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TOURISM BOOMS IN DHOFAR

315,000 passengers travelled through Salalah Airport since the beginning of June till August 13

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Tourism rebounded this khareef season in Dhofar with a 50 per cent increase in passengers travelling through Salalah Airport.

As many as 315,000 passengers travelled through Salalah Airport since the beginning of June till August 13. The number of passengers in the airport in the June to August period of 2021 was 206,657.

In a statement to ONA, Salim bin Awad al Yafei, executive vice-president of Salalah Airport, said the airport has been handling 195 flights per week (incoming and outgoing).

He noted that the governorate has become one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Gulf region during summer due to its diverse natural features, exceptional weather and varied terrain.

Several international airlines have started khareef season special flights to Salalah, including the low-cost airline Wizz Air, with two weekly flights from Abu Dhabi, and Gulf Air also operating two weekly flights from Bahrain.

Jazeera Airways and Kuwait Airways together operate six weekly flights from Kuwait, while Flynas flies four weekly flights



Dhofar governorate has become one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Gulf region during summer

SALIM AL YAFEI

from Riyadh.

Among airlines that operate around the year but increase frequency during khareef, Yafei informed, are Qatar Airways which has increased its flights to seven per week, Air Arabia to 14 per week from Sharjah and Abu Dhabi, and Fly Dubai operating six weekly flights from Dubai.



National carrier Oman Air and low-cost SalamAir too have increased flights to cater to the demand. "Oman Air is operating 12 domestic flights per day, while SalamAir has nine," Yafei said.

Salalah Airport recorded a 68.9 per cent increase in the number of flights (international and domestic) to 2,743 till the

end of May 2022, compared to the same period in 2021, according to statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Historically, Salalah was known as the 'Land of Frankincense' and is home to two UNESCO World Heritage sites - the ruins of Al Baleed Port and Khor

Ruri, which still bear the signs of trade during ancient times.

Modern day Dhofar is more famous for its white sandy beaches and a selection of four- and five-star beachfront hotels located in integrated tourism complexes (ITC), a growing trend in Oman's tourism industry.

Hawana Salalah, the largest

ITC in the country, is in Dhofar. With tourism picking up pace, in the first six months of 2022 Hawana Salalah welcomed 30,532 visitors.

Mohamed Abdelaziz, acting CEO of real estate and tourism developer Muriya, said, "As part of our pledge to Oman, we have dedicated our strategy to de-

velop Hawana Salalah which aims to unlock the potential of Dhofar and provide the catalyst for further investment in the governorate. Hawana Salalah is Muriya's flagship destination and has introduced a platform for job creation, local and international investment, as well as tourism promotion."



Electricity from renewables touches 650MW mark



Bullet Train - An outrageous, wild ride

Tanwea'a to speed up economic diversification

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In order to accelerate achievement of targeted goals set in the economic diversification plan, the Ministry of Economy, in collaboration with the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-Up Unit, has launched Tanwea'a - a national programme for economic diversification.

Tanwea'a will act as one of the enablers of the 10th Five-year Plan (2021-2025) and speed up accomplishment of its goals.

H E Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, informed that the programme



H E Dr Said al Saqri

includes several proposed policies and procedures to accelerate Oman's economic diversification, including expanding the production and export base and enabling

economic sectors to contribute to non-oil revenues.

The programme, according to the minister, has two parts - planning and implementation. "Planning involves defining initiatives and studies, looking at integration with other national programmes, conducting financial and economic analyses, and creating a risk management system."

The implementation component involves connecting with establishments dealing with specific diversification sectors - mining, transport, logistics, foodstuff and tourism.

H E Saqri anticipated that the programme would produce broad-based economic diversi-

fication policies, focused incentive schemes, and in-depth national indicators.

"The programme's tools will allow change in how economic diversification activities are pursued, with the scope of these being linked to stimulus plans as well as sectoral and regulatory reform strategies," he said.

Mohammed bin Hamad al Hashmi, executive director of the National Programme for Economic Diversification, said that one of Tanwea'a's priorities is to achieve the targeted performance percentages in the sectors of mining, tourism, manufacturing industries, transport, logistics and food security.

Israel, Turkey to restore full diplomatic ties



Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu (R) and Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid (L) shake hands during a press meet on June 23, 2022, in Ankara

Jerusalem - Israel and Turkey announced the resumption of full diplomatic ties on Wednesday, following years of strained relations between the Mediterranean nations.

Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid hailed the diplomatic breakthrough as an "important asset for regional stability and very important economic news for the citizens of Israel".

Lapid's office said the diplomatic development will see ambassadors and consul generals posted to the two countries once more.

The announcement follows months of bilateral efforts to mend ties, with reciprocal visits by top officials. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said the return of ambassadors "is important to improve bilateral ties", while still vowing to "defend" Palestinian rights.

Cavusoglu, in May, became the first Turkish foreign minister to visit Israel in 15 years, during a trip which also saw him meet the Palestinian leadership in the occupied West Bank.

During a landmark visit by Is-

raeli President Isaac Herzog to Ankara two months earlier, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan proclaimed their meeting marked "a turning point in our relations".

Bilateral relations began to fray in 2008, following an Israeli military operation in Gaza.

Relations froze in 2010 after the deaths of ten civilians following an Israeli raid on the Turkish Mavi Marmara ship, part of a flotilla trying to breach a blockade by carrying aid into Gaza.

A brief reconciliation lasted from 2016 until 2018, when Turkey withdrew its ambassador and expelled Israel's over the killing of Palestinians. More than 200 Gazans were shot dead by Israeli forces during border protests from 2018 to 2019.

The current reconciliation publicly got underway after Herzog took office in July 2021.

On Wednesday, Herzog said the full renewal of ties "will encourage greater economic relations, mutual tourism, and friendship between the Israeli and Turkish peoples".

AFP

RISHI SUNAK AND LIZ TRUSS SPAR IN BELFAST



Artist Ciaran Gallagher puts the finishing touches to a mural in Belfast, Northern Ireland, depicting contenders vying for the next UK prime minister's role and leader of the Conservative Party - Britain's former chancellor to the exchequer Rishi Sunak (L) and British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss (R) dressed up as boxers, ahead of elections on September 5, 2022 (AFP)

Govt's desire to cut debt lauded

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Following the upgrade of Oman's credit rating by several international agencies to 'stable' outlook, experts are attributing it to the country's commitment to fiscal performance control procedures, initiatives in line with the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan (2020-2024), and higher oil prices that improved economic and financial indicators.

Fitch raised Oman's credit rating to 'BB' on Tuesday. Earlier, Standard & Poors amended its credit rating to 'BB-', with a stable outlook' and Moody's from 'negative' to 'stable'.



The reasons behind Fitch raising Oman's credit rating include the government's sincere desire to cut general debt

HON DR SAID AL MAHRAMI

Hon Dr Said Mubarak al Mahrami, Member of State Council and professor of finance in Sultan Qaboos University's College of Economy and Political Sciences, said, "The reasons behind Fitch raising Oman's credit rating include the government's sincere

desire to cut general debt."

He attributed the improvement in the rating also to the sultanate's "serious abidance" to the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan and high revenues from oil and gas prices.

"I hope Oman's next credit rating will be an investment-based one," he added.

The direct factors that prompted Fitch's action were the performance of fiscal control measures undertaken within the context of the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan, ability to ease external borrowing pressure, sustained efforts to reform general finance, and a sharp fall in general debt owing to high oil prices.

Dr Mohammed Humaid al Wardi, an academic and economist, echoed a similar view, noting that Oman's credit rating upgrade is a result of the government's commitment to the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan aimed at achieving financial sustainability.

"The upgrade reasons include Omani economy's ability to rebound, realise good performance in accelerating the execution of development projects, enhancing factors that furnish an attractive investment environment and reassure investors, the country's ability to stay firm on general debt rectification course and shrink external borrowing," Wardi said.

26,170 students admitted in higher education institutes for 2022-23

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Unified Admission Centre of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation announced the results of the first screening for the academic year 2022-23 on Wednesday.

Dr Hamad bin Khalfan al Numani, director general of the Unified Admission Centre, informed that out of a total of 27,442 academic opportunities offered, 95.4 per cent or 26,170 students were admitted to higher education institutions, including those on internal and external scholarships.

Government higher education institutions absorbed 59.3 per cent of the total admissions.



The percentage of students accepted on internal scholarships and grants was 38.4 per cent of the total accepted applications, while those accepted for foreign scholarships and grants was 2.3 per cent.

The ministry attributed the high percentage of those accepted - 95.4 per cent - to the high rate of successful applicants

in the unified admission system. Only 4.6 per cent of the seats offered were left vacant due to an insufficient number of students who met the admission requirements.

"Completion of registration procedures for accepted students will start at 2:30pm on Thursday, August 18, and continue till Wednesday, August 24. This is an important step that accepted students must undergo during the specified period to ensure admission. The Unified Admission Centre has published results on its website," Numani said.

The centre will conduct a re-selection procedure on September 4 for students who wish to compete for vacant seats.

Al Wusta steps up efforts for environment protection

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environment Department in Al Wusta has been carrying out a number of programmes to protect the environment and wildlife and increase green cover in the governorate.

Among the most prominent of these programmes is planting around 39,000 ghaf, sidr and samar saplings and 5,000 seeds of these indigenous species in different locations in the governorate in cooperation with the private and government sectors and the local community.

A nursery has been established to grow wild plants in the wilayat of Duqm, which will provide 60,000 seedlings annually. In addition, the Environment Authority has been granted a plot of land in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm where a nursery for wild plants will be set up.

A concept for a project to combat desertification is in the final phase where a large area will be fenced off in the wilayat of Haima to protect wild plant species. It will also have a designated site for school students where they will be introduced to the plant species as well as the natural environment of Al Wusta.



Environment Authority has been granted a plot of land in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm where a nursery for wild plants will be set up

The Environment Department in Al Wusta responded to 45 reports of environmental violations this year.

Additionally, it conducted 287 site visits to ascertain the implementation of environmental laws and regulations.

Month-long campaign in Oct to bridge generational gap

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To bridge the gap between senior citizens and the youth, a month-long workshop and campaign will run in the six GCC countries starting in October.

The campaign will be organised by the Gulf Health Council (GHC), this was announced at a press meet held at W Hotel on Wednesday.

GHC also reviewed its plans and programmes with medical and media organisations of Oman. The press meet aimed at highlighting the efforts of GHC at the regional and international levels as well as to introduce its initiatives and projects like the one in October.

Speaking at the event, Saeed bin Juma al Busaidi, director of GHC's Corporate Communications Department, said, "The aim of the council is to enhance cooperation and integration among the member states in the field of health in order to achieve the objectives of good health among all."

The council works on several pillars: Prevention through the Gulf Centre for Disease Preven-



The aim of the Gulf Health Council is to enhance cooperation and integration among the GCC member states in the field of health

SAEED BIN JUMA AL BUSAIDI

tion and Control; Awareness by launching awareness campaigns and programmes and making awareness guides; and Development through training and capacity-building programmes, research and studies, and hold-

ing scientific conferences.

Busaidi added that the council aims to cooperate and coordinate among member states, spread health awareness among citizens, define concepts of health and scientific issues and prioritise these.

It also works to benefit from global experiences, and enhance cooperation with Arab, regional and international organisations.

GHC has three main programmes - Gulf Unified Procurement, Central Registration and Examination of Expatriates. Gulf Unified Procurement, which was established in 1976 and has 600 affiliated manufacturing companies, aims to reduce costs.

Central Registration was established in 1999 with the aim of registering medicines and medical devices and following up on post-marketing pricing of medicines and veterinary registration.

Examination of Expatriates is aimed at limiting the entry of restricted cases to the GCC states and ensuring the health, fitness and suitability of workers to work in these countries. This programme was established in 1995 and covers 23 countries.



Arab Sports Media Forum held in Dhofar

Salalah - The Arab Sports Media Forum was held on Wednesday at Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah, with the participation of 100 media and sports persons.

The event was organised by Omani Journalists Association, represented by its sports media committee. The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of H H Sayyid Marwan Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

The forum included a seminar on FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 as well as a session on Arab sports media.

Additionally, an exhibition on FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 was held on the sideline of the forum.
ONA



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Electricity from renewables touches 650MW mark

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Production of electricity from renewable energy sources in Oman this year has reached 650MW, a remarkable milestone since a modest beginning in 2019 with the 50MW Dhofar Wind Power Plant.

The sultanate has set at an ambitious target of producing 3,350MW by 2027, as well as having renewables contribute 20 per cent of the overall energy consumption requirements by 2030.

The government aims to enhance energy security for a sustainable future and achieve a balance between the requirements of sustainable development and the optimal use of natural resources for the growth of the national economy, while reducing the effects of climate change.

It seems difficult to comprehend that a 13mn sqm area, currently occupied by Ibri Solar Power Plant in which nearly 2,000 robots operate to clean 1.5mn two-sided solar panels in Ibri Solar Power Plant spread over a 13mn sqm area

The Ibri plant was opened beginning of this year with a production capacity of 500MW, enough to cover 50,000 homes and contribute to reducing 340,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions annually.

The country is working, according to an ambitious plan, to promote renewable energy generation through diverse projects in a strategic direction based on creating effective, balanced and resilient ecosystems to protect the environment and sustain its



(Supplied photo)

Nearly 2,000 robots operate to clean 1.5mn two-sided solar panels in Ibri Solar Power Plant spread over a 13mn sqm area

eration through diverse projects in a strategic direction based on creating effective, balanced and resilient ecosystems to protect the environment and sustain its

natural resources in support of the national economy.

'This transformation is being achieved by raising the percentage of renewable energy production and reducing dependence on natural gas in the production of electricity and its exploitation in other areas such as industry. This is in addition to enhancing the environmental performance index - to be among the top 40 countries around the world,' a report by ONA stated.

After Dhofar Wind Power Plant, which contributes to reducing 116,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions annually, the

Amin Solar Power Plant was launched in 2020.

It has a production capacity of 100MW, enough to power 15,000 homes and contribute to reducing 225,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions annually.

Among the most important projects planned in the renewable energy sector are the Manah 1 and 2 solar power plant projects, with an estimated production capacity of 1,000MW for the two plants. It will contribute to reducing 680,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions annually and is expected to start commercial operation by

the end of 2024.

Other projects include a Concentrated Solar Power project, with a thermal storage to keep operating after sundown in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, a wind farm with a production capacity of 100MW in the wilayat of Jalan Bani Bu Ali in South Sharqiyah, and establishment of at least two wind energy projects with capacities ranging from 160MW to 200MW in the wilayat of Duqm.

In Dhofar, there are plans to establish a wind energy farm - Dhofar 2 - with production capacity of 100MW.



(ONA)

The hospital is being constructed at a cost of RO15.35mn

Construction of RO15mn Mazyona Hospital gains pace

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Construction work of the 50-bed Mazyona Hospital in Dhofar, being built on an area of 90,000sqm since March 2022, is gaining pace.

With a built up area of 15,276sqm, the hospital is being constructed at a cost of RO15.35mn.

Jamal bin Salim al Shanfari, director general of Directorate General of Projects and Engineering Affairs in the Ministry of Health, described the hospital as one of the vital projects for the health sector in the governorate in general and the wilayat of Al Mazyona in particular.

"The hospital will provide medical services to citizens and residents of the wilayat in line with the ministry's strategy towards implementing Oman Vision 2040 to provide comprehensive health coverage for all," Shanfari said.

He informed that the main building of the hospital includes clinics for general medicine, internal medicine, dentistry, pediatrics, surgery, ENT and ophthalmology, in addition to departments of immunisation, and obstetrics and gynecology.

Besides wards for men, women, children and neonatal, the hospital will have a dedicated ward for accidents and emergencies, a dialysis unit, radiology department, biomedical engineering workshop, central sterilisation unit, medical store, general store and a laboratory.

In a report on the health projects in the pipeline, the Ministry of Health said it is currently implementing projects in various governorates at a cost exceeding RO275mn. The projects include Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah, Suwaiq Hospital, Khasab Hospital, raising the capacity of Medha Health Centre in Musandam and expansion projects at The Royal Hospital.

RAFO DELIVERS AID IN MOUNTAINOUS AREAS

(Supplied photo)



Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) delivered aid to people residing in Saya town in Quriyat on Wednesday. The Ministry of Defence said, 'Royal Air Force of Oman, with the support of Royal Army of Oman, has flown a helicopter to transport consumables to the people of Saya town in Quriyat.' The aim was to facilitate the task of delivering goods to citizens residing in the mountainous areas. This comes within the framework of national efforts and the development of humanitarian services provided by the Sultan's Armed Forces and other departments of the Ministry of Defence

RO4,156 recovered in Dakhliyah in July: CPA

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A report released by the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) states that the total amount recovered by its department in Dakhliyah in the month of July 2022 was RO4,156.

The total financial revenues amounted to RO1,140, while RO3,016 was recovered for consumers through efforts to resolve complaints submitted by them.

The CPA stated that there



(Supplied photo)

were 138 complaints and 42 reports, across various sectors under the authority's jurisdiction, including automobiles and automobile services, building materials, electronics and electrical appliances, and furnishings and furniture workshops.

The RO1,140 generated in financial revenues included fees and administrative fines that were imposed on violating commercial establishments.

The total number of violations recorded in July was 19.

University of Technology and Applied Sciences

Electronic Local Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender Committee at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (Ibri Technical College) announces the offering of the practices shown in the following table:

M	practice number	Subject	Companies that are eligible to participate	Document's Price	Last date bid submission
1	24/2022 1(25269)	Maintenance of extinguishers and fire alarm systems at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (Ibri Technical College)	Companies and institutions specialized in this field and registered with the Tender Board	(25) Twenty five Riyal Omani	30/08/2022 at 10:00 am
2	25/2022 2(25274)	Maintenance of elevators at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (Ibri Technical College)	Companies and institutions specialized in this field and registered with the Tender Board	(25) Twenty five Riyal Omani	30/08/2022 at 10:00 am
3	26/2022 3(25275)	Operation and maintenance of a sewage treatment plant	Companies and institutions specialized in this field and registered with the Tender Board	(25) Twenty five Riyal Omani	30/08/2022 at 10:00 am

- Companies specialized in the above-mentioned businesses can purchase tender documents electronically from Sunday, August 21, 2022 AD, starting at 7:30 am through the website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- All bidding companies must attach with their bids electronic temporary tender bond in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified by one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, not less than (1%) of the bid value, addressed to the name of the Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee, and valid for a period of (90) days from the date of bid submission. The bid must be submitted sealed by the authorized person, and submitted with the electronic bidding system of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in the name and number of the tender only.
- Preference in awarding will be given to small and medium enterprises registered with the Authority for SME development and whose bid includes the biggest percentage of Omanisation and a biggest purchase percentage of national products.
- The University shall not be bound to accept the highest or any other bid.

MARKET WATCH

MSX30

4,648.29

Sensex

60,260.13

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

Indian

206.28

Pakistan

558.21

Bangladesh

247.02

Philippines

145.00

Sri Lanka

935.76

*Rates as on August 17
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

UAE economy to grow by 5% in 2022: UBS

Michael Bolliger, chief investment officer - emerging markets at UBS Global Wealth Management, has stated that he expects the UAE's economy to grow by over five per cent in 2022.

In an interview with the Emirates News Agency (WAM), Bollinger said that the UAE's economy grew by 3.8 per cent in 2021, due to appropriate government incentives and plans and the vaccination of all citizens and residents, noting that the growth of the non-oil sector also played a significant role in this economic recovery.

All indexes, including the Purchasing Managers Index (PMI) and Business Confidence Index (BCI), showed that the growth of the non-oil sector is still robust after a good start to the year, as the country's GDP grew by 8.2 per cent in the first quarter of 2022 while oil-related GDP grew by 13 per cent, in line with relevant OPEC+ agreements, he added.

Economic recovery to benefit Islamic insurers in GCC: S&P

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The ongoing economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, spurred by higher oil prices, government spending on infrastructure projects, and increasing activity in the non-oil sector, will support GCC Islamic insurers' growth prospects in 2022 and 2023, according to S&P Global Ratings.

However, intense competition and a surge in motor and medical claims will continue to constrain earnings, if insurers do not substantially adjust their premium rates, S&P said in a report.

S&P expects improving economic sentiment, new mandatory coverage, and overall higher insurance demand will benefit GCC's Islamic insurers over the next two years.

'In our view, higher hydrocarbon prices, with our assumption of an average Brent price of US\$100 per barrel for the rest of 2022 and US\$85 in 2023, will lead to accelerated economic growth in the oil-exporting region. This should feed through to the takaful insurance sector, where we expect gross written premiums to expand about 10 per cent in 2022 and 5-10 per cent in 2023,' the ratings agency said.

Following several years of slow growth, there was a pick-up in regional takaful premiums in 2021 thanks to Saudi



S&P expects improving economic sentiments, new mandatory coverage, and overall higher insurance demand will benefit GCC's Islamic insurers over the next two years

Arabia, which contributed about 87 per cent of gross written premiums for all GCC Islamic insurers. The about 8 per cent aggregate regional growth was mainly spurred by an increase in medical business, following some rate adjustments and extension of covers, according to S&P.

Competition intensifies

S&P anticipates that intense competition and an increase in claims frequency will continue

to weigh on Islamic insurers' earnings this year, before a modest recovery in 2023, thanks to anticipated rate adjustments in loss-making lines and higher interest rates, which should boost investment returns.

Intense competition and higher capital requirements will result in further capital raising and consolidation, according to S&P.

'This will particularly be the case in Saudi Arabia, where a large portion of insurers re-

main loss-making. We also expect further consolidation in the UAE, where takaful players compete against larger conventional players.'

'In our view, increased scale could help dilute insurers' fixed costs, while reducing top- and bottom-line volatility. We also expect further capital raising and consolidation will support capital buffers,' S&P said.

In 2020, regional takaful and conventional insurers benefited from little or no exposure to COVID-19-related claims and saw fewer motor and medical claims due to movement restrictions. However, S&P noted that motor and medical claims reached or even exceeded pre-pandemic levels in most GCC countries in 2021, as economies opened up

and mobility increased.

'Claim costs have increased, as the current inflationary environment is resulting in price increases for motor spare parts and services and amplified pressure on profit margins,' the ratings agency said.

S&P said that ongoing pressure on earnings and capital has already resulted in some capital raising and consolidation in the GCC's two largest markets - Saudi Arabia and the UAE - in recent years and this trend is expected to continue in 2022 and 2023.

'Upcoming regulatory and accounting-related changes (such as IFRS 17) will likely lead to rising operational costs, requiring insurers to upgrade their information technology systems and other internal processes. This will also reinforce the need for capital raising and mergers, in our view,' the ratings agency added.

S&P expects the GCC Islamic insurance industry's net earnings to remain modest in 2022-2023, mainly due to relatively weak profitability in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi market recorded a net loss of US\$13mn in 2021 compared with a net profit of US\$370mn in 2020. In contrast, combined net earnings in the other GCC markets (excluding Saudi Arabia) declined about 9 per cent to US\$111mn in 2021 from US\$119mn in 2020.

India's Sensex reclaims 60,000 points mark

Mumbai, India - The Indian stock market's benchmark index Sensex reclaimed the 60,000 points mark for the first time in over four months on Wednesday led by strong buying support in financial, IT and energy stocks.

The 30 stock Sensex surged 417.92 points or 0.70 per cent to close at 60,260.13 points against its previous day's close at 59,842.21 points. The Sensex started the day in the positive at 59,938.05 points and soared past the psychologically important 60,000 points level in the morning session.

The Sensex has crossed the 60,000 points mark level for the first time since April 5. The index hit a high of 60,323.25 points in the intra-day.

The broader Nifty 50 of the National Stock Exchange surged 119 points or 0.67 per cent to 17,944.25 points against its previous day's close at 17,825.25 points. The Nifty rose to a high of 17,965.95 points in the intra-day.

Bajaj duo led the rally. Bajaj Finserv soared 5.74 per cent and Bajaj Finance surged 3.28 per cent. Bharti Airtel soared 2.55 per cent.

There was strong buying support in IT stocks. Tech Mahindra surged 2.45 per cent while HCL Technologies soared 2.22 per cent. Wipro, Infosys and TCS also registered significant gains. Reliance Industries Limited rallied 0.52 per cent.

ANI



Dubai airport handles 28mn passengers in first half of this year

Dubai, UAE - A steady surge of growth throughout the second quarter has propelled Dubai International Airport's (DXB) half yearly traffic to 27.9mn passengers. DXB achieved the milestone despite a significant reduction in capacity resulting from the 45-day closure of its northern runway in May-June for a major refurbishment project.

Maintaining its growth recovery for the ninth successive quarter since the start of the pandemic, DXB recorded 14.2mn passengers in the second quarter of 2022, a year-on-year jump of 190.6 per cent. The hub welcomed a total of 27,884,888 passengers in the first half of the year, up 161.9 per cent compared to the first half of 2021.

The traffic volume represents 67.5 per cent of DXB's pre-pandemic passenger traffic during the same period in 2019.

India remained DXB's top destination country by passenger numbers with traffic for the first half reaching 4mn passen-

gers - driven primarily by top city destinations such as Mumbai, Delhi, and Hyderabad.

Saudi Arabia was second on the list with 2mn passengers, followed closely by the United Kingdom with 1.9mn passengers. Other country destinations of note include Pakistan (1.7mn passengers), and the US (1.4mn passengers). The top three cities were London with 1.3mn passengers, Riyadh (910,000 passengers), and Mumbai (726,000 passengers). DXB handled 390,520 tonnes of cargo in the second quarter, bringing the total freight volume for the first six months of 2022 to 910,075 tonnes.

During the first six months of 2022, DXB handled a total of 154,993 flight movements, up 55.9 per cent compared to the first half of 2021. The figure represents 87 per cent of the pre-pandemic flight movements at DXB during the first half of 2019.

"DXB's recovery from the impact of the global pandemic has

been spectacular, and that position has been strengthened during 2022, particularly during the second quarter. Not only has Dubai Airports been successful in managing the recovery, but customer service quality has been maintained throughout," said Paul Griffiths, CEO of Dubai Airports.

"We knew at the start of the pandemic that the dramatic downturn would be followed by an equally dramatic upturn, so we were well prepared for it and using all of the business data at our disposal were able to predict the start of the recovery. We worked with our service partners across the airport community to be ready and prepared to deliver the consistently smooth and easy experience that our passengers have come to expect at DXB," Griffiths said.

The baggage handling system at DXB processed a total of 27.1mn bags in the first half of 2022.

WAM

Curtis delivers victory for Oman in defense against US trade measures

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The US Department of Commerce on Tuesday issued its final determination in its countervailing duty (CVD) investigation of steel nails from Oman.

The leading international law firm Curtis, which represents corporate and government clients globally, said its team led by partner Matt McCullough helped secure a favorable final result for the government of Oman, including a first-ever finding by the US Commerce Department in an Oman CVD case that the provision of electricity conferred no subsidy benefit on the company respondent.

Relying on a team drawn from Washington, DC, Paris, Geneva, and on the ground in its Muscat office, Curtis delivered a victory for the government of Oman, with the final CVD margin for the



lone Omani company respondent, Oman Fasteners, set at just 2.49 per cent, the law firm said in a press statement.

The low CVD margin will help Oman's steel nails exporters to retain their competitive edge in the US market.

Tuesday's result follows two earlier Curtis wins for the Omani government. A year ago, the same Curtis team secured a huge victory for the government in a case involving aluminum foil, where the government of Oman successfully beat back allega-

tions of government-directed lending to the respondent in that case.

In 2016, another Curtis team also led by partner McCullough delivered a de minimis CVD outcome, resulting in no CVD order on exports of PET resin from Oman.

"We are proud of what we have achieved for the government of Oman," McCullough said.

"These are complex cases and the US Department of Commerce investigation process re-

quires careful attention under incredibly tight deadlines. I firmly believe that no other firm can deliver both the expertise and the commitment that Curtis brings to the table in Oman and elsewhere," he added.

Curtis' Muscat managing partner Simon Ward said, "This result reflects Curtis' position as market-leading counsel to sovereign clients in complex disputes. Our platform delivers high level substantive experience, a deep understanding of the GCC region, and a committed team of experienced lawyers that can be called upon across our numerous global offices."

McCullough's team included Geneva and Paris associates Arthad Kurelekar and Amrane Medjani, as well as Muscat associate Budoor al Zadjali. Muscat partners Simon Ward and Mehdi al Lawati were also instrumental in the defense, Curtis said.

Egypt central bank chief quits amid crisis

Cairo, Egypt - The governor of Egypt's central bank, Tareq Amer, resigned on Wednesday, state media reported, with the Arab world's most populous country in the grip of a deepening economic crisis.

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi accepted the resignation of Amer, who took up his post in 2015 and had been due to stay on until next year, the state-owned newspaper Al-Ahram reported.

Sisi named Amer a presidential adviser but there was no immediate word on who would replace him at the central bank.

He leaves with the Egyptian



Tareq Amer

pound changing hands at 19.1 to the US dollar, its second lowest exchange rate on record, exceeded only during the currency's brutal devaluation in

winter 2016.

Egypt devalued its currency again in March in the face of soaring inflation.

The world's largest importer of wheat, Egypt has been badly hit by the war between its two main suppliers - Russia and Ukraine - which has sent world prices soaring.

The cost of some foodstuffs has risen by as much as 66 per cent, helping push inflation to a headline rate of 15 per cent.

Thirty million of Egypt's 103mn people now live below the poverty line, with as many more living precariously, according to World Bank figures.

Ratings agency Moody's downgraded Egypt's outlook from stable to negative, citing a growing risk of social unrest triggered by plummeting living standards.

Egypt's hard currency reserves have fallen from US\$41bn in February to US\$33.1bn now, despite support from close ally Saudi Arabia which deposited five billion dollars in the central bank in late March.

Egyptian authorities are in talks with the International Monetary Fund on a new bailout as the public debt has hit 90 per cent of GDP.

AFP

IMF projects Saudi Arabia's growth at 7.6% this year

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - The Saudi economy is expected to grow 7.6 per cent this year, up from 3.2 per cent in 2021, on the back of soaring oil revenues, the International Monetary Fund said Wednesday.

The government's Vision 2030 reform programme, designed to reduce the kingdom's dependence on oil, has also given the economy a boost as more Saudis join the workforce, particularly women, the IMF said.

"Liquidity and fiscal support, reform momentum under Vision 2030 and high oil prices and production helped the economy recover with a robust growth, contained inflation and a resilient financial sector," it said.

"Overall growth was robust at 3.2 per cent in 2021, in particular driven by a rebounding non-oil sector - supported by higher employment for Saudi nationals, particularly women."

Gross domestic product was "expected to increase significantly to 7.6 per cent in 2022 despite monetary policy tightening and fiscal consolidation, and a, thus far, limited fall-out from the war in Ukraine," the IMF said, while projecting GDP growth of 3.7 per cent in 2023.

The kingdom managed to contain inflation at 3.1 per cent in 2021, and the IMF predicted it would remain little changed this year at 2.8 per cent, even as rates soar in much of the developed world.



A file photo shows Riyadh skyline

The fund said that was largely due to "low passthrough" of the double-digit wholesale price inflation and increasing shipping costs battering the world economy.

Bumper oil revenues and increased tax revenues from the non-oil economy saw the overall fiscal balance improve by almost nine percentage points to a deficit of 2.3 per cent of GDP last year, the IMF said.

"Higher oil prices and stepped-up oil production improved the current account by 8.5 percentage points in 2021, registering a surplus of 5.3 per cent of GDP as strong oil-driven exports surpassed growing imports and large remittance out-

flows."

Russia's war in Ukraine and a post-pandemic surge in demand have sent crude prices soaring. They have dropped by US\$30 per barrel from a peak in June, but remain close to US\$100.

The high oil price has been a major factor in the inflationary pain suffered by consumers worldwide but have led to wind-fall profits for oil majors and producer countries.

Oil giant Saudi Aramco on Sunday unveiled record profits of US\$48.4bn in the second quarter of 2022, the biggest quarterly adjusted profit of any listed company worldwide, according to Bloomberg news agency.

Net income leapt 90 per cent

year-on-year for the world's biggest oil producer, which clocked its second straight quarterly record after announcing US\$39.5bn for the year's first three-month period.

Saudi Arabia has sought to open up and diversify its oil-reliant economy, especially since Mohammed bin Salman's appointment as crown prince and de facto ruler in 2017.

Abu Dhabi-based energy expert Ibrahim Elghitany said the oil bonanza was a "golden opportunity" for the kingdom, creating the large surpluses that would be needed to finance its non-oil development plans.

AFF

UK inflation hits new 40-year high as food prices rocket

London, UK - British inflation surged to a new 40-year high in July on soaring food prices, official data showed Wednesday, adding to a cost-of-living crisis as the country faces the prospect of recession.

The consumer prices index (CPI) accelerated to 10.1 per cent last month from 9.4 per cent in June - itself a four-decade high - the Office for National Statistics said.

The Bank of England warned earlier this month that UK inflation would climb to just above 13 per cent this year, which would be the highest level since 1980.

It also projected that the country would enter a recession near the end of the year that the BoE expects to last until late 2023.

Official data last week showed Britain's economy shrank in the second quarter.

"I understand that times are tough, and people are worried about increases in prices that countries around the world are facing," finance minister Nadhim Zahawi said following the latest data.

"Getting inflation under control is my top priority," he said, as Britons face also rocketing energy bills.

While the government of outgoing Prime Minister Boris Johnson has pledged to help reduce fuel costs for millions of Britons



this coming winter, consumer groups are demanding far more state support.

It comes as Britain endures a cost-of-living crisis, with wage values falling at a record pace.

The deteriorating economy will be inherited by Johnson's successor after he leaves office next month, with Foreign Secretary Liz Truss and former finance minister Rishi Sunak vying to take the reins of the Conservatives.

Rate hikes

In a bid to bring down inflation, the Bank of England has hiked its key interest rate several times since the end of last year.

The most recent increase was by 0.5 percentage points, the biggest hike since 1995 and which leaves borrowing costs at 1.75 per cent - driving up mortgage repayments for households

but boosting savers.

"Today's data leaves the Bank of England stuck in a bit of a quandary, with multi-decade high inflation accompanied by an economy expected to enter into a deep recession in 2023," noted Matthew Ryan, head of market strategy at global financial services firm Ebury.

He added that "another 50 basis-point interest rate hike is effectively guaranteed at the bank's next meeting in September".

The BoE's recent moves mirror aggressive monetary policy from the US Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank, as the world races to cool red-hot inflation that has been fuelled by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The UK statistics office said the "largest movements" in July's CPI came from food.

AFF

US employers struggle to find enough workers

Washington, US - Salespeople, food servers, postal workers - "Help Wanted" ads are proliferating across the United States, as companies struggle to deal with a worker shortage caused by the pandemic, a rash of early retirements and restrictive immigration laws.

More than 10mn openings went unfilled in June, according to government data, while fewer than six million people were seeking work, even as employers desperately try to boost hiring amid a frenzy of consumer spending.

"We have a lot of jobs, but not enough workers to fill them," the US Chamber of Commerce, which represents American companies, said in a statement.

Many of those who stopped working as Covid-19 first ravaged the US economy in early 2020 have never returned.

"There would be 3.4mn more workers today if labor force participation" - the percentage of the working-age population currently employed or actively seeking work - was at the pre-pandemic rate, the Chamber calculated. It has slipped from 63.4 per cent to 62.1 per cent.

And where have all these people gone? Many simply took early retirement.

"Part of that is just the US population continues to age," Nick Bunker, a labor-market specialist with jobs website Indeed, told AFP.

Too few immigrants

The huge cohort of "baby boomers" had already begun leaving the labor market, but there has been an "acceleration in retirements" since the pandemic struck, Diane Swonk, chief economist at KPMG, told AFP.

Millions of people opted for early retirement, concerned for their health and with sufficient assets - thanks to a then-buoy-



ant stock market and high real-estate prices - to leave the workplace.

In the short term, Bunker said, "We're unlikely to get back to exactly the pre-pandemic level of labor-force participation because of the aging of the population."

Adding to this, said Swonk, "We haven't had immigration at the pace to replace the baby boomers."

Restrictions imposed under president Donald Trump, plus the impact of Covid, steeply reduced the number of foreigners entering the country.

"It has rebounded a little bit, but still not at the levels we were seeing several years ago," Bunker said.

The Chamber of Commerce also underscored the impact of generous government assistance during the pandemic, which "bolstered people's economic stability - allowing them to continue sitting out of the labor force."

Large numbers of women quit their jobs in 2020, in part because extended school closings required many to stay home to care for children. Those who wanted to place children in day care were often frustrated, as labor shortages hit the day care sector as well.

Swonk noted that not only

Covid infections but also the debilitating effects of long Covid have had a serious impact.

It's "really one of the most underestimated and misunderstood issues" keeping workers sidelined, she said.

To lure workers back, many employers have boosted pay and benefits.

And if Americans' buying frenzy slows, analysts say, companies will need fewer workers.

The labor shortage is expected to ease a bit as the Federal Reserve continues aggressively raising interest rates in its effort to combat inflation.

In the meantime, wage earners have profited. Over the past year, millions have changed jobs, often lured elsewhere by higher wages and better working conditions.

This "Great Resignation" has resulted in higher hourly wages. The private sector average is now US\$32.27, up 5.2 per cent in a year, adding to inflationary pressures.

The US labor market showed new signs of vitality in July.

The 22mn jobs lost due to Covid-19 have returned, and the unemployment rate is a historically low 3.5 per cent.

AFF

Biden signs anti-inflation bill

Washington, US - President Joe Biden on Tuesday signed into law a big climate change and health care spending bill, giving Democrats another boost ahead of midterm elections in which Republicans are suddenly less certain of their predicted crushing victory.

The law, dubbed the Inflation Reduction Act, was touted by the White House as the biggest commitment to mitigating climate change in US history, as well as targeting long sought changes in the way medicines are priced, while adding fairness to the tax system, with a minimum 15 per cent tax for corporations.

"A nation can be transformed. That's what's happening now," Biden said in a White House speech likely to form the basis of his campaign ahead of the November polls, where Republicans have hoped to end Democrats' narrow control of Congress.

"It's about tomorrow," Biden said. "It's about delivering progress and prosperity to American families. It's about showing America and the American people that democracy still works in America."

While the sprawling bill is a fraction of the gargantuan package Biden originally tried and failed to get through Congress, the fact he was able to sign even the scaled-back version marked a political resurrection - a suc-



US President Joe Biden signs the Inflation Reduction Act into law during a ceremony at the White House in Washington, DC, on Tuesday (AFP)

cess Democrats now hope might fuel a comeback at the ballot box later this year.

Under the plan, the government will spend about US\$370bn on green energy initiatives while also allowing the state-run Medicare system to negotiate prices for prescription drugs, a popular measure designed to cut the often ruinous prices Americans are forced to pay.

Although the Republican National Committee called a provision to subsidize electric vehicle purchases a "scam," the Sierra Club, an environmental lobbying group, praised what it called a

bold step in the struggle against an overheating planet.

"This day will be remembered by future generations as the turning of the tide against the fossil fuel industry and toward a healthier, cleaner, and more just future for all people across this country," Sierra Club president Ramon Cruz said.

The law's massive cost will be covered in large part by closing numerous tax loopholes and enforcing a new 15 per cent minimum tax on corporations - a measure Biden has long promised to his base as a way to get the wealthy to "pay part of their fair share."

In addition to the Inflation Reduction Act, Congress has passed the first meaningful gun safety legislation in three decades, a government-financed plan to rebuild the anemic US microchip industry, and a bill expanding health care for military veterans exposed to toxic smoke.

Coming on top of wins early in his presidency to pour billions of dollars into supporting the pandemic-hit economy and transforming national infrastructure spending, this amounts to a serious legacy, Biden argued.

AFF

US retail sales flatline as gas prices fall

Washington, US - US retail sales held steady in July as gas prices fell and spending on automobiles dropped sharply, according to government data Wednesday, which showed signs that consumers continued to spend.

Americans flush with savings have been a key driver of the US pandemic recovery, and the Federal Reserve is keeping a careful eye on economic data as it battles to quash red-hot inflation without tipping the world's largest economy into recession.

While the headline data of the closely-watched report flatlined at US\$682.8bn, rather than rise slightly as economists had expected, sales increased 0.7 per cent when gasoline and motor vehicles are excluded from the calculation, the Commerce Department said.

US gas prices at the pump soared in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in late February, but in recent weeks have been trending down and have fallen by more than

US\$1 a gallon after hitting an all-time high over US\$5 in mid-June, squeezing family budgets.

While spending on automobiles fell 1.7 per cent and gasoline stations dropped 1.8 per cent, Americans ramped up spending on furniture, food, electronics and at online stores.

Sales of building materials and garden supplies jumped 1.5 per cent, but at clothing and department stores they fell.

AFF

Zubair Corporation focuses on performance management

Adil al Rahbi, Group Chief Transformation Officer (GCTO) of The Zubair Corporation, recently inaugurated a workshop highlighting the relation between employee's performance and organisational success.

The workshop, titled, 'The SMART Performance Management Process', was organised by the Zubair Corporation's HR department at Bait al Zubair, and saw a number of executives and line managers from different departments of The Zubair Corporation and its subsidiaries participating in the workshop.

With an aim to build a productive work environment based on a culture of high performance, the workshop aims to improve the quality of the performance management process and emphasises on the importance of linking employee performance with the objectives of the group companies.

"The Zubair Corporation seeks to launch several initiatives in the field of human capital management in order to enhance the culture of institutional performance," said Adil al Rahbi adding that "this can be achieved by unifying the efforts made towards achieving the future goals of the Group that are set by the corporation's board of directors".

This workshop, he said, "is part of a series of workshops that will be implemented according to a plan designed to change some of the perceptions associated with the performance management (PM) process".

Oxy Oman to sponsor Oman Science Festival in October



In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Oxy Oman representatives recently attended the sponsorship signing ceremony for the Oman Science Festival, which the company will support as a Gold Sponsor.

The Oman Science Festival is a biennial six-day exhibition that will be held in October 2022, and targets over 200,000 school students and other community members from all over the sultanate. The festival will host scientific workshops, lectures, interactive corners, and showcases for all age groups, under the organization of the Ministry of Education.

The signing event was held at the Ministry of Education, under the auspices H E Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education for Education. Steven Lauer, President and General Manager of Oxy Oman, and H E Dr Ambusaidi signed the sponsorship agreement on behalf of their respective organisations. The Oman Science Festival will be held at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Center, and is expected to host booths and activities from over 80 government and private sector organisations.

Festival visitors and participants will have the opportunity to join competitions and interactive events on programming, robotics, hackathons, drone technology, and other emerging technologies.

'Free Jewellery Maintenance' at Malabar Gold & Diamonds

Malabar Gold & Diamonds, one of the leading jewellery retailers globally with over 285 outlets across ten countries, has launched an exclusive & unique campaign - 'Free Jewellery Maintenance', giving customers a golden opportunity to repair, polish and resize their jewellery possessions for free.

Running until September 17, the free maintenance offer can be availed for jewellery purchased from anywhere. In addition to this, customers can exchange their old gold jewellery purchased from anywhere at Malabar Gold & Diamonds showrooms to buy the latest and trendy collections at the best exchange value.

"At Malabar Gold & Diamonds, we value and cherish what your jewellery means to you and being a product that requires delicate care and maintenance, we are delighted to provide our customers with this once-a-year opportunity to dust off their old jewellery and make it as good as new," said Najeeb K, Regional Head - Oman, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

As part of the Malabar Promise, jewellery purchased from Malabar Gold & Diamonds comes with the assurance of free lifetime maintenance. For a limited period, Malabar Gold & Diamonds is extending this offer to jewellery purchased from all other retailers. However, if repair requires additional precious gems or other metals, they will be charged at preferential rates.

HSE executives visit to 'super-multi-speciality' Aster Royal Hospital



A comprehensive group of local and international Energy and Minerals Companies marked presence in Aster Royal Hospital - the newest super-multi-speciality hospital located in Al Ghubra.

HSE executives of major energy and minerals stakeholders were guided in a site-tour in the country's largest multidisciplinary private hospital in Oman, that announced the soft opening for the end of this month.

During the visit, Dr Ashendu Pandey, the hospital's Group CEO, made a brief statement on its structure, focusing on the public's healthcare needs, the international standards of quality, the specialised medical services and the innovative diagnostic treatment solutions.

With the opening of this hospital, Dr Pandey said, "we are able to bring more patients onboard, allying the modern facilities, with the usual trust that we generously receive from the Oman population and that we are so grateful for these last 12 years.

"Our compromise it to work every day to keep this trust, bringing health and well-being to the community."

The distinguished visitors get to know the hospital's Excellence Centres - Gastroenterology, Urology, Orthopaedics and Women & Children. They also visited the Deluxe rooms, the VIP lounge area, the radiology department (totally equipped with the renowned brand Siemens Healthineers), the state-of-the-art operation theaters and the unique 'cath lab' - that is ready for the performance of heart and neurosurgery interventions.

This visit is in collaboration with OPAL (Oman Society for Petroleum Services), with the support of the OPAL's CEO, Abdulrahman al Yahaei.

"It is fundamental to support the private sector projects, by guaranteeing that the companies and the society in general are aware of varies offers the market avails," Abdulrahman said. "It is part of OPAL's mission to serve our sector by promoting synergies and we found the opening of Aster Royal Hospital as an opportunity for the improvement of the quality of life and health care services of our members."

Hussain al Lawati, HSE in Total Energies shared his experience during the visit. "It was a good experience to visit Aster Royal Hospital and getting to know it's excellence centres and unique services, some of them available for the first time in the private sector in Oman."

Aster Royal Hospital will be operated initially in a phased manner, starting with the emergency department, radiology, laboratory, and outpatient clinic (and related facilities). Additional departments will be gradually be available over the next few months. The hospital counts on two underground parking area, 200 inpatient beds, bringing a total of 150 new doctors and staff members, modern technologies and infrastructure, ready for any major operation or complication with 24-hour emergency services.

Aster DM Healthcare is currently one of the largest and fastest growing conglomerates in the MENA region.

With the opening of this hospital, we are able to bring more patients onboard, allying the modern facilities, with the usual trust that we generously receive from the Oman population

DR ASHENDU PANDEY

Nothing Phone (1) up for sale in Oman from tomorrow

Nothing - a London-based company removing the barriers between people and technology to create a seamless digital future - has come up with its own smartphone Phone (1) that is being made available in Oman from Friday.

Phone (1), its first smartphone and the gateway to its future connected and open product ecosystem, will be sold from 12am on Friday through Adhwa Al Billa Technology (ABT) - its sole distributor in the Sultanate of Oman.

Featuring the innovative Glyph Interface, a 50 MP dual camera, refined Nothing OS, 120Hz OLED display and a Qualcomm® Snapdragon 778G+ chipset, Nothing Phone (1) delivers speed and a smooth experience at a price starting from RO215.145 (inclusive of VAT).

Adhwa Al Billa Technology CEO Faris al Juma said, "We are delighted to introduce the Nothing product range to Oman region a new innovative phone with elegant style and features of pure Android, distilling the operating system to just the essentials, where every byte has a purpose."

It is designed to deliver a fast, smooth and personal experience, he said, adding that "a coherent interface, the hardware seamlessly integrates with software through bespoke fonts, colours, graphical elements and sounds and unique Glyph interface on the back, showing off how a number of strategically placed LED strips pulse, flash, and light up to give you unique notification lights, among other things".

Nothing Co-founder and its



Adhwa Al Billa Technology CEO Faris al Juma (left), Nothing CEO Carl Pei

CEO Carl Pei said, "We designed Phone (1) as a product we'd be proud to share with friends and family."

"This simple principle helped

us wander off the beaten path, tune into our instincts, and create an experience that hopefully marks the start of change in a stagnant industry."



Nothing like you've seen before, the Glyph Interface is a new way of communicating to help minimize screen time. Unique light patterns made up of 900

LEDs indicate who's calling and signals app notifications, charging status and more. Simply pair individual contacts to a ringtone, each with a unique Glyph pattern, to never miss what's truly important.

For quieter focus, the Flip to Glyph feature triggers silent, lights-only notifications by placing Phone (1) with the Glyph Interface face up.

Nothing Phone (1) features a transparent back with a unique design composed of over 400 components. Its 100 per cent recycled aluminium frame makes it light and robust, while over 50 per cent of the phone's plastic components are made with bio-based or post-consumer recycled materials - an industry leading percentage.

Dual-side Gorilla Glass 5 provides toughness, whilst advanced vibration motors make touch responses life-like. The symmetrical bezels and aluminium frame adds elegance, lightness and durability.

"Nothing OS delivers only the best of Android," the company claims.

"No bloatware, just pure speed and a smooth user experience. Hardware and software speak a single visual language, with bespoke widgets, fonts, sounds and wallpapers, all designed in-house," it adds.

The Nothing Ecosystem is the home for all your favourite tech. No more separate apps. Control third party products from Phone (1)'s Quick Settings as easily as Nothing ones, starting with Tesla. Unlock doors, turn on AC, see miles left and more. More third-party brand integrations to be announced soon.

RoyalJet names Mohammed Husain Ahmed new CEO



RoyalJet, the world's leading premium private aviation company affiliated with the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, has announced the appointment of Mohammed Husain Ahmed as the new CEO.

Mohammed brings with him a considerable experience in the aviation industry with more than 25 years of experience across both the government and the private sectors in the UAE.

A committed leader with strong, proven management and organizational skills fostered in a military and civilian environment, he is an accomplished aviation expert with a solid history of achievement in the industry.

"We are delighted to have Mohammed join RoyalJet as CEO. RoyalJet's role in the UAE economy and regional aviation sector is well known and with Mohammed's expertise and experience, we are at the dawn of another era of success and brilliance," said His Excellency Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad bin Tahnoun al Nahyan, Chairman of RoyalJet.

Prior to joining RoyalJet, Mohammed served as the General Manager of Abu Dhabi Airports, overseeing the planning, implementation and evaluation of the organisation's programmes and services. He also supported in the development of a vision and strategic plan to guide the organisation ensuring that it meets the expectations of its clients, board, and founders.

Alizz Islamic Bank's digital banking offers best comfort

Alizz Islamic Bank's digital banking services offer its customers the convenience of banking from the comfort of their homes. The bank's digital channels have seen a significant increase in the number of users due to the seamless user interface and user experience that offers flexibility and ease in conducting and executing banking transactions without the need to visit the branches.

The digital channels provided by Alizz Islamic Bank include the mobile banking application, the Internet banking platform, interactive teller machines and automated teller machines, in addition to contactless card payments that offer customers the ability to conduct a maximum of 10 transactions per day with the need to use the chip and PIN method.

Alizz Islamic Bank recently launched an internal award for the 'Digital Banking Champions' which is given to the branch that records the highest percentage of onboarding customers to the mobile banking application. Moreover, the bank continues to invest in the new digital technologies that enhance the customer experience. The bank also utilizes fintech based solutions, and works on building the basic foundations that meet the needs of customers while adopting a culture of innovation within the institution.

Alizz Islamic Bank was also recently awarded with the 'Best Rated Mobile Banking App in Oman' as per the reviews of users who downloaded the application.

UAE, Saudi place importance on premium travel experiences



Priyanka Lakhani

The travel ecosystem is already making a comeback after a disruptive event that has impacted every industry. Travellers are again taking to the skies for business, leisure, and even bleisure (business+leisure). UNWTO World Tourism Barometer shows a 182 per cent year-on-year rise in international tourism for the first quarter of 2022, with destinations worldwide welcoming an estimated 117mn international arrivals compared to 41mn in the first quarter of 2021. Collinson, a global leader in traveller experiences, recently performed a study of nearly 2,000 frequent travellers in the United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, revealing some interesting insights. The analysis found that the region's recovery was already robust in 2021, indicating a bright future.

Priyanka Lakhani, Senior Vice-President at Collinson, said, "As a significant number of cardholders are open to using more products and services from their everyday card provider, now is the time to capitalise on this opportunity and double down on proactively expanding and providing more comprehensive solutions.

"Offering travel benefits on a credit or charge card not only enhances the cardholder experience but also drives transaction revenue," she added.

beIN SPORTS, Twitter partner ahead of Qatar World Cup

beIN MEDIA GROUP and its flagship channel beIN SPORTS, the official broadcaster of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), has partnered with Twitter to share bespoke content throughout the world's biggest football event, which kicks off in Qatar on November 20 this year.

beIN SPORTS will be sharing content for regional audiences across Twitter, highlighting the biggest moments throughout the tournament and providing brands and marketers with association opportunities via Twitter Amplify sponsorship. Each match will be highlighted through content clips, one match recap and an in-studio analysis, aired through the beIN SPORTS official handle, @beINSPORTS for a total of 320 videos.

"Football is one of the biggest conversations in this region. We've witnessed a 74 per cent spike in average monthly football conversations in comparison to the previous 12 months. From Saudi Arabia alone, we've seen more than 53mn Tweets about football so far this year," said Kinda Ibrahim, Director - Global Partnerships, MEA and Turkey, Twitter. "When Twitter talks sports, the world listens. From firing up fan excitement to meeting fans on their home turf, Twitter is the best place to connect to the moments that get the world talking - right where it's happening."

Sohar International sponsors Data Academy programme for children



With an inherent zeal to contribute meaningfully and enhance the lives of individuals from different sections of society, Sohar International recently signed an agreement to sponsor the Data Academy Training Programme for children at the Child Care Centre.

According to press release, the sponsorship will cover the training of 40 children at the centre for a period of ten days.

Sohar International's sponsorship will enable the centre to arrange materials needed to ensure the programme is conducted seamlessly and the training remains uncompromised, the press release added.

The training programme will focus on core subjects like Programming, Arts, Science, and Math.

Dedicated to providing the necessary intervention at every stage of a child's educational journey, the programme will have two distinct categories to better address their varying needs. While the first category is for children in the age group of five to ten years old, the second targets those from 11 to 15 years of age.

Sohar International has been at the forefront of spearheading several thoughtful corporate social responsibility campaigns with an underlying objective of supporting platforms to share knowledge.

Commenting on the sponsorship, Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International

The ability to impart quality education for the masses is one of the key pillars to promote sustainable development

AHMED AL MUSALMI

said, "The ability to impart quality education for the masses is one of the key pillars to promote sustainable development.

"Having timely access to the right learning modules goes a long way - especially for children - in helping them develop their personality, explore and excel in their interest areas for sustainable growth and development. The educational sector has also been identified as one of the vital focus areas under Oman Vision 2040.

"At Sohar International, we exercise increased emphasis on supporting educational programmes through various knowledge-sharing initiatives. As a socially responsible bank, Sohar International has invested in the long-term prosperity of the nation and will continue to lead efforts to promote an inclusive and progressive society," Musalmi added.

Placing immense importance on creativity, innova-

tion, and the ability to think out of the box, the training programme delivered by the Data Academy is in line with the bank's fundamental principles. The training will be instrumental in helping instill critical thinking amongst children from an early age while improving their analytical, logical, and problem-solving skills.

This will also help boost performance in other areas of learning and development while better preparing them to tackle complex real-world challenges in a data-driven future.

Dr Abdullah al Muniri, Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the Data Academy, said, "We appreciate Sohar International's efforts, its ongoing commitment to support its relationship with the society, and its interest to sponsor our training programme.

"We look forward to continuing to cooperate with the Bank to achieve the training program objectives and create a greater impact and contribution to the socio-economic progress of the country."

Through its various CSR efforts, Sohar International has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to social causes. With an innate drive to contribute to the welfare of children, the bank has been conceptualizing, implementing, and promoting a number of social responsibility programmes that enable children and youth to develop skills that will help them succeed in a competitive world.

Tasees Khimji - Ramdas CSR Initiative spurs entrepreneurial ecosystem

Building on its role as a facilitator for start-ups and SMEs, 'Tasees', (formerly Eshraqa Entrepreneurship Academy) is on a mission to shape and mould the fortunes of aspiring Omani entrepreneurs with a proven methodology of skill-building exercises, combined with consultancy and infrastructural support.

'Tasees' has earned a credible reputation as a reliable mentor and guide; it continues to enlist entrepreneurs to its fold, empowering and inspiring them to build, develop and enhance their business opportunities by adopting a grass-roots strategy.

As a coach and patron with the potential to fulfill dreams of start-ups, it has supported 24 business ventures from various sectors, including construction, e-commerce, food and beverage, training and management consultancy, cosmetics, and IT solutions, among others.

Urging small businesses to dream big, 'Tasees' continues to foster an entrepreneurial mindset through educational and training resources that are specifically designed to provide a boost to initiate the business project. Starting from the pre-incubation stage, 'Tasees' shares the large task of 'incubation', followed by 'acceleration' and 'Funding and Guidance' to bring the project to fruition with a strong base to expand and grow.

It is this direct engagement with new



start-ups that makes 'Tasees' approach and method unique; it has supported business ideas from every sector, both traditional and modern. Thanks to its training and involvement in the various stages of development, a couple of businesses in the country have already found success and have reached newer levels.

What has also been a major spur in bolstering 'Tasees' ambitious entrepreneur support system is its resolve to partner with the government in realising the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Nailesh Khimji, Director, Khimji Ramdas Group, said, "We aim to enable aspiring and established entrepreneurs to dream big and achieve their true poten-

tial. In line with Oman Vision 2040, under the visionary guidance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, we have been able to nurture and mentor a diverse range of Omani businesses to excel in their respective fields."

"It is our desire to target the potentials of young entrepreneurs in achieving the main theme of 'economy and development, as inscribed in the Vision manifesto. The ambit of our training module is based on the sound belief that effective leadership or entrepreneurship should begin early.

"That belief puts the onus on major corporations like us, who have a responsibility to their community and have the

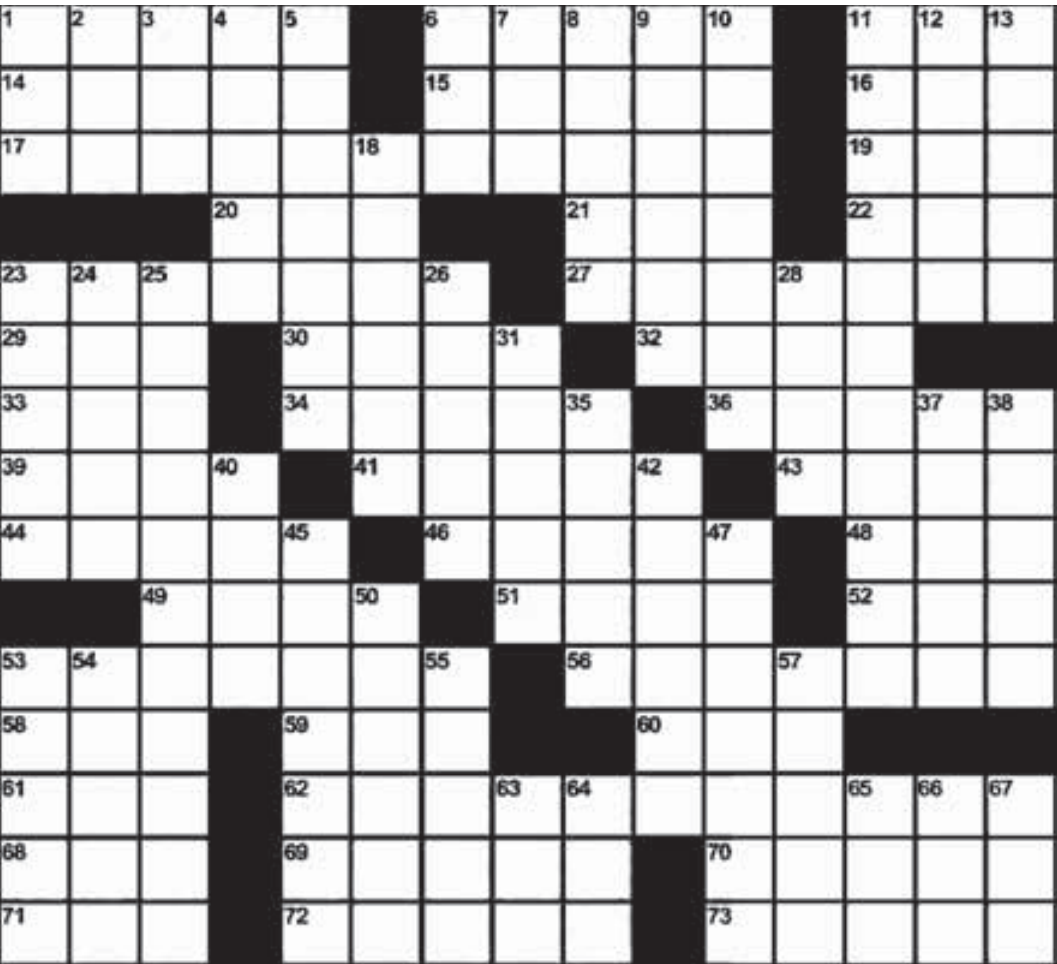
resources and capabilities to champion the cause of aspiring entrepreneurs.

"Through Eshraqa, we have implemented several social impact projects, and through 'Tasees' we have kept our focus on empowering young Omanis who dare to dream and are willing to take the leap of faith with us. We have honed our training operations to suit the market requirements and have the requisite expertise to assess and analyse businesses that need that extra push to savour newfound success," he added.

With Oman Vision 2040 emphasising the importance of strengthening sustainable human development, Tasees is well on its way to bridging the gap with its threefold approach to training - capacity building, consultancy interventions, and infrastructural support. Whether it is one-to-one training, low cost shared space and utilities, workshops and training programs, or its annual mentorship program in partnership with Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development - ASMED (Riyada), Tasees is determined to play an active role in the larger picture.

Since its inception in 2018, 'Tasees' has backed the nation's agenda of inclusive and sustainable development. It has stimulated economic independence and leadership among young Omanis who are ready and willing to meet the government's diversification drive.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Barn attics
- 6) Gemstones for some Libras
- 11) Prankster with pointy shoes
- 14) Be useful to
- 15) High hideaway
- 16) Postal motto conjunction
- 17) Definitely not now?
- 19) Word with "cents" or "faced"
- 20) Longoria of TV
- 21) Title of respect, abroad
- 22) Decaf alt.
- 23) Roof supports
- 27) Groups of four
- 29) Sculler's item
- 30) Enonnous birds of myth
- 32) In a minute
- 33) Canton that borders Bern
- 34) Casino machines, briefly
- 36) Postgame segment
- 39) Lushes
- 41) More in need of liniment

- 43) Bone-dry
- 44) Get in
- 46) Measuring tube (var.)
- 48) Misfortune
- 49) Some signatures of old
- 51) Kind of helmet
- 52) Egyptian cobra
- 53) Square dancer's need
- 56) Mariners' assents
- 58) Current or former court org.
- 59) _ of Good Feelings
- 60) Movie, in Hollywood lingo
- 61) Ticket word
- 62) What a convict seeks
- 68) Keogh alternative
- 69) Form of lyric poem
- 70) Cornball
- 71) Yorkshire's home
- 72) Supergiant in Cygnus
- 73) Kitchen wrap
- DOWN**
- 1) Judges lay it down
- 3) Caesar's salad ingredients?
- 3) Wray of "King Kong"
- 4) Lhasa is its capital
- 5) Drools
- 6) Acorn producer
- 7) Seat at the wedding
- 8) Buddhist in Nirvana
- 9) Feudal vassals
- 10) Washington, D.C. resident
- 11) Threshold location
- 12) Emulated a cow
- 13) Leaping amphibians
- 18) December ditties
- 23) Force out
- 24) Brother of Moses
- 25) Squander slowly
- 26) Ice-cream portion
- 28) Reddish deer
- 31) Get naked
- 35) Brown tone
- 37) Sprang up
- 38) Makes baby chick sounds
- 40) Canonical hour
- 42) Fix a word-processing error
- 45) Continued a sub-scription
- 47) Some believers
- 50) Outerwear in Sonora
- 53) Home to Notre Dame
- 54) Cancel, to NASA
- 55) Synthetic fiber
- 57) African coastal capital
- 63) Poem of homage

- 64) Four winter wks.
- 65) Gas-station offering, sometimes
- 66) Bake sale organizer, for short
- 67) Suffix for "Hallow"

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
You've been firing on all cylinders lately, and this mad pace must stop, and soon. Now would be the perfect time to take a break. Deadlines can wait, and there aren't going to be any emergencies erupting any time soon. Relax your mind and stay close to home (or any other place where you feel you can be totally yourself). Although it's tempting, avoid vegetating in front of the TV. Instead, work on a fun project or dig your way through a compelling book.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
When you're making a tough decision, use equal parts good old-fashioned research and good old-fashioned instinct. Facts and feelings are an unbeatable combination that will steer you right every time. Even if the decision you need to make today is a fairly simple one, approach it as if your whole life were riding on it. What should you order for lunch? Consider your wallet and look at prices. Then listen to your inner cravings and look for what will fulfill them.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
If a life or business partner just doesn't seem able to get revved up and active today, try to encourage this person to pick up the pace. It might be tempting to let them rest while you burn rubber, but teamwork is important, and you're not part of a team if you're doing all the work, are you? It might be time for you to work on your motivational skills. Having the right priorities will earn you respect, so go ahead and be the boss.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
What's on your mind right now? Good or bad, it's time to talk all about it. Find a few friends to tell your problems to today. They might not be able to solve them or even help you figure out how to solve them, but just being able to get things off your chest will make you feel much better! That's what friends are really for. It's not all about how they can make your life better. It's all about how they can make you feel better about yourself.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Mapping the course of your day will be difficult. Everything will be changing constantly, and you won't be able to count on other people to keep their commitments (although any flakiness won't be their fault). The surprising thing is all this unpredictability is going to keep you happily on your toes! This isn't a day to count on your normal routine. Last-minute cancellations, rescheduling, and absences will require that you think on your feet and use your razor-sharp critical eye.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
You don't have to be a poet, songwriter, or novelist to know how to be creative with your words. Creative writing is a gift everyone has and everyone should develop. So today, try to do the unexpected with your written words. Throw a rhyme scheme into your emails, achieve a lot of alliteration in an agenda, and see what happens if you begin a memo with "Once upon a time." It might seem silly, but creativity is supposed to be fun!



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
Be clear with all your communication today to avoid any type of misunderstanding. People are working off a lot of assumptions, and you need to make sure that (at least as far as you're concerned) they have their facts straight. Working with other people could be a challenge today. Your goals aren't in complete alignment with theirs, and compromises might not be possible. Watch out for people who say one thing and do another. You can't trust them no matter how powerful they are.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Get ready to have some of your daily routine disrupted, but you shouldn't let yourself get frustrated. Quite the contrary! The little fires that erupt throughout your day will offer you some great opportunities to show what you're really made of. It's been a long time since you've been tested to this extent, and you could really use the exercise. It's nice to have a long period of calm, but you need to push yourself every once in a while.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
Money issues will be swirling around you all day, and it won't be clear until late in the day whether you'll end up over or under your target. Just in case, try to curb all spending unless it's absolutely necessary. Today isn't a good day for a shopping spree, no matter how essential the items on your list might be. If you share an account with someone else, double-check the account with them. On a day like today, you don't want to rely on guesstimates.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
Interesting and positive energy will be circling all around you today, and these good vibes will put you in a good frame of mind to deal with some surprising news from a friend. If your reaction is negative, resist the urge to sound the alarm right away. Respect the choices your friend is making, and wait a while to see how things proceed before you voice your concerns. You run the risk of coming off as judgmental or as seeming to think that you know better than everyone else.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
A blast from the past has some big plans in store for you. This person just might offer the missing links between you and several opportunities, including greater wealth and a steamy romance. Keep an eye out for unfamiliar phone numbers or email addresses, because everything isn't exactly what you assume it to be. Sometimes relationships or other types of connections are circular. They come back to where they started to make things complete.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
Right now, the people around you have more power over your life than you may realize. So it's important to value others and listen to what they say. Outside opinions aren't something you need to cherish, but it's important to be aware of the impressions you may be making, especially if any of them are negative. Getting input from people who already adore everything you do isn't very productive. You can handle the truth, so ask for it!



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. How fast does the Earth at its equator spin round its axis?
A. About 1,040 miles per hour (1,670 km/h)
B. About 1,040 miles per second (1,670 km/s)
C. About 1,040 miles a day (1,670 km/d)
D. About 100 miles per hour (161 km/h)

02. Which team won the Fédération Internationale de Volleyball Women's World Championship in Japan, that was held in October / November 2010?
A. USA
B. Brazil
C. Japan
D. Russia

03. Where is Tipperary?
A. Scotland
B. England
C. Belgium
D. Ireland

Answers: 1.A 2.D 3.D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

S	S	E	O
M	E	C	N
S	B	Y	G
K	M	A	E

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Israel, Germany slam Holocaust remarks

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas compared the Holocaust to Israel’s killings of Palestinians

Jerusalem - Israel and Germany on Wednesday condemned remarks by Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas in Berlin, where he compared the Holocaust to the Jewish state’s killings of Palestinians.

Standing beside German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Abbas was asked on Tuesday if he would apologise on behalf of the Palestinian gunmen who carried out the 1972 Munich Olympics hostage-taking in which 11 Israelis were killed.

Abbas did not give a direct reply regarding the attack half a century ago this year but instead compared it to the situation faced by Palestinians, accusing Israel of committing ‘50 massacres, 50 Holocausts’ against Palestinians since 1947.

“Our demand is to say: enough... I don’t want more than peace. Please come to peace, come to security, let’s build trust between us and you,” added the 87-year-old.

Scholz did not immediately challenge Abbas on his Holocaust comments during the press conference but, following widespread criticism, tweeted on Wednesday that he was ‘dis-



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas shake hands after a press conference in Berlin, Germany, on Tuesday (AFP)

gusted by the outrageous remarks’ made by the Palestinian leader.

“For us Germans in particular, any relativisation of the singularity of the Holocaust is intolerable and unacceptable. I condemn any attempt to deny the crimes of the Holocaust,” Scholz wrote

on Twitter.

The German chancellor drew fire for failing to immediately condemn Abbas while standing alongside him.

“One would have liked (Scholz’s) clarification to be more immediate,” wrote *Spiegel* magazine.

Christoph Heubner, executive vice president of the International Auschwitz Committee, said he found it ‘astonishing and disconcerting that the German side was not prepared for Abbas’ provocations, and that his statements on the Holocaust were left unchallenged at

the press conference’.

‘Monstrous lie’

In Israel, Abbas’ remarks drew a hail of condemnation.

“Mahmud Abbas accusing Israel of having committed ‘50 Holocausts’ while standing on German soil is not only a moral

disgrace, but a monstrous lie,” wrote Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid on Twitter.

“Six million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust, including one and a half million Jewish children. History will never forgive him.”

Defence Minister Benny Gantz called the Palestinian leader’s remarks ‘an attempt to distort and rewrite history’.

Abbas’s office on Wednesday said ‘the Holocaust is the most heinous crime in modern human history’.

Abbas’ ‘answer was not intended to deny the singularity of the Holocaust that occurred in the last century’, said a statement published by the official Palestinian news agency Wafa, adding that he condemns the mass murder ‘in the strongest terms’.

Palestinian prime minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said President Abbas did not deny the ‘massacres the Jews were subjected to in the era of Nazi Germany’.

“But he told the world not to lose sight of the massacres the Palestinian people are subjected to,” Shtayyeh said.

Term apartheid ‘not correct’

Abbas often uses the terms ‘genocide’ and ‘apartheid’ to refer to Israel’s treatment of Palestinians, but rarely cites the Holocaust.

Scholz contradicted the Palestinian leader when Abbas used the term apartheid on Tuesday, with the German chancellor saying he did ‘not think that is correct, to use the term to describe the situation’.

Groups including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have concluded that Israel’s treatment of Palestinians amounts to apartheid - a charge the state strongly denies.

A Holocaust survivor and leader of the Jewish community in the Munich region, Charlotte Knobloch, said Abbas’ statements must be met with more than a verbal rebuff from Scholz.

“German politicians must know who their partners in the Palestinian Authority are and act accordingly. The clear words of the German chancellor afterwards should not be the only consequence.”

AFP

Famed director Wolfgang Petersen dies aged 81

Los Angeles, US - German director Wolfgang Petersen, who achieved international fame with films *Das Boot*, *Outbreak* and *Air Force One*, has died from pancreatic cancer, a spokeswoman said. He was 81.

Petersen, who directed Hollywood A-listers including Clint Eastwood, Dustin Hoffman, George Clooney, Harrison Ford and Brad Pitt over a career spanning five decades, died in Los Angeles on Friday.

Born in Emden, Germany in 1941, Petersen scored his first major success with World War II submarine thriller *Das Boot*, adapted from a novel of the same name about the Battle of the Atlantic.

The film earned him two Oscar nominations at the 1983 Academy Awards, including for best director, and Petersen released his first English-language film - children’s fantasy flick *The NeverEnding Story* - the following year.



Wolfgang Petersen (AFP)

He transitioned to Hollywood action and disaster movies in the 1990s, working with Eastwood and John Malkovich in assassination thriller *In The Line of Fire*, and directing Hoffman in pandemic-themed *Outbreak*.

In the 2000s, Petersen directed Clooney in *The Perfect Storm* and Pitt in *Troy*.

He died at his residence in Brentwood, Los Angeles in the arms of his wife of 50 years, Maria Antoinette.

AFP

Indonesia celebrates first Independence Day at future capital in ancient rainforests

Sepaku, Indonesia - Indonesia celebrated its first Independence Day at its future capital in the ancient rainforests of eastern Borneo on Wednesday as the nation plans a move away from slowly sinking, traffic-clogged Jakarta.

Nusantara, which is 2,000km from Jakarta, is set to become the new political centre of the world’s fourth-largest country.

It is a legacy project of President Joko Widodo but environmentalists have warned it could accelerate the destruction of tropical jungles home to long-nosed monkeys and orangutans.

The government is preparing to ramp up infrastructure projects to open the doors to the city - which will cover about 56,180 hectares on Borneo island - by the time Widodo leaves office in 2024. “The main point (of the ceremony) is to take the spirit of the 77th Independence Day to strengthen our resolve and spirit



A flag-raising ceremony is being held at ground zero of Indonesia’s future capital in Sepaku on Wednesday (AFP)

to build the new capital,” said State Capital Authority head Bambang Susantono, who will govern the new city.

After the national flag was

hoisted by officials to mark the occasion, workers at the site cheered in unison that they were ‘ready to develop Nusantara’, which means archipelago in In-

donesian. Jakarta is home to 30mn people in its greater metro area and it has long been plagued by serious infrastructure problems and flooding exacerbated

It is a legacy project of President Joko Widodo, but environmentalists have warned it could accelerate the destruction of tropical jungles

by climate change.

It is sinking as much as 25cm a year in some areas - double the global average for major coastal cities - with some experts predicting up to a third of the megapolis could be underwater by 2050. Government officials say the new capital will take decades to be fully completed and inhabited by its planned population of two million people and will help spread economic growth.

AFP

Top Republican Trump critic Cheney loses seat in US Congress

Jackson, US - Republican rebel Liz Cheney lost her seat in Congress on Tuesday to an election conspiracy theorist, but vowed to fight on and do ‘whatever it takes’ to ensure that former president Donald Trump is never returned to power.

Once considered Republican royalty, the lawmaker from Wyoming has become a pariah in the party over her membership on the congressional panel investigating the January 6 assault on the US Capitol - and Trump’s role in fanning the flames.

“I have said since January 6 that I will do whatever it takes to ensure Donald Trump is never again anywhere near the Oval Office, and I mean it,” the Wyoming congresswoman said in a concession speech after losing her bid at reelection.

Defeat for the 56-year-old daughter of former vice president Dick Cheney in the Wyoming Republican primary marks the end of the family’s four-decade political association with one of America’s most conservative states.

The Republican nomination to contest November’s midterms instead goes to 59-year-old lawyer Harriet Hageman - Trump’s hand-picked candidate who has amplified his false claims of a ‘rigged’ 2020 election. In her speech Tuesday night, Cheney delivered a stark warning about the danger of Trump’s election fraud conspiracy theories, urging politicians on both sides of the aisle to join her fight to protect US democracy.

Speaking at a cattle ranch near Jackson, Cheney sought to move quickly beyond her defeat, setting out what she said was ‘real work’ of her effort to ensure Trump never regains the White House.

She blamed the former president, who is embroiled in numerous criminal and civil investigations over alleged misconduct in office, for sending the deeply-divided United States towards ‘crisis, lawlessness and violence’ with his inflammatory rhetoric.

“No American should support election deniers, for any position



Liz Cheney speaks to supporters at an election night event at Mead Ranch in Jackson, Wyoming on Tuesday (AFP)

of genuine responsibility, (because) their refusal to follow the rule of law will corrupt our future,” she warned.

‘Under attack’

There is already speculation that Cheney may challenge Trump for the Republican presidential nomination in 2024 - or even run as an independent - and supporters were hoping her concession

speech would double up as a blueprint for her political future.

She pointedly avoided addressing the issue, but had earlier told CBS that the primary - regardless of the result - would be ‘the beginning of a battle that is going to continue’.

“We are facing a moment where our democracy really is under attack and under threat,” she said.

Cheney had framed her campaign as a battle for the soul of a party she is trying to save from the anti-constitutional forces of Trumpism.

She was the last of 10 Republicans in the House of Representatives who backed Trump’s second impeachment to face primary voters.

Four retired rather than seek reelection, three lost to Trump-backed opponents, and only two - California’s David Valadao and Dan Newhouse of Washington state - have made it through to November’s midterm elections.

Cheney voted in line with Trump’s positions 93 per cent of the time when he was president but he didn’t pull his punches as he sought vengeance for her role in the House committee probe.

Trump has made Cheney his bete noire, calling her ‘disloyal’ and a ‘warmonger’, prompting death threats that have forced her to travel with a police escort. He called her defeat on Tuesday night ‘a wonderful result for America’.

“Now she can finally disap-

pear into the depths of political oblivion where, I am sure, she will be much happier than she is right now,” he posted on his Truth Social platform.

During the lead-up to Tuesday’s vote in Wyoming - the first US state to grant women the right to vote, in 1869 - the congresswoman was forced to run a kind of shadow campaign, with no rallies or public events.

She even avoided the traditional election day photo op on Tuesday, eschewing media at her local polling station to instead cast her ballot in nearby Jackson.

“Liz is representing the constituents that are in her mind, and they aren’t the constituents of Wyoming,” said Mary Martin, chairwoman of the Republican Party in Teton County - Cheney’s Wyoming base.

There were also elections on Tuesday in Alaska, where 2008 Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin’s comeback battle - to complete the term of a congressman who died in office - divided locals.

AFP

Journalist found dead in Mexico

Mexico City, Mexico - A crime reporter has been found dead in northwestern Mexico, authorities said on Tuesday - the latest suspected murder in what is already one of the deadliest years yet for the country’s press. The body of Juan Arjon Lopez, an independent journalist who ran a news page on Facebook, was discovered in San Luis Rio Colorado in the northwestern state of Sonora near the US border.

The 62-year-old was identified from his fingerprints, a source at the Sonora attorney general’s office told AFP, hours after state prosecutor Indira Contreras told reporters that a body with tattoos matching those of Arjon had been found. He had been reported missing on August 9.

AFP

Australia ex-PM Morrison defends secret power grab

Sydney, Australia - Australia's ex-prime minister on Wednesday defended secretly appointing himself to several key ministries during the COVID-19 pandemic, rejecting accusations he created a 'shadow government' and undermined the country's democracy.

Refusing bipartisan calls to apologise and resign from parliament, Scott Morrison insisted he was right to take 'emergency powers' over the health, treasury, finance, resources and home affairs departments, without telling the public or his cabinet colleagues. "I was steering the ship in the middle of the tempest," the former conservative leader said in a defiant first public appearance since the scandal broke, dismissing critics who were 'standing on the shore after the fact'.

"Only I could really understand the weight of responsibility that was on my shoulders, and on no-one else," Morrison said, describing his moves as 'break-glass-in-case-of-emergency' safeguards.

Morrison's tenure in office, from 2018 to 2022, was a period of crisis for Australia with record bushfires, floods and drought as well as the pandemic and a first-in-a-generation recession.

But revelations that any prime minister could make such an extraordinary power grab without parliamentary or public oversight have left some questioning whether the country's democracy is also in crisis.

Australia's new prime minister, Anthony Albanese, has asked the solicitor-general to present



Australia's former prime minister Scott Morrison speaks to media during a press conference in Sydney on Wednesday (AFP)

I was steering the ship in the middle of the tempest. Only I could understand the weight of responsibility on my shoulders and no one else

SCOTT MORRISON

advice on whether his predecessor acted legally.

"This is fundamentally a trashing of our democratic system. A

trashing of the convention and rules that have operated in Australia for 121 years," Albanese said on Wednesday. "This is unprecedented."

The Labour leader tied Morrison's actions to a worldwide 'retreat' of democracy.

"There's people fighting now in Ukraine to protect democracy and a sovereign nation. You have a rise of undemocratic regimes. "Our democracy is precious. We need to defend it and strengthen it, not undermine it, which is what the former government has done."

Morrison's home affairs min-

ister Karen Andrews said her former leader 'needs to resign and he needs to leave Parliament'.

No resignation

Morrison said he intended to represent his south Sydney constituency 'to the best of my ability' until at least the next election in just under three years' time.

A devout Christian, he has previously described his election as prime minister as a 'miracle'.

In power, he was routinely accused of lacking honesty and transparency - an indictment that burst onto the global stage when French President Emmanuel

Macron claimed he had lied over an abandoned submarine deal.

The former prime minister insists he gained 'no personal advantage' from being sworn in to administer five portfolios and stressed that the arrangements were only to be used in an emergency, such as if a minister died during the pandemic.

Morrison said he only used the powers once, which was to override his resources minister and block a controversial offshore gas project - a move he conceded was separate from the pandemic.

AFP

UK disputes lack of access to EU programmes

London, UK - Britain has launched dispute procedures with the European Union over its exclusion from the bloc's scientific research programmes, using a mechanism set out in a post-Brexit deal.

These are the first such legal proceedings launched by the UK against the EU since Brexit.

The UK government said that its inability to participate in science and technology programmes was causing 'serious damage' both in the UK and EU countries.

The British government said in a statement late on Tuesday that it has launched action 'set out in the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) to resolve disputes between the UK and EU'.



EU is in breach of agreement said UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss (AFP)

European Commission spokesman Dan Ferrie confirmed the UK's request had been received, saying the Commission 'will follow up on this in line with the applicable rules' according to the agreement.

He said earlier that the EU would follow up, but there were 'serious difficulties' since the post-Brexit trading accord does not oblige the EU to make the UK an associate on such programmes, or give it a precise deadline to do so.

The UK said it took action due to 'persistent delays' to its access to various EU science programmes.

It said it had negotiated access to these programmes in 2020 but the EU 'has still refused to finalise' its inclusion in academic programmes.

The UK remains excluded from the bloc's flagship Horizon

Europe programme that funds research, nuclear regulator Euratom and Copernicus satellite monitoring group, the government said.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said the 'EU is in clear breach of our agreement', accusing it of, 'repeatedly seeking to politicise vital scientific cooperation by refusing to finalise access to these important programmes'.

The UK said if the EU refuses, it has 'prepared an alternative set of programmes to support UK scientists and researchers'.

Provision for such formal consultations on disputed topics is part of the UK-EU post-Brexit trade deal - known as the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA).

The British government controversially left the European Erasmus student exchange scheme after Brexit, launching its own scheme called the Turing programme.

AFP

Blasts, arson attacks hit Thailand's restive south

Bangkok, Thailand - Arson attacks and explosions hit more than a dozen locations in Thailand's restive deep south on Wednesday, injuring seven people, authorities said.

Officials said most of the targeted sites were convenience stores in petrol stations, all located in the provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat.

A low-level conflict has rumbled in Thailand's southernmost provinces since 2004, killing more than 7,000 people as militants in the Muslim-majority region battle for greater autonomy

from the state.

Seven people were slightly injured in the incidents, a statement from the military said, while police said they were gathering CCTV footage and other evidence.

Authorities said the immediate motive for the wave of attacks was still unclear. Militants usually target symbols of the Thai state and its security forces.

The coronavirus pandemic brought a lull in southern clashes between rebels and the military, but a six-day gun battle in October last year killed six people.

AFP

Dead Indian soldier found after 38 years in Siachen

New Delhi, India - The body of an Indian soldier who went missing 38 years ago on a glacier on the disputed border with Pakistan has been found.

A unit of the Indian Army tweeted pictures of the coffin of Chander Shekhar wrapped in an Indian flag early on Wednesday, two days after India celebrated the 75th anniversary of the country's independence.

The Army said Shekhar was deployed for Operation Meghdoot in 1984 when India and Pakistan fought a brief battle to assert control over the Siachen Glacier, reputed to be the world's highest battlefield.

At over 18,000 feet (5,486 metres) with temperatures that can plunge to minus 50 degrees Celsius, Siachen is one of the



Indian soldiers standing in respect next to a coffin with the remains of Chander Shekhar, in Leh on Wednesday (AFP)

toughest military deployments in the world.

Located in the Himalayan re-

gion of Ladakh, it has long been contested between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

Local media reported that Shekhar was part of a 20-member group that got caught in an

ice storm during a patrol.

Fifteen bodies were recovered at the time but the other five could not be found, among them Shekhar, the reports said.

His last rites will now be performed with full military honours in the state of Uttarakhand, where his family lives.

His daughter, who was four years old when he went missing, said the family would now get closure.

"He has been long gone... Papa has come but I wish he was alive," the Hindustan Times newspaper quoted her saying.

Decades after the first battle for Siachen, both India and Pakistan continue to maintain a military presence in the extremely remote area.

AFP

Climate change driving unprecedented loss due to forest fires

Paris, France - Forest fires supercharged by climate change are burning twice as much global tree cover as 20 years ago, according to a data on Wednesday showing the equivalent of 16 football pitches are now lost every minute.

The research showed in unprecedented detail how wildfires have progressed over the past two decades, with the blazes claiming an estimated three more million hectares each year - an area the size of Belgium - compared with 2001.

The study showed that the majority of tree cover loss is occurring in the boreal forests that blanket much of Russia, Canada and Alaska, which are among the largest storers of carbon on Earth. Researchers from the Uni-

versity of Maryland used satellite imagery to map areas of tree cover lost, including that burned by what are known as stand-replacing forest fires.

These are fires that kill all or most of the forest's canopy and which cause long-term changes to forest structure and soil chemistry. The data showed 2021 to be one of the worst years for forest fires since the turn of the century, causing 9.3mn hectares of tree cover loss globally.

That was more than a third of all the forest lost last year, according to the data, compiled by Global Forest Watch and the World Resources Institute research group. "Forest fires are getting worse worldwide," James McCarthy, research analyst at Global Forest Watch, told AFP.



A silhouette of a firefighter is pictured during a wildfire in Manteigas, central Portugal, last week (AFP)

sands of hectares of forest lost in France, Spain and Portugal. The researchers said that climate change was likely a 'major driver' in increased fire activity, with ex-

treme heat waves that render forests tinder dry already five times more likely today than a century and a half ago.

These drier conditions lead to higher emissions from fires, further exacerbating climate change as part of a 'fire-climate feedback loop', they said.

'Best defence'

The vast majority - some 70 per cent - of fire-related tree cover loss over the last two decades occurred in boreal regions, likely because high-latitude regions are warming at a faster rate than the rest of the planet. Last year, Russia lost 5.4mn hectares of tree cover due to fires, the highest on record at an increase of 31 per cent over 2020. "This record-breaking loss was due in

part to prolonged heatwaves that would have been practically impossible without human-induced climate change," said the study.

The team warned that increased changes to climate and fire activity could eventually turn boreal forests from a carbon sink into a source for carbon emissions. "In these boreal regions carbon has accumulated in the soil over hundreds of years and has been protected by a moist layer on top," said McCarthy.

"These more frequent and serious fires are burning off this top layer and it's exposing that carbon in the soil."

This century, fire-related tree cover loss in the tropics has increased round five per cent - some 36,000 hectares - a year, the study showed.

Fire is not the principal cause of forest loss in these regions, with deforestation and forest degradation the main drivers.

But the researchers said that forest loss from deforestation was making it more likely that forests would be lost to fire, as the practice leads to higher regional temperatures and drier vegetation.

They called on governments to improve forest resilience by ending deforestation and limiting local forest management practices that include controlled burning, which can easily burn out of control particularly during dry spells.

"Forests are one of the best defences we have against climate change," said McCarthy.

AFP

North Korea fires two cruise missiles into West Sea: Seoul

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea fired two cruise missiles on Wednesday, Seoul's defence ministry said, ending a month-long lull in Pyongyang's record-breaking spate of weapons tests this year.

The isolated nation has not tested a cruise missile - which are not banned under United Nations sanctions on Pyongyang - since January, the Yonhap News Agency reported.

The last time North Korea conducted a weapons test was July 10, when they fired what appeared to be multiple rocket launchers.

"Early this morning, we detected that North Korea fired two cruise missiles into the

West Sea from Onchon, South Pyongan province," a ministry official told AFP, using an alternative name for the Yellow Sea.

"The US and South Korean military authorities are analysing detailed specifications such as flight distance."

North Korea has conducted a blitz of sanctions-busting tests this year, including firing an intercontinental ballistic missile at full range for the first time since 2017.

Washington and Seoul officials have also warned that the isolated regime is preparing to carry out what would be its seventh nuclear test.

The cruise missile launch came as South Korea's Presi-



People sit near a screen showing a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul on Wednesday (AFP)

dent Yoon Suk-yeol marked 100 days in office on Wednesday, telling reporters at a press conference that he did not support

regime change by force in North Korea.

Yoon, who took office vowing to get tough on Pyongyang, ear-

lier this week laid out details of his 'audacious plan' to offer massive aid to Pyongyang - if Kim Jong Un will give up his nu-

clear weapons.

Analysts say the chances of Pyongyang accepting such an offer are vanishingly slim, as North Korea, which invests a vast chunk of its GDP in weapons programmes, has long made clear it will not barter its missiles away.

Joint drills

Pyongyang's latest test also comes after South Korean and American military troops kicked off preliminary drills this week ahead of the start of their annual combined Ulchi Freedom Shield (UFS) exercise. The two militaries have been holding talks in Seoul, and issued a joint statement saying they had discussed

North Korea, 'particularly the increased volume and scale of DPRK missile tests over the course of the last year', they said, using the country's official name.

"With this in mind, and considering the evolving threat posed by the DPRK, both leaders committed to expanding the scope and scale of combined military exercises and training." This will start 'with Ulchi Freedom Shield next week... to bolster combined readiness', they added.

For the last few years such joint military exercises had been scaled back due to COVID-19 and during a bout of failed diplomacy with the North.

AFP



Iraq PM Mustafa al-Kadhemi speaking during the National Dialogue meeting in the capital Baghdad on Wednesday (AFP)

Iraqi crisis talks go ahead without firebrand cleric

Baghdad, Iraq - Iraq's Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi met party and other leaders on Wednesday to discuss the country's political deadlock, but key player Moqtada Sadr, a firebrand Shiite cleric, did not attend.

Ten months after a general election, war-scarred Iraq still has no government, new prime minister or new president, because of disagreement over forming a coalition.

Tensions have been rising since July between the two main Shiite factions, one led by Sadr, the other by the pro-Iran Coordination Framework. Attempts to mediate have so far proved fruitless.

Sadr wants parliament dissolved to pave the way for new elections, but the Coordination Framework wants to set conditions and demands a transitional government before new polls.

A statement from Kadhimi's office said he had called a meeting on Wednesday 'to start a serious dialogue; intending to find solutions to the current po-

litical crisis'.

The Coordination Framework was represented by two former premiers, Nuri al-Maliki and Haider al-Abadi.

Also present were Hadi al-Ameri and Faleh al-Fayyad, senior officials in the Hashed al-Shaabi network of former paramilitaries, now part of the national forces.

Maliki is a longtime foe of Sadr, the influential cleric whose bloc emerged from last October's elections as parliament's biggest, but still far short of a majority.

Sadr supporters have been staging a sit-in outside parliament in Baghdad's high security Green Zone for more than two weeks, and the Coordination Framework began a rival Baghdad protest on Friday.

President Barham Saleh and parliamentary speaker Mohammed al-Halbussi also attended Wednesday's talks, as did officials of the two main Kurdish parties and the UN envoy in Iraq.

AFP

Rohingyas unable to return to Myanmar: UN rights chief

Nearly a million members of the refugees live in settlements near Bangladesh's southern coast

Dhaka, Bangladesh - UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet said on Wednesday that it remained unsafe for Rohingya refugees to return to their homes in Myanmar, nearly five years after a crackdown there sparked an exodus to neighbouring Bangladesh.

Nearly a million members of the mostly Muslim minority live in a sprawling and squalid patchwork of refugee settlements near Bangladesh's southern coast.

Most fled their homes after a 2017 Myanmar army offensive that is now subject to a landmark genocide case at the UN's top court. Five years later, the refugees refuse to go back without guarantees for their safety and rights in Myanmar, which is now ruled by a military junta after the ouster of its civilian government last year.

Bachelet met with Rohingya community members during a tour of the camps on Tuesday and said they had expressed 'resounding hope' that they would be able to go back to their homes. "Unfortunately the current situation across the border means that the conditions are not right for returns," Bachelet told reporters in the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka.



United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet (centre) visits a Rohingya refugee camp in Ukhaia on Tuesday (AFP)

"Repatriation must always be conducted in a voluntary and dignified manner, only when safe and sustainable conditions exist in Myanmar."

Bangladesh has become increasingly impatient with the presence of its huge refugee population, and Bachelet said she was concerned about 'increasing anti-Rohingya rhetoric' and scapegoating of the community.

She added that many refugees were fearful for their safety due to the activity of armed groups and criminal gangs.

Security has been a constant issue in the camps, with scores of killings, kidnappings and police dragnets targeting drug trafficking networks. Two Rohingya community leaders were shot dead earlier this month, allegedly by an insurgent group active in the camps that has been accused of murdering political opponents.

Bachelet was on a four-day visit to Bangladesh before her term as UN high commissioner for human rights ends later this month. While touring the camps on Tuesday, she urged the inter-

national community to continue to support the Rohingya despite heightened global focus on more recent crises.

She added that the Russian invasion of Ukraine was being keenly felt among the Rohingya, with global food prices soaring and driving up the costs of supporting a population dependent on humanitarian aid.

"I would insist that the international community don't abandon the Rohingyas and continue supporting and even looking at if they can scale up and support,

because of the consequences of the war," she said.

Bachelet is the first UN rights chief to visit Bangladesh and her trip included meetings with local activists to discuss accusations of gross abuses by security forces, including extrajudicial killings. Campaigners say that under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the country's security forces have killed thousands of people in staged shootouts, while hundreds of others have disappeared.

AFP

Crimea attacks: Ukraine puts pressure on lost territory

Warsaw, Poland - Two massive attacks on Russian bases in Crimea far from the frontline in recent days have given Ukraine a boost - eight years after Russia's humiliating takeover of the strategic peninsula.

Russia's defence ministry said a series of explosions at an armaments storage facility near the village of Dzhankoi on Tuesday, which also damaged a railway line, were an act of 'sabotage'.

There was no public claim of responsibility by Ukrainian authorities, but presidential aide Mykhailo Podolyak called it 'demilitarisation in action' - using the same terminology employed by Russia to justify its invasion of Ukraine.

The blasts came exactly a week after an attack on an air base which a senior Ukrainian official speaking on condition of

anonymity described as a 'well-prepared, special partisan job'.

Analyst Oliver Alexander said the explosions, which he believes might have been caused by ballistic missiles, were hitting morale on the Russian side and lifting it on the Ukrainian side.

"Crimea has been relatively safe in the last six months. Now it isn't any longer. It does put more pressure on the Russians," he said.

The attacks have sparked panic among Russian tourists in Crimea and concern in Moscow that a newly-built bridge linking Russia to Crimea across the Kerch Strait could be targeted.

Mykhailo Podolyak on Wednesday called for the bridge to be 'dismantled'.

"Not important how - voluntary or not," he said, suggesting it, too, was a legitimate military target.



Fire and smoke billowing from munitions depot in Crimea (AFP)

'Coherent' counter-offensive

The Institute for the Study of War in Washington pointed out

that Tuesday's attack was on a key supply hub for Russian forces in southern Ukraine.

It said attacks of the past week were part of 'a coherent Ukrainian counter-offensive' to disrupt supply lines and force Russian troops back across the Dniro River in southern Ukraine.

"Russian supply lines from Crimea directly support Russian forces in mainland Ukraine including those in western Kherson Oblast," it said.

Ukraine says it has recaptured dozens of villages on the southern front and struck strategic targets including bridges in recent weeks. There have also been several explosions in occupied cities believed to be the work of saboteurs.

On Wednesday, Ivan Fedorov, the mayor of Melitopol, a city close to Crimea which is under Russian occupation, said two ex-

plosions had cut the TV signal which was being supplied by Russia. Britain's defence ministry said Russian commanders would likely be 'increasingly concerned with the apparent deterioration in security across Crimea, which functions as a rear base area for the occupation'.

'Not a place for them'

Once on the fringes of the Ottoman Empire, the diamond-shaped trading hub of Crimea was captured by Russian imperialist forces in the 18th century.

It was the site of the last stand by anti-Bolshevik forces after the Russian Revolution of 1917 and was transferred to Soviet Ukraine after World War II.

The port of Sevastopol retained a special status as the headquarters of Russia's Black Sea Fleet. Following a pro-West-

ern revolution in Kyiv in 2014, Russian forces took over the peninsula, pushing out heavily outnumbered Ukrainian soldiers.

After a March 2014 referendum widely seen as a sham, Russia annexed the territory.

In the first hours of its invasion on February 24, Russia poured troops and weapons through Crimea into southern Ukraine. It eventually captured the city of Kherson - the only major city it holds. Russian forces eventually established a land corridor linking Crimea to Russian-held parts of eastern Ukraine - a key strategic objective.

As the war grinds on, the aim of pushing Russian forces back to their positions before the invasion is no longer enough for many Ukrainians who want all their territory, including Crimea, back.

AFP

Morocco bus crash leaves 15 people dead, scores injured

Rabat, Morocco - A bus crash east of Morocco's economic capital Casablanca left 15 people dead and 37 injured on Wednesday, according to an initial toll from local authorities.

The bus overturned on a bend of a motorway in Khouribja province in the morning, the authorities said. It was travelling between Casablanca and the rural region of Ait Attaj, near the town of Beni Mellal at the foot of the High Atlas mountains.

The injured were taken to a hospital in Khouribja and an investigation has been opened into the accident. Road accidents, often deadly, are relatively frequent in Morocco and other North African countries.

AFP



Warriors for change

UK YOGA ‘WARRIORS’ FIGHTING TO DIVERSIFY BOOMING INDUSTRY

London-based yoga instructor Stacie Graham is on a mission to make the ancient practice more racially and socially diverse, urging her charges to become ‘warriors for change’ in the booming industry. Yoga, which originates from India, and pilates - a form of exercise focused on postural alignment - are now a US\$30bn a year industry, according to the Global Wellness Institute. But this success masks a lack of diversity, which affects the entire fitness sector, argued Graham, who also works as a diversity

policy consultant for corporations. “Here we are in London. If you go to any space where there is a gym or yoga studio, you will likely not see ‘London’, but typically white, female, able bodies - middle class - participating,” she said. “And my question has been - how is that possible?” A survey of yoga teachers and practitioners in the UK by the medical studies site BMJ Open found that 87 per cent were women, and 91 per cent white, around 10 per cent higher than the national proportion of white people.

Graham has just published book *Yoga as Resistance*, to help industry professionals broaden their clientele.

Subtle exclusion

She also convenes regular workshops with other teachers, practising yoga and plotting how to diversify the industry. “You want to be warriors of change, yoga gives us everything we need for that fight,” she tells her charges as they perform the Warrior 2 posture - one leg bent, the other stretched behind, and the arms horizontal, like arrows. Attendee Ntathu Allen, who specialises in ‘breathing and healing’ sessions for women of colour, told AFP that she is sometimes asked ‘if I’m really a teacher’ when she arrives at a new studio. Pam Sagoo, owner of Flow Space Yoga in London’s multicultural Dalston neighbourhood, was also at the workshop. “You just have to look outside the window and look at the people... to know you need appeal to a wider audience,” giving the examples of black, older and LGBT people. It is a similar situation in the United States, where “there are not many black women in these spaces, and it does not



You want to be warriors of change, yoga gives us everything we need for that fight

STACIE GRAHAM

afloat. To be profitable, studios often charge high prices. A single session in London costs around £20, potentially pricing many out. Graham, however, points to more subtle exclusionary factors, such as a performance-oriented atmosphere that discourages those who are less flexible, less slim and older. As a result, many people who could really benefit from yoga, such as those suffering from pandemic-related mental health issues and long COVID-19, are missing out, she added. Despite the awareness generated by the Black Lives Matter movement, Graham believes that economic constraints discourage studio owners from making the necessary efforts and investments to make yoga more inclusive. The first step would be to diversify the recruitment of teachers and staff. “They should recruit more instructors of colour, LGBT people, Asians,” urged Raquel Horsford Best. And, of course, making the classes more affordable. Sagoo, for instance, offers substantial discounts to people on benefits, and free classes to certain associations. AFP

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HOLLYWOOD/BOLLYWOOD

TINSEL TOWN TICKING AGAIN

HOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW: BULLET TRAIN



AN OUTRAGEOUS, WILD RIDE

Based on a book, *Deadpool 2* director David Leitch channels the Coen Brothers' twisted comedic arc, Guy Ritchie's signature brand of filmmaking, and Tarantino's sensibility in this unpredictable tale of fate and a mysterious briefcase.

Bullet Train is an action film that could easily have been an animated movie, and often looks and feels like one. The story takes place on a bullet train careening across Japan, but most of the movie was shot on green-screened sets, and the cityscapes and countrysides that the train rides through are mainly miniatures and CGI.

A reformed assassin operating under the name 'Ladybug' (Brad Pitt), the code mocks his bad luck, accepts a snatch and grab job as he fills in for a colleague. He just needs to find a briefcase and get off the train. It can't be that easy though, can it? There's

a catch.

A British hitman Tangerine (Aaron Taylor-Johnson) and his partner in crime Lemon (Brian Tyree Henry) cannot lose that bag at any cost. There's also a young girl with a mysterious agenda (Joey King), a snake, an underworld kingpin called the 'White Death' (Michael Shannon) and a father-son duo who seeks revenge and redemption (Hiroyuki Sanada as The Elder and Andrew Koji as Kimura). The more the merrier, isn't it?

As their tracks intertwine, the film is fuelled with nonstop action, gory humour and comic book style storytelling that never quite slow down the train. While the story doesn't quite evolve as the journey progresses, there's not a single dull moment in this dark comedy that parodies mafia movies and internet wokery.

It's wacky, breezy and makes a statement.



J LO, BEN AFFLECK TO THROW THREE-DAY WEDDING

Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck are all set to exchange vows for the second time. Yes, you read it right.

As per report, the lovebirds, who got married in July this year, will continue celebrating their love with a three-day wedding extravaganza this weekend, reported.

"It's going to be all about J Lo. Ben wants all of the focus to be on her for their big day," an insider told the publication.

"Their three-day intimate celebration for family and friends will kick off with a rehearsal dinner on Friday," the source added.

The actual ceremony will take place on Saturday, and the couple will close out their weekend with a barbecue and picnic on Sunday.

NIGHT CHANGES



One Direction fans couldn't contain their excitement or questions when Louis Tomlinson like his former bandmate Zayn Malik's latest Instagram video. The latter shared the black and white clip on August 15 and in it, he's singing an a capella version of the band's 2014 hit song *Night Changes*. There was no caption or explanation for the post, but Louis' approval of it seemed to prove there's still a musical appreciation between them.

The second video the fan is referring to is one of Zayn singing *One Direction*'s song *You & I*, off their 2013 album *Midnight Memories*. He shared the clip in June, and Louis liked that one as well. He was standing in front of shelves of awards, which were most likely his own from his days with the band, while holding a microphone, in the black and white clip. He hit a high note of a lyric from the chorus and the surprising post caused just as much excitement as his recent one online.

BRITNEY SPEARS DRAGS ON WITH ELTON JOHN DUET

Fans are bursting at the seams with excitement regarding Britney Spears' upcoming collaboration with Elton John, but Britney is taking her time with it to make sure she is happy with the final product. "Britney is a huge perfectionist when it comes to her music so until she feels



the song is 100% ready, she's not going to drop it. But everything is prepared to go full steam ahead as soon as she gives her final approval," a person close to Britney, 40, told *HollywoodLife*. In July, the singer collaborated on a new version of the 75-year-old musician's 1971 hit *Tiny Dancer*, marking Britney's return to music after a six-year hiatus.

'NOPE', A HAT TRICK?

Comedian turned smash-hit horror creator Jordan Peele brings his third feature film *Nope* to the masses. Having scared audiences with both *Get Out* and *Us*, can he replicate the same success and make *Nope* a hat trick?

The easy answer to this question is yes. In all honesty, Peele's third feature is perhaps his best yet.

The director is now fully at home behind the camera, and more importantly, trusted by those that employ him. His golden track record has facilitated a space in which Peele can work freely without interference and he throws everything in that he can to ensure *Nope* is his most terrifying story yet. This terror begins right from the very start when, over the top of the opening logos, comes the sound of voices.

The audio sounds like a sitcom, but as the dialogue turns to screams, things don't sound as they should. Once through the logos, *Nope* reveals its first visual and this first image is bold. On screen is a television set upon which sits a chimp – a chimp smothered in blood. Next to the animal is a small slender set of legs, one foot missing a shoe. Its pair lies in a frame also speckled with blood. Any film that begins like this clearly means business and immediately puts the viewer on edge.



ROBERT DE NIRO TO STAR IN 'WISE GUYS'



Hollywood veteran Robert De Niro is set to play the lead in filmmaker Barry Levinson's mob drama *Wise Guy*. It is a period piece centered on Vito Genovese and Frank Costello, a pair of Italian Americans running two separate crime families during the mid-20th century.

According to the reports, De Niro will be taking on both key roles in the film scheduled to be released theatrically. 'Goodfellas' scribe Nicholas Pileggi has penned the script.

Wise Guys marks De Niro and Levinson's fifth collaboration following Emmy-nominated movie *The Wizard of Lies*, *What Just Happened*, *Wag the Dog* and *Sleepers*.

JOHNSON LOBBIED TO SIPHON BLACK ADAM FROM 'SHAZAM'



Hollywood star Dwayne Johnson has revealed that if it wasn't for him the titular character that he'll play in *Black Adam* could've debuted in 2019's *Shazam!*, had Warner Bros. went ahead with its original plan.

According to report, the *Shazam!* movie went into development in 2014 and its script originally included origin stories for both the title character and *Black Adam*.

Both the super-powered fictional individuals have a shared history in the DC comics, so it seemed fitting to launch their big screen iterations together in one film. However, Johnson disagreed with this.

BOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW: LAAL SINGH CHADDHA



A journey of joy

Directed by Advait Chandan, *Laal Singh Chaddha* is a Hindi adaptation of Robert Zemeckis' 1994 Oscar winning film *Forrest Gump*, starring Tom Hanks.

Laal Singh Chaddha, starring Aamir Khan and Kareena Kapoor in lead roles, verbalises *Forrest Gump*'s musings on life, love, destiny. Though the original conveyed things best in a soft, easy, unspoken way, this film turns up the tone and energy a bit. It opts for speech over silent tears, so expect a perpetually wide-eyed Aamir Khan doing a lot of Punjabi accent with 'PK's body language and enthu-

siasm. He sets the tempo of this film a bit higher, that of a blockbuster feature film, but retains the essence of the original — a Disney like fairy-tale without the luxury of magic but an ingrained belief in miracles. *Laal Singh Chaddha* localises the events but continues to stay in *Forrest*'s world.

Adapting a classic isn't an easy territory to tread. Remaking *Forrest Gump* is even more complicated given its meandering, all-encompassing, nonlinear plot and profound yet simple approach to life and its purpose. You watch a simpleton wandering through life, not looking for answers but finding them along

the way. He tells you his story as he embarks on a train journey from Pathankot to Chandigarh - his tough childhood, feisty mother (Mona Singh), childhood sweetheart Rupa (Kareena Kapoor Khan), accidental wealth, wars fought, friends made (Naga Chaitanya Akkineni as Bala and Manav Vij as Mohammed), facing death, and running through the pain.

We can't say if the remake was necessary, but it was definitely a tough act to follow given how disarmingly poignant the original is and you know exactly how the events unfold in it. Worth watching.

Zaman scores century in Pakistan’s victory



Pakistan players celebrate the fall of a Netherlands wicket on Tuesday

Rotterdam, Netherlands - Opener Fakhar Zaman hit his seventh one-day international century to steer Pakistan to a 16-run victory in the first of a three-match series Tuesday against the Netherlands in Rotterdam.

Pakistan won the toss and elected to bat in warm and humid conditions on a day where big scores were expected on a sluggish pitch at the VOC Cricket Club outside the Dutch harbour city.

The tourists however got off to a slow start before posting a commanding 314-6 after 50 overs.

Despite a valiant run chase, the Dutch finished on 298-8 against a spirited Pakistani team, backed by a myriad of vocal supporters.

Pakistan captain Babar Azam afterwards admitted being concerned at times during the match in what he described as “tricky conditions”.

Zaman’s innings however “gave a solid partnership on which we could build”, he said.

AFP



South Africa's Kagiso Rabada celebrates after taking the wicket of England's Zak Crawley on the opening day of the first Test against England at Lord's on Wednesday (AFP)

PROTEAS PACERS REIGN

South Africa’s Rabada and Nortje rock England in first Test at Lord’s

London, United Kingdom - South Africa quicks Kagiso Rabada and Anrich Nortje did the damage as England slumped to 116-6 before heavy rain forced an early end to the opening day of the first Test at Lord’s on Wednesday.

Rabada, passed fit following an ankle injury, removed openers Alex Lees and Zak Crawley early on during a return of 2-36 in 12 overs.

And Nortje, one of eight South Africans playing their first Test in

England, grabbed three wickets, including the scalp of home captain Ben Stokes.

Only Ollie Pope, unbeaten on 61, offered prolonged resistance before rain arrived soon after lunch, turning into a downpour that left the outfield saturated.

Following weeks of searing temperatures in England, Wednesday’s bad weather meant only 32 overs were possible before the players left the field early in the second session.

But that was still long enough for the Proteas’ pace attack to rip through England’s top order.

The home side came into the game with a perfect record of four wins from as many Tests under their new leadership pairing of Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum.

All of those victories had been

Only Ollie Pope, unbeaten on 61, offered prolonged resistance before rain arrived half an hour after lunch

the World Test Championship table were soon justified.

Spearhead fast bowler Rabada, 27, had left-hander Lees caught behind for five and removed struggling fellow opener Crawley for nine after he nicked a ball that nipped away low to Aiden Markram at second slip.

Crawley’s exit left him with a lowly Test average for a specialist batsman of 26 from 47 innings.

Star batsman Joe Root was powerless to stop the rot, the former England captain lbw for eight to a huge inswinger from towering left-arm paceman Marco Jansen.

Root reviewed Indian umpire Nitin Menon’s decision but replays indicated the ball would have clipped leg stump.

Jonny Bairstow had made 106 and an unbeaten 114 during Eng-

land’s most recent Test, a seven-wicket win over India at Edgbaston last month.

But he was bowled between bat and pad for a five-ball duck by Nortje as he tried to drive on the up, with England now 55-4.

Pope completed a 69-ball fifty but, with the very last delivery of the session, Nortje squared up Stokes to have the all-rounder caught in the slips for 20, leaving England on 100-5 at the interval.

That became 116-6 shortly afterwards when wicketkeeper Ben Foakes played on to express quick Nortje for six.

Pope was now batting with the tail, but rain spared England from further punishment at the hands of the Proteas pace attack, with only Lungi Ngidi yet to take a wicket.

AFP



Serena Williams congratulates Emma Raducanu after their match

Serena Williams trounced by Raducanu in Cincinnati

Cincinnati, United States - Serena Williams bowed out of the WTA/ATP Cincinnati Masters at the first hurdle on Tuesday, losing in straight sets to US Open champion Emma Raducanu as the end of her glittering career looms ever closer.

Williams, who last week indicated that she is planning to retire after this month’s US

Open, was no match for British teenager Raducanu, who romped to a 6-4, 6-0 win.

The 40-year-old Williams left the court swiftly after the defeat without speaking to television reporters and did not hold a press conference.

In the men’s draw, Nick Kyrgios defeated Alejandro Davidovich Fokina 7-5, 6-4.

AFP

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India to play two five-Test series against Australia

New Delhi, India - India and Australia will clash home and away in two five-Test series between 2024 and 2027, cricket’s world governing body said on Wednesday as it released its international schedule.

The two heavyweights have long competed for the Border-Gavaskar trophy in a maximum of four Tests in one series, but Australia will host India for five Tests in 2024-2025 and they will meet again in India in 2027.

It is the first time in more than 30 years that they will play series contested over five Tests.

The International Cricket Council said its 12 members would play 777 international matches, including 173 Tests, 281 ODIs and 323 T20Is in the next Future Tours Programme cycle for 2023-2027.

Australia, India and England, often called the Big Three of cricket, will feature in the largest number of Test matches in 2023-2027. The upcoming cycle also features five major ICC events, starting with the 50-over World Cup in India next year.

AFP



Indian players during a team training session

India present huge ODI challenge for transformed Zimbabwe team

Harare, Zimbabwe - Transformed Zimbabwe face their biggest challenge since Dave Houghton became coach two months ago when they host India in a series of three one-day internationals, starting on Thursday.

Although several stars, including batters Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, are being rested ahead of the Asia Cup in the UAE this month, the tourists are expected to win all three matches in Harare.

India are placed third behind leaders New Zealand and England in the ODI rankings, 10 places above Zimbabwe.

Under the guidance of 64-year-old former batting star Houghton, the southern Africa nation have won nine of 11 ODI

and Twenty20 internationals.

With Houghton in charge, hosts Zimbabwe beat non-Test teams Jersey, Singapore, the United States, Papua New Guinea and the Netherlands to qualify for the 2022 T20 World Cup.

Higher-ranked Bangladesh were expected to burst the bubble, but suffered shock 2-1 losses in both T20 and ODI series.

Pakistan-born batsman Sikandar Raza, whose childhood dream to be a fighter pilot was dashed by an eyesight glitch, played a key role in the ODI series with successive centuries.

“He is a very good player who has been representing Zimbabwe with distinction for a long time,” said India vice-captain and opening batsman Shikhar Dhawan.

Houghton said the unbeaten innings of 135 and 117 by the 36-year-old had a knock-on effect as they instilled confidence in his teammates.

“Playing alongside Sikandar, Innocent Kaia hit a century in his first ODI, then Regis Chakabva scored his first ODI ton with some brilliant shots.”

Although missing Kohli and Sharma, Houghton says there is no such thing as a weak India.

“They could pick four teams and then occupy the first four places in an international tournament. That is how good they are.

Opener KL Rahul, a late inclusion after recovering from a hernia injury and testing positive for coronavirus, leads India.

AFP

GOLDEN COMEBACK

Marcell Jacobs storms to Euro 100m crown as Ingebrigtsen, Perkovic shine

Munich, Germany - Olympic champion Marcell Jacobs put an injury-ravaged season behind him to storm to gold in the 100m gold in the European Athletics Championships in Munich on Tuesday.

Jacobs, who was world indoor 60m champion in Belgrade in March, but withdrew before the semi-finals of the 100m at last month's world championships in Oregon, clocked a championship record-equalling time of 9.95 seconds.

Defending champion Zharnel Hughes claimed silver in 9.99sec with another Briton, Jeremiah Azu, taking bronze in 10.13.

"This was a difficult season with problems, with injury," said the 27-year-old Italian, who has been beset by leg injuries and competed with a heavily-strapped left calf in Munich.

"My leg is not good and I am not happy about how the race went technically, there were some problems.

"But I am over the moon with the gold medal. After Olympic gold, I've now got the European gold. I've got to get the world championship gold now."

In a heady night of track and field at a packed Olympic Stadium, the raucous crowd went wild as unheralded home favourite Gina Lueckenkemper pulled off a shock by winning the women's blue riband sprint.

The 25-year-old, who won 100m silver in the last European champs in Berlin in 2018 and 200m bronze in 2016, threw her-



Italy's Marcell Jacobs celebrates after winning gold in the men's 100m at the European Athletics Championships in Munich on Tuesday (AFP)

My leg is not good and I am not happy about how the race went technically, there were some problems. But I am over the moon with the gold medal

MARCELL JACOBS

self at the line to clock 10.99sec for a photo-finish victory over Switzerland's Mujinga Kambundji.

Britain's Daryll Neita took bronze with 11.00sec, while her teammate, defending champion Dina Asher-Smith, pulled up with injury halfway through the race and finished last.

Proven trio shine

A trio of proven performers had earlier showed off their prowess

in perfect, balmy conditions, retaining their titles in no little style.

First up was Norway's Jakob Ingebrigtsen, who dominated the 5,000m to keep a repeat double bid on track.

The 21-year-old, crowned world champion over the distance at last month's worlds in Eugene, timed 13min 21.13sec.

"I believe in myself and I believe in the things I have done before. It was amazing here today, it was a great race to be a part of,"

said Ingebrigtsen.

"It feels great to be back and win, it is special."

Greece's defending long jump champion Miltiadis Tentoglou, the reigning Olympic and world indoor champion who won world silver in Eugene, then set a championship record to retain his Euro title.

The Greek soared out to 8.52m on his fourth attempt, bettering the previous best of 8.47m set by Germany's Christian Reif in Barcelona in 2010.

Then came the turn of the doyenne of the women's discus, Croatia's Sandra Perkovic.

The 32-year-old Croat left it late, going out to a winning 67.95 metres on her fifth attempt for gold.

It was a record sixth successive European title, the two-time Olympic and world champion having first won the continental competition in Barcelona in 2010.

"I just won my sixth European title here at this beautiful stadium in front of this amazing crowds, so I am so happy and proud tonight," said Perkovic.

"I knew I was ready to do it and I think the fight was nice."

There was also drama in the decathlon as Germany's Niklas Kaul snatched gold from Swiss rival Simon Ehammer on the back of a monstrous 76.05m in the javelin and a personal best of 4:10.04 in the strength-sapping final 1500m. Kaul had 8,545 points while Ehammer took silver, just 77pts behind Estonia's Janek Oiglane claimed bronze (8,346).

AFP



Ukraine's Mykhailo Romanchuk celebrates after winning gold in 1500m freestyle at European Aquatics Championships in Rome (AFP)

Romanchuk stuns Paltrinieri to grab 1500m swim gold

Rome, Italy - As a string of world champions added European titles on Tuesday, Ukrainian Mykhailo Romanchuk provided an upset in Rome by toppling Gregorio Paltrinieri in the men's 1500m.

The Italian set out quickly, as he did on his way to the world title in Budapest in June, building a lead of more than a second by halfway, but Romanchuk, the reigning European champion, surged past in the 19th of the 30 lengths and pulled away.

He beat Paltrinieri by 3.69sec and, as the Italian crowd, which had fallen silent, applauded a Ukrainian victory, the winner balanced on the lane rope at the Foro Italico pool and beat his chest with his fist.

It was Ukraine's first medal in the swimming in Rome.

"These are hard times for me, especially mentally," said Romanchuk, adding that he had been disappointed with his world championship and earlier 800m races in Rome. "I was mad at myself."

On the eve of her 29th birthday, Swede Sarah Sjoestroem won the 50m freestyle for her 45th major championship gold medal.

Sjoestroem cruised to her second gold of the championships in 23.91sec.

Pole Katarzyna Wasick was second at 0.29sec.

Sjoestroem won both events at the world championships in Budapest in June.

It was her 27th European long-course medal, breaking a tie with Russian Alexander Popov for most by a single swimmer.

"I think my number of medals continue going up and I'm really enjoying myself here," said the Swede.

"Now when I look up the stands and I feel the support and energy, I know why I'm doing this and why I want to go on."

Hungarian Kristof Milak also duplicated his double at the worlds when he opened the evening by winning the 200m butterfly.

AFP

Tiger Woods huddling with PGA players over LIV split

New York, United States - Tiger Woods was reportedly huddling with the PGA Tour's top professionals on Tuesday to discuss the ongoing battle with the Saudi Arabia-backed LIV golf circuit.

Woods and fellow professional Rickie Fowler jetted into Philadelphia from Florida before meeting players on the sidelines of the BMW Championship in Delaware.

Multiple US reports said Woods and around 20 of the top players on the PGA Tour were set to discuss strategies aimed at tackling LIV, which has been steadily luring players away from the tour with lucrative multi-million-dollar contracts.

Golf has been in turmoil since the launch of LIV this year, with Australia's newly minted British Open champion Cam Smith reported to be the next big name to join the upstart circuit.

Woods, who is reported to have turned down between \$700-800 million to join LIV, has been one of the new circuit's most trenchant critics.



Tiger Woods

At St. Andrews last month, Woods said he "disagreed" with players who had signed with the series.

"I think that what they've done is they've turned their back on what has allowed them to get to this position," Woods said, adding that younger players joining LIV may "never, ever get a chance to play in a major championship. That, to me, I just don't understand it," he said.

The BMW Championship is the second leg of the PGA Tour's lucrative season-ending FedEx Cup Playoffs.

AFP

Popovici drops out of 400m freestyle final at the Euros

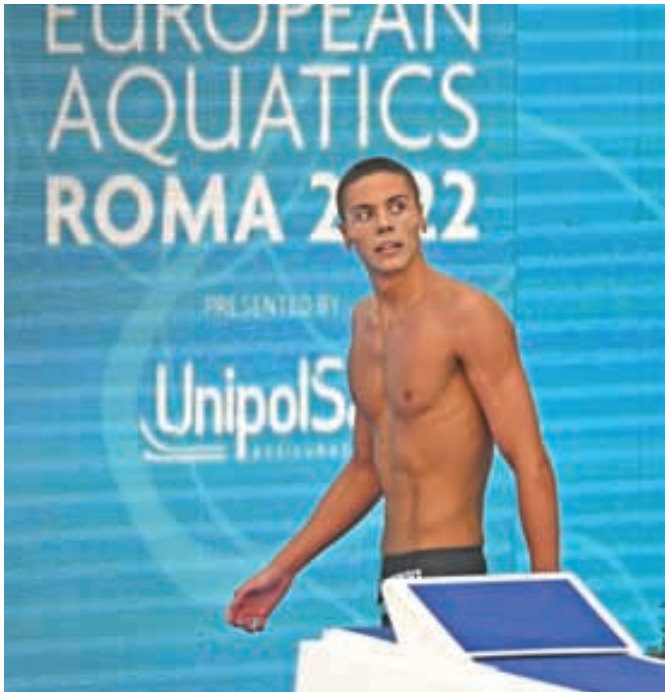
Rome, Italy - Swimming's teen sensation David Popovici pulled out of the European Championships 400 metre freestyle final on Wednesday.

The 17-year-old Romanian had qualified for Wednesday evening's final in Rome after posting the fourth fastest time in the heats of three minutes and 47 seconds.

However his name was not on the list of swimmers in the final, with Norway's Henrik Christensen taking Popovici's place.

Popovici, who previously had told reporters he had only swam 400m "three times in my life" had already won the 100m and 200m freestyle at the Foro Italico in the Italian capital, breaking the world record on his way to gold at the shorter distance.

Those were the latest triumphs in a golden summer for Popovici, who in June became the first man to complete the 100-200m freestyle double at the World Championships in



David Popovici had qualified for the final in Rome after posting the fourth fastest time in the heats of three minutes and 47 seconds (AFP)

nearly 50 years.

He also won three European junior titles in his home town of Bucharest and is due to fly to

Lima in the coming days to compete in the junior world championships.

AFP

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Former Colombian goalkeeper Rene Higuita executes a 'scorpion kick' as he makes a save in an exhibition match between the Brazilian Masters and Indian All Stars in Kolkata, India, on December 8, 2012 (AFP)

‘Higuita’s Rule’ cut time wasting and, after 30 years, is still changing football

Bogota, Colombia - Sweeper-keepers such as Manchester City’s Ederson, his Brazilian compatriot Alisson Becker at Liverpool and Bayern Munich’s Manuel Neuer are all the rage in modern football.

But until FIFA changed the back pass rule 30 years ago, goalkeepers were rarely expected to use their feet to take part in the team’s build-up play other than to punt the ball upfield. They could take their time and throw

the ball.

Former Colombia international goalkeeper Rene Higuita - famed for his outrageous overhead scorpion kick - claims he was responsible for the rule change.

“Football greats like Pele and (Diego) Maradona... (were) very good players, but they didn’t change a rule at FIFA,” Higuita told AFP by video call.

In Colombia, the decision to ban goalkeepers picking up a

back pass with their hands is known as the “Higuita Rule.”

World football’s governing body FIFA decided to act After the 1990 World Cup in Italy came in for huge criticism for dull matches that produced a record low 2.2 goals per game. Higuita argues that in that tournament, he showed the way forward.

FIFA banned the back pass at the next Olympic Games in Barcelona in June and July 1992, initially to confusion and ire.

“FIFA put an end to something that was awful, in the 1990 World Cup almost all the teams played backwards, giving the ball to the goalkeeper,” historian Luciano Wernicke told AFP.

At that World Cup, goalkeep-

ers such as Argentina’s Sergio Goycochea, Luis Gabelo Conejo of Costa Rica and Italy’s Walter Zenga “had the ball in their hands for a huge amount of time,” added Wernicke, an Argentinian.

Higuita stood out, not just for his frizzy locks, but also for his fearlessness with the ball at his feet and an ability to create attacking situations with his passes.

It was not all glory. Higuita’s ball playing ultimately cost his side.

In the last 16, Higuita was tackled far outside his penalty box by Cameroon’s Roger Milla while trying to dribble past the forward.

Milla then raced away to score the winning goal and eliminate

Colombia. His dancing celebrations of his two goals in that 2-1 win became iconic moments at the tournament.

‘Clueless’ keepers

Higuita, known as “El Loco” (the madman) also took penalties and free-kicks, scoring 43 goals in his career.

“Now (football) is much faster, there’s more movement, every day the goalkeeper has to work a little more on his feet to give something to the team,” said Higuita, who is convinced that he was the reason for the rule change.

While Wernicke recognizes Higuita was unique, he disputes that theory.

“It’s not that the law changed because of Higuita but rather because of all the many goalkeepers who weren’t like Higuita.”

Many keepers, such as Barcelona great Andoni Zubizarreta, were against the new rule, arguing to El Pais newspaper in 1992 that it would “limit the goalkeeper.”

Higuita smiles mischievously when remembering how “clueless” keepers struggled to adapt.

Santiago Canizares, who played for Spain at the 1992 Olympics, recently spoke about how the back pass rule made him nervous. “It was a surprise for us,” he told Olympics.com. “We didn’t know that this could become part of our lives.”

The impact was immediate with the next World Cup in the United States in 1994 producing 2.7 goals per game, the highest figure since 1970.

“It is the best rule change in the last 40 years, it made football more dynamic,” said Wernicke.

Whether or not he was responsible, Higuita supports other measures that could help cut time wasting, for example by stopping the clock when the ball goes out of play.

“There is a lot of talk about introducing ‘real time’ like they have in basketball, and that’s not a bad idea,” said Higuita.

Should that happen, Higuita might take the credit.

AFP



Cristiano Ronaldo (AFP)

Ronaldo blasts ‘lies’ over Man Utd future

London, United Kingdom - Cristiano Ronaldo has hit out at the “lies” surrounding reports about his future at Manchester United.

The Portugal forward missed United’s pre-season tour to Thailand and Australia due to personal reasons as speculation swirled over whether he would be leaving Old Trafford.

It has been reported Ronaldo wants to play Champions League football, but United maintain the 37-year-old is not for sale and remains an integral part of the plans of new boss Erik ten Hag.

The former Real Madrid star played the full 90 minutes of United’s 4-0 defeat at Brentford on Saturday, which left them bottom of the Premier League.

In a reply to a fan account on Instagram that referred to a report linking the United frontman to Atletico Madrid, Ronaldo said fans would “know the truth” in a

couple of weeks, adding: “The media is telling lies.”

“I have a notebook and in the last few months of the 100 news I made, only five were right. Imagine how it is. Stick with that tip.”

Manchester United will seek to kickstart their Premier League campaign when they host fierce rivals Liverpool on Monday.

United’s owners, the Glazer family, have come under fire following the team’s terrible start.

Former United defender Gary Neville has warned the club could finish in the bottom half of the Premier League if they do not address their “horror story” recruitment strategy.

Manchester United supporters’ group The 1958 is planning a protest march outside Old Trafford against the club’s owners ahead of the Liverpool match.

AFP

Tweet about buying United a joke: Musk

Washington, United States - Elon Musk tweeted on Tuesday that “I’m not buying any sports teams”, calling a viral post about him purchasing Manchester United a joke.

The world’s richest man has a habit of posting provocative statements on Twitter for fun and Musk was at it again when he told his more than 103 million followers: “Also, I’m buying Manchester United ur welcome.”

The billionaire Tesla and SpaceX CEO made the comment in reply to another of his tweets, about supporting both of the United States’ two major political parties.

The 51-year-old, who is embroiled in a lawsuit over his bid to buy Twitter, was subsequently asked on the platform if he was serious about owning Manchester United.



Although, if it were any team, it would be Man U. They were my fav team as a kid

ELON MUSK

“No, this is a long-running joke on Twitter. I’m not buying any sports teams,” Musk replied, after his original tweet garnered nearly 500,000 “likes” in a matter of hours.

“Although, if it were any team, it would be Man U. They were my fav team as a kid.”

Manchester United, one of the biggest clubs in world football but suffering a prolonged slump, are owned by the Glazer family. They have been targeted

by angry fans.

There was no immediate reaction from United or its owners to Musk’s tweets.

Shares of the team listed on the New York Stock Exchange are down year to date, but ended Tuesday flat, with a market capitalization of \$2.1 billion.

Despite calling it a joke, Musk’s tweet could land him in trouble with US regulators.

The Glazers are the focus of fan fury after the team’s dra-

matic fall from grace.

The Americans also own the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, an NFL franchise in Florida.

United fans have protested against the team’s senior management for poor performances in recent years, as well as their involvement in a plan to start a new “Super League” of Europe’s richest teams.

The Red Devils finished last season a lowly sixth in the English Premier League.

United have made another poor start to the campaign under their new coach Erik ten Hag and are bottom of the table after two defeats in as many games.

Fresh protests against the Glazers are planned ahead of United’s next game, at home to fierce rivals Liverpool on August 22.

AFP



Brighton sign Estupinan from Villarreal

London, United Kingdom - Brighton signed Ecuador defender Pervis Estupinan from Spanish side Villarreal on Tuesday in a deal worth a reported £17 million (\$20 million).

Estupinan agreed a five-year contract with the Premier League club, who needed a replacement for Marc Cucurella following the left-back’s recent move to Chelsea.

PSV escape with draw in Champions League play-offs

Glasgow, United Kingdom - Armando Obispo spared Walter Benitez’s blushes as PSV Eindhoven rescued a 2-2 draw against Rangers in the Champions League play-off first leg on Tuesday.

PSV goalkeeper Benitez looked to have gifted Rangers the advantage when he allowed Tom Lawrence’s free-kick to squirm through his hands in the second half at Ibrox.

Benitez’s howler put Rangers 2-1 ahead after Antonio Colak had cancelled out Ibrahim Sangare’s opener for PSV.

But Obispo bailed out his team-mate with a priceless late leveller that leaves the tie on a knife-edge heading into next week’s second leg in Eindhoven.

Although PSV will be



Antonio Colak of Rangers celebrates after scoring against PSV in Glasgow on Tuesday

favourites on home turf, Rangers should still fancy their chances after staging a rousing comeback

from 2-0 down to defeat Union Saint-Gilloise 3-0 in the third qualifying round.

“The better chances were for us in the second half but 2-2 is a fair result,” PSV coach Ruud Van

Nistelrooy said.

FC Copenhagen held off a fightback from visiting Trabzonspor to win their first leg 2-1.

Viktor Claesson gave the home team a first half lead. Lukas Lerager added a second three minutes after half time, smashing the ball in from close range after a corner. The Turkish champions responded by penning the Danes back, but struggled to break through. Their only goal was a 25-yard shot from Tasos Bakasetas that took a deflection off centre back David Khocholava with 11 minutes left.

In Norway, hosts Bodo/Glimt edged Dinamo Zagreb 1-0. Norwegian veteran Amahl Pellegrino headed in the only goal in the 37th minute.

AFP