

FOOTBALL FEVER

Excitement builds up as World Cup begins in Qatar

Shaddad al Musalmey
Muscat

On Sunday, arguably the world's biggest sporting event kicked off when host Qatar met South America's Ecuador in Al Bayt Stadium about 35km from Doha. Alongside the excitement on the pitch, FIFA World Cup 2022 will also provide a major boost to GCC economies through fan visits and tourism boom.

Football's premiere event is expected to draw over 1.2mn visitors to Qatar over the course of the five-week tournament. Besides being the first World Cup in the Middle East, it is also the first played during winter.

This World Cup is likely the last for Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, two giants who have ruled the football pitch for the past decade. In an interview with Piers Morgan earlier this week, Ronaldo, 37, vowed to retire if he leads Portugal to victory.

Across Oman, both young and old are geared up to celebrate the 'beautiful game'. Sabri Abdullah, a football fan who works for PDO, said he has made elaborate preparations to catch the excitement.

"The first thing I did was to invest in an enormous TV. I try to make such events a family affair; I don't like the idea of going out to public places like hotels and restaurants to watch matches," he said.

Aiman al Zakwani, another passionate football fan, said he opted not to avail his annual leave in November to avoid travel and thereby miss the matches. "I just want to be home throughout the tournament. I enjoy watching matches in the comfort of my bean bag. Match timings are very good this year," he said.

Others like Mohammed al Balushi, a football fan from Sohar, however, have more fun watching matches in cafes with a bunch of family and friends. "That's way more exciting. It is more fun cheering and celebrating with other football lovers."

For Balushi, the bigger the crowd, the better it is, and the time of the matches doesn't matter. "After all, the World Cup happens once in four years. We can sleep after the finals."

To keep up with demand, giant screens are ready at cafes to welcome large crowds.



SAYYID THEYAZIN ATTENDS WORLD CUP OPENING CEREMONY

Dancers perform during the opening ceremony ahead of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Group A football match between Qatar and Ecuador at the Al Bayt Stadium in Al Khor, north of Doha, on Sunday. H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Sports, Culture and Youth, attended the opening ceremony (AFP)



► NEWS BRIEF

SAYYID BADR RECEIVES NORWEGIAN COUNTERPART

Muscat - H E Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, met Anniken Huitfeldt, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway, on Sunday.

The two ministers reviewed areas of bilateral cooperation and ways of enhancing these, especially in the fields of economy, renewable energy, climate and green economy transition. They also exchanged views on various regional and international developments of mutual interest.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the two ministers signed a memorandum for renewal of political consultation between the two countries.

Khalid Hashel al Muselhi, Head of the Minister's Office Department, attended the meeting.

Trump signature golf course, villas to be built in Yiti

New York, United States - The Trump Organization will develop a signature Trump Resort, including residential villas, a hotel and a golf course in the AIDA project - a premium, mixed-use project nestled within the master plan of Yiti Integrated Tourism Development.

The developer of AIDA - Dar al Arkan, a leading Saudi real estate company - and The Trump Organization signed an agreement in New York for the development of the project.

The 100m hilltop development is one of the largest premium mixed-use real estate projects in the world, situated directly by the sea.

AIDA will be developed with the support of Oman Tourism Development Company (USMRAN Group). Valued at US\$4bn, the project will be developed over ten years on an area of 3.5mn sqm. Development of AIDA is due to begin in the first quarter of 2023.

Signing the agreement, Yousef al Shelash, Chairman of Dar al Arkan, said, "The Trump Organization is known for its exclusive, world-class developments. Superior quality, detail and perfection are the standards that Trump demands throughout its projects - from residential to resort, from hotel to golf course, and from commercial office to retail. We are always looking to enhance Dar al Arkan's unique projects with premium facilities and experiences, and our partnership with Trump will distinguish our first project in Oman and put it on the global map."



Yousef al Shelash and Donald Trump

Superior quality, detail and perfection are the standards that Trump demands throughout its projects

YOUSSEF AL SHELASH

About the project, Eric Trump, Executive Vice-President of The Trump Organization, said that when the company was looking for its next project and a place to expand its footprint, "we knew it had to be in an outstanding location and with an amazing team. At AIDA, in the heart of Muscat, situated directly overlooking the incredible sea, we have truly found that".

Ziad el Chaar, CEO of Dar al Arkan Global, said, "AIDA sits on a high peak overlooking one of the most breath-taking horizons

in the world. Imagine the beautiful setting of a villa in these majestic surroundings or playing a game of golf overlooking the sea - it is truly unrivalled."

AIDA's master plan was designed to ensure innovative standards with the adoption of architectural foundations, utilising rich natural surroundings. Most importantly, AIDA is being developed sustainably, fully respecting and preserving the topography and unique environmental features of the area with homes integrating seamlessly within the cliffs.

The meticulously planned course will feature state-of-the-art golf facilities, an expansive golf club, and the finest amenities ultimately creating a new luxury benchmark for golf in the Middle East. While the AIDA golf course will offer the ideal setting for the game's enthusiasts, the hospitality and residential component will be second to none for the luxury traveller, a press release stated.

Sayyid Badr holds meeting with heads of missions in Oman

Muscat - H E Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, held the third annual meeting on Sunday with ambassadors and heads of diplomatic missions accredited to the sultanate.

H E Sayyid Badr highlighted Oman's pillars of foreign policy and touched on regional and international developments and the sultanate's efforts in enhancing the investment milieu and economic diversification. He also addressed climate issues and underscored Oman's efforts in achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050. He pointed out that Oman welcomes cooperation and partnership with Arab and friendly countries in this field.

He congratulated Qatar for hosting the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and also congratulated the UAE on being chosen to host the Conference of the Parties (COP28) in 2023.

H E Sayyid Badr exchanged views with the ambassadors on cooperation between the Foreign Ministry and diplomatic missions. He lauded the efforts of the envoys and members of the diplomatic corps to consolidate ties between their respective



H M receives message from President of Tajikistan

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from President Emomali Rahmon of Tajikistan dealing with the bilateral relations between the two countries.

The message was handed over to Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, when he received Zubaydullo Zubaydov, Ambassador Designate of Tajikistan to Oman.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed cooperation in various fields. The meeting was attended by Khalid Hashel al Muselhi, Head of the Minister's Office Department, and several other Foreign Ministry officials.

countries and Oman.

The meeting was attended by H E Mohammed Nasser al Wa-

haibi, Undersecretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs in the Foreign Ministry.

Norwegian ship wins Sultan Qaboos Sailing Award

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Defence, represented by the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), presented the Sultan Qaboos Sailing Award in Gran Canaria, Spain, on Saturday.

In its tenth edition this year, the award went to the Norwegian ship *Christian Radek* for its impressive history in training for sailing.

The presentation ceremony

coincided with the 52nd National Day of the sultanate and was held under the auspices H E Omar bin Saeed al Kathiri, Ambassador of Oman to Spain, in the presence of Brig Gen Tariq bin Isa al Raisi, Chief Staff Officer at RNO, a number of RNO personnel and officials of Gran Canaria island.

Several government and private maritime institutions competed for the award this year, besides entities engaged in sailing.

The winner of the award was chosen during the annual conference of the International Association for Training in Sailing.

The Sultan Qaboos Sailing Award is supervised by the Ministry of Defence in cooperation with Sail Training International. The award was launched in Norway in 2011 in response to the Royal orders of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

The award is one of the world's most prestigious sailing awards.



Bisat oil field production to hit 60,000 bpd by early 2023



Superfan to cheer Saudi team at 'home'



TIME FOR REFLECTION AND CELEBRATION



Based on the Royal orders of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the official holiday for the 52nd National Day has been announced on November 30 and December 1. What does the National Day mean to you? And what do you plan to do in the National Day holiday? Here is what *Muscat Daily* readers said

Ahmed al Siyabi
Businessman

National Day is the day to be proud of our traditions, culture and the country. A strong sense of patriotism lingers in our hearts and minds for weeks. This year, the holiday was announced a little early and this has helped me plan in advance. I plan to spend some quality time with my family. I also plan to take my staff for an evening outing somewhere in Muscat followed by a good Omani dinner.

Omar al Musallami
Marketing manager

National Day is the day when we remember

our beloved the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said more compared to other times of the year. I have always decorated my cars with images of Oman. This time, I printed a big '52' on the door. During the holiday, I plan to visit my friends in Dubai. My brother is also there and we long to spend some good time together.

Bader al Harthy
Government employee

Every National Day, I dress up my children in beautiful clothes and take pictures. I also visit my village and meet all my cousins and relatives. It is a lovely time to feel the togetherness with good food, in a nice environment,

weather and people around. We play patriotic music most of the day and make sure to cook homemade food. National Day is very close to my heart and I always take immense pride in celebrating it.

Vinod Raghavan
Businessman

I have been in Oman for the last ten years and every National Day is special to me. The day is special to Omanis as well as expatriates. I plan to visit some interior areas of the country this National Day holiday with my sponsor, who is also a friend. We will also go to his village. I write blogs and this holiday will be the right time for me to write about the real Oman.

Mohammad Lawati
Sales executive

National Day is the time of the year to look back on our glorious past and the many achievements that the country has accomplished during the past five decades. Our office celebrated with cake, music and food. Everyone joined the celebration, including expatriates who have been a very integral part of our lives.

During the holiday on November 30 and December 1, I would love to chill watching the matches of FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. I wanted to go to Qatar, too, but sadly I cannot because now no tickets are available.

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NEXT ON YOUR SAY

Has Oman done enough to attract FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 guests and what else can be done now to woo them before the end of the tournament?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by *Muscat Daily*. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om You can also log on to our Facebook page or tweet us your comments on the issue.

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

Share your comments in not more than 50 words along with your full name and profession before next Sunday, 10am, via WhatsApp, Facebook or Instagram

SEND US ON OUR NEW WHATSAPP NO 91953774

‘Great opportunity for an expat’



Abdul Latheef, MD of Badr al Samaa Group of Hospitals, promises to position Oman as a global player if elected to the OCCI board

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Abdul Latheef, managing director of Badr al Samaa Group of Hospitals, who is contesting the upcoming elections to the board of Oman Chamber of Commerce & Industry (OCCI), hopes to be instrumental in making the expatriate business community in Oman an integral part and a catalyst in Oman Vision 2040 if elected.

Latheef, who has three decades of experience in the healthcare industry in Oman and the GCC, besides owning businesses in travel, real estate, education, construction, retailing and hospitality, firmly believes that allowing representation of the expat community is a historical and important step taken by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Membership to the OCCI board comes with significant opportunities and responsibilities to support the expat business community in meaningful ways and to become a partner in the economic growth of Oman, Latheef affirms.

His election manifesto lists representing the expat business community, facilitating and framing policies and streamlining businesses, overcoming economic challenges, keeping pace with regional and international business developments, and positioning Oman as a global player.

He will also strive for synergy between the public and private sectors, establish more public-private partner-

ships to undertake and accomplish projects of national importance, and contribute towards meeting the national agenda laid down in Oman Vision 2040.

Latheef responded to *Muscat Daily's* questions on what he proposes to do if elected to the OCCI board.

What initiatives for community welfare and a safe and healthy environment do you have in mind? Will these be carried out with the help of other corporates?

This is the first time an opportunity has been given to an expat and I wish to express my sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the Government of Oman for involving expats in this prestigious body.

I believe each one of us deserves the best quality healthcare and it will be my responsibility to take healthcare services to every part of Oman. We have already made good progress in this direction. Wherever workable, I will undertake public-private partnership projects and work closely with the Ministry of Health to achieve targets listed in Vision 2040.

My main focus will be health education, health awareness, preventive screening and non-communicable disease surveillance and control. Preventive health screening by conducting regular health screening and holding health awareness talks will be on the 'to-do' list.

Are there any specific concerns regarding ease of doing business in Oman which need immediate attention? What efforts will you take to solve these?

In the past, many policy changes and progressive plans have been put in place which ensured a gradual improvement in Oman's ranking in ease of doing business. Oman's regulatory environment is conducive to business operations. However, I will have discussions with all stakeholders. I will understand the challenges faced by them and prepare recommendations accordingly and

work on streamlining these issues.

Does the private sector's participation in healthcare in Oman need further streamlining so that more private players from other countries enter the market?

The targets set under Vision 2040 for more super specialised healthcare services and establishing medical institutes and universities is a huge responsibility for us. The Ministry of Health, with its advanced policies, is ensuring safe healthcare practices, and with the introduction of international quality accreditations like JCI (USA) and ACHSI (Australia), the quality of service delivery has reached international benchmarks.

Quality of services is well taken care of. We need to focus more on expansion of services, introduction of tertiary care modalities, and ensure patients in Oman are not compelled to seek medical care abroad. In this context, I believe everyone is welcome to join hands in the projects aimed at meeting Vision 2040. I'll accept suggestions and recommendations from representations of every private healthcare provider and work in the best interest of the industry.

Would you initiate any measures to build trust in the existing medical facilities (government/private) in Oman to reduce medical tourism to other countries?

Definitely. We need to do a study to understand the reasons, other than long waiting time and unavailability of some services in the private healthcare sector, behind patients travelling abroad for medical tourism. More awareness needs to be raised about the abilities of our healthcare system, and along with it, major focus needs to be put on expansion and advancement of services.

Is there a need for the expat business community to play a bigger role in Oman Vision 2040? Which areas need greater private participation?

There are major businesses run by expats in the sultanate. We should focus on diversification into other growing sectors and businesses. Vision 2040 can be achieved as a team, and equal responsibility lies on the expat business community. We should diversify and focus on industries like manufacturing, education, healthcare, environment and technology.

NATIONAL DAY HOLIDAY

National Day holiday triggers rush for inbound tourism

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With the National Day holiday announced, travel agents are reporting a rush of enquiries for travel in and outside Oman. However, the trend this year seems to be making the most of the holiday destinations within Oman, or flying to places which don't require prior visa arrangements.

According to travel operators, some of the best options to travel during the upcoming National Day holiday within the country are Nizwa, Jabal Akhdar, Sur, Masirah Islands, Jabal Shams and Ras al Jinz.

Aslam Saleem, Assistant Manager - Holidays at Majan International Agencies Travel and Tourism, is confident of a good response from both Omanis and expatriates for inbound tourism. "During short holidays, people rush to nearby places for a quick break and spend some quality time with their family. This time, most of the movement within Oman is for Nizwa, Jabal Akhdar and Jabal Shams. We have also made a good number bookings for desert adventures and camping. A lot of people are also travelling to Sur and Ras al Jinz. People are also looking for options like Al Ashkhara and Masirah."

Following the lifting of restric-



We have booked suites and apartments in destinations like Jabal Shams, Sohar, Sur and Ras al Jinz for such holidayers

MOHAMMAD ALI KHOSHBAKHT

tions after two years, leisure tourism is picking up rapidly in Oman. "Also, the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 is here. So we have many enquiries for Qatar too," Faiyaz Khan, general manager of Travel Point, informed.

He added, "We have several

queries for both inbound and outbound trips for the National Day holiday. People were eagerly waiting for the dates to be announced and are now making bookings."

Often last minute travel plans are made for such short holidays,

noted Rashid Fazal, Holiday In-charge at Akbar Travels. "That is why people prefer destinations that provide visa on arrival. And so Thailand is among the top choices for our customers. Other favourites are Georgia and Azerbaijan."

He added that locally, holiday-makers are interested in desert safaris and destinations like Wadi Shaab and Jabal Sifah. "Apart from expatriates, we are also seeing good response for local tours from European tourists who are already in

Oman."

Besides the popular inbound destinations, there are many who are opting for staycations. To cash in on the holiday mood, many hotels have staycation offers. Mohammad Ali Khoshbakht, manager of Al Rafa Travel and Tourism, said, "There are many Omani families who prefer to spend leisure time in hotels with no adventure or travelling involved. We have booked suites and apartments in destinations like Jabal Shams, Sohar, Sur and Ras al Jinz for such holidayers."



Ibri citizen fights mesquite menace

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To check the spread of mesquite trees and raise awareness of the importance of weeding out these small leguminous trees for the protection of green covers, an Ibri resident has made it a mission to get rid of the harmful trees from his wilayat.

Mohammed Saeed al Hinaï said he started alone to destroy mesquite trees in the wilayat of Ibri in Dhirah governorate.

"I have succeeded in removing over 80 trees so far. I cut down and burn the pestilent shrubs and trees, that endanger vegetation in the immediate surrounding, often facing the challenges of strong winds."

The initiative aims to get rid of all mesquite trees and spread awareness of its impact on the soil and environment as a whole. He also aims to encourage community members to plant wild trees, spread environmental awareness in the community and motivate young people to participate in voluntary works for environment protection.

Hinaï described the species as a "menace that threatens indigenous flora, competing for water and soil nutrients". Leaves of mesquite shrubs and trees contain a toxic substance, and the thorns cause serious injuries to human beings.

According to Hinaï, mesquite pollen has been identified as a respiratory allergen, and consumption of the pods by animals leads to teeth decay. The shrubs and trees also affect soil salinity, he added. Talking about the challenges Hinaï said lack of equipment and prevalent of snakes pose major challenges during the removal of those trees. "But with determination, patience and documenting the place where the mesquite trees were located, I was able to overcome it."

Hinaï has also been distributing wild plant saplings since 2018 so that they can not only replace the harmful trees, but can also help in the protection of soil, while ensuring the green cover in the sultanate. "I have started a small nursery at home and till now I have successfully grown 7,000 saplings," he added.

Municipality launches contest for Muscat Nights' logo design

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Municipality has announced launch of a competition for the designing of a logo for Muscat Nights 2023 - a festival that Oman plans to organise next year for the promotion of the country's heritage and culture.

The municipality has set some guidelines for the design to make the logo 'innovative' and not taken from any other logo of whether local, regional or international entity. The logo should include the name of Muscat Nights in both Arabic and English and the elements of the logo

must be clear in different colours and combine simplicity in design with depth of meaning in content,' the municipality said.

'The design should derive its elements and colours from the identity of the Muscat Municipality,' it further added.

The contest is open to Omanis only, and a participant can submit a maximum of three different designs, while the Muscat Municipality will have the sole right over the winning logo. The winner of the contest will receive OR500.

One can submit ideas for the logo until November 29 at mm@mm.gov.om

Omani brand launches luxury cane collection for men

Muscat - Luxury design brand Deema on Wednesday launched its limited edition men's walking canes, artistically crafting a signature of Oman's heritage and architecture on each one of them.

The fine jewellery brand launched three designs inspired by Omani heritage and monuments in celebration of the country's 52nd National Day.

"Our 2023 Men's Cane Collection is inspired by Oman like all our products. The designs are mainly influenced by Omani heritage and architecture," said co-founder Suad al Riyami.

"The inspiration behind this collection is the Omani khanjar, the Royal Opera House and the



Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque," added Shadya al Ismaily, another co-founder of the Deema brand.

The canes are made out of rosewood decorated with silver and precious stones such as sap-

phire and black onyx studded on them.

"As usual, a modern twist is added to our canes, with special attention to detail, uniqueness, design and fine craftsmanship,"

The inspiration behind this collection is the Omani khanjar, the Royal Opera House and the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque

SHADYA AL ISMAILY

she elaborated.

A second edition of the collection is set to launch in December this year using different materials, alongside matching rings.

The brand launched its first

Cane Collection in 2016.

"We believe that men deserve something beautiful as well. There's plenty for us women, but men have something special too," Suad explained.

Additionally the brand offers cufflinks and rings.

The Deema brand was founded by mother and daughter duo Shadya al Ismaily and Suad al Riyami in 2008. The fine jewellery brand aimed to adapt traditional Omani designs for the modern women. The brand later expanded to include linen, chinaware, corporate gifts, large scale abstract paintings and interior design services.

(Contributed by Hibba al Kindi)

Oman takes part in GCC agricultural meet

Muscat - The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, took part in the extraordinary meeting of the GCC Agricultural Cooperation Committee held on Sunday.

Dr Saud Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, headed the Omani delegation at the meeting, held via video conferencing with the prime aim of discussing food security.

The meeting concluded with a number of proposals, including the endorsement of a permanent committee for food security to stem from the GCC Agricultural Cooperation Committee, as well as renaming the Agricultural Cooperation Committee as the 'Agricultural Cooperation and Food Security Committee'.

The meeting discussed the formation of a high-level GCC working team that will comprise personnel of the public and private sectors, under the leadership of Saudi Arabia.

ONA

WANTED
TRANSLATOR / INTERPRETER

The Embassy of the Republic of Kenya in Muscat is looking for a professional and suitable candidate for appointment as a **Translator / Interpreter**

QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED:

1. Minimum of a Diploma in social sciences or linguistics / translation studies;
2. Prior work experience of at least five years both in translation and interpretation preferably in public sector;
3. Sound knowledge of English, Arabic with Kiswahili being an added advantage;
4. Solid communication skills (written, reading and verbal), translation and interpretation skills, and;
5. Conversant with office equipment and social media platforms.

NATURE OF WORK:

1. Translation of official documents, media reports, and maintaining proper records of translated documents;
2. Liaising with Oman Government and relevant Stakeholders;
3. Facilitation of administrative requirements for Embassy officials;
4. Protocol Duties, and;
5. Any other assigned duty.

SALARY

The post of a translator is Grade Four Level with a starting salary scale of OMR 650 per month.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Candidate should have a minimum of 7 years' work experience preferably in the public sector.

MANDATORY REQUIREMENT

Candidate should possess valid Oman residence visa. .

Interested candidate should send their detailed CV along with scanned copies of their academic records, Oman residence visa and references by previous employers to info@kenyaembassymuscat.com by 1500HRS on Monday, 12th December, 2022. Indicate the Job Advertisement Number as indicated above in the email subject area.

WANTED
UTILITY DRIVER

The Embassy of the Republic of Kenya in Muscat is looking for a professional and suitable candidate for appointment as a **Utility Driver**

QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED:

1. Secondary School / High-School Certificate;
2. Valid Oman driving licence;
3. Sound knowledge of English, Arabic with Kiswahili as an added advantage;
4. Solid communication skills (written, verbal and spoken);
5. Basic mechanical skills and high-level of alertness;
6. Basic knowledge of First-Aid (Accident and Emergency response), and;
7. Conversant with the road network in Oman.

NATURE OF WORK:

1. Timely and safe pick-up, transfer and drop-off of officials and goods to various destinations;
2. Research and plan for traffic, construction and weather delays;
3. Use navigation applications to determine the best, shortest and safest route;;
4. Updating route, mileage and delivery logs;
5. Ensure vehicle is always fuelled and arrange for vehicle repairs as needed, and;
6. Any other assigned duty.

SALARY

The post of a Driver II is Grade One Level with a starting salary scale of OMR 450 per month.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Candidate should have a minimum of 7 years' work experience preferably in the public sector.

MANDATORY REQUIREMENT

Candidate should possess valid Oman residence visa.

Interested candidate should send their detailed CV along with scanned copies of their academic records, Oman residence visa and references by previous employers to info@kenyaembassymuscat.com by 1500HRS on Monday, 12th December, 2022. Indicate the Job Advertisement Number as indicated above in the email subject area.

OQ says Bisat oil field's production capacity to hit 60,000 bpd by early 2023

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The production capacity of Bisat oil field in Oman's Block 60 concession area will increase to 60,000 barrels per day (bpd) by early next year, according to the operator OQ.

OQ, the sultanate's global integrated energy group, on Saturday announced the commissioning of its third crude oil processing plant in the Bisat oil field.

The commissioning of the third plant will contribute to increasing the field's production capacity to 60,000 bpd, further enhancing OQ Group's share in Oman's total oil production.

Discovered in 2017, Bisat oil field now includes around 165 oil wells and consists of three crude oil processing plants. The first crude oil processing plant started operation in August 2019 and second plant started its operation in September 2021. The third plant was commissioned on a



trial basis on November 9, 2022.

OQ successfully increased the production of Bisat oil field from 5,000 bpd in 2019 to 55,000 bpd by the third quarter of 2022, the fastest annual growth of oil field production in the region.

A wide group of Omani talents contributed to the project, which included employees from OQ Group and employees working for the contracting companies. The initiative is part of OQ's contribution to support the government's efforts in enabling national companies to carry on work in the areas of oil explo-

ration and production.

The commissioning of this new crude processing plant makes OQ Group one of the largest oil producers, bringing the group's production capacity to 219,000 barrels of equivalent oil per day, representing 12.6 per cent of Oman's total oil production.

In a press statement, Eng Ahmed bin Said al Azkawi, CEO of Upstream Sector at OQ Group, said, "The project will support the group's strategy to boost investments in oil exploration and production while con-

taining environmental impact. This is an important stage that precedes the full commercial operation of the project and will enable us to ensure the reliability of all equipment and components of the plant."

"What makes us proud is the contribution of national talents in the completion of the project and in the commissioning phase ahead of the scheduled date and within budget. In addition, the project completed more than 3,750,000 working hours without lost time injuries," he added.

ESG to enter centre stage as Oman charts path to Net Zero

Muscat - Oman will target investments worth more than US\$190bn by 2050 into the country's energy transition and decarbonisation projects to alleviate the negative effects of climate change, the sultanate's ambassador to Egypt told the COP27 conference last week.

Oman's roadmap to achieve Net Zero by its 2050 target date and the role of ESG (environmental, social and governance) in achieving sustainable economic diversification in the country will be the central theme of the workshops tackled at the 9th Oman Energy ESG Forum in Muscat on Tuesday.

The sultanate is finalising a national policy for energy transition that focuses on setting a general framework, policies, and regulations to accelerate the transformation process in sectors of hydrogen, renewable energy, energy efficiency and the capture, transfer, use and storage of carbon, and an update of the country's strategic plan will be presented at the industry



event this week.

"There is no doubt that ESG will be increasingly embedded in nearly all business conversations in Oman going forward," said Sean Evers, chairman of the Oman Energy Forum, which is returning to Muscat after a three-year hiatus due to the Covid pandemic. "What used to be a 'nice to have' is now certainly a 'must have' - and the clock to gain competitive footing in this fast-growing market is ticking," he said.

ESG is a framework that helps

stakeholders understand how an organization is managing risks and opportunities related to environmental, social, and governance criteria. It is increasingly playing a prominent role in creditworthiness, as ESG can - and does - influence credit quality, specifically, the capacity and willingness of borrowers to meet financial commitments.

The Capital Market Authority said in March that it was committed to introducing ESG reporting guidelines for companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange, but initially for voluntary implementation only before it becomes mandatory sometime later.

The 9th Oman Energy Forum, which will be held only a few days after the conclusion of the UN climate conference in Egypt (COP27), will convene 250 executives and officials from a diverse range of sectors, including energy, aviation, automobile, agriculture, academia, freezones and logistics, and through 18 sessions with over 40 speakers.

OOMCO signs deal to supply clean biofuel to Oman Aluminium Rolling

Muscat - Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) and Oman Aluminium Rolling Company (OARC), a well-known producer of aluminium sheets in Sohar, have signed an agreement for the supply of green biofuel blends.

This agreement makes OOMCO as the first fuel marketer providing biofuel in Oman market and OARC becomes a first company in Oman using such environmentally friendly and cost-effective B5 Biodiesel by OOMCO in a partnership that will contribute to a reduction OARC's carbon footprint.

The renewable fuel will be produced by an Wakud International LLC (Wakud) at their biodiesel plant in Barka's Khazaeen Economic City. Wakud is an Omani SME producing biofuels using recycled cooking oils used by Oman's hospitality industry.

"This agreement is a step forward on the national and global path towards the transition to a carbon-neutral society. We aim to distribute decarbonised prod-



ucts as climate change continues to call for lower greenhouse gas emissions and sustainable solutions that can adapt to the decarbonisation strategies of our partners," Tarik al Junaidi, chief executive officer of OOMCO, said in a press release.

He added, "Our collaboration with Oman Aluminium Rolling Company and Wakud will further contribute to Oman's circular and green economy ambitions."

The decarbonisation partnership with OARC is in line with OOMCO's continuous commitment to deploy sustainable and clean energy in all its operations. And this also a first step toward

achieving Oman 2050 Carbon Neutrality target as biodiesel B5 meant to reduce 4.3 per cent of carbon emission and OARC will use B5 in its aluminium rolling operations as a quick win solution in the journey of decarbonisation.

Peter Rijkooort, chief executive officer of OARC said, "There is an urgent need for companies like ours to address the challenges, while also leveraging the opportunities associated with decarbonisation. The use of blended biofuels for our production processes can lower our company's direct emissions by 5 per cent, while remaining cost-effective."

MSX signs MoU to develop investor relations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on Sunday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Middle East Investor Relations Association (MEIRA) to develop investor relations activities and enhance

transparency.

The MoU was signed by Haitham Salim al Salmi, CEO of the MSX and John Gollifer, general manager of MEIRA.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, Salmi said that the MSX is a member at MEIRA and the MoU aims to prepare representatives of investor re-

lations in companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange.

The collaboration between the MSX and MEIRA is considered a strategic partnership that brings international benchmarks and best practices toolkit to support the listed companies and develop the quality of companies' performance in the

market.

Moreover, MEIRA's approach is to initiate and accelerate local Investor Relations (IR) Chapters in regional capital markets and develop expertise by providing access to a wide variety of programmes, training and certifications.

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Ominvest Group
مجموعة أومينفست

PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT

THIS IS AN ANNOUNCEMENT OF AN OFFER (THE "OFFER") TO ALL SHAREHOLDERS OF (TOGETHER THE "AAIC SHAREHOLDERS" AND EACH AN "AAIC SHAREHOLDER") OF AL AHLIA INSURANCE COMPANY SAOG ("AAIC") BY NATIONAL LIFE AND GENERAL INSURANCE COMPANY SAOG (THE "OFFEROR" OR "NLGIC") TO ACQUIRE 47.5 PERCENT OF THE ISSUED SHARE CAPITAL OF AAIC (THE "ISSUED CAPITAL") PURSUANT TO THE TAKEOVER AND ACQUISITION REGULATION (E/2/2019) (THE "TAKEOVER REGULATION").

OFFER DETAILS

Offeror or NLGIC	National Life and General Insurance Company SAOG, a public joint stock company, licensed to do insurance business, bearing Cr No. 1487876, with registered office at Building No: 115, Plot No: 330, Greater Muttrah, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman and mailing address of PO Box 798, Postal Code 117, Wadi Kabir, Sultanate of Oman. The Offer is only being made by the Offeror and there are no persons acting in concert with the Offeror in making the Offer.
Offeree or AAIC	Al Ahlia Insurance Company SAOG, a public joint stock company, licensed to do insurance business, bearing CR no. 1754807, with registered office at Ominvest Business Centre, Building no. 95, Way no. 501, Airport Heights and mailing address of PO Box 751, Postal Code 112, Ruwi, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.
Offer	The offer by the Offeror to all the shareholders of AAIC excluding RSA Middle East B.S.C.(c) to acquire the remaining 47.5 percent. of the Issued Capital which would increase the Offeror's beneficial shareholding in AAIC to 100.0 per cent of the Issued Capital (being 100,000,000 fully paid-up AAIC Shares as at the Record Date). Offer Completion is subject to acceptance by AAIC Shareholders representing a minimum of 90 percent of the Offer.
Offer Document	Offer Document approved by Capital Market Authority, Oman ("CMA") for the Offer.
Offer Dates	Offer Opens: 5 December 2022 Offer Closes: 25 December 2022 Note: The offer shall be open for 21 days but shall close prior to offer close day, if it receives acceptance from AAIC shareholders amounting to 100 percent of the offer.
Announcement Date	20 November 2022.
Record Date (for purpose of the Offer)	4 December 2022.
Offer Notice	Offer Notice published by NLGIC via a disclosure made on Muscat Stock Exchange ("MSX")'s website dated 20 November 2022. Copy of the notice is available on NLGIC's website.
Suspension of Trading	The trading in AAIC shares to be suspended once the Offer is accepted by 90 percent AAIC shareholders during the Offer Period, subject to regulatory approvals.
Offer Objective	The Offeror is making the Offer with the following objectives: • A strategic decision for NLGIC which shall consolidate NLGIC and AAIC's combined position in the insurance sector in the region. • By merging the operations of NLGIC and AAIC, the combined entity is expected to enhance efficiency and derive the benefit of synergies thereby creating value for its policyholders, shareholders, and other stakeholders. • Upon completion of the Offer, all employees of AAIC will continue in their employment and there will be no immediate change to the employment structure. AAIC employees will be subject to periodic appraisals and restructuring, as standard course of business, giving due considerations to operational synergies and business requirements. • It is expected that AAIC shares will be delisted from the regular market in MSX and converted into a closed joint stock company, subject to regulatory approvals. Post Offer Completion, there may be a restructuring exercise for both entities.
Offer Price	A cash only Offer of OMR 0.466 per AAIC Share which is in line with the previous disclosure of 7 July 2022, and represents the following: • 1.15x of AAIC's book value as on 30 September 2022. • represents 52.3% higher than the AAIC's six months average price of OMR 0.306 prior to the disclosure of 7 July 2022. • a 50.3% premium over the closing price of RO 0.310 as of the disclosure date of 7 July 2022, and 2.2% premium compared to the closing price of OMR 0.456 as of 14 November 2022.
Offer Acceptance Qualification	In the event that AAIC Shareholders who hold in aggregate less than 75 percent, except RSA Middle East B.S.C.(c), of the Offer accept the Offer for the Offer Price in accordance with the terms of the Offer Document (together the "Selling AAIC Shareholders" and each a "Selling AAIC Shareholder"), NLGIC may choose to either withdraw the Offer or acquire the relevant number of AAIC Shares from the Selling AAIC Shareholders. In the event that Selling AAIC Shareholders who hold in aggregate more than 90.0 percent of the Offer accept the Offer for the Offer Price in accordance with the terms of the Offer Document, NLGIC will compulsorily acquire the shares from the remaining shareholders in order to acquire 47.5 percent direct shareholding in AAIC which amounts to a 100 percent beneficial shareholding in AAIC.
Encumbrances	Only an AAIC Shareholder whose AAIC Shares are not subject to an encumbrance may accept the Offer.
Compulsory Acquisition	As provided in the Takeover Regulation, once AAIC Shareholders holding 90 percent or more of the shares in AAIC accept the Offer, NLGIC intends to exercise the "compulsory acquisition" provisions of Articles 62 to 65 (inclusive) of the Takeover Regulation, subject to regulatory approvals.
Compulsory Acquired Shares	AAIC Shareholders who do not respond to the Offer during Offer Period will have their shares compulsorily acquired by NLGIC, subject to regulatory approvals.
Cash Consideration for Compulsory Acquired Shares	As per Article 65 of the Takeover Regulation, NLGIC will pay the shareholders of the Compulsory Acquired Shares the Offer Price as stated in the Offer Document.
Offer Completion	The completion of the Offer which shall occur on the date the Offer Price is paid to the Selling AAIC Shareholders post completion of the Offer Period and implementation of the Compulsory Acquisition.
Offer Completion Date	The date on which the Offer Completion occurs.
Offer Rationale	Offer Completion will result in the formation of a stronger insurance company that the Board of Directors and management of NLGIC envisages would become more competitive, both locally and regionally.
Offer Manager	Ubhar Capital SAOC, a closed joint stock company incorporated in Oman with registered office at PO Box 1137, PC 111, CPO, Oman. Ph.: +968 24 949 051 Email: ubhar-corporatefinance@u-capital.net

OTHER DETAILS

Shares in AAIC Already Held by NLGIC	NLGIC does not have any direct shareholding in AAIC as of the date of this Offer Announcement. However, RSA Middle East B.S.C.(c) which holds 52.5 percent of the Issued Capital of AAIC is a wholly owned subsidiary of NLGIC as of the date of this Offer Announcement.
Other Information	(i) Neither NLGIC nor AAIC have any outstanding convertible securities. (ii) As of the date of the Offer Document, details of the number and percentage holding of voting AAIC Shares held directly or indirectly by the following persons are as set out below: • RSA Middle East B.S.C (c): 52,500,000 AAIC Shares - 52.5 percent. • NLGIC shareholding in RSA Middle East B.S.C (c): 100 percent • NLGIC Directors: Nil AAIC Shares Nil per cent. The parties under paragraphs (i) and (ii) above have not dealt in the voting shares in question during the period commencing six months prior to the beginning of the Offer Period and ending with the date of this Offer Document

INDICATIVE OFFER TIMELINE

1	Offer Announcement	20 November 2022
2	Offer Document sent out to AAIC Board and AAIC Shareholders	24 November 2022
3	The Offer Period opens	5 December 2022
4	The Offer Period closes	25 December 2022
5	NLGIC to pay the Offer Price	29 December 2022
6	NLGIC acquires remaining shares – Compulsory Acquisition	29 December 2022

Note: The above timeline is indicative only and may be subject to change, following review, input, and approval from the competent authorities.

ACCEPTANCE OF OFFER-TERMS, CONDITIONS,& PROCEDURE

Notice Procedure	Only electronic copy of this Offer Document will be sent based on Muscat Clearing & Depository Company SAOC ("MCD") data and be available on NLGIC, Ubhar Capital SAOC and the Capital Market Authority, Oman ("CMA") websites.
Acceptance Form	The acceptance form to be used by AAIC Shareholders to submit their acceptance of the Offer pursuant to the terms of the Offer Document. These forms will be sent to each AAIC Shareholder through email based on MCD data. The acceptance form will also be available on NLGIC, Ubhar Capital SAOC and CMA websites.
Procedure for Acceptance of Offer by AAIC Shareholders	In order to accept the Offer, the AAIC Shareholders are required to: • deliver the Acceptance Form duly completed and signed to Ubhar Capital SAOC located in OMINVEST Business Center, PH Level, Building no. 95, Way no. 501, Airport Heights, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman. or alternatively, • the AAIC Shareholders can send an email to ubhar-corporatefinance@u-capital.net stating their acceptance of the Offer along with a scanned copy of the Acceptance Form duly completed and signed.along with the requisite documents (as set out below) on or before 2 pm, on the Offer Closing Date. Completed Acceptance Form / email once submitted cannot be revoked by AAIC Shareholders. The Offer will remain open for acceptance for 21 days starting from 5 December 2022 to 25 December 2022 (both days inclusive). Acceptances received after working hours i.e., 8am -2pm on Offer Closing Date shall not be accepted.
Required Documents	Letter/form of acceptance furnished by the AAIC Shareholder(s) without the requisite documents listed below may be rejected by the Offer Manager as being incomplete and invalid. The letter/form of acceptance must be accompanied by the following documents: For Individual Applicants: A copy of Omani ID for Omani national AAIC Shareholders and Passport copy for Non-Omani national AAIC Shareholders. Birth Certificate of the minor AAIC Shareholder, if the father is accepting the Offer on behalf of his minor children. A copy of a valid power of attorney duly notarised by the relevant authorities must be included in the event the acceptance is on behalf of another person (with the exception of an acceptance made by a father on behalf of his minor children). For Corporate Applicants: ID Card of signatories, Commercial Registration Certificate Copy of the company board resolution authorizing persons to accept the Offer with specimen signatures of such authorized persons, if applicable.
Acceptance by NLGIC	The acceptance by NLGIC of the AAIC Shares tendered by the AAIC Shareholders and settlement is subject to the following conditions: Offer Completion. Approval of the CMA for the final Offer result. The settlement for the tendered AAIC Shares does not contravene any Applicable Law. The letter/form of acceptance being duly and validly completed along with the required documents and submitted to the Offer Manager on or before the Offer Closing Date. The person accepting the Offer is a valid AAIC Shareholder. NLGIC not withdrawing the Offer in accordance with the provisions of the Takeover Regulation.
Timing of Payment of the Offer Price	Upon receipt of valid letter/form of acceptance along with the requisite documents and subject to satisfactory verification, the Offer Manager will notify the eligible AAIC Shareholders regarding acceptance of the Offer and arrange to make payment via bank transfer in coordination with MCD (based on bank account details available with MCD) in favour of the AAIC Shareholder within 10 (ten) days of the Offer Closing Date. No interest, mark-up, surcharge, tax, or other increment will be payable for any cause or reason on the aggregate price for the AAIC Shares purchased by NLGIC from any AAIC Shareholder for any cause or reason. After a Selling AAIC Shareholder has accepted the Offer, he/she/it shall not be permitted to sell their relevant AAIC Shares to any other party unless and until NLGIC withdraws the Offer.

OFFER RELATED PARTIES & CONTACT PERSONS

Offeror	National Life and General Insurance Company SAOG Contact: Mahmood Ali Rustam Habib Investor Relations Officer PO Box. 798, Wadi Kabir PC 117 Sultanate of Oman Tel: +968 24630812 Email: mahmoodali@nlcigulf.com	Offer Manager	Ubhar Capital SAOC Contact: Muhammad Kashif Sabih Head Corporate Finance and Advisory PO Box 1137, PC 111, CPO, Sultanate of OmanTel: +968 24 949008Email: ubhar-corporatefinance@u-capital.net
Offeree	Al Ahlia Insurance Company SAOG Contact: Miron Kibria Chief Finance Officer Al Ahlia Insurance Company SAOG PO Box 751, Postal Code 112, Ruwi, Muscat Sultanate of Oman Tel: +968 24766895 Email: miron.kibria@om.rsagroup.com	Legal Advisor to the Offeror	Younis Al Amri Advocates and Solicitors Contact: Taher Noor Sayed Managing Partner Building no.1135, 1st Floor, Office No. 113, Behind Bader Al Sama, Way No.4505, Al Khuwair, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman Tel: +968 24473212 Email: taher@anlawoman.com

Bank Muscat named Oman's 'Best Consumer Digital Bank'

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, has won the award for the Best Consumer Digital Bank in Oman 2022 at the Global Finance's Best Digital Bank Awards held in Dubai.

The winners were selected based on a number of criteria, including their strategy for attracting and servicing digital customers, success in getting clients to use digital offerings, growth of digital customers, breadth of product offerings, evidence of tangible benefits gained from digital initiatives, and web/mobile site design and functionality, said a press release.

The award was received on behalf of the bank by Mohammed Sultan al Habsi, Chief Representative at the UAE Representative Office of Bank Muscat, the bank said.

Abdullah Hamood al Jufaili, Assistant General Manager, Digital Banking, said, "Bank Muscat is delighted to win the Best Consumer Digital Bank in Oman award from Global Finance once again. The award is a testament to the bank's commitment to continue investing in state-of-



the-art technology to further increase efficiency and improve customer service.

"As the leading financial services provider in Oman, he said that the bank is committed to offering the latest financial services and solutions in line with global financial trends. "The consistent rise in active customers on our e-channels reflects the rising pop-

ularity of Mobile and Internet Banking as well as other digital banking channels," he added.

"By emphasising on service delivery through multiple channels and new products that cater to different customer segments, the bank aims to maintain its leadership in hi-tech products and services, including electronic payment and digital services."

Bank Muscat's continuously upgrades Internet and mobile banking services to offer customers a fast, comfortable and secure banking experience. Today, over 1.3mn retail banking customers are using various features like real-time bill payments for utilities - such as electricity, water, telecom, mobile top ups and credit card bill payments.

Floward celebrates 1st anniversary in Oman

Floward, the go-to online flowers and gifts destination in MENA and the UK, held a ceremony celebrating one year since it launched its operations in the Sultanate of Oman.

The event was held under the patronage of H H Sayyida Alia bint Thuwaini al Said, Chairperson of the Omani Women's Association and in the presence of Floward Chairman and CEO Abdulaziz B al Loughani, Floward CGO Mohammed al Arifi, Oman Country Manager Muhammad Haris Aslam, and other dignitaries from the sultanate at Jumeirah Muscat Bay resort.

In the year since its launch in Oman, Floward has witnessed great success and has recently moved its operations to a new head office located at Bawshar Heights in Muscat occupying an area of 2000sqm distributed in three floors that include the administration offices and fulfilment centre.

This area is also considered a strategic location that will allow Floward to provide better and easier logistics and delivery services to its customers in Muscat. For the first time, clients will also be able to pick up their orders di-



rectly from the fulfillment centre.

Floward also took this opportunity to celebrate Oman's 52nd National Day by showcasing its exclusive collection of unique products with designs that reflect the national identity of Oman and are inspired by the Omani culture with their diversity of colours and patterns. It also showcased its exclusive and licensed collection for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

Floward Chairman and CEO Abdulaziz al Loughani said, "At first, we'd like to congratulate the Omani people and leadership for the sultanate's 52nd National Day, and wish them continuous peace, security, and prosperity.

"Today, we are thrilled to inaugurate our new head office in Muscat, and we'd like to thank

H H Sayyida Alia bint Thuwaini al Said for her presence and generous patronage; we'd also like to welcome all our esteemed guests. We are currently working on further developing and expanding our operations to cover the entire sultanate by mid-2023, which will play a role in the economic diversification and add many job opportunities for Omani youth." Established in 2017, Floward is a full-fledged e-commerce solution that offers prime fresh-cut flowers sourced from the best growers and farmers around the world and arranged locally by a team of florists and designers. Floward also offers cakes, chocolate and perfumes curated by the region's most exciting designers bundled with its flower arrangements.

OETC participates in 18th GCC Power Conference & Exhibition

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) has participated in the 18th GCC Power Conference & Exhibition 2022 from November 14 to 16, a press statement said.

GCC Power Conference & Exhibition 2022, organised by the Regional Committee for Electric Power Systems in the Cooperation Council States (GCC CIGRE), is an annual conference in the region in the electric energy field. It addresses the production, transmission and distribution of electricity and witnesses the presence of many officials in the energy sector in GCC countries, including senior decision-makers of companies working in this field regionally and globally, a group of experts, engineers and those interested in the electrical energy field.

The conference discussed various topics related to the electric power industry, exchange expert information, the latest technological solutions and provide an opportunity for industry



representatives and experts to raise the challenges they face while introducing a range of solutions and innovations through a series of interactive panel discussions led by key industry experts.

OETC Chief Operating Officer Masoud bin Salam al Riyami highlighted the importance of the GCC Power Conference & Exhibition 2022, and underlined on the Gulf needs for such conferences as a platform to deliberate on the present and future of the electricity industry and an opportunity for cooperation between companies and institutions working in this field.

Riyami emphasised that or-

ganising the 18th edition of GCC Power Conference reflects its importance and role in embracing Gulf decision-makers and businessmen in the electric energy field with the aim of developing this dynamic industry and to keep pace with the latest technologies.

OETC has participated with several research papers and posters that address the current and future challenges of the electricity sector and seek ways to develop them. Some of OETC technical papers discuss the local interconnection project 'Rabt', which link the electricity grid in the Sultanate of Oman.

ISWK win CBSE under-19 girls football

Indian School Al Wadi Kabir (ISWK) won the CBSE Cluster Under-19 Girls Football tournament held on November 8 with the host Indian School Muscat (ISM) losing at the final 2-0.

There were six teams in the fray, in the U-19 Girls category, from six CBSE affiliated schools in Oman. Each one of them was in a frenzy to prove better than the opponent to lift the coveted trophy at the CBSE Cluster 2022.

The first round of the knockout matches of all the U-19 teams was played in the morning. In the first match, Indian School Muscat (ISM) defeated Indian School Al Maabala (ISAM) by 4-2 goals. Indian School Al Ghubra (ISG) beat Indian School Darsait (ISD) in the second match by scoring three goals.

The U-19 teams that won the first round in the morning fought for a berth in the semifinals in the afternoon. The first semi-final in was played between Indian School Al Wadi Kabir (ISWK) and Indian School Bousher (ISB), while the second semifinal was played between Indian School Al Ghubra (ISG) and the host Indian



School Muscat (ISM).

In the one-sided match, ISWK defeated ISB 6-1 and qualified proudly for the final match. In another hard-fought match in the same category, ISM defeated ISG 2-1, to reach the final.

The final U-19 matches that were played in the afternoon gave some hair raising moments to the spectators. ISWK and the host ISM team fought neck to neck in the final. The match witnessed beautiful manoeuvres of the ball by both teams. It was a moment for jubilation for the ISWK team when they edged the

host by taking a 2-0 lead. The highlight of their victory was the stupendous saves by their goalkeeper.

The guest of honour, of the day's function, Zainudheen C, Vice Chair, ISM Purchase Subcommittee, expressed his pleasant surprise to see the girls playing football beyond his expectations. He urged the students to continue playing football, for it ensures physical, mental and moral fitness of a person. He appreciated the visionary leader, Principal Dr Rajeev Kumar Chauhan and the

school management for giving adequate importance to both academics and outdoor games.

After the speech, Zainudheen gave away the medals, the runners-up and winner's trophies, and expressed his gratitude to the six participating teams.

ISM obtained the runners-up trophy, while ISWK lifted the winner's trophy. Indian School Bousher (ISB) and Indian School Ghubra (ISG), who shared second place, received their medals.

The event came to an end with a group photo with the guest of honour and other officials.

AVOD champions healthy lifestyle at Muscat Marathon

To reinforce its commitment to supporting local events and reaffirm its 'Eat Right, Live Well' philosophy, AVOD and its employees took part in this year Al Mouj Muscat Marathon that was held on November 11 and 12. The Al Mouj Muscat Marathon that saw the participation of 12,000 runners this year is undoubtedly Oman's biggest running event.

Areej Vegetable Oils and Derivatives (AVOD), Oman's most trusted brand, has always endeavoured to take part in events that are not just good for community bonding but also promote physical and mental wellbeing, the company stated.

AVOD CEO Salem Bortmany said, "AVOD has been a proud instrument of change in the way people view and manage healthy lifestyles for over three decades. For us, healthy mindsets begin at home, in our organisation, where our employees are as committed to bettering their own lives as



they are to improving our customers' experiences.

"As a health-conscious brand we have always taken part in community events such as the Muscat Marathon to not just commit to an active and healthy lifestyle but also contribute to the awareness of benefits that physical activity brings with it."

Sixty employees, consisting of both men and women, represented AVOD in the marathon to champion the cause of health

and wellbeing that has been the cornerstone of AVOD's transformation journey for over 30 years.

AVOD runners were present on both days of the event that consisted of 5km, 10km, and 1km races in Al Mouj area.

Applauding the AVOD team for a fabulous performance on the track, Bortmany said, "I would also like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for AVOD employees, who have always been exemplary health am-

bassadors for the brand."

AVOD has always been at the forefront of innovation that has found the ideal balance between wellness and market demands.

Keeping its consumers at the core of its growth strategy has allowed AVOD to be part of every Omani kitchen and personal transformation journeys through its rich range of products.

Committed to creating healthier and happier communities, AVOD is the first brand in Oman

to ensure that its products, which include the flagship Minara range, Sohar, Khafeef, Jabal Akhdar, Muscat Margarine, and Areej cooking oil, are fortified with Vitamins A, D and are non-hydrogenated and go through a heart-friendly process called interesterification. The brand's modern and hygienic plant adheres to strict best practices that consistently meet national and international standards. It holds the ISO 9001 certificate for Quality Management System, ISO 14001 certificate for Environmental Management System and ISO 22000 certificates for Food Safety Management.

AVOD is one of the largest food processing companies in the GCC with exports to more than 35 countries around the world. It is also the most preferred partner of many prestigious global brands such as Heinz, Emborg, Mondelez and Unilever and many regional partners to source their requirements.



Rozna Fanzone begins daily screening of FIFA matches

The Rozna World Cup Fanzone on the premises of Oman Automobile Association in Muscat has started screening the FIFA World Cup series 2022 with the opening match played on Sunday. With the inaugural match's screening, the Fanzone begins the month-long programme of screening all the World Cup matches to be played in Qatar.

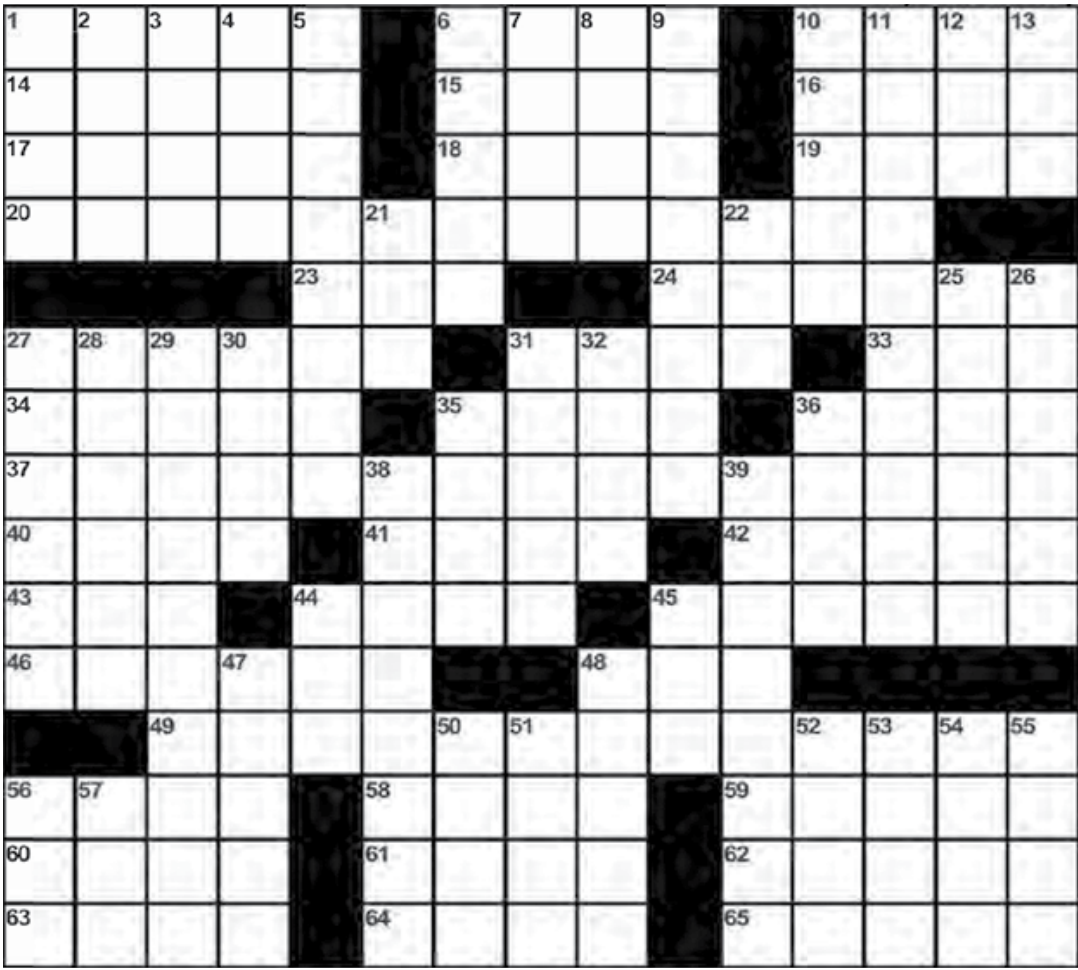
The association is excited to launch the opening ceremony of their first screening of the World Cup football match between Qatar and Eduardo on Sunday, the organisers said.

Fans will be granted seating on a number of platforms such as the stands, group seating on sofas, relaxing on bean bags, table seating and individual rooms for the VIP. Entry fee for the public has been fixed at RO3 for the regular section and RO10 for the VIP section.

A food court area with a range of foods and beverages available for the fans, is situated just outside of the seating area, which they can take in with them while they watch the matches.

All the FIFA games will be shown till December 28.

DAILY CROSSWORD

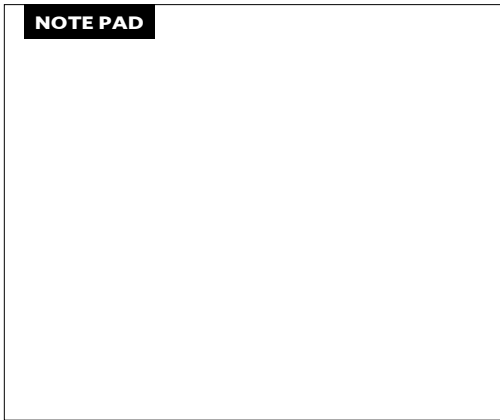


ACROSS,
1) Gp. for songwriters et al.
6) 1/60,000 min.
10) Assist in wrongdoing
14) Animal with a flexible snout
15) Legal gp. cofounded by Helen Keller
16) Spell caster
17) Go _ a limb
18) Carefully select
19) Clickable image
20) Part of a liner
23) Haul
24) Isolate
27) Laughable
31) Entrance requirement, sometimes
33)_Aviv
34) "Honi soit qui mal y _"
35) Subtle emanation
36) Seek divine guidance
37) Math lesson topic
40) Capitol products
41) Blockheads
42) Bracelet site
43) "I could go on, but won't"
44) Rocky mountain

peaks
45) Fish named for a facial characteristic
46) It might be up to its neck in hot water
48) D.C. type
49) SomeMDs
56) Ready for picking
58) Show respect to a judge
59) Circa
60) Aces, sometimes
61) Spicy Spanish dish
62) Lacking in resonance, e.g.
63) Finishes
64) Walk laboriously
65) Antique auto
DOWN
1) Reynolds film "Rent_"
2) Pucker-inducing
3) "The Elder" of Rome
4) A bit smashed?
5) Cone bearer
6) Large parrot with brilliant plumage
7) Gulf War missile
8) Beauty mag
9) It provides no outlets
10)_ curiae (friend of the court)

11) Swimming method
12) Id's counterpart
13) Highest non-face card
21) Affirmative action?
22) Suffix with "depend"
25) In a bare-bones way
26) French president's residence
27) Computer miniprogram
28) Dress down
29) Like some tall mountains
30) Delivery letters
31) Surf partners, on some menus
32) Historic periods
35) Worship from _
36) Engine knock
38) Turnips or yams, e.g.
39) Drive dangerously, in a way
44) Not-shabby link
45) Frightening word
47) Get the wrinkles out
48) Argue in court
50) Place to stack money
51) Norway's capital
52) Large wading bird
53) Royal heirs, often

54) Adjust, as a guitar
55) Charon's river
56) Seafood delicacy
57) Where to stay away



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
You've definitely got a flair for keeping track of details. So if you decide to help your sister or cousin or next-door neighbor or uncle out of a jam, they will be able to sleep easy knowing that you'll dot their i's and double-check that their t's are crossed. They sure are lucky to have a sibling or cousin or next-door neighbor or cousin or niece or nephew like you!

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
Try to accept things they way they are right now even if they're not exactly how you want them to be. Keep in mind that things will never be perfect. The sooner you can learn how to be more flexible the better! Being emotionally or physically uncomfortable isn't necessarily a bad thing. There is a lot of opportunity for growth when you're struggling to make things better. If everything were easy, attaining things wouldn't be very rewarding.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
Put your household at the top of your priority list. There has been some tension growing there, and you need to try to create more harmony. It won't take much. All you have to do is start a conversation that needs to take place. Then things will move forward from there and you can find a resolution before you know it. Anticipating these kinds of conversations is always worse than actually having them!



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Who sang, backed by U2, as the first song in the Live 8 concert in Hyde Park, London, in 2005?
A. Mick Jagger
B. Elton John
C. David Bowie
D. Paul McCartney

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
Spend the morning cranking on whatever you've got in the works, then spend the afternoon letting things glide on their own considerable momentum. Yes, you've done everything you can do for the moment, and it's time to catch your breath and clasp your hands behind your neck and rest your tired feet on your desk (watch out for the gel mouse pad!) and take it all in. If it looks like your project is losing momentum, then go ahead and give it another push.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Start flexing your muscles and using your power. It's only then that you start to understand how much power you have. If you're a little more demanding, you'll start to understand that you can be in control without being too bossy. It's good to challenge people to meet your high standards. They appreciate the fact that you believe they're capable of great things! You have to be willing to be disliked if you truly want to inspire other people..

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
You've needed to say something to a close friend for a while, and today is the perfect day to say it. The energy centered around communication is very strong, and instant clarity is likely. There is very little chance that this person will misinterpret you or get defensive. Do it at a time when you won't be interrupted, and then just speak from your heart. And don't make them pull the information out of you!

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
Give people the benefit of the doubt and you'll dramatically increase your chances of having a stress-free day. Just let their grumpiness roll off your back and try to remember how funny or amusing they can be. If someone says something that rubs you the wrong way, just laugh it off. The alternative (getting frustrated or angry) isn't going to make you feel better, and it could start a fight you don't really want to have. Stick to your guns if it gets too tough.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
All morning long you are looking at problems and coming up with solutions and facing down more problems and coming up with more solutions and, all in all, having a fantastic time. You shoot, you score! You know the drill. In the afternoon, you start getting attention for your moves out there on the basketball court of life. Whether you get nominated team captain or most valuable player, the recognition is going to feel good.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
If you don't take a little time off from your work, you'll get too tired too quickly. Even if it's only half an hour, you need to make sure that you give yourself some absolutely work-free time. Breathe deeply. Exhale slowly. If you can, take the whole day off. And if there's some way you can treat yourself (a brownie? a long workout?), do it.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
You bake cookies when people come over. You cook soup and take it to them when they're sick. You always have extra bandages in your medicine cabinet. You like to take care of the people you love and anybody else you see who's in pain too. But now maybe somebody wants to take care of you for a change. Why don't you let them? It will be a nice role reversal for both of you.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Get creative in the morning and, more than likely, you'll get careful in the afternoon. That's exactly the right order of things: Being too careful at the start of a project can hamper your creativity. And being too creative at the end stages can dampen your ability to tie up all the loose ends and create something that's both beautiful and coherent.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
While you're certainly good at looking at the big picture, that's no reason to think you aren't good when it comes to the finishing details. You have an eye for the little things that make a project look not just good but absolutely fantastic. Whether you're writing a company report or decorating a postmodern mansion, your sense of the aesthetic is a boon for everybody involved.

02. What concept was described and highlighted in a 1983 book edited by European-British historian Eric Hobsbawm and British Africanist Terence Ranger?
A. Pizza effect
B. Invented tradition
C. Imagined community
D. Folklorismus

03. Which of these entertainments was introduced to the western world last?
A. Sudoku
B. Frisbee
C. Chess
D. Mah Jong

Answers: 1.D 2.B 3.A

KIDS COLOURING



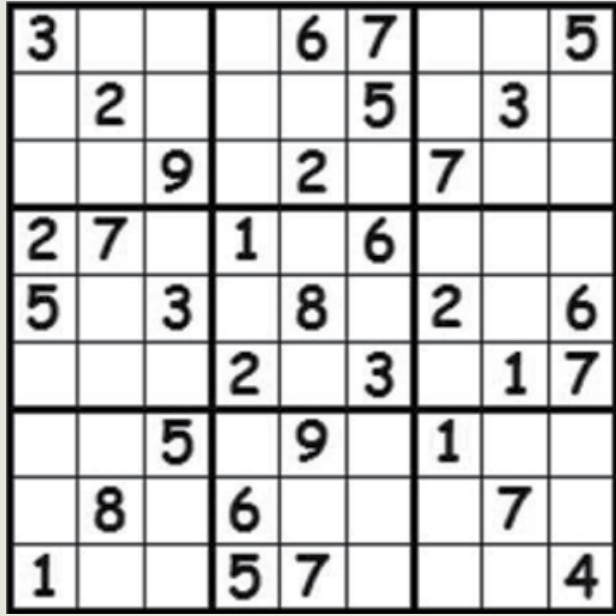
BOGGLER



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



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



COP27 strikes historic deal to fund climate damages

The two-week talks in Egypt delivered a major breakthrough on a fund for climate ‘loss and damage’

Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt - A fraught UN climate summit wrapped up on Sunday with a landmark deal on funding to help vulnerable countries cope with devastating impacts of global warming - but also anger over a failure to push further ambition on cutting emissions.

The two-week talks in Egypt’s Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, which at times appeared to teeter on the brink of collapse, delivered a major breakthrough on a fund for climate ‘loss and damage’.

Pakistani climate minister Sherry Rehman said COP27 ‘responded to the voices of the vulnerable, the damaged and the lost of the whole world’.

“We have struggled for 30 years on this path, and today in Sharm el-Sheikh this journey has achieved its first positive milestone,” she told the summit.

Tired delegates applauded when the loss and damage fund was adopted as the sun came up on Sunday following almost two extra days of negotiations that went round-the-clock.

But jubilation over that achievement was countered by stern warnings.



Egypt’s Foreign Minister Sameh Shukri, heads the closing session of the COP27 climate conference, at the Sharm el-Sheikh International Convention Centre in Egypt’s Red Sea resort city of the same name, on Sunday (AFP)

UN chief Antonio Guterres said the UN climate talks had ‘taken an important step towards justice’ with the loss and damage fund, but fell short in pushing for the urgent carbon-cutting needed to tackle global warming. “Our planet is still in the emergency room,” Guterres said. “We need to drastically reduce emissions now and this is an issue this COP did not address.”

‘Stonewalled by emitters’
A final COP27 statement covering the broad array of the world’s efforts to grapple with a warming planet held the line on the aspirational goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels. It also included language on renewable energy for the first time, while reiterating previous

calls to accelerate ‘efforts towards the phasedown of unabated coal power and phase-out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies’. But that failed to go much further than a similar decision from last year’s COP26 meeting in Glasgow on key issues around cutting planet-heating pollution. European Commission Vice President Frans Timmermans

said the EU was ‘disappointed’, adding that more than 80 nations had backed a stronger emissions pledge. “What we have in front of us is not enough of a step forward for people and planet,” he said. “It doesn’t bring enough added efforts from major emitters to increase and accelerate their emission cuts,” said Timmermans, who 24 hours earlier

had threatened to walk out of the talks rather than getting a ‘bad result’. Britain’s Alok Sharma, who chaired COP26 in Glasgow, said a passage on energy had been ‘weakened, in the final minutes’. Germany Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said she was frustrated that the emissions cut and fossil fuel phase-out were ‘stonewalled by a number of large emitters and oil producers’. Criticised by some delegations for a lack of transparency during negotiations, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, the COP27 chair, said any missteps were ‘certainly not intentional’. “I believe I succeeded in avoiding that any of the parties were to backslide,” he said.

‘Loss and damage’
The deal on loss and damage - which had only barely made it onto the negotiation agenda - gathered critical momentum during the talks. Developing nations relentlessly pushed for the fund, finally succeeding in getting the backing of wealthy polluters long fearful of open-ended liability.

A statement from the Alliance of Small Island States, comprised of islands whose very existence is threatened by sea level rise, said the loss and damage deal was ‘historic’. “The agreements made at COP27 are a win for our entire world,” said Molwyn Joseph, of Antigua and Barbuda and chair of AOSIS. “We have shown those who have felt neglected that we hear you, we see you, and we are giving you the respect and care you deserve.” With around 1.2C of warming so far, the world has seen a cascade of climate-driven extremes, shining a spotlight on the plight of developing countries faced with escalating disasters, as well as an energy and food price crisis and ballooning debt. The World Bank estimated that devastating floods in Pakistan this year caused US\$30bn in damage and economic loss. The fund will be geared towards developing nations ‘that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change’ - language that had been requested by the EU. AFP



A general view of the National Palace a day after Malaysia’s 15th general election, in Kuala Lumpur on Sunday (AFP)

Rival blocs claim majority in Malaysian poll stalemate

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - Rival blocs claimed on Sunday they had secured the support they needed to form a government after Malaysia’s hotly contested polls saw no party emerge with a clear majority of parliamentary seats. Veteran opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim said his coalition had enough seats to form the country’s next government, which would allow him to become prime minister. Former premier Muhyiddin Yassin - who heads the rival Perikatan Nasional (National Alliance) grouping - also said he was in talks to form the next administration after Saturday’s election.

ference after hours of frenzied horse-trading negotiations through the night. When pressed about who would enter into an alliance with him, Anwar did not give names, but said commitments had been made in writing and would be submitted to the king for endorsement. At the end of vote-counting, Anwar’s Pakatan Harapan (Alliance of Hope) coalition won 82 seats and Muhyiddin’s Perikatan Nasional grabbed 73, official results showed.

Islamist party gains
The once mighty Barisan Nasional - dominated by jailed ex-leader Najib Razak’s United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) party - trailed far behind the rest with only 30 seats, its worst performance since Malaysia won independence in 1957. The graft-tainted bloc said it accepted the results and that it was a ‘big signal from the citizens towards us’. The election also saw the rise of an Islamist party allied with Muhyiddin’s group. The Malaysian Islamic Party, or PAS, backs a hardline interpretation of Islamic law. Ethnic Malay parties have campaigned on a platform that claims that members of Malaysia’s majority ethnicity would lose their rights if non-Malays - such as Anwar’s multi-ethnic bloc - are elected. AFP

Nepal votes in poll coloured by downturn and discontent

Kathmandu, Nepal - Nepali voters cast their ballots for a new parliament on Sunday in a contest dominated by public frustrations over the Himalayan republic’s elderly political elite and anxiety over its teetering economy. A revolving door of prime ministers - most serving less than a year - and a culture of horse-trading have fuelled perceptions the government is out of touch with Nepal’s pressing problems. Several younger faces are contesting for the first time, up against established parties whose leaders have strode the corridors of power for decades. Though analysts expect Nepal’s entrenched political veterans to again dominate the next assembly, many voters have lost faith in the status quo and a mood for change is palpable. “Every party took turns in government over the past five years and they did nothing,” Chiranjibi Dawadi, a driver by trade, told AFP. “My family has decided to vote for a new party this time. It’s OK even if they don’t look after



A voter casts his ballot in the general election at a polling station in Bhaktapur on the outskirts of Kathmandu on Sunday (AFP)

us. Old parties didn’t either.” Sunday’s elections are the second since a new constitution was promulgated in 2015, ushering in a new political order after the conclusion of Nepal’s traumatic Maoist insurgency. The civil war ended in 2006, having claimed more than 17,000 lives and prompting the abolition of the country’s monarchy, while also bringing the former rebels into the government fold. Since then the former guerrillas have alternated in power with another communist party and the established Congress in various coalitions. But political instability has

been a recurrent feature of Nepal’s parliament, and no prime minister has served a full term since the war ended. A constant balancing act has left governments of different stripes struggling to navigate the traditional rivalry between Nepal’s two neighbours, China and India, at a time of rising Western concern with Chinese-funded mega-projects in the country. Incumbent premier Sher Bahadur Deuba, 76, is serving in the role for the fifth time. The two other main party leaders are 70 and 67 and have both held office as prime minister twice. AFP

Japanese government loses third minister

Tokyo, Japan - Japan’s internal affairs minister resigned on Sunday over a series of campaign finance scandals, becoming the third member of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida’s cabinet to step down in less than a month. Minoru Terada quit over allegations of mismanagement of political funds. He had acknowledged to parliament that his local campaign group had even listed a dead person as its treasurer in annual financial statements. Other accusations published by the weekly *Shukan Bunshun* magazine included illegal payments to staff during his reelection campaign last year. “I just tendered (my) resignation to the prime minister,” Terada told a hastily arranged news conference on Sunday night. “I felt my problems over political funds must not become a hindrance’ to parliament, he said. Terada’s exit came on the final day of Kishida’s diplo-

matic tour to Thailand for an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, and ahead of budget deliberations in parliament. The string of cabinet departures has been dubbed by Japanese media as ‘resignation dominoes’ and will pile further pressure on Kishida. The approval rating for Kishida’s government is barely more than 30 per cent, its lowest level since he took office last year, according to the latest NHK poll. “I would like to apologise deeply for the fact that a series of cabinet ministers ended up resigning during the parliamentary session,” Kishida told reporters after accepting Terada’s resignation. He said he took his responsibility for having appointed Terada seriously but vowed to do his duty and ‘produce results’ on the mounting political challenges ahead. He said Terada’s successor would be named on Monday. AFP

Trump Twitter account reappears after Musk poll

San Francisco, US - Donald Trump’s Twitter account was reinstated on Saturday after the platform’s new owner Elon Musk ran a poll in which a narrow majority of voters supported the move, days after the former US president announced another White House bid. Trump was banned from the platform early last year for his role in the January 6 attack on the US Capitol by a mob of his supporters seeking to overturn the results of the 2020 election. “The people have spoken. Trump will be reinstated,” Musk tweeted, shortly after the 24-hour poll ended. “Vox Populi, Vox Dei,” he added, repeating a Latin adage he posted on Friday meaning ‘the voice of the people is the voice of God’. More than 15mn people - out of 237mn daily Twitter users - voted on whether to reinstate the controversial profile, with 51.8 per cent in favour and 48.2 per



The suspended Twitter account of former US President Donald Trump is displayed on a mobile phone in Washington, DC (AFP)

cent against. Trump, who had more than 88mn users when his account was suspended, reveled in using Twitter as a mouthpiece during his presidency, posting policy announcements, attacking political rivals and communicating with supporters. Musk’s poll asked for a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response to the

statement ‘Reinstate former President Trump,’ which the billionaire Twitter boss posted on Friday. “Fascinating to watch Twitter Trump poll!” Musk mused on Saturday morning in a blast of tweets from the controversial and hard-charging new owner of the one-to-many messaging platform. He has posed similar polls in

the past, asking followers last year if he should sell stock in his electric car company Tesla. Following that poll, he sold more than US\$1bn in shares. **‘I have Truth Social’**
Trump said on Saturday he would not return to the popular platform but instead remain on his own network, Truth Social, launched after he was banned from Twitter. Appearing via video at a gathering of the Republican Jewish Coalition in Las Vegas, Trump said he welcomed the poll and was a fan of Musk, but appeared to reject any return. “He did put up a poll and it was very overwhelming... but I have something called... Truth Social.” As to whether he would return to the platform, he said: “I don’t see it because I don’t see any reason for it.” Trump had not posted to Twitter by late Saturday, though

he did share a series of unrelated messages on his Truth Social account, including opinion articles criticising the US Justice Department’s appointment of a special counsel this week to investigate his role in the Capitol attack. But several of his political allies were highlighting his return. “Welcome back, @realDonaldTrump!” tweeted House Republican Paul Gosar. Prominent Trump-backer Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene, whose personal account is also suspended, re-tweeted several of his previous posts from her official government account, including some tweets that were still marked with fact-checking badges refuting his claims about 2020 election fraud. “Anyone who thinks President Trump isn’t going to win the 2024 primary is fooling themselves,” she tweeted. AFP

King Charles III to host first state visit of reign welcoming S Africa president

London, UK - King Charles III next week hosts his first state visit as monarch, welcoming South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and his wife to Buckingham Palace.

The last state visit to the UK came in June 2019, when queen Elizabeth II hosted US president Donald Trump and his wife Melania. Charles has yet to announce where he will go on his first overseas visit as king, and this was the first invitation he extended since succeeding his late mother in September.

The pomp of the major diplomatic event will be clouded by events in South Africa, where Ramaphosa risks impeachment for allegedly covering up a crime.

Christopher Vandome, a senior research fellow at the Chatham House international affairs institute in London, said 'setting the right tone will be crucial'. He said London - a former colonial power in South Africa - needed to avoid lecturing about Pretoria's UN voting record on Ukraine while South Africans are still sore about lack of Western support during the COVID crisis.

Climate change, trade and Charles's vision for the Commonwealth will also likely be high on the agenda, Vandome said.

Ramaphosa was last in Lon-



This file photo shows Britain's Queen Elizabeth II greeting South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa during an audience at Windsor Castle, Berkshire, on April 17, 2018 (AFP)

don for the state funeral of the queen at Westminster Abbey in September.

His state visit comes more than a decade after the last by a South African leader, when Jacob Zuma came to the UK in 2010. Ramaphosa arrives on Monday before an official programme starts on Tuesday, including a state banquet at Buckingham Palace.

Charles and Queen Consort Camilla will be in charge of welcoming Ramaphosa and First Lady Tshepo Motsepe but will

also see the visiting couple meet other senior royals.

Heir to the throne Prince William and his wife Kate, Princess of Wales, will take him to join Charles and Camilla for a ceremonial military welcome.

Charles's youngest brother Prince Edward has also been recruited to accompany Ramaphosa to London's Kew Gardens and a biomedical research centre.

Also on the agenda is an address to lawmakers from both houses of parliament and a

meeting with Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in Downing Street.

Impeachment cloud

A protege of Nelson Mandela - who was on first name terms with Charles's mother - Ramaphosa stood alongside the anti-apartheid icon when he walked out of jail in 1990.

In a symbolic moment, the South African leader on Tuesday will view a memorial stone for Mandela, installed in Westminster Abbey in 2018 on the centenary of his birth.

After leaving politics to become one of Africa's wealthiest businessmen, Ramaphosa returned to become Zuma's deputy in 2014 and gained the presidency in 2018.

He is now fighting for his political life and facing calls to resign as the deeply divided ruling party African National Congress (ANC) is to hold a vote on its leadership in December.

A scandal in which Ramaphosa is accused of concealing a multi-million dollar cash theft has piled pressure on him. He denies any wrongdoing.

He faces an accusation that he failed to report a heist at his luxury cattle farmhouse in which robbers took US\$4mn in cash and instead organised for the robbers to be kidnapped and bribed into silence. The president has acknowledged a burglary but denies kidnapping and bribery, saying he reported the break-in to the police.

A panel appointed by South Africa's parliament is set to determine whether to impeach him. South Africans are also deeply frustrated by the economic situation, with an official unemployment rate of 33 per cent and constant power outages.

AFP



This file photo shows a general view of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant in Enerhodar, Zaporizhzhia Oblast, on September 11, 2022 (AFP)

Ukraine, Russia trade blame over nuclear power plant shelling

Moscow, Russia - Kyiv and Moscow on Sunday traded accusations of shelling on the territory of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant that Russia controls in southern Ukraine.

The UN atomic watchdog that has a team of experts at the plant - the biggest nuclear facility in Europe - said 'powerful explosions' had occurred on Saturday and Sunday.

Kyiv 'does not stop its provocations aiming at creating the threat of a man-made catastrophe at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant', the Russian army said in a statement on Sunday.

Despite the shelling, radiation levels 'remain normal', the army added. It said missiles exploded around a power line that feeds the plant, the fourth and fifth power units and 'special building number 2'. Renat Karchaa, an ad-

visor to the Russian nuclear agency Rosatom, told state-run agency TASS that the 'special building' contained nuclear fuel.

Ukrainian nuclear energy agency Energoatom said shortly after that Russia was behind the explosions.

"This morning on November 20, 2022, as a result of numerous Russian shelling, at least 12 hits were recorded on the territory of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant," Energoatom said.

It accused Russia of 'once again... putting the whole world at risk'.

"The news... is extremely disturbing. Explosions occurred at the site of this major nuclear power plant, which is completely unacceptable," UN atomic watchdog chief Rafael Grossi said in a statement.

AFP

French-speaking bloc examines growing unrest in Africa

Djerba, Tunisia - Facing calls to do more to resolve global crises, the world's French-speaking leaders met in Tunisia on Sunday to discuss growing instability and popular discontent in Francophone Africa.

But tensions crept into the International Organisation of Francophonie (IOF) conference itself when the Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Jean-Michel Sama Lukonde, refused to pose for a photo next to Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda.

The DRC accuses Rwanda of supporting M23 rebels who have seized swathes of territory in its eastern region, displacing

tens of thousands of people and igniting regional tensions.

The head of the 88-member IOF bloc, Louise Mushikiwabo, said on Saturday it should strive to be a 'link that can be used to prevent tensions from degenerating into conflicts'.

But Senegalese civil society figure Alioune Tine said the IOF has shown itself to be 'totally powerless in the face of fraudulent elections, third mandates (of African leaders) and military coups' in Mali, Guinea, Chad and Burkina Faso.

On Sunday, delegates at the conference on the island of Djerba were to also attend workshops on the youth and



France's President Emmanuel Macron speaks to the press during the 18th Francophone countries Summit in Djerba, on Saturday (AFP)

women's entrepreneurship before an economic forum starts.

Ahead of the summit,

Mushikiwabo told AFP that 'the defiance that we're seeing among young people in fran-

cophone Africa comes from political disillusionment' and frustrations over daily life.

The defiance among youngsters in francophone Africa comes from political disillusionment

LOUISE MUSHIKIWABO

The IOF, founded in 1970, aims to promote the French language, develop economic coop-

eration and help mediate international conflicts.

Many African leaders have expressed dismay at the West's rapid response to the war in Ukraine, in contrast to wars in their own countries.

Still, Macron said 'a declaration of all the members' had stated 'a very clear position on the war launched by Russia in Ukraine'. Macron also said on Saturday that the IOF should reclaim its diplomatic role, and Paris later announced that it would seek to take on the organisation's rotating presidency from 2024.

Senegal's President Macky Sall and Canadian Prime Minis-

ter Justin Trudeau have also been among leaders attending the two-day gathering which ends on Sunday.

This year's conference is a diplomatic boon for Tunisian President Kais Saied, whose government has faced international criticism since a sweeping power grab last year in the only democracy to have emerged from the Arab Spring uprisings.

Macron on Saturday alluded to concerns over the country's political future, saying that 'fundamental freedoms were intrinsic' to Tunisia's 'democratic achievements'.

AFP

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STARTUP UNICORN

Korean kale... and then some

Frustrated foodies gobble up South Korean grocery unicorn's varied offerings



Korean farmers are proud of the fact that they can produce such nice quality products, but it is very difficult for them to get to the consumer

SOPHIE KIM

When Sophie Kim moved home to South Korea after 15 years in the United States, she couldn't find anywhere to buy kale for her green juice. So she found a farmer, then built an app to help others seek out top-quality produce.

The next-day grocery delivery service - Market Kurly - that 38-year-old Kim founded, is now one of South Korea's most important startup unicorns, last valued at US\$3bn and set for an initial public offering by February.

Kim, a self-professed 'foodie', came up with the idea after she got tired of endlessly going from shop to shop to find the high-quality groceries she wanted in Seoul's supermarkets. But she knew the products were out there and began driving to South Korea's agricultural heartlands to find them, for example, visiting the famous meat market in Majang-dong to procure half a cow's worth of beef, which she would then split with her co-workers.

"While I was trying to figure out why it was so difficult to have access to great quality, fresh food in Korea, I got to know some farmers and fishermen, and they had exactly the same issue of not being able to find customers," she told AFP.

"Korean farmers are proud of the fact that they can produce such nice quality products, but it is extremely difficult for them to get to the consumer," she said.

At first, Kim said she thought about setting up a farmers' market, before abandoning the idea as too unwieldy and - more importantly - unhelpful for producers, who don't have the time to travel to Seoul.



Farmers who have been growing organic vegetables for decades at their farms collaborate with next-day grocery delivery service Market Kurly

Lightbulb moment

It was a lightbulb moment when Kim realised 'if we can make this work for both consumers and producers, it would probably be a breakthrough for the entire industry'.

Kurly customers - initially urban working women but now a diverse cross section of society - can order rare beef, hand-made bread, or pick one of more than a dozen varieties of local, hard-to-find apples by 11pm and be guaranteed delivery by 7am the next morning.

As with companies from Amazon to Uber Eats, the rapid-fast shipments rely largely on gig economy drivers, and Kurly has not been immune to the global industry-wide complaints of overwork and poor conditions. But consumer convenience has proved key to the app's success - even though Kim says she's most proud of how the complex data-driven logistics network she's built supports South Korea's beleaguered farmers.

Kim launched Market Kurly with 30 products, in-

cluding her beloved kale, which was supplied by farmer Hwang Han-soo, who has been growing organic vegetables for 30 years at his farm in Gyeonggi province.

Hwang said his kale was originally popular only with cancer patients for its perceived health benefits. He sold so little of it, he considered switching crops, but the pleas of one of his terminally-ill customers in Busan convinced him to keep going.

Farming is tough in South Korea, Hwang said, owing to thin profit margins and a reliance on hard-to-find overseas workers amid dwindling interest in the industry from young South Koreans. But working with Kurly has helped.

"In the early days of Kurly, we sold around 20 to 30 bags each day (but now) our average daily sales is around 800 bags of kale, he said.

Part of the growth can be attributed to changing consumer trends, with kale now popular with young women who see it as a trendy health food, Hwang said, but Kurly's next-day cold-chain logistics net-

work also plays a key role.

Social costs

"It takes less than a day to go from harvesting to the consumer's doorstep," he said, adding that before Kurly came along it would take two or three days for his kale to make it to stores.

Next-day delivery services are very helpful because it is a system that goes directly from the farm to the consumers, while Kurly also handled all the promotion and marketing, he said, adding, "I can focus on farming."

Hwang also said reading reviews of his products on Kurly's app allowed him to feel more connected to the people who eat what he grows.

South Korea's next-day delivery apps including Kurly and rival Coupang Fresh have been criticised for the strain they put on delivery drivers, with local media reporting on occasional deaths from extreme overwork, as workers make scores of deliveries each night.

The rise of such services has also sucked gig workers from other crucial sectors including city taxis, where the supply crunch is so severe that the Seoul government recently hiked basic fares in a bid to entice more drivers to provide late-night services.

It is important for South Korea's unicorns like Market Kurly to take into account the social costs of their business models, said Minister for Small and Medium Enterprises and Start-ups Lee Young.

"It's very possible for these platform companies to contribute to society," she said. "Market Kurly is a very good example because it has created a very innovative idea and they have gone through multiple struggles until they achieved current success."

AFP



SAUDI SUPERFAN

Saudi national football team fan and the head of the fan association for the prestigious Jeddah-based Saudi club Al-Ahly, Bader Turkistani, is upbeat about the World Cup in Qatar



Oh Saudi, we have come!

This is the green of Saudi. 50,000 fans will repeat this chant behind me in Qatar, instead of only 5,000 fans in Russia

BADER TURKISTANI

Travel-weary Saudi superfan, who has been going around the world cheering his national team, is all set for the World Cup at 'home' (Qatar)

For the past two decades, Bader Turkistani has crisscrossed the globe to cheer on the Saudi national football team, leading crowds in poetic chants that have made him a social media star. This year's World Cup in neighbouring Qatar, by contrast, has the feel of a home game - Doha is a mere two-hour flight from his base in Jeddah, on the Red Sea coast.

The close proximity has Turkistani dreaming of a ferocious turnout by football-mad Saudis, the kind of support he says could help the Green Falcons break out of the group stage for the first time in nearly three decades. "The Saudi national team is considered to be playing on its land, playing among its fans. Having the World Cup in Qatar is like having it in Saudi Arabia," the 37-year-old engineer told AFP. "A simple border separates us. We will be present in very large numbers and fill the stadiums with 50,000 to 60,000 fans." On a recent afternoon, wearing a white-and-green scarf over his traditional white thobe, Turkistani gave a preview of some of the chants he hopes will propel the Green Falcons to glory. "This is the green of Saudi," he sang into an electronic megaphone, as a friend pounded a drum made of animal hide. "Oh Saudi, we have come." The stands of the Jeddah stadium behind him were empty, but he is certain the scene will be completely different once play gets underway. "50,000 fans will repeat this chant behind me in Qatar, instead of only 5,000 fans in Russia," he said. "This enthusiasm is transmitted to the players. We hope that we, as fans, will bring out the players'



best energy." **High hopes** In total, Turkistani estimates he has watched more than 100 international matches played by the Green Falcons over the years, most of them documented in a bulging photo album he eagerly shows off to visitors. He also leads the fan association for the prestigious Jeddah-based Saudi club Al-Ahly. Beyond its high cost, the hobby can be

trying in other ways - while on the road, Turkistani has struggled with language barriers, fiercely cold weather and unfamiliar foreign food. "In Qatar, all these things will be very convenient for us," he said. Saudi officials are putting on 240 weekly flights linking the kingdom to Qatar, up from six normally, and easing overland travel during the tournament, Tourism Minister Ahmed Al Khateeb said last month.

At an event last week marking the World Cup trophy's stop in Saudi Arabia, Ibrahim Alkassim, secretary general of the national football association, said that the Saudi turnout would be high enough "to exceed half the capacity of the stadium in each match." Once Saudi fans are on Qatari soil, Turkistani will be ready for them, having stocked up on green-and-white t-shirts, plastic blowhorns, drums and balloons to distribute. Turkistani sees it as an opportunity to showcase the unique elements of Saudi fan culture - especially the songs - that he considers 'a cultural heritage' and that have earned him nearly 280,000 followers on Twitter. As for the Green Falcons' chances, Turkistani is well aware they face a tough fight in group play against the likes of Argentina, Mexico and Poland. He is confident, however, the squad will profit from what he describes as home-field advantage, and he expects the other competing Arab countries - host Qatar, Tunisia and Morocco - to benefit, as well. "The Saudi and Gulf fans will support the Arab teams," he said. "This makes me expect the Arab teams will surprise everyone and go far at this World Cup." AFP

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FIFA WORLD CUP

Qatar2022



MONDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2022 | MUSCAT DAILY | 13

FOOTBALL FIESTA

IT'S PARTY TIME

South Korean K-pop star Jung Kook headlines the opening ceremony at the spectacular Al Bayt Stadium as Qatar World Cup begins



Fireworks explode around a replica of the FIFA World Cup trophy during the opening ceremony of the Qatar 2022 World Cup at the Al Bayt Stadium in Al Khor on Sunday (AFP)

Show of Enner strength

Enner Valencia scores double in Ecuador's win as Qatar become first World Cup hosts to lose opener

Al Khor, Qatar - Qatar became the first home team to lose their opening World Cup match as Ecuador cruised to a 2-0 victory over the hosts, with Enner Valencia scoring twice in the tournament curtain-raiser on Sunday.

Asian champions Qatar enjoyed the backing of the majority of the crowd at the 60,000-capacity Al Bayt Stadium, but could not follow a glitzy opening ceremony with a statement performance.

Ecuador thought they had made a dream start when they silenced the home fans as Valencia headed in, only for the goal to be ruled out by VAR for an offside in the build-up. Valencia did break the deadlock with a penalty in the 16th minute and doubled his tally just after the half-hour mark.

Qatar improved slightly in the second period, but by the end of the 90 minutes, the excitement which greeted the build-up - featuring Morgan Freeman and BTS star Jung Kook - was a distant memory as thousands of fans left early amid a deflated atmosphere.

Felix Sanchez's Qatar will likely need a positive result in their second Group A match against Senegal on Friday just to avoid the ignominy of becoming only the second hosts,



Ecuador's Enner Valencia (R) celebrates with team-mates after scoring against Qatar in the opening match of the Qatar 2022 World Cup on Sunday (AFP)

after South Africa in 2010, to be dumped out in the first round.

Hopes were high among the crowd that Qatar could make a winning start, but the deficiencies of the World Cup debutants were ruthlessly exposed by an impressive Ecuador.

Qatar failed to even muster a shot on target in the game, with spectators filing out of the stands long before the final whistle.

In the 92-year history of the tournament, home countries had previously won 16 and drawn six of their opening matches.

Early VAR intervention

The South Americans had the ball in the net inside three minutes when captain Valencia nodded home from Felix Torres' miscued overhead kick.

VAR officials spotted an offside against Michael Estrada in the

build-up after Torres challenged for the ball with Qatar goalkeeper Saad Al Sheeb.

Ecuador were completely dominant in the early exchanges, though, and were awarded a penalty after Valencia was tripped by Al Sheeb when through on goal.

The former West Ham forward coolly sent Al Sheeb the wrong way from the spot and stroked the ball into the bottom corner to score his 36th international goal.

Ecuador did not have to wait long to double their advantage as, after a surging run from Moises Caicedo, right-back Angelo Preciado swung in a cross which Valencia met with a thumping header.

Even the small section of noticeably enthusiastic Qatari fans situated behind the goal, who arrived together after the majority of the crowd and wore matching t-shirts, briefly fell silent.

Almoez Ali, the hero of Qatar's 2019 Asian Cup success, should have pulled one back on the stroke of half-time but could only steer a free header wide from eight yards out.

Ecuador allowed Qatar more of the ball after the break but still looked the more dangerous side, with Romario Ibarra bringing a diving save from Al Sheeb.

Valencia hobbled off in the 77th minute after being on the wrong end of a series of heavy challenges, although that would only have taken some of the shine off a famous night for Ecuador.

AFP



FIFA WORLD CUP Qatar 2022



Belgium's Romelu Lukaku arrives in Doha on Saturday (AFP)

LUKAKU OUT of first two World Cup games: Belgium source

Doha, Qatar - Romelu Lukaku will not play for Belgium at the World Cup until at least their final Group F match against Croatia, a team source told AFP on Sunday.

The forward did not take part in the Red Devils' first proper training session since they arrived in Qatar on Friday as he continues his recovery from a hamstring injury.

Lukaku is Belgium's all-time top scorer with 68 goals in 102 appearances and was called up to their World Cup squad despite coach Roberto Martinez admitting he was not fully fit.

"It would be better for us if he was there for the first game (against Canada on Wednesday), but I cannot tell you when he will be back," Atletico Madrid midfielder Axel Witsel told reporters.

"The most important thing is how he feels. I was in his place in the last European Championship when I came back from an injury and I'm sure we'll have Romelu back very soon."

Lukaku has endured a difficult past 18 months, moving back to Inter Milan

on loan after a dismal season with Chelsea.

However, the 29-year-old has played just twice for Inter since August after first picking up the injury in a 3-1 defeat at Lazio.

He returned to action in style last month, scoring in a 4-0 win against Viktoria Plzen that ensured Inter's passage to the last 16 of the Champions League but he then injured his hamstring again a few days later.

Martinez has to decide who will replace Lukaku up front for the clash with Canada. Fenerbahce forward Michy Batshuayi started in Belgium's one warm-up match before the tournament, a 2-1 defeat to Egypt on Friday.

Batshuayi was replaced by Lens forward Lois Openda, who pulled a goal back in the 76th minute of the clash in Kuwait City.

Belgium also take on Morocco before meeting 2018 World Cup finalists Croatia at the start of next month as they try to improve on their run to the semi-finals four years ago.

AFP

END OF THE ROAD

Holders France rocked as thigh injury rules Ballon d'Or winner Karim Benzema out of World Cup

Doha, Qatar - France's hopes of successfully defending the World Cup were dealt a huge blow late on Saturday as Ballon d'Or winner Karim Benzema was ruled out of the tournament in Qatar with an injured left thigh.

The 34-year-old Real Madrid striker had been struggling with the injury for some time and had played less than half an hour of football in his club's last six games before the World Cup.

On Saturday, he took part in full training for the first time since the World Cup holders gathered last week ahead of the tournament.

He was forced to withdraw from the session at the home stadium of Qatari champions Al Sadd with the injury and was taken for tests.

The French Football Federation (FFF) later said in a statement that the injury "will require a recovery period of three weeks", ruling out any prospect of him being fully fit for the tournament which finishes on December 18.

"I am extremely sad for Karim, for whom this World Cup was a major objective," France coach Didier Deschamps was quoted as saying in the FFF statement. Deschamps said he would not ask for a replacement for Benzema even though FIFA's rules give him until Monday to do so.

"Despite this new blow for the France team I have full faith in my squad. We will do all we can to rise to the huge challenge that awaits us."

Deschamps brushed away questions about the French team's handling of Benzema who had been nursing an injury for the past month.

"I know that you're looking for controversy," he said. "But everything is under control, (the injury) was not even caused by him accelerating

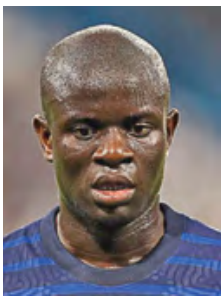
FRENCH SICKBED



Presnel Kimpembe



Paul Pogba



N'Golo Kante



Christopher Nkunku

or shooting."

The 36-year-old Olivier Giroud is set to benefit from Benzema's absence by coming into the France attack alongside Kylian Mbappe and Antoine Griezmann.

France begin their defence of the trophy on Tuesday, when they take on Australia in Al Wakrah. They will also play Denmark and Tunisia in Group D as they aim to become the first team since Brazil in 1962 to retain the World Cup.

Pogba, Kante already out

Benzema's injury is a major blow for Deschamps, whose preparations for the tournament had already been hampered by fitness problems.

France have come to Qatar without the key duo of Paul Pogba and N'Golo Kante, their starting midfield pairing from the successful 2018 World Cup campaign, who were both ruled out due to injury before Deschamps named his squad.

Ronaldo will be 'phenomenal' at World Cup, says Neves

Doha, Qatar - Cristiano Ronaldo enters the World Cup under a cloud of controversy but his Portugal team-mate Ruben Neves believes the forward will have a "phenomenal" tournament.

Reduced to a peripheral role at Manchester United this season, the superstar last week lashed out at his club and United coach Erik ten Hag in a TV interview.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner remains the spearhead for Portugal at 37 despite his struggles at club level and Neves is confident he can shine at his fifth World Cup.

"From what I've seen in training he is in a spectacular state of form," Neves said on Sunday.



From what I've seen in training he is in a spectacular state of form

RUBEN NEVES

"We're not worried about anything. We know that we can work very well so that individuals stand out. If we are good, Cristiano will be phenomenal."

Ronaldo, with 117 goals, is the all-time leading goalscorer in men's international football.

Footage emerged last week of a seemingly tense handshake between Ronaldo and his Manchester United

and Portugal team-mate Bruno Fernandes.

But Neves played down speculation over tensions in the squad.

"I don't think there's controversy in the dressing room, it's impossible for us to go around without some controversy," said the midfielder.

"There's more outside the camp and in the media than in the dressing room. It's all been said, and we have

a spectacular atmosphere."

Wolves player Neves, 25, has been linked with a move away from the struggling Premier League club and was asked if he might leave in January.

"I'm leaving Wolves this month, I hope at least until the 18th (of December, the World Cup final)," he joked.

"I don't want to come back earlier. My big goal is to stay here as long as possible and give my best for the team."

Portugal open their World Cup campaign against Ghana on November 24, before facing Uruguay and South Korea in Group H.

AFP



Cristiano Ronaldo takes part in a training session in Al Samriya on Saturday



England coach Gareth Southgate at a team training session in Al Wakrah on Sunday

HIGH HOPES

Doha, Qatar - England kick off their World Cup campaign against Iran on Monday desperate to take the final step after twice falling just short of winning the country's first major trophy in more than half a century.

Gareth Southgate's players will be relieved to finally focus on football after spending much of the build-up to the tournament mired in the ceaseless controversies surrounding host nation Qatar.

But now England start their three Group B fixtures established as one of the leading contenders.

That lofty status is a stark contrast to six years ago, when Southgate took

charge with England at a low ebb after a series of humiliations on and off the pitch.

A woeful Euro 2016 exit against Iceland brought a suitably depressing end to Roy Hodgson's England reign, while his successor, Sam Allardyce, lasted only 67 days and one match before being forced out after a newspaper sting. Southgate set about rebuilding the team and has gradually restored them to the upper echelons of the international game.

A surprise run to the 2018 World Cup semi-finals in Russia gave the manager credibility among previously sceptical players and fans.

England expects as Gareth Southgate's men eye World Cup glory

And he followed that impressive achievement by leading England to their first major final for 55 years at last year's European Championship.

But while Southgate has made England a team to be feared again, he has yet to deliver the silverware his football-obsessed country has craved since Bobby Moore lifted the World Cup in 1966.

The World Cup run four years ago ended in a 2-1 defeat to Croatia after England squandered the lead, while Italy recovered from Luke Shaw's early goal to beat Southgate's men on penalties in the Euro final at a shell-shocked Wembley.

Not only did England lose when the stakes were highest, but in both matches they retreated into their shell with a conservative game-plan that left Southgate open to criticism.

The England boss, hailed as a fashion icon for donning a debonair waistcoat at the last World Cup, will be eager to end suspicions that he cannot handle pressure when it is at its most intense.

Unable to dispel accusations that his cautious approach prevents players from fully expressing themselves, Southgate has conceded there are lessons to learn from England's failures.

AFP



Karim Benzema

TODAYS MATCHES



ENGLAND
VS
IRAN
5 PM



SENEGAL
VS
NETHERLANDS
8 PM



UNITED STATES
VS
WALES
11 PM

MOMENT IN TIME



Germany forward Serge Gnabry attends a training session at Al Shamal Stadium in Al Shamal on Sunday (AFP)

Van Dijk ‘sad’ for Mane as Dutch team prepares for Senegal test

Doha, Qatar - Netherlands star Virgil van Dijk said he was sad to learn that former Liverpool teammate Sadio Mane would miss the World Cup due to injury, even if it will boost Dutch hopes.

The defender was due to come up against Mane when the Netherlands face Senegal in their opening Group A match on Monday but the Bayern Munich forward is out of the tournament after suffering a leg injury playing for his club.

"I called him the next day and obviously I wanted to know how he was," Van Dijk said at his team's pre-match press conference in Doha. "There were so many rumours coming out. As a friend I wanted to know how he was. It wasn't the best news he has had and unfortunately he won't be able to make this tournament."

Van Dijk and Mane played together at Southampton before being reunited at Anfield, winning the Premier League title and the Champions League together under Jurgen Klopp.

Mane left Liverpool earlier this year for a fresh start at Bayern.

"I feel sad for him," Van Dijk added. "I know how hard he worked for this and he has been important for Senegal so he is going to be a big miss for them."

"But hopefully we can benefit a little from that as well."

Monday's match at the Al Thumama Stadium in the Qatari capital marks the Netherlands' return to the World Cup after they failed to qualify for the 2018 tournament in Russia.

Dutch coach Louis van Gaal, who is back in charge after taking the team to third place in 2014, pointed out that his side are also handicapped by the absence of Memphis Depay. The Barcelona forward, 28, who has scored 42 goals in 81 games for his country, has not played since September.

AFP

Senegal young guns ready to ‘step up’ at World Cup, says Cisse

Doha, Qatar - Senegal coach Aliou Cisse told his younger players on Sunday that it was their time to shine after talisman Sadio Mane was ruled out of the World Cup.

Team chiefs confirmed on Thursday that the Bayern Munich forward, who has scored 33 goals in 92 internationals, had lost his race to recover from a shin injury.

But Cisse is refusing to be downcast ahead of their World Cup opener on Monday against the Netherlands.

"First of all, I'm sad for the boy, for Sadio Mane, and then for the national team, but of course it's his health that counts," he said.

"Of course we won't hide the importance of Sadio Mane for the Senegalese team -- he's very important, a coach builds his team around his best players."

"But there's also a group here with experienced players, with young players ready to step up. We've had to play matches before without Sadio Mane."

Cisse said the African champions, who also face Ecuador and hosts Qatar in Group A, have "excellent young players".

"I have a lot of depth on the bench so I will be able to make good subs if someone is getting tired," he said.

Senegal have called up Moussa Ndiaye, the 20-year-old Anderlecht defender.

Krepin Diatta, 23, is one of those who could fill the void left by Mane.

"When you talk about the spirit and morale, of course it affects you. He is our best player and a leader," said the Monaco forward.

"But we are determined to do what we can without him. We are going to have to work harder individually and harder as a team."

AFP



Brazil fans hold a cut-out of Neymar as they gather outside the Westin Doha Hotel & Spa in Doha to welcome their team on Saturday (AFP)

Indian samba greeting for Neymar and co at World Cup

Doha, Qatar - Hundreds of fans from South Asia and South America greeted Neymar and his teammates as the Brazil squad landed in Qatar for their bid to secure a sixth World Cup.

Drum-beating Indians who have already made their mark on the tournament left Brazilians in a minority outside the luxury Doha hotel that will be the Selecao's base for the tournament.

"Why do neutral fans support Brazil? Because they are the best in the world," said Kelly Dias, a Brazilian who runs a cosmetics business in

Madrid and is spending three weeks in Qatar.

"You can see it in the streets. Brazil are the favourites," added the 39-year-old.

The tens of thousands of Indian football fans in Qatar are mainly divided between Argentina and Qatar.

As with Argentina's arrival, the Brazil fans got only a fleeting glimpse of their heroes as the team bus with tinted windows drove by without stopping.

Every night the fans organise rival flash mobs in Doha where hundreds

beat drums and wave the Argentinian and Brazilian flags. Smaller groups have backed England and other European nations.

The Indian contingent was joined by Brazil fans from Bangladesh and Arab nations as they waited for more than three hours outside the hotel late Saturday.

Lijo Mathew, 24, said he waited because he wanted to see Neymar. Others wore yellow shirts with Neymar's name written across the back.

The Indians, mainly from Kerala state, are angry at European media re-

ports calling them "fake fans". Qatar organisers have also slammed the reports.

"There are a lot of fans in Kerala," said Haneef, who runs a public relations firm in Doha.

"They love Neymar, they love Brazil, because, you know, India is not good at football," she said.

Haneef said she fell for the Brazil team when they last won the title in Japan in 2002. Others are sure Brazil will triumph again on the tournament's return to Asia.

AFP



India's Suryakumar Yadav hits a six during his unbeaten knock of 111 in the second Twenty20 against New Zealand at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui on Sunday (AFP)

New Zealand succumb to Indian star Suryakumar Yadav's century in second T20

Mount Maunganui, New Zealand - Batting dynamo Suryakumar Yadav says his "special" century against New Zealand was forged on enjoyment and hard work as he steered India to a 65-run in the second Twenty20 International on Sunday.

Suryakumar struck an imperious 111 not out off just 51 balls as the tourists posted 191-6 at Mount Maunganui's Bay Oval.

New Zealand were skittled for 126 in the 19th over, handing India a 1-0 lead in the three-match series after the opening fixture was washed out in Wellington on Friday.

To win the final game in Napier on Tuesday, the Black Caps will need to find an answer

to Suryakumar, who illustrated why he is ranked the world's best T20 batter.

The 32-year-old struck 11 fours and cleared the ropes seven times as he compiled his second century in the format, having posted 117 against England at Nottingham four months ago.

He had already become the

first Indian to score 1,000 T20 runs in a calendar year before Sunday's knock and has passed 50 in seven of his last 11 innings.

"Of course in T20 cricket, 100 is always special," Suryakumar told Spark Sport.

"Obviously I'm enjoying batting this way. I'm doing the same things in the nets, in all practice sessions."

Opener Ishan Kishan provided the next-highest Indian score with 36 off 31.

Suryakumar ensured the run rate accelerated as the innings progressed and he raised three figures while taking 22 runs off the penultimate over bowled by Lockie Ferguson.

"It was really important for me to bat to the end, that's what Hardik (Pandya) was telling me from the other end," said Suryakumar, whose career strike rate has climbed to an extraordinary 181.64.

"We really wanted to maximise the last four overs and I'm really happy with the way things went."

The final over provided the

home side's best moment, when seamer Tim Southee claimed his second career hat-trick, dismissing Indian captain Pandya before removing Deepak Hooda and Washington Sundar for golden ducks.

New Zealand's run chase struggled from the moment opener Finn Allen holed out on the second delivery.

Captain Kane Williamson top-scored with 61 off 52 but his struggle for timing was mirrored by his teammates against an Indian attack boasting variety and discipline.

Spinner Hooda took 4-10 off 2.5 overs, claiming the last three scalps in the space of four balls.

AFP

Of course, in T20 cricket, 100 is always special. Obviously I'm enjoying batting this way. I'm doing the same things in the nets, in all practice sessions

SURYAKUMAR YADAV



Maqsood dazzles in Oman's victory, Canada beat Saudi Arabia to stay top

Muscat - Oman skipper Zeeshan Maqsood's career-best T20I knock, an unbeaten 102, led his team to a massive 106-run win over Bahrain in the Desert Cup T20I Series at the Oman Cricket Academy (OCA) ground in Al Amerat on Saturday.

In the other match of the evening, Canada bounced back from their loss to Bahrain to rout Saudi Arabia and stay on top of the table with eight points.

A day after Al Amerat skyline was lit up with dazzling drone and laser shows to mark Oman's 52nd National Day, Maqsood lit up the skyline in Amerat again with his batting fireworks as he blasted his maiden T20I century - 102 not out in just 44 balls.

He achieved his personal milestone in style, hammering the last ball of Oman's innings for a six, to give his side a formidable total of 220/5. Maqsood's late charge saw seven of his nine maximums come in the last three overs of the innings. His knock was also studded with seven boundaries as Oman put a step on the gas to race from 149/4 to 220 in the final 24 balls.

Maqsood was given good support by Mohammed Nadeem with a 19-ball 30 and Rafiullah with a 14-ball 25. Earlier, openers, Jatinder Singh (28) and Kashyap Prajapati (13) gave the hosts a quick start with Duleep Mendis' wards ensuring the scoring

tempo at a good pace.

Bahrain's frontline bowlers, Imran Khan, Rizwan Butt, Sathiyah Veerapathiran and Imran Javed, went for plenty with Butt and Khan conceding 53 and 45 runs in their respective spell of four overs.

Chasing a target of 221, Bahrain needed a strong start but Bilal Khan got an early breakthrough with skipper Sarfraz Ali

Maqsood achieved his personal milestone in style, hitting the last ball of the innings for a six

out for just 4. Imran Javed (22) and David Mathias put up a fight-back to lead the team to 60 in 6.5 overs. However, Rafiullah's double strike off two successive balls put Bahrain on the back foot. Mathias' dismissal by Samay Shrivastava for 39 in the 12th over triggered a collapse.

Bahrain then spun into Shrivastava's web as the leg-spinner picked up four more wickets to end with figures of 4-0-18-5. Except for Ahmed Bin Nasir (28 not out), Bahrain batters failed to put up a fight as their innings folded for just 114 in 16 overs.



Zeeshan Maqsood

Djokovic downs Fritz, faces Ruud for record-equalling sixth ATP Finals title

Turin, Italy - Novak Djokovic remained on course for a record-equalling sixth ATP Tour Finals title after a 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (8/6) win over Taylor Fritz in Turin on Saturday.

Djokovic brushed off his bruising encounter with Daniil Medvedev the day before to boss the semi-final against the ninth-seeded American.

The 35-year-old set up a meeting with Norway's Casper Ruud who at 23 years of age will bid for his first major title after

sweeping past Russian Andrey Rublev 6-2, 6-4 in the second semi-final in northern Italy.

The Serb has beaten world number four Ruud in all three of their previous meetings including this year in the semi-finals in Rome.

Djokovic will aim for his second major title of the year, after Wimbledon, having missed a significant part of the season, including the Australian Open and the US Open, for his refusal to take the covid vaccine.

"Of course, the last match of the season, I'm going to give it all. I'm going to obviously try my best," said the Serb.

"I'm very happy to be able to compete for another big trophy, one of the biggest ones that we have in our sport."

Victory in Sunday's final will also see him equal Roger Federer's haul of six wins in the tournament comprising the top eight players in the world this season.

"I had to fight to survive," said Djokovic, who has now reached

the final of the season-ending event eight times and last won in 2015.

Ruud played in two Grand Slam finals this year at Roland Garros and the US Open, and is participating in the season-ending elite eight-player tournament for the second time, having being eliminated in the semi-finals last year. Ruud took advantage of a below-par Rublev who had seen off Medvedev and Stefanos Tsitsipas.

AFP



Novak Djokovic celebrates after winning his semi-final match against Taylor Fritz on Saturday (AFP)