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► NEWS BRIEF

OMAN WELCOMES SUDANESE HUMANITARIAN DECLARATION

Muscat - The sultanate has welcomed the signing of a humanitarian declaration of principles between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Oman affirms its full support for the unity, stability and security of Sudan and the importance of continuing dialogue between all parties to achieve the aspirations of the brotherly Sudanese people in terms of hopes for peace and stability, the Foreign Ministry stated.

‘The sultanate appreciates the essential role and positive efforts made by many regional and international parties to reach this agreement, led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United States of America.’

05



Omantel, Zain launch joint venture ZOI

Retirements, expansion of health sector causing severe staff shortage

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The sultanate is facing a severe shortage of health professionals due to retirements and rapid expansion of the healthcare sector, according to H E Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health.

The announcement was made when H E Dr Sabti was hosted by Majlis A'Shura on Sunday to discuss issues such as universal health coverage, human resources in the health sector, and financing the healthcare system and its digital transformation.

In the minister's statement, he said, "The Ministry of Health (MoH) is working to enhance decentralisation of health services by providing specialised services in referral hospitals, adding approximately 240 new services."

On the issue of long waiting list at hospitals, he said the ministry is working to speed up appointments. "However, there is a severe shortage in the number of health personnel due to retirements and expansion of the health sector."

He pointed out that the total number of workers in the ministry in 2021 was 37,732, a decrease of 2.2 per cent year-on-year, while the Omaniisation level was 73 per cent for all

Budget for medicines, supplies raised to

RO10MN

Patients sent abroad for treatment up

14.9%

13 new hospitals to take total MoH hospitals to

64

NEW PROJECTS

- CENTRAL LABORATORY
- REGIONAL WAREHOUSE IN MUSANDAM
- 2 DRUG REHABILITATION CENTRES
- NATIONAL CENTRE FOR ORGAN TRANSPLANTATION



For the next Five-Year Plan, we are assessing urgent needs of all wilayats and governorates

H E DR HILAL AL SABTI



category of workers.

The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the exacerbation of the problem of the long waiting periods and postponement of outpatient appointments and surgeries. "The ministry made many urgent interventions which yielded positive results."

Currently 70 per cent of patients are able to get appointments within four weeks, compared to 30 per cent earlier.

Explaining reasons behind the shortage of medicines, he said it was due to a 15 per cent increase in the number of health clinics. "The ministry has increased reserve stocks of medicines and raised the budget for medicines and medical supplies to RO10mn to ensure availability during emergencies and stave off the effects of epidemics and disasters," he said, adding that the ministry maintains a reserve stock for three to six months of vital and life-saving items.

The number of patients who were sent abroad for treatment last year was 1,040, an increase of 14.9 per cent compared to 2019. The ministry is working to localise health services by training medical personnel and providing necessary equipment.

Giving an overview of health infrastructure, he said that 13

hospitals, with capacity ranging between 50 and 700 beds, are under various stages of development, taking the number of hospitals affiliated to the ministry to 64. "Eighteen primary healthcare centres are being established or upgraded to meet the demand of the rising population."

The ministry is also working on expanding five hospitals with around 600 additional beds, upgrading the facilities of three health centres to hospital category, and establishing and expanding eight emergency units and nine dialysis units.

Among the new projects being developed are a central laboratory, a regional warehouse in Musandam, two drug rehabilitation centres in Muscat and North Batinah, and a national centre for organ transplantation.

Oman currently has seven pharmaceutical factories and seven medical supply factories. Seven pharmaceutical factories and two factories for medical supplies are under construction.

"In preparation for the next Five-Year Plan for the health sector, we are currently assessing urgent needs of all wilayats and governorates to raise the quality of services based on the principle of easy access to service in the shortest possible time," he said.

Oman, Egypt to sign pact to avoid double taxation

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman and Egypt will sign an agreement to prevent double taxation with the aim of strengthening economic relations and tax cooperation between the two countries. It will be signed later this month.

The announcement was made during a meeting of H E Sultan bin Salem al Habsi, Minister of Finance, with his Egyptian counterpart Mohamed Maait, on the sidelines of their participation in the annual meeting of the Islamic Development Bank Group in Saudi Arabia on Friday.

According to the Egyptian newspaper *Al Ahran*, Maait and H E Habsi agreed to sign the pact this month in Cairo.



The two sides also agreed on the need to deepen bilateral cooperation in financial policies and social protection in order to achieve economic and development goals and limit the repercussions of external economic shocks.

Maait added, "We are working to contain the repercussions of global economic challenges, and focus on opening new horizons for local and foreign investments

in a way that helps in maximising the country's productive and export capabilities."

He invited Omani investors and companies wishing to expand their investments in Egypt to take advantage of the measures put in place by the Egyptian government to stimulate production and export in various sectors, including 'Golden license' and 'State ownership policy document'.

MoSD shuts down centre for physical abuse of children

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) closely monitored a social media report of a child being physically abused in a care centre, it stated on Sunday.

In a statement, MoSD said, 'The ministry has followed reports of abuse against children by specialists working in a centre dedicated to the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities and has decided to temporarily suspend the centre's services.'

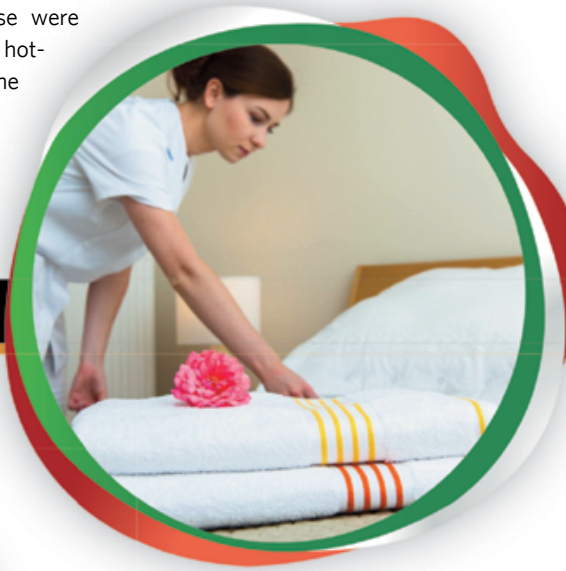
The ministry explained that it intervened through a child protection officer as soon as it learnt about the incident.

'Based on the results of the inspection, the ministry issued a decision to stop the centre from providing services and to refer the violators to competent au-

thorities through the Child Protection Committee for investigation, and to take necessary legal action against them.'

MoSD expressed gratitude to the public for bringing the incident to its notice. It stated that it receives complaints of abuse through the call centre number 1555, in addition to the child protection number 1100.

MoSD recently issued the Child Law, which aims to protect children from any kind of abuse. According to MoSD data, 1,148 cases of child abuse were reported through its hot-line in the first nine months of 2021, compared to 1,040 in the whole of 2020.



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Omani innovator wins gold at tech show in Malaysia

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omani innovator Mohammed Saud al Balushi has bagged a gold medal at the 34th International Invention, Innovation & Technology Exhibition (ITEX) held in Malaysia from May 11 to 13.

ITEX is an annual exhibition that brings the best innovations from Asia and beyond under one roof and offers them the best audience.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Balushi, HSE specialist and instructor, said, "The annual international invention exhibition attracts the best inventors/innovators from around the world. This edition saw 700 participants from many countries."

He informed that the GCC



Secretariat General nominated him to represent the sultanate in the exhibition.

"This year, I also won a gold medal at the 13th International Invention Fair in the Middle East (IIFME), organised by the Kuwait Scientific Club from February 12 to 15."

Continued on Page 03

CALLING THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

STOP THINKING!



Recognising Omani Talent



CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT Q1 2023



Our Values

Safety | ESG | Respect | Vision | Integrity | Caring | Empowerment



On behalf of the Board of Directors, I present the audited accounts for Renaissance Services SAOG for the first quarter ended March 31, 2023.

While lower occupancy at Renaissance Village Duqm (RSVD) has impacted our performance in the first quarter as compared to Q1 2022 (which included a few one-off transactions that positively affected profitability), results across the rest of our verticals have shown a healthy uptrend.

We have successfully bid and recalibrated rates for contracts in 2022 that are yielding positive results in 2023. This helped us improve our order book backlog by 90 percent to RO112 mn as of Q1 2023, compared to the corresponding previous year period.

Also, the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) price index has come down compared to the same period last year, the impact of which will further boost performance in the coming months.

We continue to remain positive on RSVD occupancy despite a timing gap related to the mobilisation of major infrastructure projects like steel, cement and roadways to green hydrogen and petrochemicals, and we expect to have clarity on potential requirements on all these projects in the third quarter of 2023.

Whilst we expect RSVD occupancy to rebound in full in 2024, the combined effect of new contracts, contract recalibrations, cost optimisation, Renaissance 2.0 and Operational Excellence initiatives, provides a positive outlook for the upcoming three quarters.

Financial Performance

RS Consolidated

	RO Million		USD Million	
	Q1 2023	Q1 2022	Q1 2023	Q1 2022
Revenue	26.82	29.90	69.66	77.66
EBITDA	5.81	7.05	15.09	18.31
Operating profit	3.84	5.14	9.97	13.35
Net profit after tax	2.82	4.10	7.32	10.65
Net profit after non-controlling interest	2.71	3.47	7.04	9.01

Performance

In keeping with our commitment to transform as an organisation under the Renaissance 2.0 programme, we are working on several operational excellence initiatives along with a focus on reengineering our cost structure.

We have redoubled our efforts to streamline operations and contract compliance to remain ahead of the curve in terms of service delivery to our customers. Real-time monitoring of contracts ensures both operational efficiency and on-track financial performance, with agility and adaptability being key to sustained growth. Proactive cost-optimisation measures and operational excellence projects that began in 2022 also helped soften the impact of short-term lulls in demand (as at RSVD), along with building a smarter, more efficient operation for the future.



We continue our investment in people as we add to the strength of our top management to develop strategic high-potential markets and businesses in Oman and the GCC. We entered Qatar with the delivery of a one-off prestigious catering contract in Q4 2022 and are currently engaged in exploring one of the fastest growing economies in the world, Saudi Arabia (KSA). Renaissance has proven capabilities in delivering workforce accommodation on a DBOOM/T model, which will be required as new mega projects are being constructed, in addition to IFM and waste management opportunities in KSA. Within Oman, we are actively pursuing long-term infrastructure and asset management projects in partnership with leading international sector experts.

Renaissance Village Duqm

An organisational restructure within the Operations team saw key members assume larger roles at RSVD to drive operational efficiency and maximise capabilities for enhanced service delivery to current and prospective clients.

In the hiatus before the commissioning of new projects and workforce mobilisation at Duqm, we have undertaken various cost management initiatives at RSVD including, but not limited to, building/room reassignment and consolidation, rationalising manpower, savings in finance cost by term loan prepayment and warehouse consolidation.



Operational Excellence

Operational excellence is an enabler for the larger objectives aligned with Renaissance 2.0 where business growth and customer satisfaction will continue to be delivered through a combination of smart strategy deployment, process excellence, high-performing collaborative teams, and innovation.

Renaissance has adopted a multi-pronged approach to fast-track its operational excellence agenda, which is expected to deliver an estimated annual savings of approximately RO1.2mn.



A reputed international consultant was engaged in Q4 2022 to conduct a third-party current-state assessment of operations and present a data-driven solutions framework. In Q1 2023, the process of developing standardised industry benchmarks to reevaluate various operational parameters is underway that will enable a data-driven, analytical approach to business development and delivery.

Additionally, best practice initiatives by staff, several of which are based on Lean Six Sigma methodologies, have either been successfully piloted or are being scaled for rollout.

ESG

Renaissance operates in a regional and national context where growing social, economic and environmental concerns require concerted efforts through innovation and digitalisation, partnerships and targeted solutions. Our focus at the Board level is to facilitate effective ESG governance that will enable the organisation to achieve significant growth by enhancing business efficiency and reputational gains. This will also help us establish a unique market position through sustainability leadership.



Sustainability

Renaissance's commitment to sustainability underpins the values and purpose upon which we drive continuous improvement in service, standards, performance and growth.

Our Net Zero goals are underlined by the shift towards greener and renewable energy sources and sustainable changes in how facilities are managed on a day-to-day basis without compromising on guest experience and welfare. The partnership with SOURCE to bring the world's first premium renewable drinking water to RSVD is on track for on-ground implementation. Measures being currently implemented at Renaissance Villages are aimed at delivering long-term energy and resource efficiency with minimal or zero impact to the environment.

CSR

We view Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as an opportunity to make meaningful contributions that empower communities, build capabilities and create a safer and greener living environment. We continue to support the Environment Society of Oman to inculcate environmental stewardship in children and building skills of young Omanis with Outward Bound Oman. Local volunteering programmes, charitable causes, as well as encouraging local and regional sporting talent are commitments that Renaissance is proud of.

Additionally, the company is helping local communities across the wilayats of the Northern Batinah region to save lives and injury in road traffic accidents, while protecting camels from vehicle hits by sponsoring over 10,500 reflective collars for this valued livestock that holds a special place in Omani and Arab culture. Accessibility and inclusion projects have been earmarked to support Oman's efforts towards offering more options for the physically impaired.



Tribute

We express our thanks to His Majesty Sultan Haitham. His Majesty's steady, reform-driven and purposeful approach has successfully brought confidence and optimism while creating a platform for local and international investment in the sultanate. We pledge our support to this vision to drive economic diversification and growth.



Samir J. Fancy
Chairman

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31st MARCH 2023

	2023 Rial '000	2022 Rial '000
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	136,846	142,053
Intangible assets	1,928	1,945
Investments	5,946	5,320
	<u>144,720</u>	<u>149,318</u>
Current assets	71,413	78,048
Current liabilities	49,822	52,124
Non-current liabilities		
Term loans excluding current maturities	62,063	76,983
Non-current payables and advance	10,367	10,448
	<u>72,430</u>	<u>87,431</u>
Net assets	93,881	87,811
Equity		
Share capital	23,641	23,641
Treasury shares	(6,853)	(6,853)
Share premium	26,936	26,936
Legal reserve	9,012	8,831
Subordinated loan reserve	-	1,500
Other reserves	478	537
Retained earnings	19,398	11,563
	<u>72,612</u>	<u>66,155</u>
Non-controlling interest	21,269	21,656
Total equity	93,881	87,811

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS FOR THE THREE MONTHS ENDED 31st MARCH 2023

	2023 Rial '000	2022 Rial '000
Revenue	26,824	29,899
Operating expenses	(22,988)	(24,763)
Profit from operations	3,836	5,136
Net finance costs	(995)	(1,209)
Profit before tax	2,841	3,927
Tax	(17)	172
Profit for the period	2,824	4,099
Net profit attributable to :-		
Shareholders of the Parent Company	2,712	3,468
Non-controlling interest	112	631
	<u>2,824</u>	<u>4,099</u>

Note:
1) The complete accounts will be sent by mail to shareholders within 7 days of receipt of request.
2) The complete set of financial results can be accessed at www.renaissanceservices.com

Omani documentary film gets Golden Palm Award

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Omani documentary film *Long Distances* won the Golden Palm Award for Gulf Film, at the 9th Saudi Film Festival, which concluded in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on Thursday.

Directed by Ali al Bimani and Hamad al Qasabi, the documentary is available on the 'Ain' platform of the Ministry of Information, and has been made available with English subtitles to reach a wider audience.

The film is set in a remote village, located between the mountains adjacent to Wadi al Sahtan. "It showcases a special talent of an Omani girl, Suad al Nusaibiya - a shepherd, who later becomes the champion of long mountain races," Bimani said.

He said that the festival provided a platform for extensive discussions, in addition to having specialised workshops. Qualitative films were shown throughout the eight-days of the festival. "Filmmakers also discussed their films, and shared new developments in the field."

Talking about the challenges, he said that the production of any documentary film is not easy, because "it requires a director to understand the story first, delve into it, study the characters and understand them".

"In addition, you face difficulties in accessing places, filming in those areas over a long period of time. Funding for such works are also not easy to come by."

Bimani believes the win is 'well deserved', as the film found



One of our greatest achievements is that our film inspired many to visit the sultanate and explore its beautiful environment, culture and the people

ALI AL BIMANI

a wide acceptance in the festival, and was praised by many Gulf critics; Arab and non-Arab filmmakers. "One of our greatest achievements is that our film inspired many to visit the sultanate and explore its beautiful environment, culture and the people."

Bimani expressed the need for such films, and pointed out the urgency to capture various facets



of Oman and the stories that are around.

"We were able to communicate with the film and its unique environment and components to a very wide range of filmmakers, writers and media professionals in the region, who in turn were inspired by the film to visit the sultanate," said Bimani.

The Saudi Film Festival aims to

encourage quality screenings and production of great films in the region. It also seeks to expand the scope of such festivals to include a broader range of Arab and international productions.

The festival held under the theme 'The Comedy' had 78 films on display within 48 screening groups, and four groups for children.

Oman hosts regional summits on aviation

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman, represented by Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), on Sunday hosted two regional summits on aviation bringing over 150 experts from 15 different countries to deliver on navigation and safety aspects of air travel.

The 20th meeting of the Middle East Air Navigation Planning and Implementation Regional Group and the tenth meeting of the Regional Aviation Safety Group will run for four days - having an exhibition as well on the latest technologies and developments in the air navigation and aviation safety.

The meetings began under the auspices of Nayef bin Ali al Abri, chairman of Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), in the presence of a number of heads of the aviation sector and CAA directors general.

The meetings offer a platform to experts to share their experiences and exchange views re-



Eng Nayef bin Ali al Abri

lated to air navigation and aviation safety, while focusing on the most important issues and problems facing the countries in the region and finding appropriate scientific solutions to them.

Abri stressed that global and regional developments in air navigation and aviation safety are the pillars of various work programmes of expert teams and working groups that the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) uses for preparing rules, recommendations and procedures.

The world is witnessing a return to civil aviation activity at a faster pace, exceeding the numbers recorded in 2019.

This demands more strategic planning and the recommendations received from the ongoing forum will contribute effectively to taking the appropriate decisions that are in line with the regional and national strategic plans, Abri added.

Mohamed Abu Baker Farea, regional director of ICAO Middle East Office, said that air traffic in the Middle East recorded an impressive increase during the last period, despite a sharp fall in the volume of traffic during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Air operations in the region, however, resumed in full force laying their progress and growth on stable steps during 2022 and 2023."

Farea said that the Middle Eastern region is among the global destinations, whether for business or tourism purposes.

"All of these necessitated dealing with air traffic congestion and improving airspace capacity to ensure efficient and effective operations," Farea explained.

Omani innovator wins gold at tech exhibition in Malaysia

Continued from Page 01

Balushi described his project as "a novel method of flow assurance for transporting heavy crude oil in pipelines".

Flow assurance is a relatively new term in the oil and gas industry. It refers to ensuring successful and economical flow of hydrocarbon stream from reservoir to the point of sale.

Balushi informed that the ob-

jective of developing the project "is to accelerate oil production, preserve the environment and the safety of workers, and reduce the cost of oil production".

"I developed the project using solar energy instead of electricity, making it sustainable."

Balushi obtained a patent for his path-breaking invention in 2021 from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment

Promotion.

"I faced financial constraints to complete the project, but the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation helped me," he said.

Balushi is now working on developing the project further after getting support from the International College of Engineering and Management to implement his project on a bigger scale.



Dhofar International Development And Investment Holding Company (SAOG) AND ITS SUBSIDIARIES

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE THREE MONTHS ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the Un-audited Financial Results of Dhofar International Development & Investment Holding Company SAOG ("DIDIC") for the period ending 31 March 2023.

During the first three months of 2023, most of the securities markets in the region, including Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) showed marginal losses in their respective indices. MSX dipped by 9 points and closed at 4863.09 points as on March 31, 2023 which is a 0.2% dip over the three months period.

Most other indices in the GCC region witnessed a drop during the period ranging from 0.1% to 8.5%.

During the three months period, the Company's investments in equities recorded a decrease of RO 0.585 million, on account of decrease in prices of its key equity investments.

Group Consolidated Performance

During the three months period ending 31 March 2023, net profits were RO 2.70 million and the total comprehensive income attributable to our shareholders amounted to RO 2.77 million as compared to net profit of RO 3.48 million and total comprehensive profit of RO 2.71 million for the same period in 2022.

The Group ended the first three months of 2023 with total assets of RO 221.75 million, a marginal decrease of 2.7% while shareholders' equity of RO 130.31 million registered an increase of 5.89% from the first

three months of 2022 where total assets amounted to RO 227.88 million and shareholders' equity attributable to our shareholders was RO 123.06 million.

Performance of Key Associates

Bank Dhofar, our banking associate, reported net profit of RO 10.02 million for the three months period ended 31 March 2023 as compared to RO 7.10 million for the same period in 2022, representing a significant increase of 41%. The net interest income and income from Islamic financing activities increased to RO 29.62 million compared to RO 28.92 million during same period of 2022 registering a marginal increase by 2.4%. However, non-funded income for the quarter was 81.6% higher compared to same period last year mainly due to increase in net fees & commission income. Net loans and advances including Islamic financing witnessed a marginal increase of 6.5% and reached RO 3.46 billion as at 31 March 2023 as compared to RO 3.26 billion as at 31 March 2022. Similarly, customer deposits including Islamic deposits, increase by 5.2% compared to comparative quarter of last year. Total shareholders' equity in the bank registered an increase by 2.5%, increasing to RO 556.54 million from RO 542.93 million a year prior.

Dhofar Insurance, our insurance associate reported a growth of 14% of gross premium written to RO 25.21 million from RO 22.06 million a year earlier for the three months period. However, its net underwriting results showed a marginal improvement of 3% from RO 2.83 million in the first three months of 2022 to RO 2.92 million a year later. It reported net profit of RO 1.41 million for the first three months period of 2023 as compared to RO 1.35 million a year earlier.

The shareholders' equity has increased by 13.3%, from RO 26.25 million as at 31 March 2022 to RO 29.74 million as at 31 March 2023.

Oman Investment & Finance Company, our billing and collection associate that has also ventured into money exchange and contracting operations through two specialized subsidiaries, has continued noteworthy improvements in its group operations in the first three months of 2023, with net profits increasing to RO 1.43 million from RO 1.36 million a year earlier.

This is mainly on account of the increase in OIFC's share of profits in its associates, mainly for Bank Sohar by 48%. The Shareholder's equity increased by 6%, from RO 26.02 million as at 31 March 2022 to RO 27.58 million as at 31 March 2023.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the board of directors, I would like to extend our gratitude to the leadership of the CMA, CBO and MOCI for their continued support. I would also like to thank the management teams of DIDIC, our subsidiaries and associate companies for all their hard work and dedication.

Finally, we wish our country continued safety and stability under the wise leadership and guidance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq, may God protect him and prolong his life.

Khalid Bin Mustahil Ahmed Al Mashani
Chairman

UN-AUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 MARCH 2023

	Group 2023 RO	Parent Company 2023 RO	Group 2022 RO	Parent Company 2022 RO
ASSETS				
Cash and bank balances	4,510,051	3,573,384	1,493,166	897,601
Receivables and prepayments	1,892,983	4,527,193	5,314,199	9,445,603
Inventories	23,300	-	22,808	-
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss				
-Investment in equities	41,338,194	25,645,214	44,637,057	29,814,849
-Investment in term deposits	1,830,000	1,830,000	1,830,000	1,830,000
Financial assets at fair value through other comprehensive income	1,148,457	-	9,887,158	-
Investment in subsidiaries	-	2,861,487	-	9,951,474
Investment in associates	165,588,529	165,588,529	159,163,434	159,163,434
Loan to subsidiary	-	4,950,000	-	4,950,000
Investment property	247,212	247,212	247,212	247,212
Property and equipment	5,174,279	537,431	5,293,623	566,948
Total assets	221,753,005	209,760,450	227,888,657	216,867,121
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity				
Share capital	54,472,000	54,472,000	54,472,000	54,472,000
Legal reserve	10,210,339	10,210,339	9,360,367	9,360,367
General reserve	7,070,404	7,070,404	7,070,404	7,070,404
Investment revaluation reserve	(3,435,829)	(3,435,829)	(2,559,308)	(2,559,308)
Retained earnings	61,992,436	61,583,848	54,719,230	54,719,230
Total equity due to shareholders of the Parent	130,309,349	129,900,762	123,062,693	123,062,693
LIABILITIES				
Other liabilities	1,006,237	436,652	3,740,544	3,564,008
Income tax payable	169,383	-	-	-
Loans and borrowings	90,268,036	79,423,036	101,085,420	90,240,420
	91,443,656	79,859,688	104,825,964	93,804,428
Total equity and liabilities	221,753,005	209,760,450	227,888,657	216,867,121
Net assets per share	0.318	0.317	0.301	0.301

UN-AUDITED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

	Group 2023 RO	Parent Company 2023 RO	Group 2022 RO	Parent Company 2022 RO
INCOME				
Dividend income	1,187,293	1,075,781	1,288,721	1,223,967
Net revenue of a subsidiary	96,521	-	83,427	-
Realised gain/(loss) on sale of financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	-	-	-	-
Unrealised gain on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	(578,475)	(585,144)	1,221,233	1,174,896
Interest income	38,735	154,713	98,682	153,856
Other income	25,076	22,300	19,345	20,748
Total income	769,150	667,650	2,711,408	2,573,465
EXPENSES				
Administrative and general expenses	(467,275)	(309,983)	(511,950)	(381,938)
Depreciation	(42,110)	(15,898)	(40,183)	(13,405)
Total expenses	(509,385)	(325,881)	(552,133)	(395,343)
Operating profit	259,765	341,769	2,159,275	2,178,122
Finance costs	(1,409,452)	(1,236,300)	(1,666,638)	(1,493,476)
Amortization of deferred finance cost	(32,212)	(32,212)	(32,350)	(32,350)
Share of loss from subsidiaries	-	(255,156)	-	(192,009)
Share of profit from associates	3,878,344	3,878,344	3,018,755	3,018,755
Profit for the period before tax	2,696,445	2,696,445	3,479,042	3,479,042
Income tax	-	-	-	-
Profit for the period	2,696,445	2,696,445	3,479,042	3,479,042
Other comprehensive income				
Items that will not be subsequently reclassified to profit or loss				
Changes in fair value of financial assets through other comprehensive income	(40,003)	-	(160,013)	-
Share of other comprehensive loss of subsidiaries	-	(40,003)	-	(160,013)
Share of other comprehensive loss of associates	108,981	108,981	(608,411)	(608,411)
Other comprehensive income/(loss) for the period	68,978	68,978	(768,424)	(768,424)
Total comprehensive income for the period	2,765,423	2,765,423	2,710,618	2,710,618
Basic earnings per share	0.007	0.007	0.009	0.009

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who request the company in either Arabic or English as requested within 7 days of receipt of the request.



WILL ABER PUT AN END TO HAGGLING OVER TAXI FARES?

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology is set to launch a new application aimed at regulating public taxis in Oman on June 1. The move is expected to bring significant changes to taxi services in the sultanate, improving the safety, reliability and efficiency of public transport.

The Aber taxi mobile app for orange and white taxis will determine the tariff for each trip doing away the need of haggling over unreasonable taxi fares. The app will help taxi drivers calculate the distance and time travelled per trip and estimate the total fare.

This will ensure a better overall experience for both drivers and passengers. The application is also expected to bring more transparency to taxi services, allowing for greater accountability and a higher level of customer satisfaction.

How do you think the Aber app will change taxi services in Oman? Here is what *Muscat Daily* readers said -



Salim Ahmed al Busaidi
Translator

The new taxi app will be of great benefit to all of us. Firstly, it will provide a convenient and efficient way for people to book and track their taxi rides. And secondly, it will enable authorities to regulate public taxis by monitoring their movement and ensuring compliance with regulations.

Toufiq Ahmed
Private sector employee

The app will enhance safety and security by providing a platform for passengers to rate and provide feedback on their rides. Overall, the new taxi app will be a valuable tool that will improve taxi services in Oman and will benefit both passengers and authorities. However, people (not friends) who take rides from different parts of the city will find it a bit challenging in the sharing mode of payment.

Warun Chandran M
Salesman

A good initiative by the sultanate; it will be comfortable for customers. We can now afford cabs as fares will be reasonable.

Shahil Shah
Design engineer

I guess this is a great move by the authorities. It will help residents and expats to opt for taxis more often. I myself have had some experiences after which I decided not to opt for taxis. Following this development, I can once again avail taxi services.

Ameer al Badri
Student

If the app is designed effectively, it could significantly improve taxi services in Oman, offering greater transparency, accountability, and safety to passengers. For example, the app could include features such as real-time GPS tracking of taxis, driver identification, fare estimates and electronic payment options, all of which could enhance the overall user experience.

Raghavendra Singh
Accountant

There aren't enough taxis in the Nizwa area; sometimes drivers cancel rides themselves. Implementation of any new rule will not change anything in taxi services.

Irabel Otejam
Digital creator

Otaxi is already an excellent app. The ministry should improve public transportation, change bus timings and increase the number of buses and routes.

Najma Nadeem
Student

A new app regulating public taxis will be much more convenient than having to stand on the roadside in the scorching heat of Oman waiting for an affordable taxi. I believe that it will save time, energy and money. An increasing number of people will begin to rely more on public taxis. Moreover, this decision will be one of the most effective ones for the improvement of Oman's transport system.

NEXT ON YOUR SAY

ROP recently announced that all foreign visitors and tourists, who hold valid licences issued by their country, are allowed to drive in Oman. What do you think of the decision and how will it affect the tourism sector and the economy?

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



Keralites in Oman divided on 'The Kerala Story'

Muscat - The flutter in political circles in India in the last few days, created by the May 5 release of the Hindi film *The Kerala Story*, has sent ripples among Keralites residing in Oman.

The film, directed by Sudipto Sen and produced by Vipul Amrutlal Shah, portrays the hapless plight of a group of women from different parts of the southern Indian state of Kerala who were tricked, converted to Islam and made to join the ISIS.

The film's critics say it paints an ugly picture of Kerala, while those supporting it agree with the claims of the filmmakers that it only exposes the menace of terrorism.

While political parties ruling different states in India have jumped into the ring - calling for the film's ban or according it a tax-free run - expatriates from the state residing in Oman are also divided on their view of the film, though most have not seen it yet.

Vinod Raghavan, who runs an advertising agency in Muscat, said it was wrong of the Indian state of West Bengal to ban the film. "It's a movie; a work of art.

Whether it is good or bad is for the people to decide, not the government. When a movie is banned by a government, whether it is *Padmaavat* or *Kashmir Files*, it doesn't serve the interest of the people but the agenda of politicians."

Raghavan totally disagrees with those who are trying to "gain political mileage" from the film.

Remya Denzil, member of

tion gives all the right to expression. Movies can be censored but they shouldn't be banned; it's not justifiable. Now the situation has changed. I think democracy is in great danger."

Another Keralite, who chose to remain anonymous, noted that India's Central Board of Film Certification views all films before release. "They should have been more vigilant when allowing the

It doesn't represent the state as such," Raghavan observed.

Some Malayali residents argued that the film showed Kerala in bad light and that the state has been 'targeted intentionally' for political reasons.

Mathew added, "I haven't seen the movie. I only read the story and the reviews. I believe conversion is not acceptable at all. It's a fact that many are joining ISIS voluntarily, some by force, which is not right." He alluded to a political agenda behind the film.

"People should not unnecessarily politicise movies and create controversies," Remya pleaded. "There have been many films in world cinema on religious themes. But these were not intended to change people's faith or to hurt religious sentiments."

While the intent of the film is debatable, it is being used conveniently to score political brownie points in India. The Indian diaspora in Oman is yet to find common ground over it. Opinions are divided, though most Keralites in Oman are yet to see the film.

(Contributed by Shivani Praveen)

Ministry of Information organises Provincial Media workshop

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Information organised a workshop on Provincial Media at Grand Millennium Muscat on Sunday.

The workshop aimed to find solutions to the challenges facing the media in the interiors of the sultanate and identify enablers to facilitate them.

The workshop was held under the patronage of H H Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, in the presence of H E Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harassi, Minister of Information, governors and representatives of several institutions and those directly involved with the media.

H E Harassi stressed that Provincial Media constitutes an essential element of the media ecosystem in Oman and feeds content daily from across the country through audio, visual,



Provincial Media constitutes an essential element of the media ecosystem in Oman and feeds content daily from across the country

H E DR ABDULLAH AL HARASSI

print and electronic channels.

He pointed out that the Ministry of Information is committed to empowering all governorates

through effective communication and media participation, and that "the media forms a bridge linking the efforts of the governorates to the broader segments of society".

The workshop focused on four main themes - the Role of the Ministry of Information, the Role of Institutional Media based in offices of governors and government departments, the Role of Private Media Agencies, and the Role of Community Media and Voluntary Media Initiatives in Governorates.

S KOREAN MILITARY OFFICIAL MEETS SAF CHIEF



Vice-Admiral Abdullah Khamis al Ra'eesi, Chief of Staff of Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), and Dr Mohammed Nasser al Za'abi, Secretary General in the Ministry of Defence, received Gen Kim Seung-Kyum, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Republic of Korea, on Sunday. The two sides discussed several military topics and reviewed matters of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by Brigadier Abdulaziz Abdullah al Manthari, SAF Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Planning, the Ambassador of Korea to Oman, and the Military Attaché of the Republic of Korea's Embassy in Muscat (ONA)

MARKET WATCH	
MSX30	4,704.78
Sensex	61,761.33
FOREX RATES	
(ROI equals)	
Indian	215.28
Pakistan	744.75
Bangladesh	280.37
Philippines	146.31
Sri Lanka	821.75

*Rates as on May 14
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Russia becomes top oil supplier to China, India

Russia became the largest oil supplier to China and India in March 2023 as in the previous month, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) said in its May report.

Russia ensured 18 per cent of China's total oil imports in March, according to OPEC, as reported by Russian state news agency TASS. Saudi Arabia accounted for 17 per cent of supplies, whereas Iraq accounted for almost 12 per cent of China's imports in the reporting period.

Overall, China's crude imports rose by almost 16 per cent in March month-on-month, hitting a record level of 12.4mn barrels per day.

In India, Russia has been the biggest oil supplier for the ninth consecutive month, according to data provided by Kpler analytical agency cited by OPEC, as it ensured 43 per cent of the country's total imports in March. Iraq and Saudi Arabia ensured around 18 per cent and 15 per cent of supplies, respectively.

Omantel, Zain launch joint venture, to offer premier wholesale services

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Zain Group, a leading telecommunications operator providing services in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa, and Omantel on Sunday announced the launch of a new joint venture (JV) to be called Zain Omantel International (ZOI).

ZOI is an unprecedented joint venture that will establish itself as the Middle East's premier international wholesale services provider, Omantel and Zain said in a joint press statement.

This groundbreaking partnership aims to revolutionise the wholesale telecommunications sector by offering a unique proposition that combines the strengths of both parties to deliver unparalleled service and support to customers worldwide.

ZOI signifies a substantial advancement in the telecommunications industry and is poised to become a global powerhouse due to Zain's extensive regional presence and success in the retail and digital arenas, combined with Omantel's exceptional wholesale capabilities and comprehensive international subsea and terrestrial networks.

Zain Group will be holding 74 per cent stake in the JV share



Omantel CEO Talal al Mamari

capital whereas Omantel's share will be 26 per cent, according to a disclosure filed by Omantel to the Muscat Stock Exchange.

The JV will cater to the end-to-end telecommunications needs of operators in the Middle East, as well as international carriers, data centers, hyperscalers, content, and cloud providers seeking services within the region and beyond.

As a result, ZOI will manage all international wholesale requirements of Zain and Omantel operations in eight countries, serving over 55mn customers. Furthermore, ZOI will optimise

the existing wholesale businesses of both companies by reducing operating costs and increasing competitiveness through access to state-of-the-art low-latency and high-capacity services over its extended footprint.

Bader al Kharafi, Zain's vice-chairman and group CEO, said, "This strategic value-enhancing partnership reflects the next stage of industry collaboration and advancement, and represents another significant milestone of our '4Sight' profitable growth strategy.

It also demonstrates our commitment to transforming the business and creating synergies while extending our reach and capabilities to provide the highest quality services to our customers. ZOI is ideally positioned to evolve into a significant international player on the wholesale telecommunications scene that will benefit both Zain and Omantel on financial, commercial and operational levels."

Omantel CEO Talal al Mamari said, "The joint venture with Zain is a testament to our unwavering commitment to transforming the international arm of Omantel Group into a leading global provider, building on our existing position as a top

Sohail Qadir named CEO of ZOI

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sohail Qadir has been appointed as the CEO of Zain Omantel International (ZOI), the newly formed joint venture between Omantel and Zain Group.

With a proven track record of success, Qadir has spearheaded the development and expansion of Omantel's international wholesale business. During his 13-year tenure as the vice president of wholesale at Omantel, he successfully positioned the company on the global map and in-



creased revenues tenfold.

Under Qadir's leadership, Omantel Wholesale had a remarkable transformational journey that resulted in investments in more than 20 subsea cables, hosting of global hyperscalers, direct interconnections with all major international service providers and extensive roaming coverage all over the world.

Commenting on his appointment as the CEO of ZOI, Qadir said, "The region has matured in terms of the scope and consumption of reliable wholesale services, and this strategic partnership in this integral part of the telecom business is well-timed to capitalise on global trends. I look forward to leading ZOI in delivering differentiated services to regional and international customers alike, and providing increased value and enhanced customer-experience to all associated stakeholders across our extensive operational footprint."

regional wholesale player.

ZOI is poised to become the primary gateway from our region to the rest of the world, leveraging the combined strengths of Omantel and Zain. With these differentiating factors, ZOI is the preferred partner with a truly unique presence in the international telecommunications landscape."

ZOI, in collaboration with the Omantel and Zain Group oper-

ating companies, will ensure that Zain and Omantel customers continue to experience supreme quality in international services such as internet connectivity, voice, roaming, messaging and more.

Some noteworthy projects that ZOI will undertake, along with its consortium partners include the development of Blue-Raman; Africa-1; Jeddah to Marseille (J2M) subsea sys-

tems and an extensive terrestrial network connecting most of the regional countries to the landing stations and data centers.

Omantel and Zain added that ZOI is set to be a game changer in the telecommunications wholesale industry, offering a wide portfolio of services and solutions to meet the increasing demands of wholesale customers.

US default would have 'serious repercussions' globally: IMF

Washington, US - The International Monetary Fund warned of severe consequences if the US defaults on its debt, ahead of a rapidly-approaching deadline for the country to raise or suspend its borrowing limit.

"Our assessment is that there would be very serious repercussions not only for the US but also for the global economy should there be a US debt default," IMF communications director Julie Kozack told reporters, encouraging all parties to urgently resolve the matter.

Republicans and Democrats remain sharply divided over the debt ceiling, with Republicans in Congress insisting that President Joe Biden's administration agree to significant budget cuts in exchange for support to lift the limit before the country runs out of money to pay its existing bills.

Democrats have been calling for a "clean" increase of the borrowing limit, accusing Republicans of using extreme tactics to try and push their political agenda ahead of the so-called "X-date" - the point at which the



US will be unable to meet its financial obligations.

Broader instability

The IMF warned Thursday of the potential for higher borrowing costs, broader global instability and economic repercussions in the event of a US default.

"We have seen a world in the last few years that has been affected by many shocks, so we would want to avoid those severe repercussions," Kozack said.

The lifting of the debt ceiling has historically been seen as a routine affair, given that it involves raising money to pay for

spending commitments already made by Congress.

When Republicans won a narrow majority in the House of Representatives during last year's midterm elections, the right wing of the caucus insisted incoming speaker Kevin McCarthy tackle the ballooning US debt in exchange for their support. But with the Biden administration refusing to negotiate on the debt ceiling, a standoff has arisen just weeks before the US risks running out of money to pay its obligations.

President Biden met with McCarthy earlier this week in a

failed attempt to find common ground on the issue.

"Default is not an option," Biden said after the talks had concluded, while McCarthy told reporters he "didn't see any new movement" in the meeting, which was also attended by the Senate majority and minority leaders and the minority leader of the House.

The talks will resume on Friday as both sides look to resolve the issue before the X-date, which the US Treasury recently warned could come as soon as June 1.

AFF

China inflation grows at slowest rate in two years

Beijing, China - China's inflation rate edged up 0.1 per cent year-on-year in April, the slowest rate recorded since 2021, official figures showed Thursday, signalling a weak recovery after lifting pandemic curbs.

Producer prices fell for the seventh consecutive month due to sluggish domestic demand and lower commodity costs, data released by Beijing's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed.

April's consumer price index (CPI), the main gauge of inflation, was the lowest level recorded since February 2021 and fell below the 0.3 per cent increase forecast by analysts

polled by Bloomberg.

In March, China's CPI was 0.7 per cent.

Food prices - a major component of the inflation basket - increased by only 0.4 per cent in April, compared to the previous year.

April's figure was also affected by last year's high base for comparison, Dong Lijuan, an NBS analyst said in a statement.

Food prices were high in April 2022, as Covid lockdowns in several major cities including Shanghai squeezed supply.

"The subdued inflation readings suggest post-Covid recovery momentum continued to weaken in April," Ting Lu, chief

China economist at Nomura said.

"Looking ahead, given still softening food prices... subdued fuel prices, the elevated unemployment rate... we expect CPI inflation to remain fairly soft in May," he added.

China's inflation figures were in stark contrast to the latest data in the US, where consumer prices rose by 4.9 per cent in April as the Federal Reserve attempted to tame escalating prices by hiking rates 10 consecutive times.

China's service prices rose one percent in April compared to the previous year and up from the 0.8 per cent recorded in

March, according to NBS data, as consumers spent more on travel and other leisure services.

"The economic recovery seems unbalanced at this stage, with the service sector normalizing... while the manufacturing sector (remains) muted," Zhiwei Zhang of Pinpoint Asset Management wrote in a note.

China's producer price index, which measures prices paid by wholesalers, fell 3.6 per cent in April compared to the previous year.

The decline was due to the fall in the global price of raw materials such as iron ore and crude oil.

AFF



Pakistan School Muscat

ANNOUNCEMENT OF TENDERS

PSM intends to offer the tender of **Development Works for the year 2023**. The contractors with relevant experiences are invited for following bidding:

Tender No.	Tender's Name	Tender Collection Date & Time	Site Visit Date & Time	Final Submission Date & Time
2023/001	Paint of school & residence	May 15 to May 22, 2023 09:00 AM To 01:00 PM Working Days/Hours	May 16, 2023 to May 17, 2023 09:00 AM To 01:00 PM	Before and Until May 23, 2023
2023/002	Water proofing			
2023/003	Supply & fixing of new doors & fixing of glass/acrylic sheet in the existing doors			
2023/004	Supply & fixing of Portacabin			
2023/005	Renovation of office toilet			
2023/006	Construction of new washroom, ablution area & wall			
2023/007	Renovation of staff mess kitchen			
2023/008	Renovation of classrooms & staffroom			
2023/009	Construction of wall near basketball ground			

Experienced contractor(s) having relevant experience of at least 3 years of jobs of similar nature preferably in Oman, who wish to participate in the bidding may collect the documents after payment of **RO. 20,000** only through POS (non-refundable) per Job.

Admin Office
Pakistan School Muscat
P.O. Box 987, P.C. 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman; Tel: 24702489 Fax: 24709746,
In case of any query you may contact 00968 93690691
Email: tulaib@pakistanschool.edu.om, directorfinancebods@pakistanschool.edu.om

The tenders shall be submitted in original and completed with all relevant documents. Tenders not in compliance with tender's requirements shall not be considered. **Tender Documents shall be submitted in sealed envelope with clearly mentioned Tender Number/name, Company Name and POC's Number/name. The sealed envelope shall be dropped in the Tender Box available at Admin Office on or before the date mentioned above and addressed to:**

Pakistan School Muscat
(PSM is not bound to accept the lowest Tender or any Tender)

FREE CLASSIFIED LISTING

Muscat Daily now offers free classified listings for individuals in the following categories:
Situations Wanted/Accommodation Wanted or Available/Sale of Household Items/ Car for Sale or Wanted/Matrimonial Alliances (Word limit is 35)
Please email your listing to dailyclassifieds@apexmedia.co.om or call 991043446

National Museum holds exhibition in France

Embodying the historical ties between Oman and France, the National Museum in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth organised an exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts in Lyon, French dedicated as ‘Oman Day’.

The exhibition, which was inaugurated on Thursday titled ‘Journey to the Land of Frankincense’, was held under the auspices of Gregory Doucet, Mayor of Lyon city, in the presence of Nathalie Perrin-Gilbert, Vice-Mayor of Lyon city, Sylvie Raymond, Director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Lyon, Jamal bin Hassan al Moosawi, Secretary General of the National Museum and a number of governors, responsible ambassadors, staff of the National Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts of Lyon and a number of those interested in the cultural field.

The inauguration ceremony included a musical performance by the Omani musician Musalam bin Ahmed al Kathiri and al-Balad musical band.

Kathiri was the winner of a special award at the Aga Khan Music Award 2022 for his excellence in serving the Omani musical heritage.

“We are honoured to collaborate with the Museum of Fine Arts of Lyon, one of the foremost museums of the French Republic, which plays host to the ‘Oman Day’ exhibition and satellite programmes, following the successful introduction of the premier ‘Fragrant Journeys’ exhibition in historic Muscat at Bayt Greiza palatial mansion, a part of the National Museum,” said Jamal al Moosawi. This exhibition is notable as it is the first temporary exhibition from Oman to be hosted in the French Republic in many years, and the first ever outside of Paris.

“The partnership with Lyon comes within the framework of the National Museum’s cultural diplomacy, which aims to



strengthen bonds of friendship and offers views of Omani cultural heritage through a select number of artefacts,” he added.

These reflect distinct historical, aesthetic and moral characteristics from the Civilisation of Magan, the Civilisation of the Land of Frankincense, the Age of Islam, and the formation of the

Omani Empires under the al-Ya’aruba and al-Bu’said dynasties.

Sylvie Raymond, director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Lyon, French Republic, pointed out that contributing to spread cultures and strengthening partnership across borders is one of the most important challenges for muse-

ums in the 21st century. “This ambitious Franco-Omani project transcends the boundaries of time and space arose through a French diplomatic initiative and fruitful cooperation with Jamal al Moosawi and his team from the museum,” she noted.

“The National Museum of the Sultanate of Oman, where the Museum of Fine Arts in Lyon displayed a group of collections dated back to ancient times and some of them are dated to the late 20th century, shed light on the path of perfumes in an exhibition entitled ‘Fragrant Journeys’ inside the corridors of the wonderful Bayt Greiza. The exhibition was opened in October 2022.”

The Museum of Fine Arts director acknowledged that “it is a great honor to host in the city of Lyon the ‘Journey to the Land of Frankincense’ exhibition, which includes a prominent collection

of Oman’s National Museum, which were carefully selected by a team from both the museums”. She invited visitors to dive into the depths of the rich Omani heritage and culture from ancient times to the present day.

“This exchange of our museum artefacts, which is based on the foundations of rich scientific and cultural exchange, gives us the opportunity to offer our visitors a new experience of fruitful cooperation projects.

“It was also important to display the Omani artefacts in a context that includes realistic scenes from the Sultanate of Oman, so we called the photographer Ferrante Ferranti, who will create a realistic atmosphere of the Land of Frankincense.”

The exhibition, which will continue until September 10, is having 25 artifacts offering a visual representation of the na-

tion, its people, its past and present - giving form to patterns of life in the country and expressing the cultural qualities for which it is renowned, manifested in images of beauty, the culture of scent, as well as through the importance of faith and the seeking of knowledge.

Trade is also highlighted in the exhibition with objects representing the importance of trade in forming and solidifying exchange routes across the ancient world, allowing Omani civilisations to connect with Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, Ancient Egypt, East Africa, and the Roman Empire, serving as reminders of a well-connected world.

Among the most prominent artefacts on display are the Plaque with Ancient South Arabian (Hadramitic inscription) from Sumhuram, (Dhofar governorate) dating back to circa first

century BC (Iron Age); an incense burner with animals and astral motif from Khor Ruri (ancient Sumhuram) in Dhofar governorate/Iron Age; and a necklace (2700-2000 BC/Middle Bronze Age) in Bat (Dhahirah governorate). Together, the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Bat, Al-Khutim and Al-Ayn form the most complete collection of 3rd millennium BC settlements and necropolises in the world.

A snake figure from Saih al-Qa’a, Al-Hamra (Dakhliyah governorate) dated back to 1300BC-300AD (Iron Age) was also one of the exhibits. Excavations have uncovered a wealth of serpent cult objects at Sall. Snake cults, amongst many other ancient religious sects, gradually declined with the advance of monotheism and the dawn of the age of Islam in Arabia.

The exhibition also includes tiles from The Great Mosque, Qalhat dated back to 14th to 15th century AD. The ancient city of Qalhat, known as the Twin of Hormuz, was the main port of northern Oman from the 13th to 15th century and The Great Mosque was its most famous edifice. In addition, Inkwell (attributed to Sultan Turki bin Said) dated back to the second half of the 19th century (al-Busaid Dynasty) found a place in the exhibition alongside a jar with coins (Sinaw Hoard) from Sinaw (North Sharqiyah governorate) dated back to 710-717AD. It is the largest currency treasure unearthed in Oman to date. The treasure was found inside an earthen vessel in September 1979 in Sinaw area in the wilayat of Mudhaibi (North Sharqiyah governorate). The glazed vessel dated back to the Sassanid Islamic period is distinguished by turquoise blue and handles on both sides. Nine-hundred-and-sixty-two pieces of silver dirhams, dating from the early Sassanid and Islamic periods were found in the vessel.

Al Ahlia announces winners of ‘Insure & Win’ campaign

Al-Ahlia Insurance Company, the leading insurer in the Sultanate, has announced the names of the winners of its recently concluded Ramadan campaign, ‘Insure & Travel’.

Held over the period of March 23 to April 27, the campaign affirms the company’s endeavors in enhancing the overall customers experience, as well as bringing the winning experience to its valued customers.

As per the campaign, customers who purchase a new or renew their motor insurance policy during Ramadan through any of Al Ahlia channels: branches, agents, call center or online website were eligible to enter the draw.

The winners stood a chance to win exciting prizes like travel package for two people to Malaysia, Azerbaijan or Georgia. They also won a luxurious stay, food vouchers from Crowne Plaza (Sohar, Salalah, OCEC) or Dusit D2, Naseem Resort, Jabal al Akhdar.

The prize draw was conducted in the presence of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Hana al Hinai, CEO of Al-Ahlia Insurance Company, along with a number of representatives from the company. These draws witnessed five winners

won international packages for two, while 21 winners were given hotel stay, food vouchers from selected luxurious hotels. The campaign ensured a unique insurance experience while offering customers more chances to win.

Commenting on the campaign, Hana al Hinai said: “We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all the lucky winners and appreciate their continuous support and trust for Al Ahlia Insurance services.”

The recent edition of the campaign witnessed a great turnout of audience, she further said.

“Contributing to fulfill the aspirations and ever-changing needs of our customers, we remain committed to providing an unmatched insurance experience to our loyal customers, as well as enhancing their chances of winning through our on-going innovative campaigns and thoughtful initiatives,” Hana added.

With a focus on enhancing customers journey, Al Ahlia Insurance is committed to developing innovative solutions and fully digitized processes to ensure facilitating insurance procedures and enable customers to make the best use of various products and services that the company offers.

Beban TV invites Oman-based firms for investment

Beban, an entrepreneurship-themed reality television show produced by Hope Ventures, the investment arm of Hope Fund, announces the opening of applications to Oman-based entrepreneurs to apply to Season 3 through the website hopefund.bh/beban by June 4.

Beban matchmakes promising businesses with strategic regional investors who can accelerate their expansion beyond borders, as well as provide opportunities for business growth to the show’s participants.

Through its first and second seasons, Beban successfully wit-

nessed over US\$6mn worth of investments raised by the participants on the show from local and regional reputable investors.

Beban season 2, which aired on Shahid platform, Bahrain TV, AlRai TV, and Dubai TV, has introduced a new element to the show, a Crowdfunding platform that provides viewers the opportunity to also invest in businesses showcased on the show.

The new season, Season 3, is expanding to the region, including Oman, as part of Hope’s mission to encourage cross-border investment and market entry for entrepreneurs. The show aims to strategically accelerate busi-



Fajer al Pachachi

ness growth into international markets while simultaneously shedding light on their journeys and their merited founders.

Commenting on the occasion, Fajer Saleh al Pachachi, general manager at Hope Ventures, said, “Beban is an investment platform that connects entrepreneurs with strategic investors across the region. The show has resulted in the growth and expansion of local businesses regionally, capitalising on investors’ know-how, expertise, and business network to successfully enter new markets.

“We encourage entrepreneurs from Oman to take the initiative and apply for season 3 for the opportunity to unlock doors that can accelerate the growth of their businesses. Wishing

them the best of luck in applying and looking forward to witnessing their growth and success,” she added.

Entrepreneurs will be selected through an evaluation process comprising five stages, starting with screening businesses for viability based on certain criteria, followed by an evaluation stage led by experts and specialists in the business sector. Candidates will then be nominated to take part in an intensive training bootcamp stage.

The final stage will announce the eligible finalists, who will then go on to film the production’s episodes.

OMPAY supports 20th Student Forum’s ‘Digital Horizons’

Oman’s newest and most exciting payment solutions provider, OMPay, showcased its online payment abilities at the recently concluded 20th Student Forum held at the Oman Across Ages Museum, Manah.

Conducted by UTAS Nizwa, the forum brought together students of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Musannah, Rustaq, Muscat, Salalah and Sur.

Open to a total of 45,000 students of all 11 branches of UTAS in the country, the forum held competitions across 22 different criteria for the generation of fresh ideas in six subject categories, including technology, education and infrastructure.

Held from May 7 to 10, the event was themed ‘Digital Hori-



zons’. As collaborator of the 20th Student Forum, OMPay facilitated proceedings at the event

and showcased its products among students.

“The youth and students are

the target segment critical to the brand and the future of the country. We thank UTAS Nizwa for giving us an ideal platform to connect with them,” said Abdulaziz al Rawahi, CEO of Global Financial Technology LLC.

First, second and third place winners in 22 competition categories were awarded cash prizes digitally through the OMPay application. Additionally, special guests and judging committee members were presented OMPay cards. All attending students were also given OMPay gift cards.

OMPay handed out the competition prizes and gifts via its dedicated cards with QR codes for recipients to scan in order to claim their prize amounts. On scanning the QR code, the

OMPay app was downloaded on individual devices and the prize or gift amount made available in their respective digital wallets.

Launched in 2022 by Abdulaziz al Rawahi and Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel), OMPay is owned and operated by Muscat-based Global Financial Technology LLC, which provides fintech services through its wallet and payment gateway.

Rawahi said that Global Financial Technology’s vision is to become a formidable fintech solutions provider in the region offering a wide variety of enhanced products and services.

“OMPay transforms lives by giving users complete control over their finances,” Rawahi added.



INEOS Grenadier declared 4X4 of the Year in France

The INEOS Grenadier has been crowned ‘4X4 of the Year’ by a panel of off-road experts at 4X4 Magazine in France. This prestigious accolade follows the start of production late last year and the recent start of customer deliveries across Europe.

“For the Grenadier to be recognized by passionate off-road experts that have decades of experience is a testament to the hard work of the designers, engineers, and production team,” explains Lynn Calder, CEO of INEOS Automotive.

“The Grenadier fills a gap in the market for a true 4X4 that’s inspired by the icons of the past with modern world-class standards of quality, comfort, refinement, and technology.”

Established in 1981, 4X4 Magazine is a leading off-road outlet in France. For the awards, readers selected a shortlist of three vehicles, which were then subjected to a rigorous judging process by the magazine’s editorial team.

“The entire jury came to the conclusion that, unequivocally, the Grenadier truly embodies the authentic off-road spirit,” said Michel Renavand, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of 4X4 Magazine.

“It has all the features you need to progress efficiently on any type of surface. At ease on the road and very well equipped, its excellent climbing capabilities make it the undeniable 4x4 of the year. Truly a stroke of genius!”

Shipments of the INEOS Grenadier have started from the company’s state-of-the-art factory at Hambach, on the French-German border. INEOS Automotive has established a network of more than 200 sales and service points in over 50 markets worldwide.

The INEOS Grenadier has been designed as a tough and comfortable go-anywhere off-road vehicle. The backbone of the Grenadier is a full box-section ladder frame chassis, with heavy-duty solid beam axles a two-speed transfer case and up to three locking differentials.

It is powered by a choice of BMW 3.0-litre turbo-charged inline six-cylinder petrol or diesel engines, which have been extensively revised and recalibrated for this application. Practical features include a 70:30 split rear door, integrated roof bars, pre-wiring for auxiliary lamps and accessories, and a front bumper to sit on.

An ‘open-source’ approach to accessories means owners can tailor the vehicle to their specific requirements.

The interior combines utilitarian practicality with the technology and comfort that today’s users expect.

Its intuitive and functional layout features physical switches, widely spaced for easy use on the move, a central infotainment screen, and an overhead console for off-road and auxiliary controls.

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Indian school students excel in CBSE board exams

Students of Classes X and Class XII of Indian Schools in Oman have braved all odds to come out with flying colours in the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) results announced recently.

The 2023 results of the CBSE Board have set an all-time record for the Indian Schools in Oman with an increased percentage of high achievers as compared to previous years, thereby setting another benchmark of excellence in academics.

Dr Sivakumar Manickam, chairman, Board of Directors, Indian Schools Oman congratulated the students who have made their alma mater and parents proud with outstanding results. He lauded the unflinching support of the Principals who rolled out measures to overcome the learning loss due to the pandemic and the efforts of the School Managements that have made all efforts to set higher benchmark of success in the Board Exams.

“All stakeholders in education had pulled together to ensure that students learned despite aftermath challenges posed by the unfinished learning during the pandemic. It is the efforts of the teachers in doing the continuous follow-up; and parents with their unstinting support that helped the students perform to their best,” said Dr Sivakumar Manickam while congratulating the students and the schools for the stupendous results.

The Oman toppers in Class XII Science stream are as follows: The first position is claimed by Dhruvan Gnanadhandayuthapani (Indian School Al Ghubra)



and Shaan Shetal Vora (Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir) with 98.6%; Swatirajesh (Indian School Sohar) is in the second position with 97.8% and Jheel Chethan Thanki (Indian School Muscat) in the third position with 97.6%.

In the Commerce Stream, Meghna Jayakumar of Indian School Sohar (97%), Demello Mark Savio of Indian School Muscat (96.6%) and Melina Natasha Goves of Indian School Al Ghubra (96.4%) secured the first, the second and the third positions respectively.

The three positions in the Humanities stream are as follows: The first position is claimed by two students Rebecca Magdalena Dsouza of Indian School Muscat and Thana Aysa of Indian School Al Ghubra both scoring 96.6%; Diya Ganapathy Bollepanda (96.4%) and Fauziya Feroz Peerzade (96%) from Indian School Muscat are in the second and the third positions respectively.

Class X results of Indian

Schools have been phenomenal; the toppers in Oman are as follows: Two students from Indian School Al Ghubra, Geetika Manoj Nambiar and Vedica Chhabra have secured 99% to claim the first position; the second position goes to Amal Ikbal of Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir with 98.6%; and in the third position there are three students with 98.4% - Dhaval Gowder of Indian School Al Ghubra, Rahul Elamaram and Navneet Gopalan from Indian School Al Maabala.

The Indian Schools do not put any restriction on admissions and every child who seeks admission finds a place irrespective of academic performance.

In addition to the lessons imparted during school hours, the schools have implemented multiple initiatives, as support mechanism for children.

These include Remedial Classes, Virtual Learning Environment, and common pre-board examination aimed at ensuring well-being of children.

Oman Air announces more flights, special packages

With the approach of the peak summer season, Oman Air Holidays has introduced a range of great value packages from Muscat to destinations across Europe, the Middle East, Indian Subcontinent and Far East.

With special rates starting from as little as RQ234, as well as customisable add-ons, guests are provided with affordable and convenient options to plan their dream holiday, whether it’s a beach retreat, adventure trip, city break, or cultural experience.

Meanwhile, catering to rising demand, Oman Air has also increased its flights to some of the most popular destinations including five flights a day to Dubai and 18 flights a week to Bangkok. Guests can also enjoy increased frequencies and seamless connectivity to Kuala Lumpur, the Maldives, and many more.

Mundher al Shaikhani, acting vice president - Marketing at



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Oman Air, said, “This year, travel has picked up considerably and, as people eagerly anticipate their much-awaited summer vacation,

we are making sure to accommodate their travel requirements.

“In line with the airline’s addi-

tion of several new flights, we’re pleased to have curated an extensive selection of packages so that guests have the freedom to choose their travel plans according to their unique interests and preferences. Supported by our dedicated customer service, we guarantee that our packages are worth every baysa.”

Offering a wide selection of tailored packages, Oman Air Holidays excels in creating amazing and unique travel experiences to some of the world’s most exciting destinations.

Meanwhile, Oman Air continues to invest in its award-winning products and services, offering guests innovative cabin design, exceptional hospitality, and a growing range of destinations from its hub in Muscat.

Ooredoo wins most innovative telecom company award

Committed to making smart and innovative use of digital technologies, Ooredoo has been named the ‘Most Innovative Digitally Transformed Telecom Company - Oman 2023’ at the Global Business Outlook (GBO) Awards.

The annual GBO Awards recognise and reward companies from around the world for their performance, innovation and drive to create value. The win further confirms Ooredoo’s leadership when it comes to forward-thinking leadership in the digital space. “We are proud of receiving yet another award, which recognises our digital customer experience leadership,” said



Ahmed Diwan

Ooredoo’s chief commercial officer Ahmed Diwan. “Our aim is to provide a personalised and seamless omni-channel digital experience. Driven by efficiency and excellence, we deliver on our brand promise to ‘Upgrade Your World.’”

Sustainable tourism could be profitable if promoted properly: Experts

Environment-friendly and sustainable tourism could be profitable for businesses while reducing carbon emission, experts at multiple seminars said recently.

Travel and tour operators could benefit more by investing in technologies to make tourism more sustainable industry that could help the world achieve the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and Net Zero Target by 2050, experts said.

“Sustainable tourism need not be expensive and can be profitable as well as cost-effective, if we plan our initiatives carefully,” Dr Miniya Chatterji, CEO, Sustain Labs Paris, a flag bearer of sustainability across all industry, said at a seminar held as part of the recently-held Arabian Travel Market.

“Ten years ago, people had fringe conversations about sus-



tainability, and it was only about cleaning your house. Today, it is about making the entire supply chain sustainable. Where is it coming from?”

Tourism is a US\$2tn global business which is poised to cross

an all-time high annual global revenue of US\$2.28tn this year, surpassing the total tourism industry revenue of US\$2.2tn in 2019. Sustainable tourism is a US\$242.54bn business globally which is growing at a Compound

Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 6.2 per cent and projected to reach US\$369.54bn by 2029, according to research report by Research Analysis and Insights, a global market intelligence provider.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), more than 900mn tourists travelled internationally in 2022 - double the number recorded in 2021 though still 63 per cent of pre-pandemic

levels. Every global region recorded notable increases in international tourist numbers.

The Middle East enjoyed the strongest relative increase as arrivals climbed to 83 per cent of pre-pandemic numbers. Europe

reached nearly 80 per cent of pre-pandemic levels as it welcomed 585mn arrivals in 2022.

Most international surveys show that travellers want to travel better and seek sustainable tourism products all the way.

A Booking.com survey shows that 81 per cent of global travellers confirm that sustainable travel is important to them, with 50 per cent saying that recent news about climate change has influenced them to make more sustainable travel choices.

Dr Miniya Chatterji says, “With the increase in demand for tourism, sustainability has become important too. There can be new companies with sustainability models as well as traditional companies that are now needing to change.

“Travelling is learning and education, which is why the tourism industry should be sustainable and profitable,” she added.

IN BRIEF

At least 33 civilians killed in Burkina Faso ‘terrorist’ attack

Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso - At least 33 people were killed when gunmen opened fire on vegetable farmers in a militant-hit region of Burkina Faso, the governor said on Saturday, as the country struggles to stem an insurgency. A state of emergency has been in force in eight of Burkina Faso’s 13 regions since March, including in western Boucle du Mouhoun.

The attack on the farmers happened on Thursday evening around 5pm (1700 GMT), Governor Babo Pierre Bassinga said in a statement.

“The village of Youlou in the department of Cheriba, Mouhoun province suffered a cowardly and barbaric terrorist attack,” he said.

Six lions killed by herders in Kenya

Nairobi, Kenya - Six lions were killed on Saturday by Kenyan herders after the pride attacked 11 goats and a dog the previous night, wildlife officials said, in the latest incident of human-wildlife conflict in the country.

The killings came a day after a lion believed to be the world’s oldest in the wild was speared by herders when he wandered into a livestock pen on the outskirts of the famed Amboseli National Park.

‘A total of 10 lions (have been) killed in the Amboseli ecosystem’ since last week, the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) said in a statement, adding that officials had met with community members to discuss the issue. “The discussions centered on exploring ways to minimise the risk of human-wildlife conflict, including developing early warning systems to alert communities of the presence of wildlife in their vicinity,” the statement said.

Flooding in Somalia displaces 200,000

Beledweyne, Somalia - Around 200,000 people have been displaced due to flash flooding in central Somalia, a regional official told AFP on Saturday, as the Shabelle River burst its banks and submerged roads.

Inhabitants of Beledweyne town in Hiran region were forced out of their homes as heavy rainfall caused water levels to rise sharply, with residents carrying their belongings on top of their heads as they waded through flooded streets in search of refuge.

AFP

Zelensky calls Germany a ‘true friend, reliable ally’

Berlin, Germany - Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky on Sunday called Germany a ‘true friend and reliable ally’ in his country’s battle against Russia, as Berlin unveiled a huge new military package for Kyiv on his visit to the EU giant.

Zelensky’s trip to Germany follows meetings in Rome with Italian leaders and the pope, and comes as Kyiv is preparing a much-anticipated counter-offensive.

“In the most challenging time in the modern history of Ukraine, Germany proved to be our true friend and reliable ally, which stands decisively side-by-side with the Ukrainian people in the struggle to defend freedom and democratic values,” he wrote in the guestbook at the German president’s official residence.

“Together we will win and bring peace back to Europe,” he added in the entry, before heading into talks with German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

Ukrainian forces have been training troops and stockpiling Western-supplied munitions and hardware that analysts say will be key to reclaiming territory captured by Russia. Once accused of reticence in supplying military gear to Ukraine, Germany has since become a major contributor of tanks, rockets and anti-missile systems.

On the occasion of Zelensky’s visit, Berlin unveiled its biggest armaments package for Ukraine yet, including tanks, missile defence systems and combat vehicles worth €2.7bn.

Zelensky said he ‘discussed the current situation and the intensive cooperation between Germany and Ukraine’ with Steinmeier.

He was later greeted by Chancellor Olaf Scholz with military



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky shake hands during an official welcome ceremony on Sunday at the Chancellery in Berlin (AFP)

In the most challenging time... Germany proved to be our true friend and reliable ally, which stands decisively side-by-side with the Ukrainian people

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY

honours before heading into talks behind closed doors.

He is also expected to head to the western German city of Aachen, which this year is awarding him and the Ukrainian people the Charlemagne prize - an honour awarded for efforts to foster European unity.

Scholz, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki are due to attend the ceremony in Aachen.

A meeting with the European leaders could help prepare the ground ahead of an EU summit in Reykjavik next Tuesday, followed by the G7 gathering of world leaders in Hiroshima, Japan.

said in a statement.

“This is why Germany will supply all the help that it can, for as long as necessary,” he said.

Mykhaylo Podolyak, an adviser to Zelensky, hailed the announcement, saying it indicated that Russia was ‘bound to lose and sit on the bench of historical shame’. Early on in the conflict, Kyiv had accused Germany of being too accommodating to Russian President Vladimir Putin, while Berlin’s reliance on Russian energy had proved tricky.

Kyiv had also snubbed a visit by Steinmeier in the weeks following the invasion, which in turn delayed Scholz’s first trip to the war-torn country.

Both Steinmeier and Scholz have since visited Ukraine.

As Kyiv prepares its offensive to retake ground in the eastern Donetsk and Lugansk regions, as well as the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, Germany’s military backing will likely prove vital.

AFP

Ghana opposition chooses John Mahama for 2024 presidential race

Accra, Ghana - Ghana’s largest opposition party chose the country’s ex-president John Dramani Mahama as its flagbearer Sunday for the 2024 presidential election.

Delegates of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) voted in primaries on Saturday through Sunday to choose a candidate for both the presidential and parliamentary polls.

Mahama was declared the overwhelming winner after polling 297,603, or 98.9 per cent, of the votes while his challenger former Kumasi mayor Kojo Bonsu scored 3,181, or 1.1 per cent.



The primaries come as Ghana holds talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) over a US\$3bn bailout to help overcome an economic crisis, and as it faces a growing militant threat from a conflict in neighbouring Burkina Faso.

On Saturday, more than 355,000 NDC party delegates converged at 401 voting centres across the country for the ballot.

Despite defeats in 2016 and 2020 elections by incumbent President Nana Akufo-Addo, 64-year-old Mahama had been eyeing a return and had faced off with former central bank governor Kwabena Duffuor and Bonsu.

But Duffuor withdrew from the race late on Friday, saying the party was not ready to conduct a ‘free and fair election’.

Mahama had already been tipped by most political analysts to win the primary, based on his experience and influence in the opposition party.

“He has been tried and tested and comes with a lot of experience,” Kwame Asah-Asante, a political science lecturer at the University of Ghana, told AFP.

“Mahama is the most marketable candidate in the party now. I don’t see the delegates voting against him. The party stands a better chance of returning to power with Mahama than any other candidate.”

John Dramani Mahama was declared the overwhelming winner after polling 297,603, or 98.9%, of the votes while his challenger former Kumasi mayor Kojo Bonsu scored 3,181, or 1.1%

But later the same day he pulled out of the race.

“I wish to reiterate my commitment to the party and its grassroots. However, my concerns that the party is not ready to conduct free and fair election is evident for all to see,” he said in a statement.

“Taking part in such would be akin to knowingly drinking from a poisoned calabash.”

The ruling New Patriotic Party will hold its own primaries in November 2023 while the presidential election is scheduled for December 7 next year.

Mahama will likely look to capitalise on the economic crisis facing the West African country in the presidential campaign.

Ghana, a major exporter of cocoa and gold, has defaulted on its external debts including eurobonds, and is in talks with the IMF for a US\$3bn line of credit to strengthen the economy.

Once seen as an investors’ favourite, Ghana has recently struggled with its debt load.

The government spends more than half of its revenues on debt servicing. Ghana, along with coastal West African neighbours Benin, Togo and Ivory Coast, is also bracing for growing spillover from militant conflict over northern borders in Burkina Faso, where militants control large swathes of territory.

AFP

A ROYAL JOURNEY BY TRAIN

Japan’s Emperor Emeritus Akihito (second from left) and Empress Emerita Michiko greet staff at the Tokyo railway station on Sunday, before their journey by train for Kyoto and Nara prefectures, their first trip outside Tokyo in four years (AFP)

New rules spur migrants to seek legal path to United States

Matamoros, Mexico - With tough new asylum rules in place, many migrants on the US-Mexico border were seeking legal routes to enter the United States on Saturday, despite warnings of a chaotic surge in crossings.

Gustavo Rodriguez, who fled Venezuela after deserting the military, was among those who saw official channels as offering the best chance of being allowed to stay on US soil.

“I want to enter legally,” he told AFP in Matamoros, one of several Mexican cities along the border where thousands of migrants fleeing poverty, crime or persecution are gathered.

US President Joe Biden’s right-wing opponents predicted a rush across the border after pandemic-era restrictions allowing for immediate expulsion

ended at midnight on Thursday.

So far the surge failed to materialise, though thousands of migrants had tried to enter the United States in the days leading up to the rule changes.

That was because anyone crossing the border illegally now faces a five-year ban on applying for legal entry as well as possible criminal charges. Asylum-seekers are supposed to set up an interview appointment through a smartphone application called CBP One or processing centers the US plans in Colombia, Guatemala and other countries.

But migrants say using the app is a lottery, despite Washington’s promise to increase the number of appointments available each day to 1,000.

Jose Manuel Tovar was one of the lucky ones - after four



US Border Patrol agents keeps watch over migrants that just turned themselves in after crossing over from Mexico in Fronzon, Texas on Friday (AFP)

months of trying he finally got an appointment.

“I cried. My family, all my colleagues were crying with joy,” the Venezuelan told AFP.

Political controversy

The policy shift has been contentious, with Biden’s supporters on the left saying the new rules are too strict while opponents on the right have claimed, without

evidence, that he is ‘opening the borders’.

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador called for patience on Saturday when reporters asked about the migration crisis during a visit to a border checkpoint in Matamoros. Mexico said on Friday that the number of US-bound migrants crossing its territory was ebbing and the situation at the frontier was calm.

“The flux is dropping today. We have not had confrontations or situations of violence on the border,” Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard told reporters.

Around 26,500 migrants were estimated to be waiting in the main Mexican cities along the frontier, he said.

The national immigration agency ordered its offices to stop issuing documents authorising migrants to transit through Mexico, authorities announced.

Guatemala said that it was bracing for a major humanitarian situation there because it would have to offer shelter to migrants in transit applying for US asylum.

Erika Guevara Rosas, Americas director at rights group Amnesty International, said the US government was ‘outsourcing its border enforcement to Mexico and now Colombia and Guatemala, but it’s not willing to take responsibility for the chaos its policies have created’.

The legal channels available to migrants also include family reunification programmes and humanitarian permits for Venezuelans, Nicaraguans, Haitians and Cubans.

AFP

Thai polls close with army-backed prime minister tipped for defeat

Bangkok, Thailand - Vote counting got under way in Thailand's general election on Sunday with pro-democracy opposition parties tipped to defeat the conservative military-backed government of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha after almost a decade in power.

Opinion surveys pointed to a resounding defeat for ex-army chief and coup leader Prayut after a campaign that played out as a clash between a young generation yearning for change and the traditionalist, royalist establishment. The main opposition Pheu Thai party, fronted by the daughter of billionaire former premier Thaksin Shinawatra, was ahead in final opinion polls.

But in a kingdom where victory at the ballot box has often been trumped by coups and court orders, there are fears the military could seek to cling on, raising the prospect of fresh instability.

Polling stations closed at 5:00 pm (1000 GMT) after a smooth day of voting, with no major problems reported by Thai media.

Preliminary results are expected later in the evening, though the final number of seats won by each party will not be officially confirmed for several weeks.

After casting her ballot in Bangkok, Pheu Thai's main candidate Paetongtarn Shinawatra showed no signs of nerves.

"Today is going to be a good day. I have very positive energy about it," the 36-year-old told reporters, smiling broadly.

Millions of Thais cast ballots



A voter casts her ballot at a polling station during the country's general election in Narathiwat, southern Thailand, on Sunday (AFP)

at 95,000 polling stations scattered from the lush-forested mountains of the north to the idyllic sands of the southern beaches.

A turnout of 90 per cent in last Sunday's early round of vot-

ing pointed to an electorate looking for change, but the opposition faces an uphill battle to secure power, thanks to the junta-scripted 2017 constitution.

The new premier will be chosen jointly by the 500 elected MPs and 250 senate members appointed by Prayut's junta - stacking the deck in the army's favour.

In the controversial last election in 2019, Prayut rode senate support to become prime minister at the head of a complex multi-party coalition.

Protest legacy

The election is the first since major youth-led pro-democracy protests erupted across Bangkok in 2020 with demands to curb the power and spending of Thailand's king - breaching a long-held taboo on questioning the monarchy.

The demonstrations petered out as COVID-19 curbs were imposed and dozens of leaders were arrested, but their energy has fuelled growing support for

the more radical opposition Move Forward Party (MFP).

As he arrived to vote in Bangkok, MFP leader Pita Limjaroenrat, 42, said he expected a 'historic turnout'.

"Younger generations these days care about their rights and they will come out to vote," he told reporters.

While MFP is looking for support from millennial and Gen Z voters - who make up nearly half the 52mn-strong electorate - Pheu Thai's base is in the rural northeast where voters are still grateful for the welfare policies implemented by Thaksin in the early 2000s.

Prayut also urged voters to turn out in large numbers as he cast his ballot on Sunday.

The former general has made an unashamedly nationalist pitch

to older voters, painting himself as the only candidate capable of saving Thailand from chaos and ruin. But he has lagged badly in the polls, blamed for a sputtering economy and feeble recovery from the pandemic, which battered the kingdom's crucial tourism industry.

Voter Pakorn Adulpan, 85, said he was impressed by the quality of this year's contest.

"I am very hopeful because there is strong competition between many talented candidates, compared to the elections in the past," he told AFP.

Rights groups accuse Prayut of overseeing a major crackdown on basic freedoms, with a huge spike in prosecutions under Thailand's draconian royal defamation laws.

AFP

Gaza truce holds as Palestinians and Israelis count deadly cost

Gaza City, Palestinian Territories - Calm returned to Gaza on Sunday as a fragile ceasefire ending five days of fighting held, leaving Palestinians and Israelis to count the cost of cross-border fire which has killed dozens.

Fishermen took to their boats in the coastal Palestinian enclave, as Gazans emerged from sheltering in their homes amid the fierce exchange of fire.

The fighting which broke out on Tuesday with Israeli strikes on the Islamic Jihad fighter group ceased late on Saturday, following days of truce talks led by Egypt.

As the skies fell silent, residents were left to mourn the 33 people killed in Gaza, as well as the two in Israel - a Palestinian labourer from the territory and an elderly Israeli.

After the ceasefire took effect in Gaza, ambulances and fire trucks drove in convoy while Palestinians gathered in the streets to celebrate.

More than 50 homes were destroyed and around 950 people displaced in Gaza, said the United Nations citing local officials.

"We're on the street, there's no home for my children or their children," said Mohammed al-Louh, whose house was destroyed by Israeli strikes.

"After the ceasefire, we have an ongoing tragedy because of the great scale of the destruction," his relative said, standing



Fishermen ride their boats in Gaza City on Sunday amid a ceasefire ending five days of deadly fighting between Israel and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad fighter group (AFP)

I hope that someday the situation will improve, too bad we are killing each other

ANAT DOLEV

beside the rubble. Medics said 190 people were wounded in Gaza and 30 in Israel - seven with injuries resulting from Palestinian rocket fire and the rest while heading to shelters.

In Tel Aviv, Anat Dolev, a res-

ident from the suburb of Ramat Gan, said it was a shame to see repeated rounds of fighting.

"We have friends who live in the south and their lives are very difficult. I hope that someday the situation will improve, too bad we are killing each other," she told AFP. Movement restrictions imposed on Israelis living in areas near Gaza were lifted on Sunday.

'Quiet met with quiet'

UN Middle East envoy Tor Wennesland welcomed the truce and said he was 'deeply saddened by the loss of life and injuries'.

Sunday also saw Israel re-

open its two crossings with Gaza, the closure of which had affected Palestinians with work permits or permission to access essential medical treatment not available in the impoverished territory.

The move also paved the way for supplies of medicine, food and fuel to reach Gaza.

While Israel and Islamic Jihad committed to the ceasefire, both warned they would not hesitate to resume fire if the other side violated the agreement.

"Quiet will be met with quiet," the office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement.

Speaking at the start of Sun-

day's cabinet meeting, Netanyahu said 'the execution (of the operation) was indeed perfect'.

"Today Israel's enemies in Gaza and far beyond know that even if they try to hide, we can - and will - get to them at any point in time," said the premier.

Tariq Salimi, an Islamic Jihad spokesman, said if Israel 'commits any foolish act or any assassination... the resistance will resume where it left off'.

But as calm returned in Gaza, clashes persisted in the occupied West Bank. Israeli forces raided central Nablus early on Sunday, sparking clashes with Palestinian residents, according to an AFP photographer.

An army statement said troops had arrested two people suspected of shooting at soldiers in the West Bank, which has been occupied by Israel since the 1967 Six-Day War.

The Israeli strikes on Gaza killed at least six top figures from Islamic Jihad, which is considered a terrorist group by the United States and the European Union.

At least six children and multiple civilians were also among the dead in Gaza, which is ruled by the group Hamas. Islamic Jihad responded to the Israeli strikes with volleys of rocket fire, prompting sirens to blare as Israel's defence system intercepted most of the projectiles.

AFP

Turkey decides Erdogan's future in knife-edge vote

Istanbul, Turkey - Turkey on Sunday voted in a momentous election that could extend President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's two-decade grip on power or put the mostly Muslim nation on a more secular course.

Turnout was expected to be huge in what has effectively turned into a referendum on Turkey's longest-serving leader and his Islamic-rooted party.

It is the toughest of more than a dozen that Erdogan has confronted - one that polls suggest he might lose.

"They have been in power since I was born," 19-year-old Sila said after voting with her father in Ankara. "I want change now."

Erdogan, 69, has steered the nation of 85mn through one of its most transformative and divisive eras in the post-Ottoman state's 100-year history.

Turkey has grown into a military and geopolitical heavyweight that plays roles in conflicts from Syria to Ukraine.

The NATO member's footprint in both Europe and the Middle East makes the election's outcome as critical for Washington and Brussels as it is for Damascus and Moscow.

"My hope to God is that after the counting concludes this evening, the outcome is good for the future of our country, for Turkish democracy," Erdogan said after casting his ballot in Istanbul.



Recep Tayyip Erdogan (AFP)

Emergence of Kilicdaroglu

Erdogan's first decade of economic revival and warming relations with Europe was followed by a second one filled with social and political turmoil.

He responded to a failed 2016 coup attempt with sweeping purges that sent chills through Turkish society and made him an increasingly uncomfortable partner for the West.

The emergence of Kemal Kilicdaroglu and his six-party alliance - a group that forms the type of broad-based coalition that Erdogan excelled at forging throughout his career - gives foreign allies and Turkish voters a clear alternative.

Polls suggest the 74-year-old secular opposition leader is within touching distance of breaking the 50-per cent threshold needed to win in the first round.

AFP

Iran summons Iraq envoy over 'separatist groups'

Tehran, Iran - Iran has summoned Iraq's ambassador to protest over the presence of Iranian opposition groups at an official ceremony in Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region, media reported on Sunday.

Quoting the foreign ministry, ISNA news agency said that during Saturday's meeting Tehran expressed its 'strong objection' to the invitation of members of 'separatist groups' at the ceremony 'contrary to the recent security agreement between the Islamic republic and Iraq'.

Iran uses the words 'separatist groups' to describe Kurdish factions opposed to the Iranian government, and considers them to be 'terrorist' organisations.

Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region hosts camps and rear-bases operated by several Iranian Kurdish factions. In March Iran and Iraq signed a

deal to protect their common border, and the following month Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi acknowledged the 'security' agreement saying 'the security of Iraq and its borders is very important to us'.

On Thursday a ceremony was held in the Kurdistan region to inaugurate a cultural centre in tribute to late Kurdish national hero Mustafa Barzani.

The event was attended by Iraqi President Abdel Latif Rashid and Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani.

"Following the invitation of members of separatist groups to an official ceremony in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the continuation of some terrorist groups' movements in this region, the Iraqi ambassador in Tehran was summoned to the ministry of foreign affairs on Saturday," ISNA said.

AFP

Iranians pushed to take up homegrown applications

Tehran, Iran - Banned from using popular Western apps, Iranians have been left with little choice but to take up state-backed alternatives, as the authorities tighten internet restrictions for security reasons following months of protests.

Iranians are accustomed to using virtual private networks, or VPNs, to evade restrictions and access prohibited websites or apps, including the US-owned Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

The authorities went as far as imposing total internet blackouts during the protests that erupted after the September death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, following her arrest for an alleged breach of the Islamic republic's dress code for women.

Connections are back up and running again, and even those who are tech-savvy are being corralled into using the apps approved by the authorities such as Neshan for navigation and Snaapp! to hail a car ride.

As many as 89mn people



This file photo shows people using their mobile telephones as they walk along a street in Tehran on April 19 (AFP)

have signed up to Iranian messaging apps including Bale, Ita, Rubika and Soroush, the government says, but not everyone is keen on making the switch.

"The topics that I follow and the friends who I communicate with are not on Iranian platforms," said Mansour Roghani, a resident in the capital Tehran.

"I use Telegram and WhatsApp and, if my VPN still allows

me, I'll check Instagram," the former municipality employee said, adding that he has not installed domestic apps as replacements.

Integration

At the height of the deadly Amini protests in October, the Iranian government cited security concerns as it moved to restrict internet access and added Instagram and WhatsApp to its

long list of blocked applications.

'No one wants to limit the internet and we can have international platforms' if the foreign companies agree to introduce representative offices in Iran, Telecommunications Minister Issa Zarepour said last month.

Meta, the American giant that owns Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, has said it has no intention of setting up offices in the Islamic republic, which remains under crippling US sanctions.

The popularity of the state-sanctioned apps may not be what it seems, however, with the government encouraging people to install them by shifting essential online public services to the homegrown platforms which are often funded by the state.

In addition, analysts say, Iranian users have online safety concerns when using the approved local apps.

"We have to understand they have needs," said Amir Rashidi, director of digital rights and security at the New York-

based Miaan Group.

"As an Iranian citizen, what would you do if registering for university is only based on one of these apps? Or what would you do if you need access to government services?," he said.

The locally developed apps lack a 'clear privacy policy', according to software developer Keikhosrow Heydari-Nejat.

"I have installed some of the domestic messaging apps on a separate phone, not the one that I am using every day," the 23-year-old said, adding he had done so to access online government services.

"If they (government) shut the internet down, I will keep them installed but I will visit my friends in person," he said.

In a further effort to push people onto the domestic platforms, the telecommunications ministry connected the four major messaging apps, enabling users to communicate across the platforms.

AFP

Category 5 Cyclone Mocha hits Myanmar, Bangladesh

Kyauktaw, Myanmar - Cyclone Mocha crashed ashore in Myanmar and southeastern Bangladesh on Sunday, uprooting trees, scattering flimsy homes in Rohingya displacement camps and bringing a storm surge into low-lying areas.

Packing winds of up to 195km (120 miles) per hour, Mocha hit between Cox's Bazar, home to nearly one million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, and Myanmar's Sittwe, according to Bangladesh's weather office.

Streets in Sittwe were turned into rivers as the biggest storm to hit the Bay of Bengal in more than a decade surged through the sea-side town.

"The water is gradually rising," social worker Wai Hun Aung told AFP from Sittwe. "The tide has reached to the drain in front of a school... Soon we will move our important belongings upstairs."

The wind ripped apart homes made of tarpaulin and bamboo at one camp for displaced Rohingya at Kyaukphyu in Myanmar's Rakhine state. Its residents were anxiously watching the rising sea tide, camp leader Khin Shwe told AFP.

"We are now going to check whether sea water is increasing to our place... if the sea water rises, our camp can be flooded," Khin Shwe said.

In Teknaf in Bangladesh, high winds uprooted trees, brought



Local residents ride their motorbike amid a damaged street after Cyclone Mocha crashed ashore, in Kyauktaw in Myanmar's Rakhine state on Sunday (AFP)

Our camp houses, which are constructed with bamboo and tarpaulins, can be blown away in soft, light winds

MOHAMMAD SAYED

traffic to a halt and sent residents running for cover, an AFP correspondent said.

"Our camp houses, which are constructed with bamboo and

tarpaulins, can be blown away in soft, light winds," Mohammad Sayed, 28, told AFP from Naya-para refugee camp in Cox's Bazar.

"The schools, which are designated as cyclone shelters... are not strong shelters that can withstand the winds of a cyclone. We are scared."

Thousands left Sittwe on Saturday, packing into trucks, cars and tuk-tuks and heading for higher ground inland as meteorologists warned of a storm surge of up to 3.5 metres (11 feet).

"We are not OK because we didn't bring food and other

things to cook," said Maung Win, 57, who spent the night in a shelter in Kyauktaw town further inland. "We can only wait to get food from people's donations."

Bangladeshi authorities had moved 190,000 people in Cox's Bazar and nearly 100,000 in Chittagong to safety, divisional commissioner Aminur Rahman told AFP late on Saturday.

'Major emergency'

The Myanmar Red Cross Society said it was 'preparing for a major emergency response'.

In Bangladesh, authorities have banned Rohingya refugees

from constructing concrete homes, fearing it may encourage them to settle permanently rather than return to Myanmar, which they fled five years ago following a brutal military crackdown. The camps are generally slightly inland but most of them are built on hillsides, exposing them to the threat of landslides.

Forecasters expect the cyclone to bring a deluge of rain, which can trigger landslips.

"The wind started about 8:30 this morning and it's getting stronger," a Rohingya community leader in the Kyaukphyu displacement camp told AFP.

"A house at the camp collapsed and the roof of a shelter built by UNHCR was blown away," they said, requesting anonymity.

Hundreds of people also fled Bangladesh's Saint Martin's island, a local resort area right in the storm's path, with thousands more moving to cyclone shelters on the coral outcrop.

Those left behind said they feared the storm's approach.

"We are in a panic because we don't have enough cyclone shelters here," Saint Martin's resident Jahangir Sarwar, 23, told AFP by phone. "We asked the administrators many times that everyone should be evacuated to a safe place in mainland Teknaf town. But no action was taken."

AFP



Indian National Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge reacts to mediapersons as he arrives at his residence in New Delhi on Sunday (ANI)

India: Congress to 'fulfil all five promises' in Karnataka state

New Delhi, India - After the Congress registered a thumping victory in the Karnataka state assembly election, party's national president Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday assured the people that the grand old party will fulfil all the five promises made to the public in the election manifesto after the formation of the cabinet.

During campaigning for the Karnataka assembly elections, Congress sought to keep the narrative to local issues. The Congress heavily banked on its five guarantees - Gruha Jyothi, Gruha Lakshmi, Anna Bhagya, Yuva Nidhi and Shakti - with the party leaders promising their immediate implementation if the party comes to power.

While talking to the media, Kharge said: "People of Karnataka have rejected BJP

(Bharatiya Janata Party) and brought the Congress party back to power. People have given us a record number of votes. We will implement all five promises that we made to the public in our manifesto after we form our cabinet."

"The CLP (Congress Legislative Party) meeting will be held today and will hand over the report to the high command after which the high command will take its time to declare the name of the chief minister of Karnataka," Kharge added.

Kharge on Sunday appointed three observers in Karnataka including former Maharashtra chief minister Sushil Kumar Shinde and party leaders Jitendra Singh and Deepak Barabaria for the election of the CLP leader in the state.

ANI

PROUD MOMS ON DUTY



Police personnel hold their children as world celebrates Mother's Day, in Prayagraj, India, on Sunday (ANI)

French far-right monarchists rally after court approval

Paris, France - Around 500 people right-wing protesters marched in Paris on Sunday after a court reversed a police ban despite a government order to curtail far-right demonstrations.

The gathering organised by Action Francaise, one of France's historic monarchist groups, honoured Joan of Arc, who led the French to a famous victory over the English in the 15th century. She is revered by many of France's far-right movements.

Participants were overwhelmingly men, some wearing a beret or an armband the colour of the French flag.

They made their way from the historic Opera house to a golden statue in central Paris of Joan, known as Jeanne d'Arc in French, on a horse in the Paris city centre, laying wreaths at its feet.

The demonstration was allowed to go ahead after the Paris administrative court on Saturday



Members of the far-right French monarchist movement Action Francaise take part in a rally in honour of Joan of Arc, in Paris, on Sunday (AFP)

decided that it did not of itself constitute an incitement to public disorder.

It also allowed a symposium in the capital, titled 'France in danger', which some 350 members attended under heavy police surveillance the same day.

"We defended the right to demonstrate according to

French law," said the group's secretary general Olivier Perceval. "There has never been an incident. It's not a protest. We're just honouring Jeanne d'Arc."

According to Perceval, the annual rally has been banned only twice before: once by the Germans during World War II, and a second time after the desecra-

tion of a Jewish cemetery in 1990.

'Controversy'

Paris police had banned six rallies in Paris over the weekend on public order grounds, after Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin issued directives to ban gatherings 'of the ultra-right or extreme

right'.

Paris police chief Laurent Nunez had argued that the far-right gatherings were a threat to public order because of possible clashes with radical left activists, after 'the controversy provoked by the demonstrations' the previous weekend in Paris.

Around 600 people - some in masks, which French law prohibits in public spaces - on Saturday last week responded to a call from a far-right white supremacist group to commemorate the death of a fellow activist in 1994.

It caused outrage among opposition lawmakers at a time when pan-bashing protests against President Emmanuel Macron over his unpopular pension reform have been repeatedly blocked. Both Action Francaise and the extreme far-right group the Nationalists appealed this weekend's bans.

AFP

Pakistan ex-PM Imran Khan calls for nationwide protests

Lahore, Pakistan - Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan called for nationwide 'freedom' protests on Sunday, after his brief arrest and detention this week triggered deadly unrest.

The one-time cricket superstar - who has been tied up in dozens of legal cases since being ousted from power in April last year - was freed on bail on Friday after his detention was declared unlawful by the Supreme Court.

Enraged by the arrest, supporters set fire to government buildings, blocked roads and damaged property belonging to the military, which they blame for Khan's downfall.

"Freedom does not come easily. You have to snatch it. You have to sacrifice for it," he said in an address broadcast on YouTube on Saturday night.

He called for supporters to hold protests 'at the end of your streets and villages' across the

country on Sunday evening for one hour starting at 5:30pm (1230 GMT).

After five days of tumult across Pakistan, Sunday morning was quiet, but Khan has also pledged to return to campaigning on Wednesday for immediate elections.

For months, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party leader has waged a campaign of defiance against the military.

His arrest on Tuesday came just hours after he was rebuked for claiming senior officials were involved in an assassination attempt against him last year.

Pakistan's powerful military has directly ruled the country off and on for nearly half of its 75-year history, and continues to wield power over the political system.

"The army chief's actions have made our military bad. It is because of him, not because of



An activist of Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party listens to Pakistan's former PM Imran Khan's speech on a phone, in Zaman Park in Lahore on Saturday (AFP)

me," Khan said from his home in Lahore, although it was unclear whether he meant the serving chief, or his predecessor, whom Khan has held responsible for his ouster. He previously told reporters that 'one man, the army chief' was behind his arrest.

But Khan distanced himself from the attacks against the mil-

itary's installations at the protests, denying his party workers were involved and calling for an independent investigation into the violence.

The army, which denies the accusations made by Khan, on Saturday warned against attempts to create 'misperceptions' against the institution.

'Anti-state behaviour'

At least nine people died in the unrest this week, police and hospitals have said. Hundreds of police officers were injured and

Freedom does not come easily. You have to snatch it. You have to sacrifice for it

IMRAN KHAN

more than 4,000 people detained, mostly in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces, according to authorities.

At least 10 senior PTI leaders have been arrested since the protests began, one of Khan's lawyers said.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the head of a shaky coal-

ition, on Saturday warned that those involved in 'facilitating, abetting and perpetrating' the violence should be arrested within 72 hours.

"Those who demonstrated anti-state behaviour will be arrested and tried in anti-terrorist courts," he said during a visit to Lahore.

Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah has repeatedly vowed that police will re-arrest Khan, who remains wildly popular ahead of elections due in October. The Islamabad High Court ruled that Khan should be given protection from arrest until Monday. "If Pakistan had a Doomsday Clock, it would be reading sixty seconds to midnight," read a Sunday editorial in Dawn, the country's leading English language newspaper.

"There is a very real possibility that we may see the unleashing of total chaos if someone doesn't

push the reset button," it said.

'Everyone knows'

Khan won the 2018 election on an anti-corruption campaign, voted in by an electorate weary of decades of dynastic politics.

Independent analysts say he was brought to power with the support of the military, before falling out with the generals.

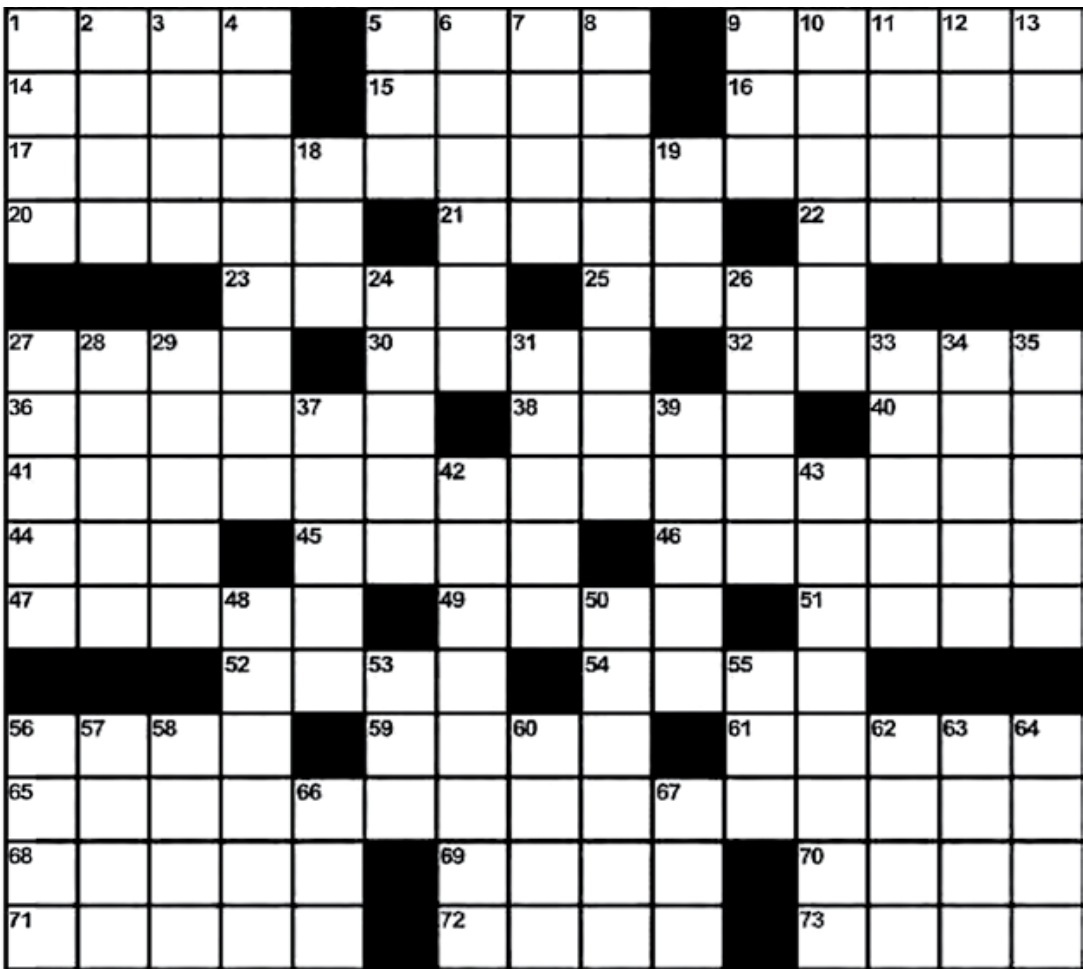
"Everyone knows who it is. It's the military behind (Khan's arrest)," 21-year-old PTI supporter Mohsin Khan told AFP outside the party chief's home.

The pushcart seller added that he wanted the military and politicians 'to work together'.

The political crisis has simmered for months, with Khan attempting to disrupt the coalition government by dissolving two provincial parliaments he controlled and agitating for early elections.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Dress that's a wrap
- 5) Baby's first word, often
- 9) Police club used in India
- 14)_ Bator, Mongolia
- 15) Made better, as cheddar
- 16) Wan-looking
- 17) Mail carrier's pun (part 1)
- 20) Bas-relief medium
- 21) Do more than want
- 22) Florence farewell
- 23) Music may set it
- 25)_record
- 27) Forbidden perfume?
- 30) The wise men who visited Jesus
- 32) Egyptian symbols of life
- 36) Mimosa-family tree
- 38) Corner chess piece
- 40) Mail carrier's pun (part 2)
- 41) Mail carrier's pun (part 3)
- 44) Mail carrier's pun (part 4)
- 45) "And it_ to pass ..."
- 46) American Airlines rival
- 47) Composer Steve
- 49) And others, for short

DOWN

- 1) Vocalized
- 2) Additive to some tissues
- 3) Butts
- 4) Considering that
- 5) Grappler's milieu
- 6) Meeting outline
- 7) A_pittance
- 8) Stick-to-it-iveness?
- 9) Lay down the_
- 10) Certain garbage receptacle
- 11) Siamese, nowadays
- 12) Queen of Olympus
- 13)_European (language family)
- 18) "Two" homophone

19) Poem of homage

- 24) Mutual of_ (insurance giant)
- 26) Bilked
- 27) Three-toed mammal
- 28) Like some angles
- 29) Deep-voiced opera stars
- 31) Roll out the red carpet for
- 33) Former capital of Japan
- 34) Optimistic one
- 35) Glove material
- 37) In need of calamine lotion
- 39) Developing egg
- 42) Retired, as a professor
- 43) Realtor inventory
- 48) Lassie was one
- 50) Craggy mountain ridges
- 53) Dash lengths
- 55) Start for Paulo or Vicente
- 56) Russian despot of old
- 57) Decorative sewing case
- 58) Gives a hand to
- 60) Astronaut's employer, for short
- 62) Casting need

63) Maritime raptor

- 64) Made colorful

66) Word with "Angeles"

- 67) Check cashers' needs

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

That warm and fuzzy feeling someone gives you is starting to grow into a decidedly hotter vibe, and not necessarily in a good way. There is some real friction going on between you two, and you just don't seem to be on the same page anymore. The good news is that this tension doesn't have to be scary. Disagreements don't signal the beginning of end. They're just disagreements! Stop giving them so much power. You two can and will work through this.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

If you've been feeling limited or held back lately, you can't be blaming anyone or anything else for this frustrating situation. The only person truly affecting your life, for better or worse, is you. On the bright side, if you've caused this, then you can cure this. To get a motivating burst of self-esteem, call up a friend for a fun night out or challenge them to a board game. Just do something that will help you get that winning feeling once again.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

The people who have been teaching or guiding you are loving the changes they've helped you make! They're very impressed by your accomplishments and are heaping a ton of praise and admiration on you right now. Don't be surprised if other people show signs of jealousy. You are getting into the good graces of some very influential people and they want to be there too. You can give them some advice, but only if you're feeling charitable.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Don't take any financial risks today. They aren't likely to pay off. There's too much uncertainty involved in this new venture, and you need to play things safe. Personal relationships are getting too entangled in your private financial business, and you would be wise to put some distance between your friendships and your investments. Listening to the advice of your friends is one thing, but do it too often and you could find yourself getting angry when things don't pan out.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

The time for you to play it cool is definitely over. Right now, you must be more daring. Act fast if you want to nab that new opportunity, get to the front of the line with that new cutie, or make that change in your life. You're finally capable of getting some traction in a new situation, but you have to show the Universe that you're ready to move forward. It's all about action and taking a risk or two. They're bound to pay off in one way or another.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Let your idealistic side take more control over your life right now. Let your ideals make the decisions you're faced with. It's time that you tried harder to see the best in everything and in everyone, because when you do, you're better able to see the best in yourself. Don't be surprised if you get a lot more attention today. People find a positive thinker to be very attractive. Seeing more beauty in your life will invite even more beauty.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

If you want to be all you can be in life, then you have to start expressing yourself more! People can't know who you really are and what you're really capable of until you do. Don't be afraid to say what you really feel or ask for what you really want! You need to share your feelings and desires with your closest partners or friends today no matter what. You're underestimating the people in your life. They can handle the truth from you.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Timing is everything when it comes to romance. So if you don't have it in your life right now, try to take a philosophical view of it. Maybe it's just not the right time. Your feelings might be hard to shove aside in favor of this kind of attitude, but it will help you stay away from the blues. Love exists in so many forms in your life right now, so you're doing the Universe a disservice by not acknowledging that fact. Spend time with the special people who care so much about you.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Friendship can mean different things to different people, so be very careful that you aren't making too many assumptions about what a new friendship is all about. An unexpected comment could catch you off guard today. They clearly have different ideas about what constitutes a good time. This might not necessarily be a deal breaker, but it's something you should clarify. What they tell you will probably open up the door to a whole new level of fun.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

If you're getting overwhelmed by the details of a project you've been working on, have no fear! A big burst of energy and positive thinking is coming along today to help you feel back on track and ready to run for the finish line. This change in attitude will help you to put your best foot forward and impress that certain someone. You're feeling more motivated than you have in a long time, and it's nice to have such an attainable goal in front of you.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Right now, you should feel free to trust your instincts about a new person who's arrived on the social scene. After all, they hardly ever steer you wrong. Just be careful not to react to what they tell you, at least not right away. Before you jump to any conclusions about this person, wait until you get someone from outside your circle to confirm your hunch. And don't be surprised if what they have to tell you is contrary to your gut. Being off base is rare for you, but it does happen.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

The Universe is finally giving you the green light to proceed with your plans even if doing so requires you to skip over the authority figures in your life! Their ideas aren't as valuable to you right now as the ideas from your peers, so listen to them instead. Closely observe the people who are at your level. What are they doing and how are they doing it? You will learn from their mistakes, and more importantly, you'll gain insight from their successes.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. In what country was the "Red Cross" founded?

- A. England
- B. Germany
- C. France
- D. Switzerland

2. In 1954, the US Department of Defence established what song as the official musical tribute to the president of the USA?

- A. Hail to the Chief
 - B. I Think It's Gonna Work Out Fine
 - C. Imagine
 - D. Smoke Gets In Your Eyes
- Correct Answer: Hail to the Chief

3. Although an annual Thanksgiving Day had been observed in several colonies throughout what became the USA, who proclaimed USA's first national Thanksgiving Day?

- A. Abraham Lincoln
 - B. George Washington
 - C. Theodore Roosevelt
 - D. Harry S. Truman
- Correct Answer: George Washington

Answers: 1. D 2. A 3. B

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

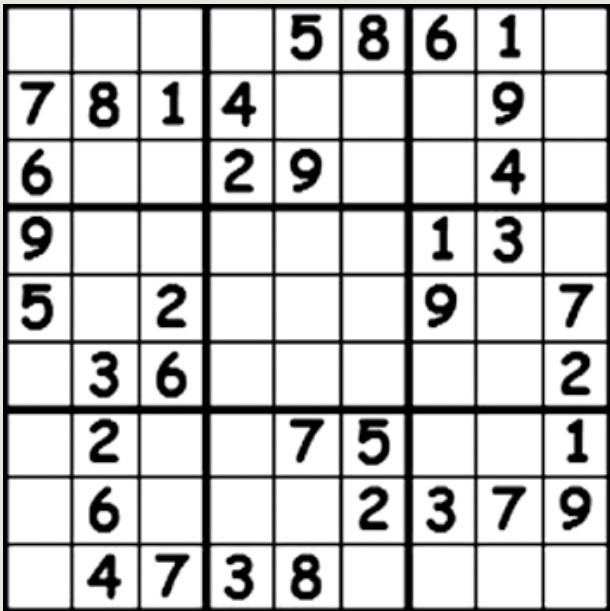


Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. 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



HOME STRETCH

PSG edge closer to title as Messi jeered on return

Paris, France - Paris Saint-Germain closed in on a record 11th French league title with a 5-0 home win over Ajaccio on Saturday as Lionel Messi received a mixed reception on his return from suspension.

Fabian Ruiz opened the scoring on 22 minutes at the Parc des Princes and Achraf Hakimi added a second goal before Kylian Mbappe struck twice shortly after half-time.

Mohamed Youssouf compounded a miserable night for the Corsicans with an own goal for PSG's fifth, while Hakimi and Ajaccio midfielder Thomas Mangani were sent off after a late bust-up.

PSG need four points from their final three games - against Auxerre, Strasbourg and Clermont - to secure the Ligue 1 title after restoring their six-point lead over second-placed Lens.

"The players were very determined to put in a proper display. They want to be champions and they realise that Lens aren't giv-

ing up and a misstep could raise the pressure," said PSG coach Christophe Galtier.

Messi's name elicited a combination of whistles and applause when it was read out before kick-off after he was banned by the club for last weekend's match over an unauthorised trip to Saudi Arabia.

The Argentine again drew jeers with his early touches in

Galtier. "He stayed focused with the desire to liven up the game and create chances. He's used to it because he's been in difficult situations in his career."

Three defeats in their past four home games for PSG had allowed Lens to stay in an unlikely title race, but Ajaccio offered little resistance as their relegation to Ligue 2 was confirmed.

Danilo's threaded pass was

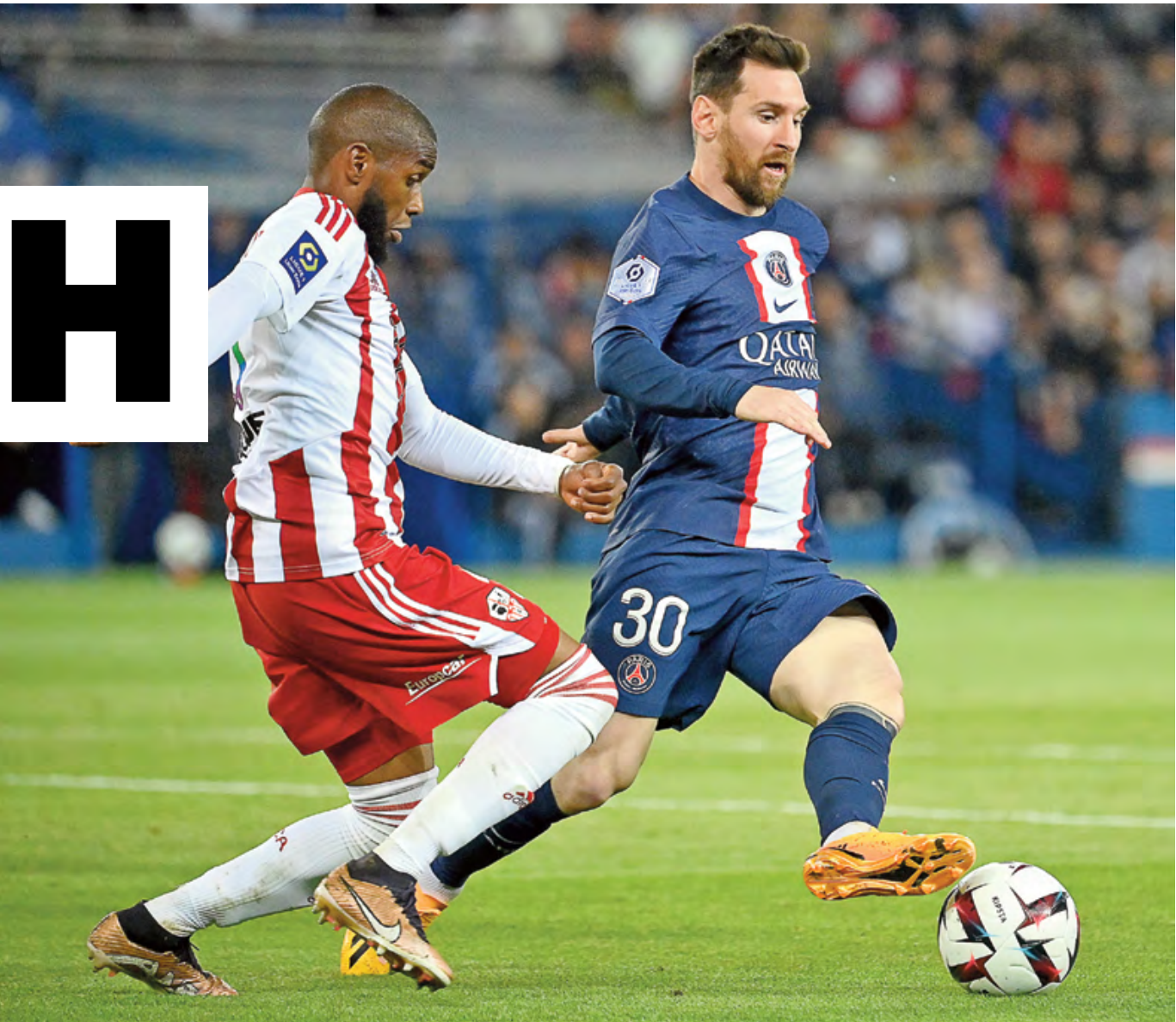
He (Messi) stayed focused with the desire to liven up the game and create chances. He's used to it because he's been in difficult situations in his career

CHRISTOPHE GALTIER

what was likely his penultimate appearance in Paris ahead of a reported move to Saudi Arabia for the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner. "So there are whistles but very quickly a large part of the stadium made sure to drown them out to support Leo," said

flicked into the path of Ruiz and the Spain midfielder took a couple of smart touches before finishing clinically for his second goal in as many games.

Hakimi then swept in the rebound after Mbappe's effort was parried by Francois-Joseph Sol-



Ajaccio's Mohamed Youssouf (L) fights for the ball with Paris Saint-Germain's Lionel Messi during their French Ligue 1 match on Saturday (AFP)

lacaro, with the goal allowed to stand despite the France striker using his arm to control in the build-up.

Mbappe hit the 25-goal mark for the fourth time early in the second half, slotting beyond Sol-lacaro after a scramble in the box to take over again as the league's top scorer this term.

He then produced a brilliant first-time volley to lash in PSG's fourth minutes later after a long ball forward from Sergio Ramos glanced off the head of a back-tracking defender.

An unfortunate Youssouf diverted a shot from Marquinhos into his own net on 73 minutes and both teams finished with 10

players after a challenge on Messi triggered a needless scuffle. Hakimi, who was sent off against Lorient two weeks ago, received his second red card in as many outings after getting into an altercation with Mangani that also led to his dismissal.

Senegalese forward Habib Diallo scored inside the opening

minute of a Ligue 1 game for the third time this year as he got both goals in Strasbourg's 2-0 win over Nice. Diallo took his goals tally to 20 for the season and secured a fourth victory in five matches for Strasbourg which lifted them six points clear of the relegation zone.

AFP



Real Madrid's Marco Asensio (L) celebrates with Vinicius Junior after scoring against Getafe on Saturday (AFP)

Madrid beat Getafe ahead of Man City showdown

Madrid, Spain - Real Madrid warmed up for their decisive Champions League semi-final visit to face Manchester City with a 1-0 win over Getafe on Saturday in La Liga.

The champions' slim victory ensured leaders Barcelona must beat city rivals Espanyol on Sunday in Cornellà to be able to clinch the title this weekend.

Marco Asensio broke the deadlock in the 70th minute with a deflected strike from distance, in a game of few chances which did not get pulses racing.

Madrid's win saw them climb provisionally second above

Carlo Ancelotti rotated heavily to keep his key players fresh ahead of the second leg battle with Pep Guardiola's City, following the 1-1 draw last Tuesday in Madrid

Atletico Madrid, 11 points behind Barcelona.

Carlo Ancelotti rotated heavily to keep his key players fresh ahead of the second leg battle with Pep Guardiola's City, following the 1-1 draw last Tuesday in Madrid.

Ancelotti lined up with just three of the side that started the

first leg - goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois, Eduardo Camavinga and Fede Valverde.

However Camavinga limped off in the final stages with knee pain sustained in a clash with Juan Iglesias.

Ancelotti said the French midfielder would not take long to recover.

"It's just a hit, it's a bit painful for him," Ancelotti told DAZN, hinting there were no worries ahead of the City match. "He's 20, he will recover very quickly."

The most excitement Madrid supporters had in the first half was the team presenting the Copa del Rey trophy they won last weekend in Seville to the Santiago Bernabeu.

Beyond that the opening period was devoid of action at either end, with Belgian forward Eden Hazard looking unsurprisingly flat on his first league start since September.

AFP



Borussia Dortmund's Sebastian Haller (L) celebrates with Julian Brandt after scoring against Borussia Moenchengladbach on Saturday

Haller helps Dortmund thump Gladbach to stay on Bayern's heels

Dortmund, Germany - A stunning first-half performance from Sebastian Haller helped Borussia Dortmund move back within a point of Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich with two matches remaining after a 5-2 thrashing of Borussia Moenchengladbach on Saturday. After Bayern demolished Schalke 6-0 earlier in the day, Dortmund struck four times in the opening 32 minutes against Gladbach, with Haller having a hand in each of the goals.

"We showed today that we will keep believing until the end

and we will chase everything until the end," said Dortmund coach Edin Terzic.

"We still have two games, after that we will see whether it was enough. Bayern have to step on the gas and we will as well."

Haller unleashed a shot after five minutes, with Donyell Malen pouncing on the rebound, scoring his eighth goal in his last eight matches. Haller was then brought down in the box, with England teenager Jude Bellingham converting from the spot to double Dortmund's lead.

Inter triumph, Milan slump ahead of Champions League semi-final date

Rome, Italy - Inter Milan warmed up for their Champions League semi-final showdown with AC Milan with an entertaining 4-2 win over Sassuolo on Saturday while their city rivals floundered 2-0 at Serie A strugglers Spezia.

A Romelu Lukaku brace on his 30th birthday, a further strike from Lautaro Martinez and an unfortunate Ruan Tressoldi own goal were enough for Inter to claim a seventh straight win in all competitions and move level on 66 points with second-placed Juventus.

"The coach told us the game was a match-point for the top four, and we're in good shape as we've been winning a lot of games recently," Lukaku said. "We can still win two trophies and on Tuesday we have a very difficult match against the team that won the league last season."

Inter hold a 2-0 lead over Milan ahead of Tuesday's second leg and Simone Inzaghi's side look almost certain to reach their first Champions League final since they last won it in 2010.

Their chances of qualifying for next season's edition of Europe's top club competition were also greatly improved by Saturday's



Inter Milan's Romelu Lukaku scores against Sassuolo in their Italian Serie A match on Saturday (AFP)

win, which came after top four rivals Lazio, Milan and Atalanta all dropped points.

Inter are five points ahead of fifth-placed Milan but after looking like they were going to cruise to the win they didn't end up having it their own way.

Lukaku put Inter ahead with a rasping effort shortly before the break after both Domenico Berardi and Joaquin Correa both had goals ruled out for offside.

Ten minutes after the restart Tressoldi headed Raoul Belanova's cross into his own net and the match seemed over three minutes later when Martinez's effort was deflected in again by Tressoldi.

Headers from Matheus Henrique and Davide Frattesi pulled Sassuolo back into the game until Lukaku finally sealed the points with a fine low finish with two minutes remaining.

Przemyslaw Wisniewski and Salvatore Esposito struck their first Serie A goals in the final 15 minutes to sink Milan and give Spezia their first win in two months.

Leonardo Semplici's team are still in the relegation zone but Saturday's win moves them level on 30 points with Verona, who sit one place above the bottom three and host Torino on Sunday.

AFP

Nine-man Mamelodi Sundowns force draw at Wydad

Johannesburg, South Africa - Mamelodi Sundowns of South Africa forced a 0-0 CAF Champions League semi-final draw at title-holders Wydad Casablanca of Morocco on Saturday despite ending the first leg with nine men.

The visiting club were reduced to 10 men on 43 minutes following a pitch-side VAR review by the Ghanaian referee of an incident in which Neo Maema stamped on a fallen opponent.

Chilean Marco Allende, who came off the bench with 12 minutes left, was shown a red card for a studs-up tackle after another VAR check having initially receiving a yellow one.

VAR played a pivotal role in a cagey clash with a Peter Shalulile goal for Sundowns on 10 minutes awarded by the match officials, then disallowed after a review.

The outcome was not surprising given the closeness of previous matches between the clubs in Casablanca with Wydad winning four by one-goal margins while another was drawn.

Sundowns host the return match in Pretoria next Saturday and will be slight favourites to reach a third final.

TOTAL DOMINATION

Gundogan masterclass takes Manchester City closer to Premier League title at Everton’s expense

Liverpool, United Kingdom - Manchester City closed in on retaining the Premier League title as Ilkay Gundogan scored twice in a 3-0 win on Sunday that kept Everton looking over their shoulders in the relegation battle.

Pep Guardiola’s men move four points clear of Arsenal, who are in action later at home to Brighton, with three games remaining for both sides.

City’s superior goal difference means five points from their remaining matches will likely be enough for a fifth title in six seasons.

Everton remain just one point outside the relegation zone and could slip into the bottom three if Leicester beat Liverpool on Monday.

By contrast to the Toffees’ troubles, City are still well on course for a treble and could afford the luxury of an afternoon off for some of their stars ahead of Wednesday’s Champions League semi-final, second leg against Real Madrid.

Guardiola made four changes from the side that drew 1-1 in the first leg in the Spanish capital on Tuesday with John Stones, Bernardo Silva, Kevin De Bruyne and Jack Grealish left on the bench.

It took the visitors 35 minutes to find their rhythm, by which point they should have been behind as Mason Holgate somehow spooned over a glorious chance to open the scoring after James Tarkowski headed down a corner.

Within three minutes of Hol-



Manchester City's Ilkay Gundogan (L) celebrates with Phil Foden after scoring against Everton in their English Premier League match at Goodison Park in Liverpool on Sunday (AFP)

Guardiola made four changes from the side that drew 1-1 in the first leg in the Spanish capital on Tuesday with John Stones, Bernardo Silva, Kevin De Bruyne and Jack Grealish left on the bench

gate’s sitter, the game was over as a contest.

Guardiola had stern words for Gundogan despite the German scoring twice in last weekend’s 2-1 win over Leeds after the midfielder missed a late penalty having been given the chance to complete his hat-trick by Erling

Haaland.

Gundogan made amends with a stunning touch to control and then flick home Riyad Mahrez’s cross in one movement to break the deadlock.

Moments later, he created the second with a floated cross that invited Haaland to power home

his 52nd goal of the season with just his third touch in 39 minutes.

Everton boss Sean Dyche showed he too was already thinking about his side’s final two games of the season by replacing talismanic striker Dominic Calvert-Lewin, who has missed most of the season through in-

jury, with Neal Maupay at half-time.

Guardiola could not have wished for a more serene second half to prepare for the visit of the European champions in midweek as another moment of brilliance from Gundogan made it 3-0 six minutes after the restart.

The 32-year-old is probably into the final month of his seven-year stay in Manchester with his contract up at the end of the season and Barcelona reportedly ready to pounce on a free transfer, but looks set to go out on a high.

Gundogan curled a free-kick beyond the desperate dive of Jordan Pickford for his ninth goal of the season.

Goal difference could be decisive in the battle to beat the drop and Everton did at least manage to stop the bleeding at three.

Indeed the home side came closest to scoring in the final quarter when Amadou Onana’s header came crashing back off the crossbar.

West Ham lose

West Ham wasted a chance to seal their survival as goals from Bryan Mbeumo and Yoane Wissa clinched Brentford’s 2-0.

David Moyes’ side would have been guaranteed to avoid relegation with a victory in west London.

But Mbeumo and Wissa netted in the first half to leave the Hammers still needing one win from their last two games to be sure of staying up.

AFP



Marco Bezzecchi celebrates with the trophy after winning the French MotoGP in Le Mans on Sunday (AFP)

Controlled Bezzecchi wins chaotic Le Mans MotoGP

Le Mans, France - Italian rider Marco Bezzecchi comfortably held off sprint winner Jorge Martin to take victory in the 1,000th MotoGP event at Le Mans on Sunday.

A number of race favourites such as world champion Francesco Bagnaia, who started on pole, and six-time champion Marc Marquez crashed out in a chaotic race, allowing Johann Zarco to complete the podium on his home track.

Bezzecchi, however, on a Ducati, showed total control once

he hit the front to claim his second MotoGP win, following his victory in Argentina last month.

The 24-year-old, who only stepped up from Moto2 at the start of 2022, is now just one point behind championship leader Bagnaia who came under investigation for his part in the crash that took him out of the race as well as Aprilia’s Maverick Vinales.

Marquez was running a strong second until he slid off the track on the penultimate lap.

AFP

Chelsea agree terms with Pochettino: reports

London, United Kingdom - Chelsea are on the verge of hiring Mauricio Pochettino as their new manager after agreeing terms with the former Paris Saint Germain boss, according to reports on Sunday.

Pochettino is reportedly set to join Chelsea at the end of this season as he returns to the Premier League four years after his sacking by Tottenham.

The Argentine will replace interim manager Frank Lampard at Stamford Bridge as Chelsea co-owner Todd Boehly bids to get his troubled club back on track after a dismal season.

Pochettino will be Chelsea’s sixth permanent manager in five years after Boehly sacked Thomas Tuchel in September and then axed Graham Potter in April. Pochettino, who has also managed in the Premier League with Southampton, left Paris Saint Germain in July 2022 and was replaced by Christophe Galtier.

Pochettino guided Tottenham to the Champions League final in 2019 when they finished as runners-up to Liverpool.



Mauricio Pochettino

ners-up to Liverpool.

He also led the north Londoners a second place finish in the Premier League in 2017 and the League Cup final in 2015, missing out on the silverware to Chelsea on both occasions.

Despite failing to end a Tottenham trophy drought that stretches back to 2008, Pochettino was widely admired by his players.

Tottenham striker Harry Kane recently bemoaned the change in the club’s culture since the Ar-

gentine’s exit.

Following his Tottenham stint, the 51-year-old took over at French side Paris Saint Germain in January 2021.

They finished second in Ligue 1 in 2022, winning the Coupe de France and the Trophée des Champions, which were the first trophies of Pochettino’s managerial career.

Pochettino led PSG to the French title in his second season but departed after failing to make an impact in the Champions League, with a last 16 capitulation against Real Madrid especially damaging to his reign.

Considered for the Manchester United job before Erik ten Hag’s appointment last year, Pochettino will arrive in west London to find a club in crisis.

Chelsea, who last won the title in 2017, are currently 11th in the Premier League.

They have won just one of their past 11 games and look set to miss out on European competition next season.

AFP



Subhas Anchalose



Zohera Hashemabadi

Oman residents complete heroic mountain trail run in Italy

Residents of Oman, Subhas Anchalose (India) and Zohera Hashemabadi (Iran) successfully completed the UTLAC250 endurance trail run in Italy on Sunday morning.

The route winds for about 258km and 14,600m of alti-

tude difference on beaten paths between the 200m of altitude of Lake Como and the maximum point of Mount Bregagno at 2,107m.

While Zohera completed her race in two days and 22 hours; Anchalose finished in three days and six hours.

Iga Swiatek sweeps into Italian Open last 16, Medvedev wins

Rome, Italy - Iga Swiatek cruised into the last 16 of the Italian Open on Sunday after thrashing Lesia Tsurenko 6-2, 6-0, while Daniil Medvedev beat Emil Ruusuvuori 6-4, 6-2.

Losing finalist in Madrid last weekend, Swiatek looked again in imperious form in the tournament she won last year before going on to blitz the French Open.

The 21-year-old is trying for

her third straight Rome title and made light work of Tsurenko after a slightly bumpy start.

Swiatek lost the first two games but then rattled off 12 in a row in a powerful demonstration of why she is world number one and favourite for Roland Garros.

Swiatek now faces either Donna Vekic or Ljudmila Samsonova in the fourth round after extending her winning streak in the Italian capital to 13 matches.

Her bid for a Rome hat-trick will be helped by five of the world’s top 10 women players being eliminated early, world number eight Maria Sakkari the latest victim after she was beaten 7-5, 6-3 by Marketa Vondrousova.

Sakkari joins world number two Aryna Sabalenka, third-ranked Jessica Pegula, world number four Caroline Garcia and seventh ranked Ons Jabeur in

being dumped out of the tournament.

In the men’s draw Medvedev came through in straight sets against Ruusuvuori to claim his first ever win at the Foro Italico courts.

The former US Open champion won a second round match which was postponed to Sunday due to the torrential rain which hit the Italian capital on Saturday.

AFP



Poland's Iga Swiatek returns to Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko during their last-32 match at Rome Open



NITISH RANA, RINKU SINGH SHINE AS KOLKATA BEAT HIGH-FLYING CHENNAI



Nitish Rana of Kolkata Knight Riders plays a shot en route to his match-winning knock against Chennai Super Kings in Chennai on Sunday. Rana made an unbeaten 57 while Rinku Singh continued his impressive form with 54. Earlier, Chennai made 144 for 6 with Shivam Dube top-scoring with 48. The win took Kolkata's tally to 12 points and helped them climb to seventh, while Chennai, on 15, missed a chance to move to the top of the standings.

Punjab end Delhi's hopes

New Delhi, India - A maiden IPL century by Prabhsimran Singh and four wickets for Harpreet Brar powered Punjab Kings to a 31-run win and ended Delhi Capitals' hopes of making the play-offs on Saturday.

Opening batsman Prabhsimran's 103 off 65 balls guided Punjab to 167-7 after being put in to bat first at Delhi's Feroz Shah Kotla ground.

Brar then returned figures of 4-30 with his left-arm spin as Delhi suffered a collapse to end on 136-8 despite a strong start from skipper David Warner, who hit 54 off 27 balls. Punjab moved to sixth to improve their chances of making the final four for a spot in the play-offs. Delhi remain bottom of the heap and are out of the running.

Warner seemed to take the game away with his power hitting but Brar led the spin charge, removing Phil Salt for 21 as Delhi slipped from 69-0 to 88-6.

Leg-spinner Rahul Chahar joined in to trap Mitchell Marsh lbw before Brar struck twice in an over to dismiss Rilee Rossouw and Warner, who registered his 60th IPL fifty.

TODAYS MATCH

MATCH 62

6 PM

GUJARAT TITANS

SUNRISERS HYDERABAD

Impact player Nathan Ellis, who came in as a substitute for Prabhsimran, took two wickets with his pace bowling.

Prabhsimran set the victory up for Punjab, smacking 10 fours and six sixes to play a lone hand in his team's total.

He put on a key partnership of 72 with Punjab's expensive England import Sam Curran, who made 20.

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ROYAL THRASHING

Glenn Maxwell, bowlers star as Bangalore crush Rajasthan by 112 runs

Jaipur, India - Fifties from skipper Faf du Plessis and Glenn Maxwell, followed by inspired bowling, led Royal Challengers Bangalore to a crushing 112-run win over Rajasthan Royals in the IPL on Sunday.

Du Plessis made 55 and Maxwell smashed a 33-ball 54 to guide Bangalore to 171-5 before their bowlers then skittled Rajasthan for 59 runs in Jaipur.

South African left-arm quick Wayne Parnell took three wickets, including Jos Buttler for a duck, as Rajasthan fell to the third-lowest total in Indian Premier League history.

The lowest IPL total was Bangalore's 49 against Kolkata in 2017.

Bangalore, still searching for their first IPL title, moved up two places to fifth in the 10-team table, with the top four to make the play-offs.

"Really good for our net-rate," said Du Plessis. "We batted first and assessed the conditions. We



Royal Challengers Bangalore's Glenn Maxwell plays a shot during their match against Rajasthan Royals in Jaipur on Sunday (AFP)

batted in the powerplay and thought 160 will be a good score."

Inaugural champions Rajasthan dropped to sixth with a game left in the league stage after their heaviest defeat in the T20 tournament.

Pace spearhead Mohammed Siraj struck first to dismiss Yashasvi Jaiswal, who hit the fastest IPL fifty in 13 balls against Kolkata on Thursday, for a duck.

The rest of the batting fell flat in just 10.3 overs, with only Shim-

ron Hetmyer (35) and England import Joe Root (10) managing double figures. New Zealand's Michael Bracewell and fellow spinner Karn Sharma took two wickets each.

Bangalore's batsmen set up victory after a strong 50-run start by du Plessis and Virat Kohli, who fell for 18 off Indian pace bowler KM Asif.

The in-form du Plessis, who remains top of the batting chart with 631 runs, stood firm and formed a key partnership of 69 with Maxwell.

Rajasthan hit back with three wickets in five balls, including du Plessis after his seventh IPL 50, with Australian leg-spinner Adam Zampa grabbing two of them in one over. Maxwell raised his fifth 50 of the season with a six but was out in the next over.

Anuj Rawat, a left-handed wicketkeeper-batsman, smashed an unbeaten 29 off 11 balls and finished the innings with two sixes and a four.

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CERRO BLANCO

DEFORESTATION DOOM

A primal forest encircled by Ecuador port faces ruination



A hilly forest that is a bastion of exceptional flora and fauna next to Ecuador's largest city, Guayaquil, is now threatened by mining, urbanisation and deforestation.

Cerro Blanco - white hill in English-- is a vast tropical dry forest that has been gradually devoured by the port city of three million people.

In the last 15 years, Cerro Blanco has become an 'island locked up and encircled by the city', Eliana Molineros, who created a foundation to protect wild animals, told AFP. The forest's fragile and rich ecosystem has been declared in danger by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

The forest of 14,800 acres is home to hundreds of bird species, around 60 mammal species, including jaguars - the largest felines on the continent - and dozens of endemic plants.

Only about 10 per cent of the world's original tropical dry forests remain.Cerro Blanco

Aerial view of a quarry in the Cerro Blanco Forest (Bosque Protector Cerro Blanco - in Spanish)

Right - Bird watchers take pictures in the Cerro Blanco Forest

and its virgin forest is one of the few remaining such environments in Latin America. But it is also a mining area that provides the primary material for cement, and from where the hill gets its name due to the colour of the limestone.

There are 36 quarries, including 10 government-run sites, that devour the forest's vegetation. Those quarries are supposedly authorised by the national agency that controls mining, and some are illegal.

Guayaquil's lungs

On Saturday, dozens of local inhabitants of an area that was deforested for mining

protested against the proliferation of mines, shouting 'Quarries out!' and 'Protect Guayaquil's lungs from depredation'.

Four local associations demanded the creation of a protected area that would ban mining and other extraction activities in Cerro Blanco.

With white butterflies fluttering overhead, biologist Paul Cun stopped in front of a 40m tall fig tree.

"We are standing in the best preserved tropical dry forest in Ecuador," said Cun, who

has been volunteering in the forest since 1998. With his boots sinking into the mud, Cun recounted stories about being bitten by snakes or having howler monkeys throw fruit at him.

Among the more than 250 species of birds that nest here is the snail kite, a rare bird of prey whose song sounds like a burst of laughter.

The large pijo trees that are typical to this area harbour the Guayaquil parrot - the emblem of the city - but whose numbers have dwindled to just 60 birds living in the wild, according to experts.

There is an abundance of mushrooms, some purple and sticky, others black that emerge from the ground like a claw and are

known locally as the 'hand of death'. All around, trees as tall as high-rise buildings disperse the sun's rays.

On the southern part of the hill, lots with about 30 upper middle-class homes are carved out of the forest. To the north, there are the 'Mount Sinai' and 'City of God' slums, the poorest parts of a city marked by huge wealth disparity and that has become a hotbed of violence related to drug trafficking.

The slums are the most dangerous neighbourhoods on the Cerro Blanco.

The forest's two unarmed rangers are helpless in the face of arsonists and squatters who flock to the forest looking to make their fortune.

Before it was turned into a private reserve, Cerro Blanco was exploited by a major landowner in the 1950s. In 1989, the state expropriated the forest and sold it to a Swiss company, Holcim, which respected its environmental commitments, and turned 4,950 acres into a protected forest.

AFP

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BHUTAN



Land of the Thunder Dragon

Steeped in history, rich in culture and abundant in breathtaking scenery, Bhutan has much to offer the Middle Eastern traveller in search of a truly unique travel destination

A small land-locked country in Asia, nestled in the world's highest peaks, Bhutan is a unique destination where happiness and peace of mind are contagious.

The Himalayan Kingdom, also known as 'The Land of The Thunder Dragon' is a destination for nature lovers, adventure aficionados, wildlife enthusiasts, culture buffs and those in search of a truly unique and captivating travel experience. Home to many luxury hotels, restaurants and bespoke experiences for travelers of all ages to enjoy, the country also offers a sophisticated escape from the hustle and bustle of city life.

Located between Tibet (China) and India, Bhutan exudes spirituality, inspiring the kingdom's culture and creating a destination that welcomes people of all backgrounds and religions. This warm welcome creates an environment perfect for the Middle Eastern traveler, Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Bhutan offers ease of accessibility for travelers from the region with transfers available from Delhi, Kathmandu and Calcutta - all within approximately a four-hour flight from the UAE and KSA. Other transfers include via Bangkok, Singapore and

Bangladesh on a regular basis. In September 2022, the Kingdom unveiled a new Tourism Strategy underpinned by transformations in three key areas - enhancements to its sustainable development policies, infrastructure upgrades, and the elevation of the guest experience. This strategy is driven by the kingdom's commitment to sustainable practices, with a US\$200 daily tourist fee contributing to programmes that preserve Bhutan's cultural traditions, as well as sustainability projects, infrastructure upgrades and opportunities for youth.

With 70% of the country forested, Bhutan is the world's first carbon negative country, reflecting the country's unique approach to sustainable tourism. A pleasant year-round climate of warm to moderate temperatures, with cool, crisp evenings, makes Bhutan the perfect destination to visit any time of the year. From storied cities, to soaring mountains, the door to the kingdom is open once again to old and new friends.

Stay options

Accommodation in Bhutan is of a very high standard, with a wide variety of choice available, ranging from home stays through to 3*, 4* and 5* hotels. There are nine different 5* luxury brands operating throughout the



With an abundance of outdoor activities and cultural experiences, Bhutan makes for the ideal destination for family travel

country, including Aman, Six Senses, Como, Taj, Le Meridien, Dusit, Bhutan Spirit Sanctuary, Gangtey Lodge and the Bhutanese 5* brand Zhiwaling. There are also excellent 3* and 4* options for travellers.

With an abundance of outdoor activities and cultural experiences, Bhutan makes for the ideal destination for family travel. The TRans Bhutal Trail is a 403km hiking route, spanning from Haa in the West of Bhutan to Trashigang in the East, considered one of the world's greatest walks and one of the best hiking routes in Asia. The not-for-profit sustainable tourism initiative showcases a unique piece of Bhutan's cultural heritage for the benefit of its people - with treks ranging from one hour to one month. Other family activities include archery camps, horse riding, white water rafting, etc.

Nature and outdoors

The Tiger's Nest Monastery, also known as Paro Takstang, is one of Bhutan's most recognized spots and makes for perfect hike destination.

As a Himalayan country, Bhutan has a many beautiful rivers ideal for water sports. The most popular rivers for rafting are Mo Chu and Pho Chu in Punakha and rafting can be done throughout every season of the year. Archery, kayaking, trekking, mountain-biking, fishing, rock-climbing and paragliding are some of the other outdoor activities adventure lovers can enjoy amongst beautiful surroundings.

The expansive network of National Parks of Bhutan is home to an outstanding diversity of wildlife species and ecosystems. The lush tropical forest in the southern lowlands

is home to tigers, rhinos, and many bespoke tours offer visitors a chance to get up close and personal with wildlife.

Culture

Bhutan has a rich cultural heritage and follows the peaceful teachings and beliefs of Buddhism, reflected in the many breath-taking monasteries and temples open for visitors. The people of Bhutan celebrate many festivals throughout the year such as Paro Tshechu, the spring festival celebrated in March, Gomphu Kora Festival in Trashigang and Haa Summer Festival.

The cuisine of Bhutan may have been influenced by India, China, and Tibet, but the local food still remains unique. Visitors can find many vegetarian restaurants within the country, providing many 'hala' options for visitors. Many restaurants also provide Arabic mezze. All meat is imported as it is illegal to slaughter any living thing in Bhutan.

Bhutan also boasts many Yoga & Meditation centres, including intensive programmes to retreats, drop-in centers and hermitages creating ample opportunities to achieve a state of inner calm and zen. Visitors can also drop into a monastery and unwind in sessions with the resident monks. AFP



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