prison for espionage, and environmentalist Morad Tahbaz, who is also a British national, was arrested in 2018 and released on bail in July.

A drive to salvage the 2015 nuclear deal began in April last year, with the aim of returning the US to the accord.

AFP

Lebanese lawmaker stages bank sit-in to free trapped savings

Beirut, Lebanon - A Lebanese lawmaker entered a bank branch unarmed on Wednesday with two of her lawyers to free trapped dollar deposits she needs to pay for surgery, her lawyer said.

Cynthia Zarazir, who was elected to parliament in May, is the latest in a growing number of angry depositors who are forcing Lebanese lenders to unlock savings trapped under informal capital controls imposed in the face of an unprecedented financial crisis.

Zarazir entered her bank branch in a northern suburb of Beirut at around 9am to demand US\$8,500 to pay for surgery costs not covered by her health insurance, her lawyer Fouad Debs said from inside the bank.

“We will not leave until we get the money,” Debs told AFP, nearly three hours after they entered the branch.

Several activists gathered outside the bank to support Zarazir, whose plight echos that of the many Lebanese who have been locked out of their savings by bank restrictions that have gradually tightened since the start of the financial crash in 2019. Commercial lenders have effectively



Lebanese MP Cynthia Zarazir (left) inside Byblos Bank Antelias branch north of Beirut demanding access to her savings on Wednesday (AFP)

banned most foreign currency transfers or withdrawals, forcing depositors to withdraw their savings in the plummeting Lebanese pound which has lost more than 95 per cent of its value against

the dollar.

Also on Wednesday, a retired member of Lebanon’s Internal Security Forces entered a bank in Beirut’s southern suburbs to demand access to his savings, said

the Depositors’ Union advocacy group.

It was not immediately clear if he was armed.

Meanwhile, dozens of protesters gathered outside central bank headquarters in Beirut to demand access to their money amid a heavy troop deployment.

“We came to claim our rights,” said protester Houssam Machmouchi, 42.

“We are not beggars, we just want our money.”

On Tuesday, a retired diplomat and honorary consul of Ireland, Georges Siam, carried out an all-day sit-in at a bank in the suburbs of Beirut to recover his savings before eventually reaching a compromise.

Almost simultaneously, at least two other armed bank heists took place in separate branches.

They included one by a retired policeman who held up a bank in eastern Lebanon to demand a money transfer to his son in Ukraine to help pay for rent and university tuition.

Lebanon’s banks closed for a week after a series of heists on September 16. They have since reopened amid tight security.

AFP

39 die from cholera outbreak in Syria

Damascus, Syria - Syria’s health ministry has recorded 39 deaths from cholera and nearly 600 cases in an outbreak spreading in the war-ravaged country that the United Nations warned is ‘evolving alarmingly’.

A total of 594 cases have been recorded across 11 of its 14 provinces since late last month, the health ministry said late Tuesday.

‘The situation is evolving alarmingly in affected governorates and expanding to new areas,’ the World Health Organization warned on Tuesday.

Most of those who have died are in the northern province of Aleppo, and it was not immediately clear if the dead were included in the overall case tally.

It is the first major outbreak of cholera in Syria in over a decade.

The extremely virulent disease is generally contracted from contaminated food or water, and causes diarrhoea and vomiting.

It can spread in residential areas that lack proper sewerage networks or mains drinking water.

AFP

Iran schoolgirls lead protests over Mahsa Amini death

Paris, France - Iranian schoolgirls have come to the fore in protests over the death of Mahsa Amini, removing their hijabs and staging sporadic rallies in defiance of a lethal crackdown by the security forces.

Amini (22) was pronounced dead days after the notorious morality police detained the Iranian Kurd last month for allegedly breaching the Islamic republic’s strict dress code for women.

Anger flared at her funeral and spread to become the biggest wave of protests to rock Iran in almost three years, despite the backlash by the security forces that has killed scores and seen hundreds arrested.

Students rallied at the weekend before being confronted by riot police who cornered them in an underground car park of Tehran’s prestigious Sharif Uni-

versity of Technology before hauling them away.

Schoolgirls have since taken up the baton around the country, removing their hijabs, shouting anti-regime slogans and defacing images of the clerical state’s leaders.

‘Death to the dictator,’ a group of bare-headed girls is seen chanting in reference to supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as they force a man, reportedly the principal, out of a school in Karaj, west of Tehran, on Monday in a video verified by AFP.

Another group of girls is seen chanting ‘Woman, life, freedom,’ as they march down a street of the Karaj neighbourhood of Gohardasht.

‘These are really extraordinary scenes. If these protests are going to achieve anything, it will be because of the schoolgirls,’



This image grab taken from a UGC video made available on the ESN platform shows school students out onto the streets of Saqqez city in Iran’s Kurdistan province, hometown of Mahsa Amini (AFP)

Esfandary Batmanghelidj of the Bourse & Bazaar news and analysis website tweeted in response.

Schoolgirls are also seen emptying classrooms and appearing at flash-mob protests to avoid detection, in other footage

shared online.

A boisterous group of girls are seen yelling ‘Get lost, Basiji’, in reference to the paramilitary force, at a man standing at a podium in the southern city of Shiraz, in a video shared by the 1500tasvir social media channel.

AFP has been unable to independently verify the footage.

Singer silenced

As the women-led protests stretch into a fourth week, Iran has widened its crackdown, rounding up high profile support-

ers of the movement and imposing internet restrictions that limit access to social media.

On Tuesday night, Iranian pop singer Shirvin Hajipour, who was arrested after his song in support of the protests went viral and became an anthem for the movement, was released on bail.

‘I’m here to say I’m okay. But I am sorry that some particular movements based outside of Iran - which I have had no relations with - made some improper political uses of this song,’ he told his 1.9mn Instagram followers shortly after his release.

Iran’s judiciary meanwhile opened an investigation into the death of teenage girl Nika Shakrami who was reportedly killed during the protests.

BBC Persian and Iran Wire had reported that authorities had taken possession of her body and

secretly buried her on Monday to avoid a funeral that could spark more protests.

At least 92 protesters have been killed so far in the unrest, according to Oslo-based group Iran Human Rights (IHR).

Amnesty International has confirmed 53 deaths, while Fars news agency put the death toll at ‘around 60’ last week. At least 12 members of the security forces have been reported killed.

Another 63 people were killed last week when security forces ‘bloodily suppressed’ a protest in Zahedan, near Iran’s southeastern border with Pakistan, said IHR. The clashes erupted after Friday prayers during protests sparked by accusations a police chief in the region had raped a teenage girl of the Baluch Sunni minority, it said.

AFP

Under-fire PM Truss vows to get UK ‘through the tempest’

A month since she succeeded Boris Johnson, Liz Truss alienated voters

Birmingham, UK - Prime Minister Liz Truss vowed to steer the UK ‘through the tempest’ as she closed her party’s tumultuous annual conference on Wednesday, making an unapologetic pitch for economic ‘growth, growth, growth’.

Just a month since she succeeded Boris Johnson, Truss has alienated voters, financial markets and many in the ruling Conservative party with a crash programme of debt-fuelled tax cuts to boost Britain’s stagnant economy.

But Truss argued in her speech that the status quo was not an option, despite the botched rollout of her fiscal plan leading to a humiliating U-turn on a pledge to cut income tax for the highest earners.

“In these tough times, we need to step up,” she told delegates, taking aim at what she said was an ‘anti-growth coalition’ holding back attempts to revive the economy.

“I’m determined to get Britain moving, to get us through the tempest and put us on a stronger footing as a nation,” she added, mentioning the word ‘growth’ 27 times during the speech.

Despite only being leader for exactly a month, Truss’ calamitous start, with a ten-day hiatus because of the death of Queen Elizabeth II, has already seen her



UK Prime Minister Liz Truss and her husband Hugh O'Leary arrive for the final day of the Conservative Party Conference in Birmingham on Wednesday

In these tough times, we need to step up... I'm determined to get Britain moving, to get us through the tempest and put us on a stronger footing as a nation

LIZ TRUSS

fighting to keep her job.

Former minister Grant Shapps, who supported Truss’ leadership rival Rishi Sunak, said she could face a no-confidence vote by MPs if the keynote speech fails to start reviving the party’s dismal standing in opinion polls.

“In the end, I don’t think members of parliament, Conservatives, if they see the polls continue as they are, are going to

sit on their hands,’ he told Times Radio.

‘A way would be found to make that change.’

The speech wasn’t without its hiccups, with protesters holding a Greenpeace banner saying ‘who voted for this?’ disrupting the prime minister around 15 minutes into her message.

Truss’ critics, including allies of Johnson, have accused her of lacking a national mandate for

her unpopular reforms after she won the Tory leadership.

But she insisted Britain needed to ‘do things differently’, with no time for ‘more drift and delay’.

“Whenever there is change, there is disruption. Not everyone will be in favour. But everyone will benefit from the result - a growing economy and a better future,” she said.

It remains to be seen whether the speech has the effect 10 Downing Street wants.

Truss’ media interviews in the build-up to Wednesday focussed unrelentingly on the U-turn she and Chancellor of the Exchequer Kwasi Kwarteng were forced to stage on the signature element of their reform overhaul.

Cabinet splits emerged in Birmingham on indications that despite the impact of the crisis on the poor, the pair will next cut welfare benefits.

Truss denied she had lost control of her cabinet after putting on a show of unity with the beleaguered Kwarteng on a visit to a construction site in Birmingham on Tuesday.

“We are working with our MPs, this is a team, this Conservative team, putting forward our policies for the country and delivering for the country,” she told ITV. But there was little team spirit on display from Home Secretary Suella Braverman, who accused party critics of seeking to stage a ‘coup’ against Truss.

AFP



Indonesia’s President Joko Widodo (left) visits a survivor at a hospital in Malang, East Java, on Wednesday (AFP)

Widodo orders stadium audit after stampede

Malang, Indonesia - Indonesian President Joko Widodo on Wednesday ordered an audit of all football stadiums in the country, vowing to find the ‘root’ cause of one of the deadliest disasters in the sport’s history.

He was in the city of Malang to visit relatives of the victims and those injured in a stampede that killed at least 131 people on Saturday, and to see the stadium where the tragedy took place.

The Indonesian leader’s trip came as anger grew over the police response to a pitch invasion during which officers fired tear gas into packed stands as fans of Arema FC tried to approach players following their defeat to fierce rivals Persebaya Surabaya.

“I want to know the root of the problem that caused this tragedy so that we can get the best solution,” he told reporters outside Saiful Anwar Hospital in Malang.

“I will order the Public Works and Public Housing Ministry to audit all stadiums used for the (football) league.”

Hundreds of people fled for small exits, resulting in a crush

that left many trampled or suffocating to death. He said ‘the problem was in the locked doors and the stairs being too steep, plus the panic’ but would wait for the conclusions of an investigation task force.

Widodo added that he had spoken with FIFA president Gianni Infantino on Monday about improving Indonesia’s ‘football management’ and possible assistance from the world football governing body.

He had earlier entered the hospital to speak with several injured patients, saying he told them to ‘keep up their spirits’, and asked them about what happened on the night of the match. He then travelled to the Kanjuruhan stadium, scene of the disaster.

“We need... improvements in the whole management, management of stadium spectators, time, security. It must all be fully audited so that this tragedy won’t happen again,” the President said.

Police described the pitch invasion as a riot and said two officers were killed, but survivors accused them of overreacting.

AFP

25 dead after wedding bus falls into Indian gorge

New Delhi, India - At least 25 people were killed after a bus carrying wedding guests veered off the road and fell into a deep gorge in northern India, police said on Wednesday.

The vehicle was travelling along a treacherous mountain highway in Uttarakhand state when it careened over an edge and plunged into at least 500m with around 45 people onboard.

“Twenty people have been rescued,” the state’s top police official Ashok Kumar said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that ‘all possible assistance’ would be given to the survivors.

‘In this tragic hour my thoughts are with the bereaved families,’ he tweeted on Wednesday.

Fatal road accidents are common in Uttarakhand, which encompasses part of the Indian Himalayas and is home to numerous religious pilgrimage sites.

Nearly two dozen people were killed in June when their bus plunged into a gorge while en route to a shrine to the Hindu deity Yamuna, north of the state capital Dehradun.

A World Bank report estimated 150,000 car crash fatalities in India annually.

AFP

Ten dead after Indian Himalayas avalanche hits climbers

New Delhi, India - Ten people are confirmed dead after an avalanche struck climbers in the Indian Himalayas, police said on Wednesday, with 18 other members of the expedition still missing.

Several dozen climbing trainees were caught in Tuesday morning’s snowslide near the summit of Mount Draupadi ka Danda-II in the northern state of Uttarakhand.

The Indian air force and local disaster agency were assisting with rescue efforts before heavy snow and rainfall forced them to abandon the search overnight.

‘Rescue teams have recovered 10 bodies,’ the Uttarakhand state police force said on Twitter after operations resumed in the morning.

Fourteen people have so far been rescued from the site of the

avalanche, around 4,900m above sea level, and police said five were being treated at a district hospital in Uttarkashi.

Police footage showed several rescued climbers arriving in the town and walking unassisted while escorted by officers.

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami confirmed on Twitter that accomplished climber Savita Kanswal, who had summited Everest earlier this year, was among the dead.

Kanswal was an instructor with the expedition and had been feted by the climbing community for summiting the world’s highest peak and nearby Makalu in just 16 days - a women’s record.

Dhami said the government would provide immediate financial assistance to those injured in the avalanche along with the families of victims.



Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) personnel stand in position during preparations for a rescue operation for missing climbers struck by an avalanche, at the ITBP Matli helipad station on Wednesday (AFP)

State disaster agency spokesperson Ridhim Aggarwal told AFP that the climbers had

been stuck in a crevasse after the avalanche hit.

The Nehru Institute of Moun-

taineering said the expedition included 34 of its trainees, seven instructors and a nursing assis-

Ukraine pushes east, Moscow vows to win back lost ground

Kyiv, Ukraine - Kyiv on Wednesday claimed further victories over Russian troops in eastern Ukraine as the Kremlin vowed to recapture territory lost in a lightening Ukrainian counteroffensive.

In recent weeks, Ukraine’s forces, bolstered by Western weapons, have wrested Russian troops out of a string of towns and villages in the east and in the south.

Kyiv this week claimed gains in the southern Kherson region and control of almost the entire eastern Kharkiv region, paving the way for its forces to enter the separatist stronghold of Lugansk.

‘The de-occupation of the Lu-



Ukrainian soldiers adjust their national flag atop a personnel armoured carrier on a road near Lyman, Donetsk region on Tuesday (AFP)

gansk region has already officially started,’ regional governor Sergiy Gaiday said in a video posted on

social media, dressed in camouflage and adding that several settlements had been liberated.

The de-occupation of the Lugansk region has already officially started

SERGIY GAIDAY

On Wednesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed into legislation his annexation of four Ukrainian territories - including Lugansk - as the EU agreed a new round of sanctions against Moscow in response.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Moscow would take

back land it lost to Kyiv within the annexed regions, vowing they would be ‘Russian forever and will not be returned.’

Putin last Friday signed agreements with the Moscow-installed leaders of the four regions to become subjects of the Russian Federation, despite condemnation from Kyiv and the West.

The four territories - Donetsk, Kherson, Lugansk and Zaporizhzhia - create a crucial land corridor between Russia and the Crimean Peninsula, which was annexed by Moscow in 2014.

Together, the five regions make up around 20 percent of Ukraine.

‘Strike back’

The Kremlin annexed the territories after hastily conducting referendums, denounced as void by Kyiv and its Western allies, but has yet to confirm what areas exactly of those regions are being annexed.

Russian forces do not have full control over Kherson or Zaporizhzhia and recently lost control of several settlements in Donetsk. “The way we are regrouping (our forces) along the front means that we can gather strength and strike back,” Kirill Stremousov, the Moscow-appointed deputy head of Kherson region, said.

AFP

INTERIM RELIEF

Hakan Calhanoglu strikes as Inter bounce back from recent setbacks to sink Barca

Milan, Italy - Hakan Calhanoglu fired Inter Milan to a 1-0 win over Barcelona on Tuesday which ended the Italians' recent troubles and boosted their hopes of making the knockout stages of the Champions League.

Inter headed into the Group C clash at the San Siro in dreadful form having lost five of the previous 10 matches in all competitions but Turkey midfielder Calhanoglu ended the crisis talk when he lashed in the only goal of the game on the stroke of half-time.

Simone Inzaghi will also be smiling as his position as Inter coach was being discussed before his team won a match which moves them above Barca and into second place in the group.

Inter are now three points ahead of the Catalan giants and the same amount behind leaders Bayern, who smashed Viktoria Plzen 5-0 earlier on Tuesday.

"It was very important today for us, to show something to our fans who are always with us. We showed that we deserved it," said Calhanoglu.

Inter had to survive a series of scares in the second half, with Ousmane Dembele hitting the post, Pedri having a goal ruled out for handball in the 68th minute following a VAR check as a tired Inter sank back into their



Inter Milan's Hakan Calhanoglu (R) celebrates with Matteo Darmian after scoring against Barcelona in their Champions League match on Tuesday (AFP)

own area late on.

But unlike in recent weeks Inzaghi's well-drilled team weren't punished for the few errors they made and even escaped a late penalty shout for handball which left Barca scratching their heads.

Elsewhere, Liverpool eased to

a comfortable 2-0 win in the 'Battle of Britain' against Rangers while Napoli underlined their credentials with an impressive 6-1 thrashing of Ajax in Amsterdam.

On a night when a minute's silence was held before every match in tribute to the 131 vic-

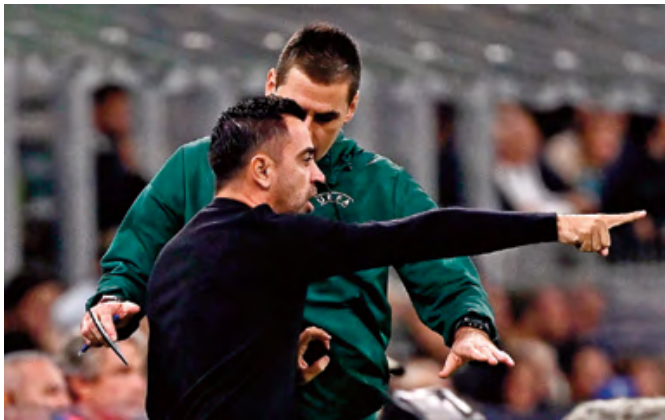
tims of the Indonesia stadium tragedy, Bayern Munich and Club Brugge also made it three wins from three.

Sporting Lisbon's march in Group D came to a shuddering halt in Marseille where the home side came from a goal down to

win 4-1 and get their first win under their belt.

Lisbon still top the group with six points, two ahead of Eintracht Frankfurt and Tottenham Hotspur who played out a goalless draw in Germany.

AFP



Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez talks to the fourth referee during their Champions League match against Inter Milan on Tuesday (AFP)

Xavi outraged at refereeing 'injustice' in Inter Milan defeat

Milan, Italy - Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez said he was outraged at what he saw as blatant refereeing injustices which condemned his team to a 1-0 Champions League defeat at Inter Milan on Tuesday.

Barca sit third in Group C, six points behind leaders Bayern Munich, following their second loss in the competition which came after two key handball decisions went against his team.

Their second-half leveller was ruled out following a pitch review by referee Slavko Vincic for Ansu Fati's handball just before the ball dropped to Pedri to tuck home.

And Barca were denied a stoppage time penalty after VAR officials ruled that Denzel Dumfries did not commit a handball offence despite touching the ball in a very similar way to Fati.

"If you ask me I'm outraged... the word is outrage because it makes no sense, it's an injustice," Xavi said. "I think it's an injustice, I just can't hide it."

Xavi insisted that referees should explain their decisions to journalists after matches as managers have to do after defeats.

"I think the referee should explain himself. He should come here and explain but he has just gone home," he continued.

"I think that they should speak. It would be important that they spoke to explain their decisions like we do. I think it's fundamental."

Simone Inzaghi said that he did not see the incidents which had so enraged Xavi, apart from the Fati handball.

AFP

Ukraine to join Spain and Portugal in 2030 World Cup bid

Nyon, Switzerland - War-torn Ukraine will join Spain and Portugal in a bid to host the 2030 World Cup, presidents from the three countries' football associations announced on Wednesday.

The original proposal was made public two years ago but

has been given a political impetus by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"The institutional headquarters are in Madrid, the administrative headquarters are in Lisbon. Now the Ukrainian delegation will unite with us," the Spanish football association's

(RFEF) president Luis Rubiales said. "In the coming months, we will come to work on practicalities," he added.

RFEF, which organised the 1982 edition, said in a statement the idea was backed by UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin.

"The Royal Spanish Football

Federation and the Portuguese Football Federation (FPF) have incorporated the Ukrainian Football Association (UAF) into the Iberian Bid to organise the 2030 World Cup," RFEF said.

"With the full support of Aleksander Ceferin, the Iberian bid incorporates the federation

chaired by Andriy Pavelko in order to build bridges and project a message of unity, solidarity and generosity from all of European football," it added.

Portugal held the 2004 European Championship while Ukraine was a joint host with Poland of Euro 2012.

"The example of tenacity and resilience set by the Ukrainian people is inspiring," the FPF said.

The FPF added that the joint bid "aims to contribute through the power of football to the recovery of a country undergoing reconstruction".

It added the terms of

Ukraine's role in the bid "will be discussed and defined in due course".

It follows the announcement last month from an Egyptian official that Egypt, Greece and Saudi Arabia are in talks to jointly host the 2030 World Cup.

AFP

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'India bowlers must start delivering in final overs'

New Delhi, India - India's T20 bowlers need to lift their game in the final overs, head coach Rahul Dravid has said, after pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah's injury ruled him out of this month's World Cup.

Rohit Sharma's men have haemorrhaged runs at the tail-end of their recent T20 series against both South Africa and Australia, conceding 73 in the last five overs of Tuesday's loss to the Proteas at Indore.

"We have to look at how we can get better," Dravid told reporters after the match.

"Certainly that's an area that we would like to improve and get better at because margins can be really small in these big tournaments, and every boundary can matter."

A back injury to Bumrah, who is known as "yorker king" for his ability to bowl the toe-crushing deliveries, has been a big blow to India ahead of the showpiece T20 tournament in Australia, which starts October 16.

Dravid said the team will miss the speedster but are in no hurry to name his replacement.

"Bumrah's absence is a big loss, he's been a great player but

it happens, it's an opportunity for someone else to stand up," Dravid said.

He added that Mohammed Shami would be an "ideal" replacement but it was too soon to tell whether the pacer had recovered from his recent bout with Covid.

"We have to get reports as to

Bumrah's absence is a big loss, but it happens, it's an opportunity for someone else to stand up

RAHUL DRAVID

how he is recovering and what's his status... and we will take a call," he said.

Top-ranked India's World Cup squad will depart for Perth on Thursday to get used to local conditions.

They begin their World Cup campaign in Melbourne against arch-rivals Pakistan on October 23.

AFP



Rahul Dravid



Australia's Aaron Finch plays a shot off Odean Smith of West Indies during their first Twenty20 match in Gold Coast on Wednesday (AFP)

Finch finds form as Australia beat West Indies in 1st T20

Gold Coast, Australia - Aaron Finch dropped to four in the batting order and found some confidence-boosting form Wednesday, hitting 58 to steer Australia to a three-wicket win over the West Indies in the opening Twenty20 international. The hosts were in trouble when they slumped to 58-5 in the eighth over, but skipper Finch, who usually opens, and Matthew Wade (39 not out) steadied the ship, putting on 69 runs.

Finch fell in the 18th over and the game went to the wire, with Mitchell Starc hitting the winning runs with a ball to spare.

Australia won the toss and sent the West Indies in at Metricon Stadium, with Josh Hazlewood grabbing 3-35 as the visitors made 145-9.

Kyle Mayers top scored with 39, while Odean Smith chipped in 27 crucial late runs after they

started strongly but faltered mid-match in the face of quality bowling.

"We were a bit sloppy in the field and with the bat. Lucky to get across the line. We just kept losing wickets. But Wade the cool head in the end," said skipper Finch.

"We had to suck up a bit of pressure towards that back end and it would have been nice for me to get the side home, but not to worry we got over the line."

Australia got off to rousing start with David Warner, returning after missing their recent India tour, crunching 14 off five balls.

But he didn't last, thick edging off Sheldon Cottrell to Brandon King in the slips and it got worse when Mitchell Marsh, also back after missing the India series, was out in the same over.

AFP



Ons Jabeur returns the ball to Ann Li during their first-round match at Jasmin Open in Monastir on Tuesday (AFP)

Tunisian star Jabeur enters second round at Monastir

Monastir, Tunisia - Tunisian tennis star Ons Jabeur eased into the second round of her home tournament at Monastir on Tuesday with a straight sets win over American Ann Li.

Top seed Jabeur, a finalist at both Wimbledon and the US Open this year, won 6-2, 6-3 in the first ever WTA tour event to be hosted in Tunisia.

The world number two took 73 minutes to dispatch her 67th ranked opponent in their first meeting.

The Monastir tournament, staged on the central coast of Tunisia, is just the second women's professional circuit organised in Africa, after that of

Rabat in Morocco.

Jabeur is hugely popular in north Africa, and the world number two is hoping "to reach the final and win in Monastir to make Tunisians happy".

The 28-year-old, whose ambition is "to be a good example for all the young people who follow her" has won three WTA titles including two this year in Madrid and Berlin.

"Young people must gain self-confidence to achieve their ambitions," said Jabeur.

Fritz ousts Duckworth

American Taylor Fritz said he surprised even himself after climbing out of his sickbed, flying

to Tokyo and beating Australian James Duckworth at the Japan Open on Wednesday.

Fritz spent seven days in quarantine in a Seoul hotel room after getting "pretty sick" upon arriving last week for the Korea Open, which he was forced to withdraw from.

The 24-year-old left South Korea and flew to Japan on Wednesday morning and barely had time to practise before he was due on court for his first-round match against the unseeded Duckworth.

The number three seed still emerged a 6-2, 6-7 (2/7), 6-1 winner.

AFP

Former Brazil gymnastics coach handed 109 years in jail for multiple rapes

Sao Paulo, Brazil - A former coach of Brazil's national gymnastics team has been handed more than a century behind bars for raping four athletes including at least one minor, local media reported Tuesday.

Fernando de Carvalho Lopes was sentenced to 109 years and eight months in prison on Monday by a court in the city of Sao Bernardo do Campo, near Sao Paulo, according to the Globo Esporte site, which had access to proceedings that were protected by judicial secrecy.

He was found guilty of assaulting four athletes, including a minor aged 13 at the time, according to Globo Esporte, which did not specify the age of other gymnasts.

Carvalho Lopes can still appeal the decision, and has maintained his innocence. He will not have to go to prison until the end of any appeals process.

The former coach took care of young gymnasts for 20 years, before being removed from the staff of the national team in 2016, a month before the Rio Olympics, after a complaint from the parents of a young athlete.

In April 2019, he was banned for life from any gymnastics-related activity.

He faces further accusations: four years ago, about 40 athletes claimed to the Globo TV channel that they had been victims of psychological, physical or sexual



Fernando de Carvalho Lopes

The former coach took care of young gymnasts for 20 years, before being removed from the staff of the national team in 2016

abuse.

Some of them took part in legal proceedings as witnesses to the events that allegedly took place between 1999 and 2016.

The case carries echoes of the case of Larry Nassar, an American former sports doctor sentenced in early 2018 to several heavy prison sentences for assaulting at least 265 victims, most of them minors, under the guise of medical treatment.

In Britain, Greece, Australia and New Zealand, athletes have also reported abuse by coaches.

AFP

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Fourthright approach

Al Manar Racing’s Al Faisal Al Zubair, Fabian Schiller and Axcil Jeffries miss Silver Cup podium in the final race of Fanatec GT World Challenge, finishes fourth overall

Barcelona, Spain - Oman’s Al Faisal al Zubair, German team-mate Fabian Schiller and Zimbabwe’s Axcil Jeffries rounded off their first season together in the Fanatec GT World Challenge Europe Powered by AWS – Endurance Cup by finishing in fourth place in the Silver Cup category at the season finale in Barcelona.

The Al Manar Racing by HRT Mercedes-AMG GT3 crew had qualified ninth for the last three-hour race of the season. They climbed four places in the race to cross the finish line in fourth with victory going to Silver Cup category champions, Benjamin Goethe, Thomas Neubauer and Jean-Baptiste Simmenauer.

The champions overtook the Garage 59 McLaren 720S GT3 of Vargas Maldonado, Dean MacDonald and Nicolai Kjaergaard in the last hour, while the Emil Frey Racing Lamborghini crew of Mick Wishofer, Stuart White and Konsta Lappalainen finished third.

The result also confirmed that the Al Manar Racing trio finished fourth in the final Silver Cup Drivers’ Championship.

Reflecting on the race weekend, Al Zubair said: “That’s the end of the season for us and definitely not the way we wanted to end it. Testing was really good and we finished first in pre-qualifying. Qualifying really sent us lower on the grid and we started P25 (all cars) and P9 nine in Silver.

“We moved up to P4 and 14th overall. The race was really good. I drove the first stint and went from about 25th to 20th and my



The Mercedes-AMG GT3 of Al Manar Racing by HRT in action in Barcelona



Oman’s Al Faisal al Zubair (R) with German team-mate Fabian Schiller (C) and Zimbabwe’s Axcil Jeffries

team-mates did a great job to get us further up. So close to a podium, but just not quite. A good season overall and we hope to go further next year.”

Al Zubair, Jeffries and Schiller were the fastest of the entire field through the pre-qualifying session on Saturday afternoon that preceded the three qualifying stints on Sunday morning. Schiller clocked a hot lap of 1min 45.398sec to win the session.

Pro Cup cars dominated the upper reaches of the Q1 results. Goethe, Neubauer and Simmenauer were the quickest of the Silver Cup crews with a best lap

of 1min 45.457sec. The Al Manar Racing Mercedes finished the stint in 13th, albeit less than a second off the winning tour.

Silver Cup runners, Maldonado, MacDonald and Kjaergaard, topped all the Q2 times in their Garage 59 McLaren 720S GT3, in a short stint where the Al Manar Racing Mercedes stopped the clocks in sixth.

Those two heats put a little pressure on the team to improve in Q3, where Maldonado, MacDonald and Kjaergaard were classified in second and again topped the Silver Cup times to claim pole position. The Al Manar

2022 FANATEC GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE – ENDURANCE CUP
Silver Cup – final positions (Drivers):
1. Benjamin Goethe/Thomas Neubauer/Jean-Baptiste Simmenauer
125pts
2. Nicolas Schöll/Alex Aka/Marius Zug
7 6pts
3. Stuart White/Konsta Lappalainen
73pts
4. Al Faisal Al-Zubair/Axcil Jeffries/Fabian Schiller
66pts
5. Aurelien Panis/Cesar Gazeau/Nicolas Baert
43pts, etc

Verstappen says rain could ‘spice up’ Japanese Grand Prix

Tokyo, Japan - Title-chasing Max Verstappen said Wednesday that the prospect of rain at this weekend’s Japanese Grand Prix could “spice things up” as he looks to clinch his second straight Formula One championship.

The flying Dutchman can claim the title with four races to spare in Suzuka if he gains eight points on nearest rival Charles Leclerc of Ferrari and six on Red Bull teammate Sergio Perez.

The Japanese Grand Prix is returning after a three-year absence because of the coronavirus pandemic, and rain has been forecast for Sunday’s race.

Verstappen has dominated this season’s championship with 11 wins from 17 Grands Prix and he predicted an “exciting race with changing conditions” as he spoke to reporters in Tokyo.

“Let’s see what the weather will do because I see there is a bit of rain forecast, that might spice things up a little bit,” said the 25-year-old, who finished seventh at last week’s Singapore Grand Prix.

“We’re looking forward to Suzuka again because we’re on a high as a team, we’ve won a lot of races in a row now, and of course we want to keep that momentum going.”

A heavy rain storm caused a delay of more than an hour to the start of the Singapore Grand Prix, which was won by Perez.

AFP

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MOH No: 558/2022

STAINS GONE BRIGHTNESS ON

MULTI-ENZYMES FORMULA
**LONG-LASTING
Perfume**

**GUARANTEED
BRIGHTNESS**



14

COOK-UP

When food is not your focus, try out a few five-minute foods



15

IN TOWN

Felicitation of Indian minister and Onam celebration by ISC-MW



16

ENTERTAINMENT

A peek into tinsel town in Hollywood and Bollywood



CANINE PARADE

Bow, wow... Wow!

Anirban Ray

Delilah has been Sandeep Sehgal's sweetheart for over 12 years. She is more than a daughter, the favourite of every family member.

Delilah doesn't earn a living, neither does she have a bank account, but her presence is the most prized possession for the Sehgal's. They simply cannot do without her warm hugs every morning and evening, and her spirited greeting when each one comes home everyday cannot be traded for anything else.

The 12-year-old white and grey Shih-Tzu, strapped on with a black and red leash, with



joyful eyes, was one of the participants at the 2022 National Day Dog Show. Her master said, "She is like a daughter to me and our bond has been a very fond one. She has a strange healing power and her very presence makes me forget all my tensions and cares."

Over 55 pet dogs attended the 2022 National Day Dog Show at Al Amal Club on Friday evening. Organised by the newly set up Al Nawader K9 Club Oman, it was the first official canine club in Oman. Three breeds - German Shepherd showline long hair, Pomeranian, and Shih-Tzu - presented a parade at the ring show where three toppers were announced as winners. Other breeds, like alsatians and bulldogs, also showed up for the three-hour event.

Speaking about the event, Amal Tarik al Khaburi, chairperson of the club, said, "The 2022 National Dog Show has been designed as an opportunity to meet other canine friendly people whilst making a difference to the canine society in Oman. Also, to promote responsible dog ownership and encourage other members to put in place programmes to that effect. We would like to have a foundation where we act as spokespersons on dog related activities and to pledge assistance and support to the other bodies. Our service is voluntary, we want to work with the people, and we want them to join us on a path to change. We also believe that being part of a dog club allows you to participate in your local community as an ambassador for dogs, in general."

The evening looked similar to a romantic date night for dogs as the canines were thrilled to socialise and meet new friends. Most of the dogs rarely get a chance to meet their canine friends and the evening gave them a good chance to run,



Hashim with Apache



Sudipta with Hazele

TOPPERS

SHIH-TZU (MALE)

- 1. Milo (Owner - Sabra Jawad)
- 2. Charlie (Owner - Hima Madasu)

SHIH-TZU (FEMALE)

- 1. Coco (Owner - Talia)
- 2. Hazele (Owner - Sudipta Dasgupta)
- 3. Lexi (Owner - Tatsiana Kaldayevea)

LOCATION - AL AMAL CLUB

September 30, 6-9pm

the ground, had a thrill of a time.

Sudipta Dasdupta, whose pet dog Hazele won the second place, said, "Hazele is a pure Shih-Tzu breed. She is one and a half years old. We entered this show on a last minute hustle. I had no plans to enter Hazel but decided just two hours prior to get her in, just to have some fun and for her to make some new friends."

"We did zero preparation except a quick blow dry and grooming session an hour before the show. She is trained but I didn't train her particularly for the show as I wasn't aware of what was going to be asked. All I did was carry lots of treats and just made sure she followed my commands with the treats."

There are twenty animal clubs (including those for birds, pigeons, fish, rabbits) under Al Nawader Club and the newly formed K9 for dogs. The club also has ambitious plans in the future to host beauty pageants, workshops and conferences about pet dogs in Oman.

Amal added, "Omanis have always loved pets and dogs are one of their favourites. A large number of today's participants are Omanis and this itself is testimony to 'the love for dogs' among Omanis."

She further said, "The entire event is indeed a team work. I commend the efforts put in by Azzan Ahmed al Zadjali, Azzan Mahmood al Zadjali, Muayed al Zadjali, Aiman Sabil al Balushi, and Issa Sabeel al Balushi."

greet one another and enjoy the great outdoors in style.

Both, male and female dogs, were well groomed with colourful bands - some even wore pretty dresses. Some seemed shy, seeing the glare of lights and clung hard to their masters. But as the evening rolled by, they soon got used to the lights and enjoyed some spirited barking, just to make their presence felt.

Hashim with his gorgeous Apache (one year old German shepherd), Charles with Tales (4 month old chihuahua) and Maryam with Poco (3 year old Pekingese) were among many who, with their pets at



Omanis have always loved pets and dogs are one of their favourites

A large number of today's participants were Omanis

AMAL TARIK AL KHABURI



cook-up

VEGAN WONDERS

CHEAT 'MEAT TREAT'

You don't have to be a pure vegetarian or a 'vegan' to enjoy a good vegetarian dish. But, using the popular techniques and ingredients that are used to flavour protein (meat, poultry, fish), one can, indeed, transform vegetables to taste just like meat

Yam Cutlets

Ingredients

- 300g yam (Suran /Elephant's foot)
- 1 potato – boiled
- 1 onion – minced
- 1tbsp minced ginger and garlic
- 2 green chillies – minced
- ½ cup minced coriander
- 1tsp red chilli powder
- 1tsp aamchur (dried mango powder)
- 1tbsp rice flower
- 1cup breadcrumbs
- 2tbsp oil
- Salt, to taste
- Oil for shallow frying

Method

Clean and chop up the yam into 2cm pieces. Heat 2tsp of oil in a pan and saute the yam, then cover lid and cook on slow fire for about ten minutes till the pieces are tender. Remove in a large bowl and cool. Mash the yam pieces with your hands or a spoon. Mash the boiled potato and add along with the onion, chillies, chopped coriander, minced ginger-garlic, chilli powder, aamchur, salt, and 1tbsp oil. Mix all together and form a dough. You may add 2-3 tbsp of breadcrumbs if needed to absorb excess moisture and to form the dough well. Refrigerate the dough for 1 hour – it helps in forming cutlets well.

Now wet your hands with a handy bowl of water and form lemon size balls. Flatten the balls slightly to form neat cutlets. Dip and run wet fingers around the cutlets to smoothen them. Gently place each wet cutlet in a plate of breadcrumbs mixed with rice flour and coat well all over. Place all breaded cutlets in a plate or box and store in the freezer for one hour. Heat oil in a pan for shallow frying and fry the cutlets (without thawing) till golden brown on both sides. Serve with mint chutney or ketchup.



Barbecue Soya Steaks

Ingredients

- 3-4 soya steaks
- 2tbsp oil
- 2tbsp water
- 1tbsp tomato paste
- 1 onion
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1tsp Italian herbs
- ½tsp smoked paprika powder
- Salt, pepper - to taste

Method

Cook the soya steaks in water for 10 minutes. Then drain, wash in cold water and press out any excess water - halve the steaks (if they are big), and place them between two folded kitchen towels and press.

Cut the onion in strips and roughly chop the garlic. Pour all ingredients in a freezer bag and shake to combine. Then add the soya steaks and massage in the marinade. Keep refrigerated for 1-2 hours and then place on a hot grill. Cook evenly on both sides, till corners are charred. Serve piping hot with any favourite sauce or ketchup.

For a stylish serving, place ketchup in a martini glass, and tag the breaded 'shrimp' along the rim



Tofu Tikka Kebabs

Ingredients

- 420g firm tofu, 5tbsp soya sauce
- 200g plain soya yoghurt, 3-4 tbsp vegan tikka paste
- 1tbsp gram flour, 2-3 green capsicum - cut into chunks
- A pinch of salt and pepper, 1-2tsp lemon juice
- Raita – to serve

Method

Drain the liquid from the tofu, pat dry, and then slice into 2-3cm cubes.

Lightly fry the tofu in the soya sauce until the liquid has been absorbed but the tofu stays soft rather than crispy. Remove the tofu from the heat and leave it to cool.

In a large bowl, thoroughly mix together the yoghurt, tikka paste, gram flour, salt, pepper and lemon juice. Stir the tofu into the yoghurt mix, making sure it is thoroughly coated, and then place in the fridge for one hour.

Heat up a grill or oven and thread the tofu pieces alternatively with the chopped capsicum. Place on grill and cook till slightly charred. Serve with raita or any favourite dip.



Vegan Shrimp Cocktail

Ingredients

- 450g hearts of palm drained, 3tbsp all purpose flour - divided
- ¼ cup non-dairy milk, ½ cup breadcrumbs
- 1tsp seasoning, oil for shallow frying

Method

Put the drained hearts of palm on a clean kitchen towel and pat dry. Cut them into 3cm long pieces. Each heart of palm will give 3-4 shrimp pieces.

Now. Place 2tbsp flour in a plate and the remaining in a small bowl mixed with non-dairy milk to form a smooth paste. Place breadcrumbs mixed with seasoning in a plate next to it.

Heat oil for deep frying in a pan. While it gets hot, roll a piece of heart of palm in the flour until it's covered, tap to remove excess flour, then dip in the milk mixture and tap to remove excess liquid. Finally, roll in the breadcrumbs and set aside on another plate. Drop them, one by one, in the hot oil, in batches. Fry evenly till golden brown and remove on paper towels to drain excess oil. Sprinkle more seasoning on the hot breaded hearts of palm, if required. Serve with cocktail sauce for dipping.

take a break

IN TOWN

ONAM CELEBRATIONS



Onam celebrations hosted by Inidan Social Club - Malabar Wing last weekend

Felicitations for Indian minister



Luncheon hosted in honour of V Muraleedharan, Indian minister of state for External Affairs, by P Mohamed Ali



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Actress Brooke Shields was married to whom for 2 years from April 1997?
A. Roger Federer
B. Lance Armstrong
C. Andre Agassi
D. Greg Norman

02. Alfonso de Albuquerque took areas of which modern day country for Portugal in the early 1500s?
A. Vietnam
B. USA
C. Mexico
D. India

03. The humerus bone connects what joints?
A. Knee and hip
B. Ankle and knee
C. Elbow and wrist
D. Elbow and shoulder

Answers: 1. C 2. D 3. D

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY:

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

BOGGLER

C	R	E	G
A	I	L	O
C	U	E	A
H	A	T	R

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

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

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

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

It's time to try a new attitude or maybe an old one that fits you really well. Start looking forward enthusiastically with your awesome pioneering spirit. Your positive energy may start a ripple effect that spreads out all around you. One way to get things going is to stop thinking and take direct action.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

An unexpected meeting might shake you up a bit. This encounter just seems so coincidental. Is it really? It could be that the Universe is goading you into taking a new look at a belief or an idea represented by this big event. In any case, if you take it in stride and look at it with an expansive attitude, it's sure to go smoothly in the end.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Look out for some cool, brainy action relating to your relationships today. Someone special is finally more or less on the same page, and it could be a sweet development. Now that you're both seeing things the same way, it could be that a partnership or a new depth is close at hand. Get ready for things to suddenly get a little more intense.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You're always there to step in when others bail out without warning. Staying late at work or picking something up for a friend could cramp your own style, but your caring nature means you're always willing. What you get in return might involve delayed gratification, so it's important to treat yourself right for now.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Things are getting exciting! Your travel plans are shaping up today (you are making some, right?), or maybe you're getting invited to all the right parties, or maybe new romantic prospects appear that are worth further exploration. Your boundless energy means you must do it all, and do it in the sweetest style.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You kind of have to plan a bit in order to be spontaneous, and that's precisely what you ought to be doing right now. Build plenty of wiggle room options into your schedule and make way for random awesomeness. If you're really ready to go with the flow, it may take you to some amazing places. If you take the right risk at the right moment, you're sure to be rewarded.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Get ready to branch out, try new activities, and discover some wonderful things in odd places. Your brains, ideals, and feelings are all expanding outward, filling up your life with all kinds of positive energy and new possibilities. The more you express yourself using words, behaviour, and body language, the more you can spread your energy.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Trust your intuition and you can start to see the good luck flow your way. Others may be in a more logical mood, but your instincts are enmeshed with your personal fortune for the time being. Suddenly everything and everyone is calling for your attention, and you should certainly tune in and see what's going on. What you're looking for is right in front of you.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Your personal inspiration can really motivate others to a remarkable degree for the time being. It's lovely for more timid people to see how you're dealing with life, using that optimistic spirit, big heart, and courageous attitude. The way you welcome the unexpected lets them see that a flexible approach is quite rewarding.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Moving at great speed isn't your typical mode, but for now you're getting somewhat ahead of yourself. You're full of hot ideas and big schemes, and this is definitely good, but you need to work on them some more before taking action. It's not that they're impossible, not at all, but you need to keep pushing against adversity.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You're the link connecting some group of people, the one who began it all and still keeps it stuck together like glue. For now, there's a great chance for your network to both strengthen and expand. Organize a gathering to celebrate the past, present, and future of the gang. You're just the one to do it. In the meantime, you have amazing opportunities to bring new people into the fold.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

A big challenge on the job is really just a big opportunity for you to prove your worth and strengthen your network. Develop a deeper awareness of all the subtleties of the situation. Your attentiveness should pay off when you figure out the little details or the intuitive element before anyone else. Give careful thought to the way in which you speak, especially when dealing with a boss or major client.

entertainment



'SMILE' TOPS N AMERICA BOX OFFICE

New psychological horror film *Smile* has Paramount executives beaming after topping the North American box office with an estimated \$22 million in weekend ticket sales, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Sunday.

The film is the disturbing tale of a therapist (Sosie Bacon, daughter of actors Kevin Bacon and Kyra Sedgwick) whose grasp on reality begins to slip after she witnesses a shocking and gruesome event involving a patient.

This is an excellent opening, the kind that launches a new horror series," said analyst David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research. Such horror films, he noted, tend to have low budgets but loyal audiences -- two things studios love.

Country legend Loretta Lynn dies at age 90



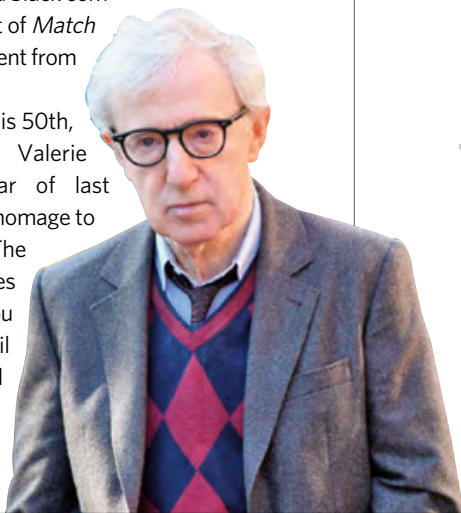
The country music world's heart is broken because Loretta Lynn is dead. The legendary singer, who turned 90 in April, passed away on October 4 after a long battle with numerous health issues, including a debilitating stroke in 2017 and a broken hip in 2018, which ended her touring career. Loretta's rep confirmed that the 90-year-old was at home in Tennessee when she died of natural causes. She was surrounded by family members when she died, as well.

Woody Allen starts shooting his first French film

Woody Allen began shooting his first French language film in Paris on Monday, as the 86-year-old Oscar winner remains largely ostracised from Hollywood over a longstanding assault allegation by his adopted daughter.

Wasp 22 is a black comedy in the spirit of *Match Point*, a statement from Allen said.

The film is his 50th, and features Valerie Lemercier, star of last year's *Aline*, a homage to Celine Dion. The film also features French stars Lou de Laage, Melvil Poupaud and Niels Schneider.



Victoria BECKHAM DEBUTS IN PARIS FASHION WEEK

Victoria Beckham made her debut at Paris Fashion Week on Friday with a five-star cast of models, her family on the front row and a collection filled with edgy sophistication.

The former *Spice Girl*, 48 - who has been away from the catwalk for two years - is hoping that joining the most prestigious date in the fashion calendar can help pull her business out of debt. She sent superstar model Bella Hadid out in an elegant green dress with long latex gloves, while her sister was dressed in a black trouser suit.

Beckham herself did not appear on the catwalk at the end of the show as is normal at fashion week. Instead, she mixed with the crowd afterwards in the courtyard of the venue, the Val-de-Grace abbey, on the arm of husband David Beckham - a rare move in the usually cordoned-off world of high fashion, and underlining her down-to-earth approach.

COMING SOON



THE WOMAN KING

A historical epic inspired by the true events that happened in The Kingdom of Dahomey, one of the most powerful states of Africa in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Genre: Action
Starring: Viola Davis, Lashana Lynch
Language: English



HOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW: **SMILE**

Genre: Horror
Starring: Sosie Bacon, Kyle Gallner, Robin Weigert, Jessie T Usher



SMILES TO GO, BEFORE YOU SLEEP

Go into the theatre knowing fully well that this is one of the scariest movies of recent times and that you will be sitting on edge throughout. They say, a smile can have many interpretations, from indicating a comely personality to a totally vicious person. *Smile*, written and directed by Parker Finn, however, takes it a step further by presenting something really terrifying.

Based on Finn's 2020 short *Laura Hasn't Slept*, in which the protagonist refuses to sleep because of the smiling man she sees in her dreams, *Smile* builds on the same concept and the excellent performances by the core actors make it a worthwhile watch.

Dr Rose Cotter (Sosie Bacon) is a therapist who watches one of her patients, who claims to be seeing visions and is being haunted by a smiling entity, die by suicide. The patient in question had, just four days prior, witnessed her professor die by suicide as well.

After the incident, Rose starts seeing visions herself and her mental health deteriorates. She imagines that she is cursed and that neither her friend (Kal Penn), her sister Holly (Gillian Zinser), fiancé Trevor (Jessie T Usher), or therapist (Robin Weigert) believes her.

The more Rose sees the smile, the more she grows desperate, seeking out Joel (Kyle Gallner), her ex and police officer, for help in the hopes that she could find a way out.

If you love horror flicks, this is your sizzling cup of tea!

Rating ★★★★★



BOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW: **VIKRAM VEDHA**

Genre: Action, thriller Starring: Radhika Apte, Hrithik Roshan, Rohit Saraf, Saif Ali Khan



CHASE OF GOOD AND EVIL

If you enjoy watching the good-looking bad guy on the silver screen, dashing around in sweaty attire, with guns and a gait that make the giddy-headed drool, Hrithik Roshan provides enough of it in *Vikram Vedha*. That is, if you didn't get enough of the same drill in Siddharth Anand's *War* just before the pandemic hit, or even Vidhu Vinod Chopra's *Mission Kashmir* 22 years ago.

Vikram Vedha is an action-thriller showcasing the face-off between a tough cop Vikram (Saif Ali Khan) and a dreaded gangster Vedha (Hrithik Roshan).

Written and directed by Pushkar and Gayathri, this film is based on their 2017 Tamil film, and inspired by (you guessed right) the Indian folktale series, popularly read as Baital Pachisi or Vikram-Vetal when Generation X were in still in school.

The movie underlines the skirmishes between the forces of good and evil, with an underlying message that what one chooses in life ultimately defines one's personality. And be ready to draw your own parallels between the screenplay and the format of the popular folktale series - expecting the 'vetal' to slip off at the opportune time.

Replacing leads Madhavan and Vijay Sethupathi of the Tamil film, Saif Ali Khan and Hrithik Roshan, both make their presence felt with dialogues that ring and zing without really sounding verbose. Radhika Apte, as Vikram's lawyer wife Priya, who intervenes in the jugalbandi of the two leads as Vedha's counsel, wasn't up to the mark as audiences would want it to be. And, if you are conversant with Pushkar-Gayatri's forte, you would expect Saif, the cop, to face a tough task staying afloat.

The plot unfolds as the force, headed by Vikram, follow a tip-off that Vedha's gang members are hiding in a faraway abandoned structure. Vikram, his best friend Abbas (Satyadeep Mishra) and others of the STF reach the place with the intention of killing them. The hunt for Vedha continues but they soon get the shock of their lives.

The film tends to drag on in the second half, unlike the Tamil version as the directors have tweaked the Hindi version. But worth a watch.

Rating ★★★★★