

► NEWS BRIEF

H M RECEIVES THANKS CABLE FROM PRESIDENT OF UZBEKISTAN

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from President Dr Shavkat Mirziyoyev of the Republic of Uzbekistan in reply to His Majesty's congratulatory cable to him on being re-elected his country's President.

ARMED GANG TAKES PIAGET JEWELLERY WORTH MILLIONS IN PARIS HEIST

Paris, France - An armed gang robbed a Paris store of luxury jewellery and watch brand Piaget on Tuesday, making off with €10mn-15mn worth of goods in broad daylight, police and prosecutors said.

According to early indications, three people were involved in the robbery at around 1pm (1100 GMT), with at least one of them carrying a weapon.

Nobody was hurt, a police source said.

The store is located on the Rue de la Paix in the heart of the French capital, situated near the prestigious Place Vendome and home to several stores of high-end jewellery brands.



Jabal Akhdar Festival from Thursday



Yemeni coffee 'Wave': True brew

Oman jumps 16 spots in global industrial competitive index

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In its latest report, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) has placed Oman 56th globally and 5th among Arab nations for industrial competitiveness in 2023. In the last seven years, the sultanate has made significant progress from 72nd in 2016.

The Competitive Industrial Performance (CIP) Index, which evaluates the industrial competitiveness of more than 153 countries worldwide, credited Oman's remarkable progress to its diversification of industrial activities and an increase in the volume of its industrial exports.

This significant 16-place rise in global rankings over a relatively short span of seven years is testament to the growth of industrial competitiveness in Oman, stated the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).



The improved ranking signifies Oman's commitment to bolstering the competitiveness of its industrial sector

H E DR SALEH BIN SAID MASAN

This momentum is anticipated to continue, bolstered by the industrial strategy implemented by MoCIIP. The strategy aims to stimulate the industrial sector and increase its contribution to the gross domestic product, strengthening Oman's global



standing as a manufacturing hub.

H E Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Undersecretary for Commerce and Industry at MoCIIP, highlighted the fact that Oman's im-

proved ranking in the index signifies the sultanate's commitment to bolstering the competitiveness of its industrial sector. "This is achieved through

execution of the Industrial Strategy 2040, the guiding force for industrial development in Oman."

H E Masan noted that the

ministry is formulating initiatives to enhance the efficiency of the industrial sector, promote the use of Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies in production, and empower local industries in international markets. "These measures will also support the growth of managerial and financial competencies of industrial entrepreneurs."

According to the 2023 index, Germany continues to hold the top position as the country with the world's most competitive manufacturing sector. Germany has maintained this position since 2001. However, China, currently ranked second, has shown impressive growth and dynamism since 1990, gradually closing the gap between the two countries.

The other top five countries in the 2023 index are Ireland, South Korea and the United States of America. The UAE is ranked first in the Arab region and 29th globally.

Oman calls for international action against desecration of the Quran

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a virtual meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Oman expressed its strong disapproval of the repeated incidents of desecration and burning of the *Holy Quran* in Sweden and Denmark.

The extraordinary 18th session of OIC saw active participation of Oman, represented by H E Sheikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthi, Undersecretary for Political Affairs in the Foreign Ministry.

During the meeting, H E Harthi conveyed Oman's strong condemnation of these acts. He stated such acts were not only an overt assault on the *Holy Quran* but also a violation of Islamic sanctities. He underscored that such provocations offend the feelings of Muslims around the world.



In his address, H E Harthi reiterated Oman's appeal to the global community. He urged international bodies to make incitement to hatred and religious intolerance criminal offences.

He further stressed the importance of cultivating values of peaceful coexistence and tolerance among diverse religious and cultural societies, and called for increased international understanding and cooperation to build a world of peace and mutual

respect.

The OIC Ministerial Council echoed Oman's sentiments, condemning all attempts to offend Islamic values and symbols, and those of other religions, under the guise of freedom of expression.

It noted that such actions contravene Articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and urged the global community to collectively oppose these provocative attempts.

Ministry allays fears of rice shortage

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Following India's ban on the export of non-basmati rice last month, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has allayed concerns of a potential rice shortage in Oman.

In a statement, MAFWR said that it has been following up on developments that have taken place since the decision by India to stop the export of rice. "In this context, the ministry confirms, in coordination with government agencies, that the strategic stock of rice in the sultanate is safe and there is no cause for concern about its shortage or high prices."

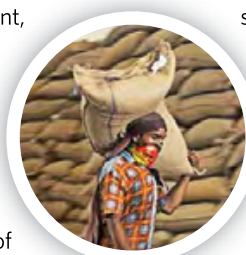
The ministry added that these actions are followed up periodically, situations evaluated and

appropriate measures taken accordingly.

On July 20, India ordered a halt to its largest rice export category in a move that has roughly halved shipments by the world's largest exporter of the grain, triggering fears of further inflation in global food markets.

The Indian government said it was imposing a ban on non-basmati white rice after retail rice prices climbed 3% in a month after late but heavy monsoon rains caused significant damage to crops.

The ban is the latest blow to the global rice market, where prices have risen 15-20% since September 2022 - this coming after a period of relative stability in the earlier part of that year, even as prices of other cereals were soaring due to the Russia-Ukraine war.



SAYYID SHIHAB RECEIVES UK AMBASSADOR



H H Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office on Tuesday H E Dr Liane Saunders, Ambassador of the United Kingdom to the Sultanate of Oman. H H Sayyid Shihab wished the ambassador success in carrying out her duties in Oman. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations and discussed several matters of mutual interest (ONA)

Minister reviews Dibba-Khasab road, other strategic projects in Musandam

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Said bin Hamood al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidi, Governor of Musandam, inspected key transportation projects in Musandam governorate on Tuesday.

This exercise aligns with the government's commitment to foster growth and development in the region.

During the visit, H E Maawali assessed the progress of the Dibba-Lima-Khasab road project. He visited the proposed route and met project managers to understand the challenges in its implementation in order to address the needs of Lima's residents.

The inspection team also visited several beaches which will be-



H E Maawali visited the proposed route of the Dibba-Lima-Khasab road and met project managers to understand the challenges in its implementation

come accessible following completion of the road.

They considered alternate designs and solutions in the Khub al Shamsi area and discussed with

government agencies how to overcome hurdles to establishment of contractor equipment sites in Khasab, Lima and Dibba. These efforts mark the prepa-

rations for construction with the aim of involving local small and medium enterprises in the project and increasing local added value.

The inspection team also visited the Khor Najd-Kumzar road, where hurdles in the route and implementation plans were assessed. The officials focused on devising an execution strategy that includes the expertise of local companies familiar with the region's topography. They also reviewed the Moh tunnel project plan and challenges in its implementation.

H E Maawali was updated on the operational progress at Khasab Port, now managed by Hutchison Sohar Company. He reviewed plans of operational enhancements and discussed future strategies for development of the port.

Our Correspondent

Muscat

Al Bashayer Festival, renowned for its Arabian camel racing, has won the Best Arab Tourism Festival Award at the 3rd Arab Forum for Tourism and Heritage in Salalah.

The award was announced on the first day of the two-day forum on Monday, inaugurated by Sayyid Marwan Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

The event, organised by the Arab Union for Tourism Media

The award was announced during the 3rd Arab Forum for Tourism and Heritage in Salalah

includes various sessions and workshops focused on tourism and heritage, with a special emphasis on 'Cultural Tourism as a Tool for Social and Economic Development'.

The forum's opening cere-

mony offered a visual display of Dhofar governorate, speeches from various participants, and a documentary highlighting the contributions of Dr Abdulaziz al-Musallam, Director of Sharjah Heritage Institute.

Dr Musallam was bestowed with the Arab Heritage Personality Award for 2023.

Sayyid Marwan later honoured the winners of the Arab Tourism Media Awards across multiple fields including tourism, investment, heritage, and media. He also acknowledged the ef-

forts of the supporting entities.

Located in Adam under Dakhliyah governorate, Al Bashayer racecourse organises an annual race for coming camels from across the region. The event stands as one of the most notable sporting events in both the sultanate and the GCC.

The festival is held under the office of Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, the Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan.

Muscat - The Court of First Instance in the wilayat of Nizwa has issued four rulings and monetary fines on a commercial entity for contravening the Consumer Protection Law and its subsequent regulations.

The cases originated from four complaints lodged by consumers with the Consumer Protection Department in Dakhiliyah. These customers had engaged the establishment for home kitchen design and installation services. However, the firm failed to deliver as per the contractual terms, causing work delays. Following legal procedures, the establishment was convicted of a misdemeanour and fined RO600.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the Bank's financial results for the six months ended 30 June 2023.

Performance Summary

Our performance in the first half of 2023 shows a 41.9% increase in net profit to R\$21.0 M compared with R\$14.8 M for the same period in 2022. This has been primarily driven by a 37.7% growth in net operating income (before Expected Credit Losses "ECL").

Net interest income was up 48.1% to R209.1 M for the period ended 30 June 2023 compared with R25.4 M for the same period in 2022 mainly due to higher interest income from the favourable interest rate environment partly offset by higher interest expense on our deposits. Net fee income was R24.8 M for the period ended 30 June 2023 compared with R25.3 M for the same period in 2022 largely due to lower fees from cards.

Net trading income increased by 28.1% to R04.1 M compared with R03.2 M for the same period last year owing to higher income from FX Swap.

A net release of R00.5 M has been reported to the Bank's ECL and other credit impairment charges compared with a net release of R05.9 M for the same period last year. The Bank released R00.2 M of Wholesale ECL and R00.3 M of Retail ECL. The ECL release was driven by the reduction in loans and advances to customers.

Operating expenses rose by 8.7% to R025.1 M compared with R023.1 M for the same period in 2022 primarily due to impairment charge on non-financial assets.

Loans and advances to customers decreased by 17.3% to R01,151.7 M compared with R01,391.8 M as at 30 June 2022.

Customer deposits decreased by 1.0% to \$61,919.8 M compared to the same period last year. Our liquidity remains strong, as evidenced by an Advances to Deposit ratio (ADR) of 60.6% at the end of June 2023.

HBON's Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) stood at 25.02% as at 30 June 2023 compared with 21.4% as at 30 June 2022.

Merger with Sohar International Bank

The shareholders of HSBC Oman voted in favour of the merger with Sohar International at the Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) held on 20th June 2023. The shareholders of Sohar International have also voted to approve the merger.

We are working closely with Sonar International to ensure a smooth process that will cause the minimum amount of disruption to our customers and, together, have set a tentative target date of 17th August 2023 as the date of completion of the merger. This timeline remains subject to all formal steps and actions being completed without any delays on account of factors beyond the control of HSBC Oman and Sonar International.

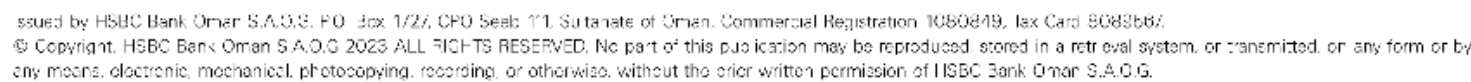
On completion of the merger, all HSBC Oman customers and colleagues will automatically transfer to Schar International, and the existing HSBC Oman entity will be dissolved.

Conclusion

Finally, I would like to express how proud we are of our involvement in the development of the Sultanate over the decades, as we mark our 75th anniversary in Oman this year. We have pioneered products and financial innovations that have helped the people and businesses of Oman thrive, and played our part in developing the banking sector in the country.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to extend my gratitude and appreciation to all our stakeholders who contributed to the success of our journey in Oman. These include our employees, our customers, our shareholders, the regulator and the communities in which we operate. Together, they have shaped HSBC Bank Oman into the organization it is today.

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles
Chairman



Interim condensed statement of comprehensive income for the three month and the six month period ended 30 June 2023 (unaudited)

Discontinued Operations*	Three month period ended 30 June 2023	Three month period ended 30 June 2022	Six month period ended 30 June 2023	Six month period ended 30 June 2022
	R'O'000	R'O'000	R'O'000	R'O'000
Interest income	27,198	17,810	53,811	33,592
Interest expense	(8,001)	(3,802)	(14,722)	(7,523)
Net interest income	19,197	14,008	39,089	26,069
Fee income	3,854	3,898	7,394	7,007
Fee expense	(1,008)	(912)	(2,505)	(1,755)
Net fee income	2,846	2,886	4,809	5,252
Net trading income	2,447	1,590	4,086	3,201
Other operating income - net	(9)	(6)	241	222
Net operating income before loan impairment charges and other credit risk provisions	24,481	18,468	48,225	35,039
Change in expected credit losses and other credit impairment charges - net	44	3,859	472	5,892
Net operating income	24,525	22,347	48,697	40,931
Employee compensation and benefits	(5,351)	(5,272)	(10,734)	(10,396)
General and administrative expenses	(5,434)	(5,376)	(10,945)	(11,517)
Depreciation and impairment of property, equipment and right-of-use assets	(987)	(434)	(2,499)	(396)
Amortisation and impairment of intangible assets	(833)	(18)	(965)	(18)
Total operating expenses	(12,705)	(11,070)	(25,143)	(23,127)
Profit before tax	11,820	11,277	23,554	17,804
Tax expense	(1,930)	(1,852)	(2,598)	(2,984)
Profit for the period from discontinued operations	9,890	9,425	20,956	14,820
Other comprehensive income / (loss)				
Items that will be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss when specific conditions are met				
Debt instruments at fair value through other comprehensive income				
- fair value loss	(334)	(326)	(276)	(190)
- Expected credit losses recognised in income statement	(76)	(407)	(17)	(384)
- Tax expense	50	49	41	20
Other comprehensive loss for the period - net of tax from discontinued operations	(360)	(684)	(252)	(494)
Total comprehensive income for the period from discontinued operations	9,530	8,741	20,704	14,326
Earnings per share – basic and diluted for discontinued operations				
- for the period (R'O)	0.005	0.005	0.010	0.002
- annualised (R'O)	0.020	0.019	0.021	0.016

**Interim condensed statement of financial position as at
30 June 2023 (unaudited)**

	At 30 June 2023*	At 30 June 2022	Audited At 31 December 2022
	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000
Assets			
Cash and balances with central banks	334,004	138,491	123,303
Due from banks	321,508	268,825	283,759
Loans and advances to customers - net	1,151,710	1,391,846	1,247,387
Financial investments	546,617	528,072	538,213
Other assets	27,517	58,539	26,304
Intangible assets	-	1,332	365
Property and equipment	15,506	20,047	17,363
Right-of-use assets	2,110	2,690	2,393
Deferred tax assets	2,007	2,614	1,335
Total assets held for distribution to Shareholders *	2,401,379	-	-
Total assets	2,401,379	2,410,340	2,241,529
Liabilities and equity			
Liabilities			
Due to banks	56,322	54,120	45,762
Deposits from customers	1,919,781	1,939,012	1,765,273
Current tax liabilities	4,626	5,124	6,303
Other liabilities	54,557	60,536	61,303
Lease liabilities	2,075	2,537	2,338
Total liabilities associated with assets held for distribution to Shareholders *	2,037,361	-	-
Total liabilities	2,037,351	2,061,325	1,862,311
Equity			
Share capital	200,031	200,031	200,031
Legal reserve	50,448	47,777	50,449
FOCI reserve	(142)	836	110
Retained earnings	113,681	100,317	108,723
Net assets held for distribution *	354,018	-	-
Total equity	354,018	349,011	359,317
Total liabilities associated with assets held for distribution to Shareholders and equity*	2,401,379	-	-
Total liabilities and equity	2,401,379	2,410,340	2,241,529

*Please refer to note 2.1 (g) of this interim condensed financial information for further details.

The interim condensed financial information were authorised for issue on 27 July 2023 in accordance with the resolution of the Board of Directors.

Opening up a world of opportunity



Jabal Akhdar Festival from Thursday to focus on tourism, traditions

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Beginning this Thursday, the exciting activities of the much-anticipated Jabal Akhdar Festival will get underway.

The festival, coordinated by the Office of Governor of Dakhliyah in cooperation with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, will take place from August 3 to August 19. Hail al Yemen Park will serve as the main venue, with events also taking place at Saih Qatanah Park.

The festival's purpose is multifold - to attract tourists, both domestic and international; showcase the natural splendour and rich cultural heritage of Jabal Akhdar and the sultanate; and to provide a platform for entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises to participate and seize tourism promo-

Hail al Yemen Park will serve as the main venue of the festival - from August 3 to August 19 - with events also taking place at Saih Qatanah Park

tion opportunities.

Throughout the festival, visitors can explore the Bait al Rudaydah Exhibition held near the Bait al Rudaydah Fort in Birkat al Mouz. This is a must-see for festival-goers and tourists seeking services or products to enrich their experience in Jabal Akhdar. The festival also features an exhibition of productive families and small and medium enter-

prises.

A plethora of activities, events and programmes suited for the whole family is included in the festival agenda. From a youth corner to a children's corner, there's something for everyone.

Spectacular paragliding displays, theatrical performances (Aladdin Show), a Chemical Science show and more will entertain attendees.

Adventure sport enthusiasts can look forward to a variety of races and events, such as the Jabal Akhdar Mountain Bike Race organised by Omani Cycling Association, tourist walking activities and the Himam Taster Run race.

Additionally, festival attendees can delve into the history of the wilayat of Jabal Akhdar by visiting the historical cliff houses in Al Sogara village, which hosts several accompanying events.

New water park opens in in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Al Naseem Water Park, a new entertainment attraction in Salalah, has started operations adding a significant asset to the tourism and entertainment sector in Dhofar governorate, especially during khareef.

H H Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, and Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, conducted a field tour of the 40,000sqm park located in the Sahel Attin area of Salalah and inspected its amenities.

Dr Musab al Hina'i, CEO of Al Naseem Group, stated that the park's establishment aligns with the group's commitment to advancing tourism development in Dhofar governorate. He emphasised the economic benefits of the water park in Salalah, particularly in terms of job creation for Omanis. The park caters to a wide age demographic, beginning from age two and above.

Free home delivery & timely service

2-day forum on endowments held in Salalah

Salalah - The two-day Endowments Investment and Promotion Forum started in Salalah on Tuesday.

Themed 'Endowment: Sustainability & Growth', H E Dr Mahad Said Ba'owain, Minister of Labour, presided over the opening.

The agenda on Day 1 included two presentations - the first explored the forum's objectives and framework, while the second delved into the state of endowments in the sultanate.

Attendees also participated in four sessions that examined the endowment sector's contribu-

tion in achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The forum also witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, the Oman National Investments Development Company (Tanmia) and Bank

ABRAJ

ENERGY SERVICES SAOG

Chairman's Report

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Abraj Energy Services SAOG, I am pleased to present the condensed interim financial statements for half year ended and for three months period ended 30th June 2023.

HSE:

Abraj HSE performance in Q2 2023 was great as there was no Loss Time Incident (LTI) or major incident in Q2 2023. All Units have achieved unit KPI target score in Q2 2023 as per the set criteria.

Company Financial Performance

During the half year ended 30th June 2023, the Company has completed all the planned major maintenance activities for some of the drilling rigs in 2023. This is required to be done for ongoing recertification of rig equipments.

Key Financials of your company:-

- Revenue during H1-2023 (6 months period ended 30th June), has increased compared to H1 2022 by 2.2% from OMR 68.2 M to OMR 69.7 M. Further, during Q2-2023 (3 months period ended 30th June) increase in revenue compared to Q2 2022 by 7.4% from OMR 33.8 M to OMR 36.3 M).
- Total expense during H1-2023 (6 months period ended 30th June) has increased compared to H1-2022 by 8.8 % from OMR 58.2 M to OMR 63.3 M. Further, during Q2-2023 (3 months period ended 30th June) total expense has increased compared to Q2-2022 by 8.3% from OMR 30 M to RO 32.5 M.
- Profit after tax during H1-2023, has decreased compared to H1 2022 by 37.5% from OMR 10.4 M to OMR 6.5 M as a result of major planned maintenance activities and also finance cost had increased due to higher benchmark rate of USD loans for USD LIBOR rate in H1-2023 compared to H1-2022.

Segment Financial Performances – H1-2023 Vs H1-2022 and Q2-2023 Vs Q2-2022:

Drilling and Workover

- This segment revenue has remained almost the same during H1-2023 at OMR 61.4 M as compared to that of H1-2022 i.e. 61.3 M. However, during Q2-2023, the revenue has increased compared to Q2-2022 by 7.3 % from OMR 30.0 M in Q2-2022 to OMR 32.2 M despite no change in the asset count.
- Profit after tax for this segment has decreased by 42.1 % in H1-2023 as compared to that of H1-2022 from OMR 10.6 M to OMR 6.1 M. During Q2-2023 profit after tax for this segment has decreased by 10.3 % from OMR 4.1 M in Q2-2022 to OMR 3.7 M in Q2-2023. This decrease is largely due to increase in OPEX as a result of major planned maintenance activities carried out during H1-2023 and higher finance cost due to higher benchmark reference rate for USD loans as compared to H1-2022.

Well Services and Others

- This segment revenue has increased by 19% during H1-2023 as compared to that of H1-2022 from OMR 6.9 M to OMR 8.2 M. This segment revenue during Q2-2023 has increased compared to Q2 2022 from OMR 3.8 M to OMR 4.1 M). The increase in revenue is mainly from fracturing business.
- As a result of the above, Profit after tax for this segment during H1-2023 has increased to OMR 353 K compared to a loss of OMR 213 K in H1-2022. During Q2-2023, profit after tax for this segment has increased to OMR 161 K as compared to a loss of OMR 220 K during Q2-2022.

Acknowledgements:

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I take this opportunity to express their sincere and deep gratitude to the vision and wise leadership of the country's leader His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq for maintaining sustainable growth and prosperity of Omani Economy. Abraj Board also appreciates the valuable support and guidance from the various stakeholders such as Government agencies, Shareholders, Clients, Management, Employees, Bankers and Suppliers.

Ayad Al Balushi
Chairman of the Board

CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	30 June 2023 (Unaudited) RO'000	31 December 2022 (Audited) RO'000
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property and equipment	191,801	196,106
Right-of-use assets	5,035	5,996
Intangible assets	248	191
Deferred tax assets	540	662
Deferred expenses – non-current	106	119
Capex Advances	2,322	1,180
Total non-current assets	200,052	204,254
Current assets		
Trade and other receivables	39,768	33,974
Advances and prepayments	1,453	2,895
Deferred expenses – current	30	140
Inventories	21,776	18,605
Bank term deposits	-	18,449
Cash and cash equivalents	4,573	4,120
Total current assets	67,600	78,183
Total assets	267,652	282,437
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Capital and reserves		
Share capital	77,020	77,020
Legal reserve	9,710	9,062
Retained earnings	48,970	58,539
Total equity	135,700	144,621
Non-current liabilities		
Term loans – non-current portion	69,982	76,953
Deferred income	1,475	1,857
Deferred tax liabilities	4,387	4,437
Employees' end of services benefits	2,061	1,955
Lease liabilities - non-current portion	3,378	4,288
Total non-current liabilities	81,283	89,490
Current liabilities		
Term loans - current portion	22,112	18,841
Lease liabilities - current	1,932	1,958
Trade payables	15,906	15,928
Other payables	8,754	7,489
Deferred income	772	1,027
Income tax payable	1,193	3,083
Total current liabilities	50,669	48,326
Total liabilities	131,952	137,816
Total equity and liabilities	267,652	282,437

CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE SIX MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 31 JUNE (UNAUDITED)

	(Unaudited)			
	Three months ended 30 June		Six months ended 30 June	
	2023 RO'000	2022 RO'000	2023 RO'000	2022 RO'000
Revenue from contracts with customers	36,308	33,775	69,647	68,195
Cost of sales	(27,981)	(25,804)	(55,111)	(49,816)
Gross profit	8,327	7,971	14,536	18,379
General and administrative expenses	(1,813)	(1,613)	(3,232)	(2,990)
Other expenses	(443)	(412)	(541)	(653)
Other income	-	17	14	103
Expected credit loss reversal / (charge) on trade receivables	-	(10)	204	(38)
Operating profit	6,071	5,953	10,981	14,801
Finance costs	(1,422)	(1,454)	(3,286)	(2,833)
Finance income	57	126	101	238
Net Finance costs	(1,365)	(1,328)	(3,185)	(2,595)
Profit before tax	4,706	4,625	7,796	12,206
Taxation	(829)	(702)	(1,313)	(1,839)
Profit for the period	3,877	3,923	6,483	10,367
Other comprehensive income for the period	-	-	-	-
Total comprehensive income for the period	3,877	3,923	6,483	10,367
Earnings per share				
Basic and diluted earnings per share-Baiza	5.0	5.1	8.4	13.5

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Oman's oil exports drop 5.8% to 153mn barrels in H1 2023

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's oil exports declined 5.8% in the first half of this year to 152.9mn barrels compared with 162.4mn barrels recorded in the corresponding period of 2022, according to the data released by National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

However, the sultanate's oil production slightly increased in the first six months of 2023.

The decline in Oman's total oil exports was mainly due to a sharp drop in oil shipments to India, South Korea and Japan while exports to China grew in 2023.

Oil exports to China, the largest buyer of Oman's crude, accounted for 92% of the total oil exports in the first six months of this year. Total exports to China rose by 14.4% to 140.8mn barrels during January-June this year compared to 123.1mn barrels in the same period of 2022.

On the other hand, exports to India dropped by 89% to just 2.7mn barrels during the first six months of 2023 from 25.4mn barrels in the same period of 2022. Oil shipments to Japan and South Korea also decreased in the first half of this year. Total oil exports for the full year 2022 had increased by 10.6% to 319.5mn barrels in comparison with 288.9mn barrels in 2021.

Output inches up 0.9%
Oman's daily average production



Average price at which Oman sold its crude during first six months of 2023 fell 9.9% to \$81.4 per barrel from \$90.4 per barrel recorded in the same period of 2022

of crude oil continued to remain above one million barrels per day (bpd) during the first six months of 2023, up by 0.9% in comparison to daily average output recorded in the same period of last year.

Daily average oil output during the January-June period of 2023

increased to 1.057mn bpd compared with 1.047mn bpd in the same period of 2022, the NCSI data showed.

The sultanate's total oil production in the first six months of 2023 also grew by 0.9% to 191.3mn barrels compared to 189.5mn barrels in the same pe-

riod of last year.

Of the total production, crude output slightly decreased 0.4% year-on-year to 149.8mn barrels during the January-June period, while condensates output grew 6.3% to 41.5mn barrels during the first four six of 2023.

The sultanate's total oil production for the full year 2022 had increased by nearly 10% to 388.4mn barrels compared to 354.5mn barrels recorded in 2021.

The average price at which Oman sold its crude during the first six months of 2023 decreased 9.9% to \$81.4 per barrel

from \$90.4 per barrel recorded in the same period of 2022.

However, average oil price for June remained at \$83.3 per barrel compared with the May price at \$78.5, the NCSI data showed.

As a result of high oil revenues, Oman posted a budget surplus of RO1.14bn for the full year 2022 against an estimated deficit of RO1.55bn in the beginning of last year year.

As a precaution against oil price volatility, Oman's 2023 state budget is based on an average oil price estimate of \$55 per barrel and average oil production of 1.175mn barrels per day.



SEZAD to organise first Duqm Economic Forum on October 16

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) will organise the first Duqm Economic Forum on October 16, 2023.

The aim of the forum is to highlight the investment opportunities available in the zone, which is witnessing rapid economic and urban growth.

The organisation of the forum comes within the efforts of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and a number of other government agencies to attract more investments to SEZAD.

The Duqm Economic Forum discusses many issues related to investment in SEZAD, most notably investment in green industries, renewable energy projects, and other industries.

The event, which will highlight the growth opportunities available to small and medium enterprises, is expected to witness the signing of a number of agreements and memorandums of understanding (MoUs).

The forum will allow investors to closely view the economic projects in SEZAD, learn about the investment opportunities available, and the possible areas of partnership.

Many major local and international companies are expected to participate in the forum to showcase their capabilities, key projects and experiences in various economic sectors.

SEZAD has recently emerged as a hub for renewable energy, green hydrogen and green iron projects. The zone currently includes a variety of investment projects with an investment volume of about RO3.6bn, most notably: Duqm Refinery, Ras Markaz Terminal, Oman Dry-Dock, integrated power and water station, and many projects in the industrial, tourism, commercial, real estate development, logistics, transportation and services sectors.

SEZAD also has high quality infrastructure project such as Duqm Airport, Duqm Port, and a multi-purpose fishing port.

Oman American Business Council appoints Rebecca Olson as CEO

Muscat - The Oman American Business Council (OABC) has announced the appointment of Rebecca Olson as the new chief executive officer, effective August 1, 2023.

Rebecca previously served as the executive director for the OABC for five years before departing in July 2022, and now returns to lead the organisation as the CEO.

In her new role, Rebecca will be responsible for overseeing the execution of the OABC's mission: implementing new initiatives to improve trade, develop bilateral relations, and establish a stronger presence promoting Oman trade and investment in the United States.



Rebecca Olson

OABC president and chairman emeritus, Ali Daud, expressed his appreciation for Rebecca's leadership during her previous period as executive director.

Daud said, "We're ushering in a new era for OABC and for the business relationship between Oman and the US over the coming years. Rebecca has a wealth of experience and earned the respect of our business community members, and we are confident she will lead OABC to accomplish our objectives."

"In line with Vision 2040, and the country's plan to diversify its economy, we intend to establish new avenues to seize the potential US-Oman Free Trade Agreement, one of only four such agreements in the entire MENA region," he added.

Rebecca expressed her gratitude upon returning to the OABC and said, "I am honored and priv-

ileged to serve as CEO of the OABC, the country's leading business networking organisation and the official affiliate of the US Chamber of Commerce in Oman. I look forward to working together with the board, our members, and our dedicated staff to ensure we continue contributing to the growth of an active business community in Oman, building bridges for trade and investment with the US, and fulfilling the expectations of our members."

The Oman American Business Center promotes understanding, partnerships, and other matters of mutual economic interest between business communities in Oman and the US.



UAE oil giant pledges to 'accelerate' net-zero plan

Dubai, UAE - The national oil giant of the United Arab Emirates, host of this year's UN climate talks, said Monday it had accelerated its emission reduction goal to achieve carbon neutrality by 2045.

The Abu Dhabi National Oil Company "is accelerating its decarbonisation plan to advance its net-zero ambition to 2045, compared to its previous target of 2050," ADNOC said in a statement.

It said it intends to "increase its investments and redouble efforts in decarbonisation," relying on an initial financing of \$15bn for "low-carbon solutions" and achieving "zero methane emissions by 2030".

Environmental groups charge that net-zero pledges from the world's energy giants are misleading when the companies in fact plan to increase their oil and gas sales, as ADNOC does.

The pledges to cut emissions apply to producing, refining and

The UAE, one of the world's leading oil exporters, is set to host the COP28 climate summit in November and December

processing operations - not to the vastly greater emissions caused when the fuel is burnt to power cars, planes and factories.

The oil giant said it has "reduced its greenhouse gas emissions" by about five million tons in 2022, mostly through the use of solar and nuclear energy, to power all of its onshore operations.

The UAE, one of the world's leading oil exporters, is set to host the COP28 climate summit in November and December.

Its new plans set this month to reduce greenhouse gas emis-

sions by 19% by 2030 compared to 2019 levels were criticised by analysts as "insufficient".

Climate Action Tracker, a project run by non-profit climate groups, said that while this marked an improvement on the UAE's previous plan, its intention to increase fossil fuel production would render it "unachievable".

ADNOC CEO Sultan Al Jaber, who will head up the UN climate talks, has argued that fossil fuels will continue to play a key role, and that carbon capture technologies will play contain emissions.

The world remains far off track on the Paris Agreement's goals to curb global warming to two degrees Celsius, and preferably 1.5C.

Meanwhile, global temperatures have hit record highs this month as people across the planet have been pounded by floods, storms and crop-withering heatwaves.

Takaful Oman records rise in profit

Muscat - Takaful Oman Insurance said that it has recorded a rise in profit and turnover this year as the company stays committed to sustained growth.

Takaful Oman Insurance has showcased remarkable business transformation and unwavering resilience amidst challenging market conditions, the company said in a press release.

In line with its growth strategy, Takaful Oman has achieved several milestones, i.e. raising the capital, improving financial performances, strengthening leadership team, onboarding a digital platform and establishing an omnichannel contact centre to provide a

seamless customer experience.

In June 2022, the company successfully floated RO6mn rights issue, fully subscribed, raising the company's capital from RO10mn to RO16mn. This achievement demonstrates the shareholders' trust and confidence in the company's future.

This transaction has resulted in the company becoming the Ominvest group subsidiary, one of the region's most prestigious and growing groups.

On the financial front, Takaful Oman has recorded a significant improvement. The deficit of RO6mn in the participants' fund in 2021 has reduced significantly to RO0.6mn. This positive momentum continues

in 2023, turning into a surplus of RO0.3mn for six months, ending June 30, 2023.

The company's net loss ratios have improved from 96% (2021) to 79% (2022). This has improved to 102% in the first six months of 2023.

The combined ratios of the company have improved from 151% (2021) to 119% (2022). This has improved to 102% in the first six months of 2023.

Recognising the significance of digitalisation as a driver of growth, Takaful Oman has transformed its call centre into an omnichannel platform, enhancing B2C and B2B interactions.

Leveraging its technological prowess, the company has created a user-

friendly, intuitive, responsive platform that boosts customer satisfaction.

Commenting on the company's renewed business approach, Sulaiman Hamad al Harthy, chairman of Takaful Oman, said, "It gives me great pride to say that Takaful Oman has thrived in a continuously evolving market by leading with innovative solutions, refining its core competencies, and placing increased emphasis on the budding needs of customers. The company has embarked on an exciting journey driven by key strategic initiatives."

Takaful Oman Insurance is one of the leading takaful insurers in Oman, established in 2014.

Eurozone economy grows as inflation slows in July

Brussels, Belgium - Economic growth in the eurozone rebounded in the second quarter, data showed Monday, but concerns remain over inflation that is slowing yet still stubbornly high, and over stagnation in the German economy.

The EU's Eurostat data agency said growth in the 20-country single currency zone reached 0.3% over the April-June period after recording zero growth in the first three months of the year.

The first-quarter figure was revised from a decline of 0.1% that had signalled a technical recession.

The figures came after data last week showed that Germany's gross domestic product (GDP) stagnated between April and June, though the French and Spanish economies grew more than expected.

The European Central Bank (ECB) has hiked interest rates to their highest level since May 2001 to tame red-hot inflation, though its president Christine Lagarde last week indicated that the aggressive rate-hiking campaign could be paused.

Analysts suggest that another hike is still a possibility, and could further constrain economic growth.

"With monetary tightening still expected to have its most



European Central Bank has hiked interest rates to their highest level since May 2001 to tame red-hot inflation

dampening effect on growth later, continued broad stagnation of economic activity remains the most likely outcome for the coming quarters," said Bert Colijn, senior eurozone economist at ING.

Colijn said the eurozone GDP reading would not be "a dovish argument" at the next ECB rate-setting meeting in September, "leaving a further hike on the table".

While the eurozone registered a slight drop in overall inflation this month, to 5.3% from 5.5% in June, in line with analyst expectations, core inflation - which

strips out more volatile elements - was unchanged at 5.5%.

Both figures remain far higher than the ECB's two-percent target, though Lagarde said before the data release that "we are reaching our goal".

"By all accounts, monetary policy has started to have an effect for lowering inflation," she told French daily Le Figaro in an interview published late Sunday.

Also, food and drink costs are still rising sharply, at 10.8% compared with 11.6% in June, hitting European consumers' wallets.

Energy prices, however, dipped further, falling by 6.1% in

July on the back of a drop of 5.6% in June.

The core inflation rate, which excludes fast-changing energy, food, alcohol and tobacco prices, is the key indicator for the Frankfurt-based ECB.

Among the 20 countries that use the euro, Belgium had the lowest inflation rate, at 1.6% in July, Eurostat said.

There will be further concerns over the health of Germany's economy as inflation remains high, reaching 6.5% in July, Eurostat said, down slightly from 6.8% in June.

AFP

HSBC posts bumper profits on rising rates

Hong Kong, China - Banking giant HSBC said on Tuesday that pre-tax profit more than doubled to \$21.7bn in the first half of 2023, boosted by higher interest rates.

The massive jump from \$8.8bn in the same period a year ago came as central banks around the world have ramped up borrowing costs to fight inflation, helping inflation lenders' income.

HSBC said revenue jumped \$12.3bn to \$36.9bn.

"We have delivered a strong first-half performance and are confident of achieving our revised mid-teens return on tangible equity target in 2023 and 2024," chief executive Noel Quinn said in a statement.

"There was good broad-based profit generation around the world, higher revenue in our global businesses driven by strong net interest income, and continued tight cost control," Quinn said.

The firm also said second-quarter earnings came in better than forecast, jumping almost 90 percent to \$8.8bn, thanks to the bumper income from surging interest rates.

With regards the outlook, it said: "Given the current market consensus for global central bank rates, we have raised our 2023 full-year guidance for net interest income to above \$35bn."



HSBC continued to sharpen its focus on Asia for diversification of revenue.

With around two-thirds of its revenue from the region, the lender has sold its Canadian, French retail and Greek businesses, exiting from Russia and downsizing personal banking in New Zealand.

The group said to grow income by investing in wealth business, especially in Asia, would be a key strategic priority to diversify its revenue.

In May it defeated an activist proposal supported by its largest stakeholder, Chinese insurer Ping An, to spin off the bank's Asia business in a search of better returns.

Ping An, which has a stake of more than eight percent in the bank, argued that the lender lags

behind international peers and that a recent improvement in performance was tied mainly to rising interest rates, which it claims have peaked.

Ping An had called on HSBC to engage in a "strategic restructuring" that would see it create a separately-listed bank headquartered in Hong Kong.

The proposal was voted down more than 80% of the voting shareholders.

In June the firm relaunched the newly acquired British arm of collapsed US lender Silicon Valley Bank as part of a major push into technology and life sciences.

The firm rebranded SVB UK as HSBC Innovation Banking, it said in a statement, three months after it bought the unit in a rescue deal for £1 (\$1.20).

AFP



BP profit slumps in Q2 on falling energy prices

London, UK - British energy giant BP on Tuesday announced a drop in second-quarter net profit as oil and gas prices retreated from peaks reached a year earlier following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Profit after tax plunged to \$1.8bn in the three months to the end of June compared with \$9.3bn in the second quarter last year, BP said in a statement, mirroring hefty falls across the sector.

"Our financial performance is impacted by fluctuating prices of oil, gas and refined products," it added.

Energy prices soared a year ago following the Ukraine invasion by key producer Russia, sending global inflation to the highest levels in decades while providing record profits for oil and gas companies.

Russia cut gas shipments to Europe while oil markets were also rocked by supply concerns.

Gas and oil prices have since pulled back but remain at elevated levels.

Despite the slump in profits, BP said it was hiking its dividend and returning \$1.5bn

BP said its profit after tax plunged to \$1.8bn in the three months to the end of June compared with \$9.3bn in second quarter last year

to shareholders by repurchasing stock.

"This reflects confidence in our performance and the outlook for cash flow," chief executive Bernard Looney said in the earnings statement.

BP's share price advanced 1.9% in early London trading following the earnings update.

"BP's move to boost shareholder returns is in line with moves by some of the other leading oil producers as they focus on ensuring investors benefit from the strength of cash flow the industry is currently enjoying," said Steve Clayton, head of equity funds at Hargreaves Lansdown.

Natural gas prices have pulled back sharply as Euro-

pean countries found new suppliers, built up reserves and experienced a mild winter.

Oil prices have also tumbled, partly on fears of falling demand as the global economy slows, with major consumer China's post-Covid recovery stumbling.

Profits remain hefty, however, as oil and gas firms stay focused on pumping out fossil fuels while pivoting toward cleaner energy.

The UK government said Monday that it would issue "hundreds" of new oil and gas licences in the North Sea to secure energy reserves while still aiming for net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

The announcement has angered environmental groups.

"Handing out new oil and gas licences will do nothing to improve our energy security," Charlie Kronick, senior climate advisor at Greenpeace UK, said Tuesday.

He added in a statement that it would instead allow "companies like BP and Shell to rake in even more money for their shareholders".

AFP

China imposes export controls on critical metals and drones

Beijing, China - Chinese controls on exports of two metals critical to making semiconductors came into force on Tuesday, a day after Beijing imposed curbs on the foreign sales of some drones.

The Biden administration has in recent months stepped up measures to restrict Chinese companies' access to the most advanced semiconductors.

China, which seeks to become self-sufficient in semiconductor design, says those measures are aimed at maintaining US supremacy in the field.

From Tuesday, Chinese companies seeking to export gallium or germanium will need to obtain a licence, according to a directive from the Ministry of Commerce.

Under the new rules, they will also need to provide information on the final recipient and give details about their end use.

China accounts for 94% of the world's production of gallium - used in integrated circuits, LEDs and photovoltaic panels - according to a report by the European Union published this year.

For germanium, essential for fibre optics and infrared, China makes up 83% of production.

The export curbs "send a clear



China accounts for 94% of the world's production of gallium - used in integrated circuits, LEDs and photovoltaic panels

signal that China holds all of the power in this dangerous game", analyst James Kennedy told AFP, calling the curbs "an unambiguous message" to the United States.

"If the US chooses further escalation, China's next response will have consequences."

For now, he said, China "aims to cause a minimum of damage" to the United States, because their needs in gallium and germanium are "low" and the metals can be acquired elsewhere.

The measures come as the Biden administration mulls fresh curbs on Chinese access to high-tech chips, as well as on outbound US investments in China.

They also follow curbs by Beijing on the exports of certain types of unmanned aerial vehicles, also known as drones.

As of September 1, exporters will require a licence laying out their end use as well as other details before they can be sold overseas.

A China commerce ministry

spokesperson said the move was not aimed at "any specific country or territory".

But they did cite the risk of drones "being converted for military use" in justifying the restrictions.

China is a major exporter of drones, with the US-blacklisted DJI representing more than 70% of global market share, according to CNBC.

The company's drones are reported to have been used extensively by both sides in the war in Ukraine.

In April 2022, DJI said it was temporarily suspending business in both Russia and Ukraine while it "internally reassess(ed) compliance requirements".

The United States has accused China of mulling arms shipments to support Russia's campaign - claims Beijing has strongly denied.

A US intelligence report last week said Beijing likely supplied Moscow with dual-use civilian-military equipment employed in Ukraine, but noted that it is "difficult to ascertain the extent to which (China) has helped Russia evade and circumvent sanctions and export controls".

AFP

Fed official leaves door open to rate hike pause

Washington, US - A Federal Reserve official left open the possibility on Monday of pausing or stopping interest rate hikes at the central bank's next policy meeting in September, saying "there's nothing off the table."

"Thus far we're on the golden path and we've got to walk that line," Chicago Fed president Austan Goolsbee said in an interview on Yahoo! Finance, referring to the path of lowering inflation without triggering a major recession.

But he signaled as well that the Fed will continue to be data



Austan Goolsbee

dependent in making its next rate decision.

To rein in surging costs of liv-

ing, the Fed has lifted the benchmark lending rate rapidly since March 2022, and most recently raised rates to the highest level in 22 years.

While the full effect of policy will take time to ripple through the economy, inflation has cooled and retail sales is showing signs of easing, even as the labor market remains robust.

"We've never been able to get inflation down even as much as we've gotten it down so far without a recession," Goolsbee said.

"It's looking like we're walking

the line pretty well," he added, calling it "fabulous news" to see inflation coming down.

But policymakers will have to "play by ear" when it comes to the restrictiveness of the policy rate, he said, signaling that the Fed will have to closely eye economic data in the coming months.

Asked about the impact of regional bank failures earlier this year - including the dramatic collapse of Silicon Valley Bank - Goolsbee noted a stabilization in the sector.

AFP

Community sailing to empower Omani youth

Oman Sail and Asyad Group, Oman's leading global integrated logistics provider, have sealed a partnership to use sailing to support youth development across the nation.

The Asyad Community Sailing Programme will allow male and female students from grades 2-10 from 150 public schools across Muscat, North Batinah and South Sharqiyah governorates to experience the joy of being on the water and learn the basics of sailing at Oman Sail's Sailing Schools at Al Mouj Muscat Marina, Sur and Barceló Resort Mussanah.

Through this initiative, participants will benefit from the life skills and personal growth opportunities that sailing offers, including building confidence, developing active citizenship, and engaging in physical activity.

By sharing expertise and resources, Oman Sail and Asyad Group strive to introduce a new generation of sailors to the sport and contribute to the overall development and well-being of the



and create a platform for young people to develop and embrace active living. This engagement is part of our strategy to support communities in Oman, focusing particularly on empowering the youth through innovation, exploration, and resilience building.

"We aim, by leveraging the expertise of Oman Sail, to enable children from all backgrounds to reach their potential, while shaping future athletes and sailing enthusiasts passionate about the maritime sports and industry."

The Asyad Community Sailing Programme will hold 32 youth development sessions at three of Oman Sail's sailing schools and, as part of the agreement also host an open day for people with special needs and a team building session for university students.

Asyad Group employees will also have the chance to support the programme and the community by volunteering to assist in its activities and sharing their maritime and professional experience and knowledge.

youth in Oman.

Dr Khamis al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, said, "We are delighted to be working with Asyad Group to deliver a life-changing programme that will offer long-term benefits for young people of all ages across the nation. This is a unique opportunity to share the expertise of both Oman Sail and Asyad Group to teach valuable life skills through sailing as well as introduce a new generation of sailors to the sport and share our maritime heritage with the youth of Oman."

Dr Ibrahim al Nadhairi, CEO Asyad Shipping and Drydock, said, "Asyad Group is extremely proud to sponsor the Asyad Community Sailing Programme



Khoula performs four complicated scoliosis surgeries

In parallel with the Scoliosis Awareness Week organised by the Department of Orthopedics in Khoula Hospital, the Chiropractic team of the hospital, led by Dr Sultan bin Saif al Kalbani, performed four complicated scoliosis surgeries.

Dr Kalbani, head of the Spine Unit, stressed on the importance of having awareness of scoliosis and its necessity.

Scoliosis is a sideways curve of the spine and is diagnosed often during adolescence. The causes of scoliosis are genetic or unknown and most of the cases may be mild but may get worse with the child's growth.

The curve may result in reduced space in the chest, which makes it difficult for the lungs to work properly.

This special week targeted children, adolescents, parents, nursing staff, and physicians dealing with scoliosis cases.

Dr Kalbani indicated that the

cases with scoliosis are being monitored closely and periodically to measure the increase in curvature. In some cases, it is advised to use a device to prevent the increase in curvature, while other cases require surgical intervention to end the deterioration of the condition.

He also shed light on Oman's efforts in educating families having persons infected with this disease to be aware of the developments of the disease and pay attention to the appearance of symptoms in other children, as well as designating special programmes in school health to detect the disease in pre-adolescent stages.

The awareness week includes a scientific day attended by medical staff to discuss the latest scientific developments, treatment methods, clinical assessment, and classification of scoliosis disease along with other related subjects.

Bahraini delegation visits health ministry

A delegation from Bahrain visited Oman's Ministry of Health (MoH) to have an understanding about the ministry's experience in implementing the Workload Indicators of Staffing Need (WISN) system.

During the visit, which was organised in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO), the delegation met H E Dr Fatma bint Mohammed al Ajmi, Undersecretary for Administrative, Financial & Planning Affairs at MoH. The delegation also visited Bowsheer Health Center.

The two-day visit was organised by the Directorate General of Planning & Studies along with the Directorate General of Primary Healthcare, Directorate General of Nursing Affairs, and other health departments.



Bank Muscat offers chance to experience motorsport

In line with its commitment to providing top-of-the-line features, services, and rewards to its 'Premier Banking' customers, Bank Muscat reminded its customers that the five special-motorsport-experience packages offered in partnership with Visa are still in place and will remain valid until August 31.

This offer is open for the Bank Muscat Private Banking and Asalah Priority Banking Credit Cardholders.

The chance for entering the draw to win one of these once in a life-time packages will be given to Private Banking and Asalah



Priority Banking Credit Cardholders who spend a minimum of RO500, whether online or internationally, on the international e-commerce site, the bank stated.

Five lucky winners - two Asalah Priority Banking Credit Cardholders and three Private Banking Credit Cardholders - will have the chance to visit the Cir-

cuit de Spa-Francorchamps track in Belgium, it added.

All Bank Muscat customers having the Private Banking Infinite credit card and Asalah Visa Signature credit card will be automatically entered into the draws once they meet the eligibility norms. Further to this, they will get additional chances every time they spend an additional amount of RO500 during the promotional period.

More interestingly, Bank Muscat allows more entries into the draw for its customers by counting their cumulative registered spends. The five winners

will embark on an extraordinary and exciting experience where they will enjoy a two-day motor experience package from October 8 to 10 including a track experience at the Belgian racetrack famous for hosting Formula 1 races.

Not only this, but those very winners will get a privilege of a two-night hotel stay which will be characterised with multiple advantages as part of the winners' package such as dinner, transfers to and from the circuit, 5 1-1 coaching drive sessions, 5 data analysis sessions, as well as business-class air tickets.

Anantara resort to organise Olive Harvest Festival in September

Olive enthusiasts will rejoice at the second annual Al Jabal Al Akhdar Olive Harvest Festival coming to the Green Mountain this September.

The Olive Harvest Festival at Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort will take place from September 21 to 23, providing guests with a daily schedule of events with olives as the main star.

From cooking demonstrations to storytelling with a Local Guru, guests of all ages can enjoy a full programme. Guests can join in the olive harvesting - a fulfilling activity for the whole family, the resort management stated.

Following the success of the inaugural event in 2022, Anan-

tara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort is once again celebrating the region's bounty, in partnership with local olive farmers and olive oil producers.

Jabal Akhdar, also called the Green Mountain, is known as one of the most fertile areas of Oman. Its ancient falaj irrigation system and picturesque farms have helped roses bloom and the growth of pomegranates and apricots for hundreds of years.

Seeking to reap the benefits of this rich landscape, around ten years ago local farmers decided to plant olive trees. A triumphant harvest the following year rewarded their efforts, and ever since olive trees have delivered a fruitful crop annually.

The harvest is a great way to



work up an appetite before sampling the best olives in a variety of dishes made by the team of chefs at the resort.

There will also be the opportunity to visit the local olive oil factory where olives are pressed. Visitors can view the entire process of extracting the oil and preparing this healthy liquid, which provides both a fascinating and enjoyable experience for people of all ages.

Throughout the month of September, which is officially harvest season, Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar will feature special dishes showcasing the local olives and olive oil at Bella Vista, its contemporary Mediterranean restaurant located on the canyon edge with spectacular views.

The menu will include delicacies such as seared cod with olive tapenade and ricotta-stuffed olives. Anantara Spa will also incorporate the super ingredient in a selection of its pampering therapies.

"At Anantara, we understand that our guests like to connect with the destination through immersive experiences. It is our pleasure to partner with local individuals and companies to highlight the wonders of Jabal Akhdar," said Maren Kuehl, General Manager of Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort.

"We are proud to offer our guests an opportunity to learn more about the region, its unique features and produce."

European nations prepare to fly out citizens after military coup in Niger

Niamey, Niger - France and Italy prepared on Tuesday to fly out their citizens and other Europeans from Niger on Tuesday, six days after a coup that toppled one of the last pro-Western leaders in the militant-plagued Sahel and stoked anti-French demonstrations.

President Mohamed Bazoum was overthrown on July 26 by his own guard, in the region's third putsch in as many years following takeovers in neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso.

After hostile crowds gathered on Sunday outside the French embassy and Niger accused France of plotting to intervene militarily, Paris said on Tuesday it would withdraw its citizens and offered to evacuate other Europeans as well.

"In the face of a deteriorating security situation in Niamey and taking advantage of the relative calm in Niamey, an operation of evacuation by air is being prepared," the embassy said a message sent to French citizens.

The evacuations 'will take place very soon in a very limited span of time', it said. The foreign ministry in Paris later said the evacuations would begin later on Tuesday.

There are an estimated 600 French nationals in Niger, not counting visiting tourists or French residents currently outside the country.

In Rome, the Italian government said it was putting on a 'special flight for those (Italians)



French Foreign and European Affairs Minister's employees work at a crisis management centre at the French Foreign and European Affairs Ministry in Paris on Tuesday, as France prepared to evacuate its citizens from Niger (AFP)

In the face of a deteriorating security situation in Niamey... an operation of evacuation by air is being prepared

FRENCH EMBASSY

who want to leave the country', adding that this was 'not an evacuation'.

It said there were around 90 Italian nations in Niamey, out of just under 500 across the country.

The West African bloc ECOWAS on Sunday slapped sanctions on Niger and warned it may use force as it gave the coup leaders a week to reinstate Bazoum.

The following day, the junta accused France of seeking to 'intervene militarily', a charge which drew a French denial, while junta-ruled Mali and Burkina Faso

warned any military intervention in Niger would be a 'declaration of war' against them.

Unstable

The events are unfolding in one of the poorest and most unstable countries in the world - a vast semi-desert nation that had already experienced four coups since independence in 1960.

Bazoum was feted in 2021 after winning elections that ushered in Niger's first-ever peaceful transition of power.

But his tenure was already marked by two attempted coups before last week's dramatic events, in which he was detained at his official residence by members of his elite Presidential Guard.

Guards chief General Abdourahamane Tiani has declared himself leader - but his claim has been rejected internationally, from ECOWAS, the African Union and the UN to France, the United States and the European Union.

Two killed in Senegal protests

Dakar, Senegal - Two people were killed on Monday during protests in southern Senegal after the indictment and detention of opposition figure Ousmane Sonko, a presidential candidate for the 2024 election, the interior ministry said.

Sonko, President Macky Sall's fiercest critic, on Monday was charged with fomenting insurrection and his party dissolved, prompting clashes between protesters and police. The leading opposition figure has faced a string of legal woes, which he claims have been designed to keep him out of politics and jeopardise his participation in the February 2024 presidential election.

The interior ministry said protests erupted on Monday afternoon in the southern city of Ziguinchor where 'two lifeless male bodies' were discovered. The ministry press release sent to AFP did not give further details of the circumstances of the deaths in the city where Sonko is mayor. Less than two hours after Sonko's indictment, the interior minister announced that his PASTEF party would be dissolved for having 'frequently' called for insurrection, leading to destruction and the loss of life.

The party slammed the move, saying in a statement that the country's stability was 'now compromised', and that the dissolution was 'anti-democratic'.

Sonko's sentencing in June in absentia to two years in prison in a moral corruption case sparked clashes that left 16 dead.

AFP

Sweden to intensify border controls following Quran burning protests

Stockholm, Sweden - Sweden's government said on Tuesday it intended to 'intensify' border controls due to a worsened security situation in the wake of several protests involving desecrations of *Quran*.

Tensions have flared between Sweden and Muslim countries following several protests involving public desecrations of *Quran* - including setting pages alight.

"People with very weak ties to Sweden should not be able to come to Sweden to commit crimes," Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson told a press conference, adding an official decision to step up border controls was expected on Thursday.

On Monday, two Iraqi men -

Salwan Momika and Salwan Najem - burned the Muslim holy text at a protest in front of Sweden's parliament.

Tensions have flared between Sweden and Muslim countries following the Quran burnings

The duo had previously staged similar protests outside Stockholm's main mosque and Iraq's embassy in the Swedish capital, leading to widespread outrage and condemnations.

Those protests prompted Iraqi protesters to storm the Swedish embassy in Baghdad twice, starting fires within the compound on the second occasion.

Last week, Sweden ordered 15 government bodies including the armed forces, several law enforcement agencies and the tax office to strengthen anti-terrorism efforts.

Justice Minister Gunnar Strommer said the intensified border checks referred to so-called inner border controls - meaning border checks for people travelling into Sweden from other Schengen nations. "The inner border controls enable us to identify incoming travellers that can threaten our security," Strommer told reporters.

Sweden reintroduced inner border controls in May 2022 citing a worsened security situation, a decision made in line with common EU legislation.

Strommer also noted that new Swedish legislation came into force on Tuesday, giving police wider powers to conduct controls within Swedish borders, including vehicle and body searches. "The purpose is to strengthen police work and prevent threats to domestic security," Strommer said.

On Monday, the Jeddah-based Organisation of Islamic Cooperation voiced 'disappointment' with Sweden and Denmark for not taking action following the spate of burnings.

AFP

FURRY IMPOSTER?



Two sun bears interact in their enclosure at Hangzhou Zoo in Hangzhou, in China's eastern Zhejiang province on Tuesday. The zoo has been forced to deny that its sun bear is actually a human in a costume, after footage of one standing on its hind legs raised online accusations of a furry imposter (AFP)

Inhabitants of Poros island dismayed by plan to scale up fish farming

Poros, Greece - On the sunny quay of the picturesque Greek island of Poros, veteran fisherman Spiros Papaioannou makes no bones about imminent plans to expand fish farming.

"We don't want them on our island," the rubber-booted man in his seventies grumbled while cleaning his nets.

"We fishermen are going to be chased away, that's for sure," he said. Greek-Spanish group Avramar, which presents itself as the world's leading producer of Mediterranean fish, already operates several fish farms in Poros.

The Greek state has long planned to make the Saronic Gulf island of 3,000 inhabitants near the Peloponnese peninsula one of the country's top aquaculture sites for sea bream and sea bass, which mainly end up at French and Italian restaurants.

Eventually, fish farms would cover a quarter of the island, 600 hectares on land and 269 hectares at sea.

A Mediterranean country with more than 15,000km (9,300 miles) of coastline, Greece is keen to develop its aquaculture industry and has earmarked 25 sites for fish farm installation.

The European Union has allocated €92mn (US\$101mn) to promote aquaculture in Greece by 2027. According to the Hellenic Aquaculture Producers Organisation (HAPO), the industry in 2021 saw a seven per cent increase in volume to 131,000 tons.

In Poros, annual production would increase eightfold to more than 8,800 tons from 1,100 tons currently over the next five years, according to local project managers POAY Poros.

Poros mayor Yannis Dimitri-



An aerial photo shows fish farms on the Poros Island, on July 5 (AFP)

adis is among those opposed to the initiative, which he says will endanger the island's existing

tourism industry. "Yes to maritime tourism, no to fish farming", read a banner

hanging from the Poros cultural centre building.

Poros 'is 95 per cent depen-

dant on tourism, directly or indirectly', Dimitriadis told AFP.

Upsetting the balance

"We are going to become an industrial zone, calling into question the whole balance of our economy," added the mayor, who claims to have already twice met Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis to explain his opposition to the project.

Contacted by AFP, the Avramar group, which achieved a turnover of €157mn in 2021, did not wish to provide details. "The project is in a preliminary phase. However, we can assure you that we are committed to transparency and will share updates as soon as we are able to do so," the group said in a statement.

According to POAY Poros, the Greek state is expected to ap-

prove the project by November 2024.

'Not Mykonos'

With its pastel-coloured buildings and oleander and bougainvillea-filled squares, Poros presents itself as a far cry from the mega hotel model.

"We don't want to be Santorini or Mykonos," explained Magdalena Iwaszko, owner of a small hotel near the island port.

"Tourists come here to relax... the establishment of fish farms would have enormous environmental consequences. Nobody wants aquaculture here," she said. Poros' advantage is 'crystal clear waters and an untouched coast', the hotelier argues.

The sea off the northern part of Poros is dotted with large floating cages.

AFP

US ‘doomsday’ mother sentenced to life for murdering children

Los Angeles, US - A US mother with ‘doomsday’ religious beliefs was sentenced on Monday to life in prison without parole for murdering two of her children and conspiring to kill her husband’s ex-wife.

Lori Vallow had been found guilty in May over the deaths of her 16-year-old daughter Tylee Ryan and adopted seven-year-old son Joshua ‘JJ’ Vallow.

“You are sentenced to the custody of the State Board of Corrections to serve the maximum allowed sentence... life imprisonment with no possibility of parole,” said Judge Steven W. Boyce, at a court in the northwestern US state of Idaho.

Vallow claimed to be a goddess charged with preparing humanity for the second coming of Jesus Christ, and said she believed she could communicate with angels.

Prosecutors alleged that she used religious beliefs to justify the murders, which became

the subject of a Netflix true-crime documentary series *Sins of Our Mother*, released last year.

They also claimed there were financial motives for the crimes.

Her fifth husband, Chad Daybell - the self-published author of several apocalyptic novels - is awaiting trial over similar charges, which include the murder of his first wife, Tammy. He has pleaded not guilty to all charges.



Lori Vallow (AFP)

The case first drew national headlines in late 2019 following the disappearance of Vallow’s children. Vallow and Daybell never reported that the children were missing, and their bodies were found in June 2020 on property owned by Daybell in Idaho.

It also emerged that several people associated with Vallow and Daybell had died in recent years.

These included Daybell’s wife Tammy, who died ostensibly of natural causes in October 2019, just weeks before the couple moved to Hawaii.

Vallow, raised a Mormon, became increasingly radical in her religious beliefs over time.

In 2018, she met Daybell - the leader of a radical Mormon sect that was preparing for the end times - at a religious conference in Utah.

Judge Boyce on Monday ordered three consecutive, rather than concurrent, life sentences, due to the gravity of Vallow’s crimes.

“In Idaho, a life sentence is just that - a life sentence without parole,” he said

But ‘because there are three separate murders with three separate victims that occurred at three separate times, running the counts concurrently would not serve the interests of justice’, he said.

“You need to be held accountable separately for each of the three murders.”

AFP

At least 20 people killed, 19 missing in China rainstorms

Mentougou, China - At least 20 people were killed and 19 were missing after heavy rains lashed Beijing and surrounding provinces, state media said on Tuesday, in downpours that have submerged roads and deluged neighbourhoods with mud.

Storm Doksuri, a former super typhoon, swept northwards over China after hitting southern Fujian province on Friday, following its battering of the Philippines.

Heavy rains began pummeling the capital and surrounding areas on Saturday, with nearly the average rainfall for the entire month of July dumped on Beijing in just 40 hours.

Swaths of suburban Beijing remain badly hit by the rains - some of the city’s heaviest in years.

On the banks of the Mentougou river, one of the worst affected areas, AFP reporters saw muddy debris strewn across the road.



People inspect a damaged road following heavy rains in Fangshan district in Beijing on Tuesday (AFP)

The rains killed at least 11 people in Beijing, two of whom are workers killed on duty during rescue and relief

reported in northeastern Liaoning province over the weekend.

President Xi Jinping on Tuesday called for ‘every effort’ to rescue those ‘lost or trapped’ by the rains.

More than 100,000 people deemed at risk across Beijing have been evacuated, according to state-owned *Global Times* newspaper.

Authorities have allocated 110mn yuan (US\$15.4mn) for disaster relief work in the capital and surrounding provinces, CCTV said.

‘Endure what we can’

Florist Wang Yongkun, 62, had piled sandbags around the door

of his shop, but the floor inside was still coated in mud.

He said in 15 years working there he had never experienced anything like the last few days.

“We started cleaning up in the afternoon yesterday... and woke up again at seven today to continue,” he said.

“You just have to deal with it... We will endure what we can.”

Further south in Fangshan district, the Dashi River had overflowed, with trees along the riverbank partially submerged, and some sections of the road cordoned off.

Roads were caked in mud, foliage and various debris, including an upturned armchair.

AFP reporters saw collapsed bridges at two locations, with locals saying the damage had happened during the rains.

Earlier social media videos tagged in Fangshan had shown multiple cars being swept along roads turned into fast-flowing streams.

Live images from broadcaster CCTV on Tuesday morning showed a row of buses half submerged in floodwater.

In the parking lot of a high-rise apartment complex, cars were piled on top of each other, alarms still sounding, while people lined up with buckets and other containers to collect fresh water.

AFP



Lightning strikes a building near Tokyo’s Haneda Airport on Tuesday (AFP)

Thousands urged to evacuate in southern Japan ahead of typhoon

Tokyo, Japan - A powerful typhoon sweeping towards southern Japan on Tuesday triggered the cancellation of hundreds of flights, with officials urging hundreds of thousands of people to seek shelter.

Typhoon Khanun was packing maximum sustained wind speeds of 180km (112 miles) an hour as it crossed the Pacific Ocean towards the Okinawa region. The Japan Meteorological Agency said the storm, which it described as ‘very strong’, was about 170km southeast of the regional capital of Naha at 0600 GMT.

The centre of the typhoon was expected to brush past Okinawa late on Tuesday or early on Wednesday before crossing to eastern China later in the week. Cities across Okinawa advised more than 760,000 people to leave their homes as the weather agency warned waves of up to 12-metres (39-

feet) high could pummel the group of islands.

The typhoon was expected to bring fierce winds and heavy rain. “Many people stay at home because their houses are concrete,” a disaster management official at the Okinawa regional government told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity.

“But we are asking people who live alone or in wooden houses in low-lying areas to consider seeking shelter before the typhoon gets bad.”

More than 500 flights were cancelled on Tuesday, while regional ferry and bus services were suspended ahead of the typhoon, national broadcaster NHK reported.

Japan Airlines and All Nippon Airways said more than 74,000 passengers in total would be affected by flight cancellations on Tuesday and Wednesday.

AFP

Australian charged with sex crimes against 91 girls

Sydney, Australia - An Australian childcare worker sexually abused 91 young girls over 15 years, police said on Tuesday, accusing him of documenting his ‘unfathomable’ alleged crimes in thousands of photos and videos.

Seasoned detectives have described it as one of Australia’s ‘most horrific’ child sex abuse cases, calling it ‘beyond the realms of anyone’s imagination’.

“I know this news will seem unfathomable, and I know there will be many questions,” said assistant federal police commissioner Justine Gough.

“There is not much solace I can give to the parents and children who have been identified,” she added. Included within the 1,623 charges are 136 counts of rape, 110 counts of sexual intercourse with a child younger than 10 - a charge used instead of rape in some Australian jurisdictions -

and 613 counts of making child pornography.

Investigators had been hunting for the 45-year-old man since discovering a cache of child pornography shared on the dark web in 2014.

But their efforts had been mostly fruitless until they made an unexpected breakthrough in August last year - matching visual clues in the background of the images to a childcare centre in the city of Brisbane. While the man was initially charged with just three offences, Gough said the gravity of his ‘heinous’ alleged crimes emerged as police sifted further through his computer, phone and hard drive.

“This is chilling and shocking news for parents,” she said.

Police believe the man filmed or took pictures of ‘all’ his alleged crimes - and catalogued more than 4,000 photos and videos of abuse.

AFP

Myanmar cuts 6 years from Suu Kyi’s 33-year jail term

Yangon, Myanmar - Myanmar reduced ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi’s 33-year prison sentence by six years in a partial pardon on Tuesday, as the junta struggles to quell bloody resistance to its rule.

The country has been ravaged by violence in the two years since Suu Kyi was deposed in a coup and hit with 19 criminal cases ranging from corruption to breaching COVID-19 rules.

There have been concerns for the 78-year-old Nobel laureate’s health and the junta moved her from prison to a government building last week.

“Six years imprisonment will be reduced,” junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun told reporters after it was announced she had been pardoned in five cases.

Suu Kyi still faces 14 cases despite the pardon. Rights groups have condemned the legal battle against her as a sham designed to remove a popular democratic leader from the public eye.

Former Myanmar president Win Myint, who was also re-



This file photo shows Aung San Suu Kyi posing for a picture at the Presidential Palace in Naypyidaw on January 17, 2020 (AFP)

moved in the 2021 coup, was granted a four-year reduction in relation to two cases, the junta spokesman said.

‘Cruel games’

Tuesday’s announcement was part of an amnesty of more than 7,000 prisoners to mark Buddhist Lent, including 125 foreigners who are to be released and pardoned. An unspecified num-

ber of prisoners facing the death penalty also had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment, the announcement said.

David Mathieson, an independent analyst on Myanmar, said the partial pardon was a ‘cynical ploy to tell the world that there might be some kind of political resolution coming. When we know that there is not’.

“I think they are just playing

Partial pardon is a cynical ploy to tell that there might be some kind of political resolution coming. When we know that there is not. They are just playing cruel games with a political prisoner

DAVID MATHIESON

cruel games with a political prisoner,” Mathieson told AFP.

“All the charges against her are absurd and shaving six years off 33 isn’t mercy.”

Human Rights Watch’s Asia division deputy director Phil Robertson said the junta aimed ‘to create the impression of moderation and dialogue when in fact there really is none on offer’.

Joe Freeman, a spokesman on

Myanmar for Amnesty International, said the reductions showed the arbitrary nature of the junta’s military courts.

“Those swept up in its clutches never know what may happen to them,” he told AFP.

Suu Kyi was detained on the night of the coup in February 2021 and has only been seen once since - in media photos from a bare courtroom in the military-built capital Naypyidaw. She was required to attend daily hearings in the junta court to hear cases against her ranging from corruption to possession of illegal walkie-talkies and flouting coronavirus restrictions.

In July, Thailand’s foreign minister met Suu Kyi, the first known meeting with a foreign envoy since she was detained. Details of what they discussed are not known. Suu Kyi remains popular in Myanmar, even after her international image was tainted by a power-sharing deal with the generals and her failure to speak up for the Rohingya minority.

AFP

Drone attacks on Moscow, Russian vessels

Russia said it downed another wave of Ukrainian drones aimed at vessels in Black Sea and Moscow

Moscow, Russia - Russia said on Tuesday it had downed another wave of Ukrainian drones aimed at vessels in the Black Sea and Moscow, as an office block in the capital's main business district was struck for the second time in a few days.

"Two Ukrainian (unmanned aerial vehicles) were destroyed by air defence systems over the territory of the Odintsovo and Narofominsk districts of Moscow region," the Russian defence ministry said.

"Another drone was suppressed by electronic warfare and, having lost control, crashed on the territory of the Moscow City," the capital's main commercial district, the ministry said.

On Sunday, Russian defences downed drones in that same district, with debris damaging two office towers, blowing out several windows and scattering documents on the pavement below.

"One flew into the same tower in (Moscow) City as last time," mayor Sergei Sobyanin said on Tuesday on Telegram.

"The facade on the 21st floor was damaged," and a number of windows were smashed, the mayor said.

He added that emergency services had gone to the scene and that there was no information on any casualties.



Police officers block off an area around a damaged office block of the Moskva City following a reported drone attack in Moscow on Tuesday (AFP)

tion on any casualties.

"We heard a big explosion, there was no panic," local resident Arkady Metler, 29, told AFP. "Nobody should be scared... we cannot do anything but stick together," said Metler.

'In shock'

Other residents were more

shaken by the renewed explosion in their neighbourhood.

"After the last attack, everyone was saying, 'They don't hit the same place twice'. But when we woke up this morning we were in shock," Anastasia Berseneva, 26, told AFP.

"I'm not sure whether I will move out or not but I'm thinking

probably yes."

Shortly after the drone attack, Moscow's Vnukovo international airport was briefly closed, TASS state news agency reported.

"Vnukovo was temporarily closed for arrivals and departures, the planes are redirected to other airports," emergency services said, according to TASS,

which later reported that it had resumed normal operations.

The same airport, to the southwest of Moscow, was briefly closed after Sunday's attack and earlier this month, a volley of drone attacks disrupted air traffic at Vnukovo.

Moscow and its environs, located about 500km (310 miles)

After the last attack, everyone was saying, 'They don't hit the same place twice'. But when we woke up this morning we were in shock. I'm not sure whether I will move out or not but I'm thinking probably yes

ANASTASIA BERSENEVA

from the Ukrainian border, had rarely been targeted during the conflict in Ukraine until several drone attacks this year.

The Russian defence ministry said on Tuesday it also foiled a Ukrainian drone attack targeting patrol boats in the Black Sea.

'Act of desperation'

"During the night, Ukrainian armed forces tried without success to attack with three drones the Sergei Kotov and Vasily Bykov, patrol boats of the Russian fleet," the defence ministry said in a statement.

The three drones were trained

on the ships, navigating in waters 340km (210 miles) southwest of Sevastopol, the base of Russia's Black Sea fleet on the annexed Crimea peninsula.

Tuesday's attacks were the latest in a series of drone assaults - including on the Kremlin and Russian towns near the border with Ukraine - that Moscow has blamed on Kyiv.

On Monday, a missile strike on a residential building killed six and wounded dozens in Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's hometown of Kryvyi Rig.

Without mentioning a particular attack, Zelensky warned on Sunday that the conflict was coming to Russia.

"Gradually, the war is returning to the territory of Russia - to its symbolic centres and military bases, and this is an inevitable, natural and absolutely fair process," Zelensky said on Sunday.

The Kremlin on Monday called the recent strikes on the capital an 'act of desperation' by Ukraine following setbacks on the battlefield.

Ukraine began its long-awaited counteroffensive in June but has made modest advances in the face of stiff resistance from Russian forces on the frontline.

AFP

India: At least 17 workers killed in crane collapse

Mumbai, India - At least 17 workers were crushed to death in western India on Tuesday when a crane collapsed above an under-construction expressway outside the financial capital Mumbai, disaster response officials said.

The crane toppled onto large concrete slabs during the night, with debris then smashing down as labourers worked on the Samruddhi Expressway in Maharashtra state, India's National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) said.

The NDRF said 17 bodies had been recovered, and three injured people had been taken to hospital.

An NDRF video clip showed rescuers working through piles of mangled steel girders at the construction site in Thane, in the suburbs of Mumbai.

The Samruddhi Expressway, connecting Mumbai with the city



NDRF members inspecting the site of an under construction Samruddhi Expressway where a crane collapsed in Maharashtra on Tuesday (AFP)

of Nagpur, is part of an expansive road infrastructure push in one of the world's fastest growing economies.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is scheduled to inaugurate infrastructure projects in Maharashtra on Tuesday, said he was 'pained' by the deaths and ordered compensation be paid to the families of the dead

and injured workers.

Accidents on large infrastructure construction sites are common in India.

In October last year, 130 people died in Gujarat when a bridge collapsed soon after it was repaired. In 2016, the collapse of a flyover onto a busy street in Kolkata killed at least 26 people. AFP

Pakistan party targeted by Islamic State bombing questions state security services

Peshawar, Pakistan - The leader of an influential Pakistan political party called on Tuesday for better state-provided security after an Islamic State suicide bomber killed 54 people - almost half of them children - at an election gathering.

Around 400 members of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-F (JUI-F) party - a key government coalition partner - were meeting on Sunday when a bomber detonated a vest packed with explosives and ball bearings.

JUI-F's leader, firebrand cleric Fazl-ur-Rehman, questioned how such a 'significant intelligence failure' could have occurred.

"The entire nation is turning to the state institutions responsible for its security," he said in a statement posted to Twitter.

"Where are they? When will they listen to us? When will they heal our wounds? When will they establish a system that safe-



Security personnel walk past bomb blast victims at a hospital in Bajaur district of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province on Monday (AFP)

guards our future generations?"

Rehman said Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam was a peaceful party, 'but even patience and endurance have their limits'.

"Nonetheless, I urge my supporters not to abandon patience and endurance," he said.

Rehman started political life as a firebrand Islamist hardliner, and while his party continues to advocate for socially conservative

miles) from the Afghan border, in an area where militancy has been rising since the Afghan Taliban - who are allied with but distinct from the TTP - took control of Kabul in 2021.

The blast has raised fears Pakistan could be in for a bloody election period following months of political chaos prompted by the ousting of Imran Khan as prime minister in April last year.

Parliament is likely to be dissolved after it completes its term in the next two weeks, with national elections to be held by mid-November. Last year, IS said it was behind attacks against religious scholars affiliated with JUI-F, which has a huge network of mosques and schools in the north and west of Pakistan.

IS accuses the JUI-F of hypocrisy for being a religious party while supporting secular governments and the military.

AFP

Pilgrims gather in Lisbon for Catholic festival

Lisbon, Portugal - Crowds of flag-waving pilgrims converged on Lisbon on Tuesday for the start of a week-long religious festival known as World Youth Day, a day before the arrival of Pope Francis.

Around 300,000 people from around the world are expected to attend the opening mass at 7pm (1800 GMT) at the hillside Eduardo VII park, which offers sweeping views of the Portuguese capital and the Tagus river.

Pilgrims roamed around Lisbon in a festive mood ahead of the mass, waving national flags in the air, dancing and singing Catholic anthems from their home countries.

"My goal is to recharge my spiritual battery because sometimes, as young people, we let it run low," Xochilt Cecilia Velis, a 24-year-old from El Salvador, told AFP in central Lisbon.

Francis is set to arrive in Lisbon on Wednesday morning to celebrate World Youth Day, which is actually a week of religious, cultural and festive events held about every three years in a different city.



Two scouts watch as the pilgrim image of Our Lady Fatima is carried on a truck in Lisbon on Monday (AFP)

gious, cultural and festive events held about every three years in a different city.

The 86-year-old pontiff is by Church standards the most liberal pope in decades and is very popular with young people.

Fernanda Euceda, a 21-year-old pilgrim from Honduras, said she felt 'deep affection' for Francis 'because the messages he sends out has so much love for young people'.

"I think this is above all what fills your heart with hope," she

told AFP.

'Coming together'

In Portugal, he has a typically packed schedule for his five-day visit, despite having spent nine nights in hospital after undergoing hernia surgery in June.

Francis, the first Latin American pope, is due to make 11 public pronouncements and hold numerous meetings, and on Saturday will visit the shrine of Fatima north of Lisbon.

Church organisers expect one

million faithful will attend the event's closing mass held by the pope on Sunday at a waterside park on the outskirts of Lisbon.

Images of the pope were on display on banners across the city as well as on screens on automatic bank machines along with the message: "I am with you".

A Lisbon pastry shop is even selling cookies with the image of the smiling pontiff wearing a crucifix. "It's going to be extraordinary, all this Christian youth coming together," said Gabriel Forestier, a 28-year-old engineer from Amiens in northern France.

World Youth Day, which has been dubbed the 'Catholic Woodstock', is part of the Vatican's efforts to galvanise young Catholics at a time when secularism and disgust over clerical child sex abuse cause some faithful to abandon the Church.

Pope Francis is expected during his visit to meet privately with victims of sexual abuse by members of the Portuguese clergy.

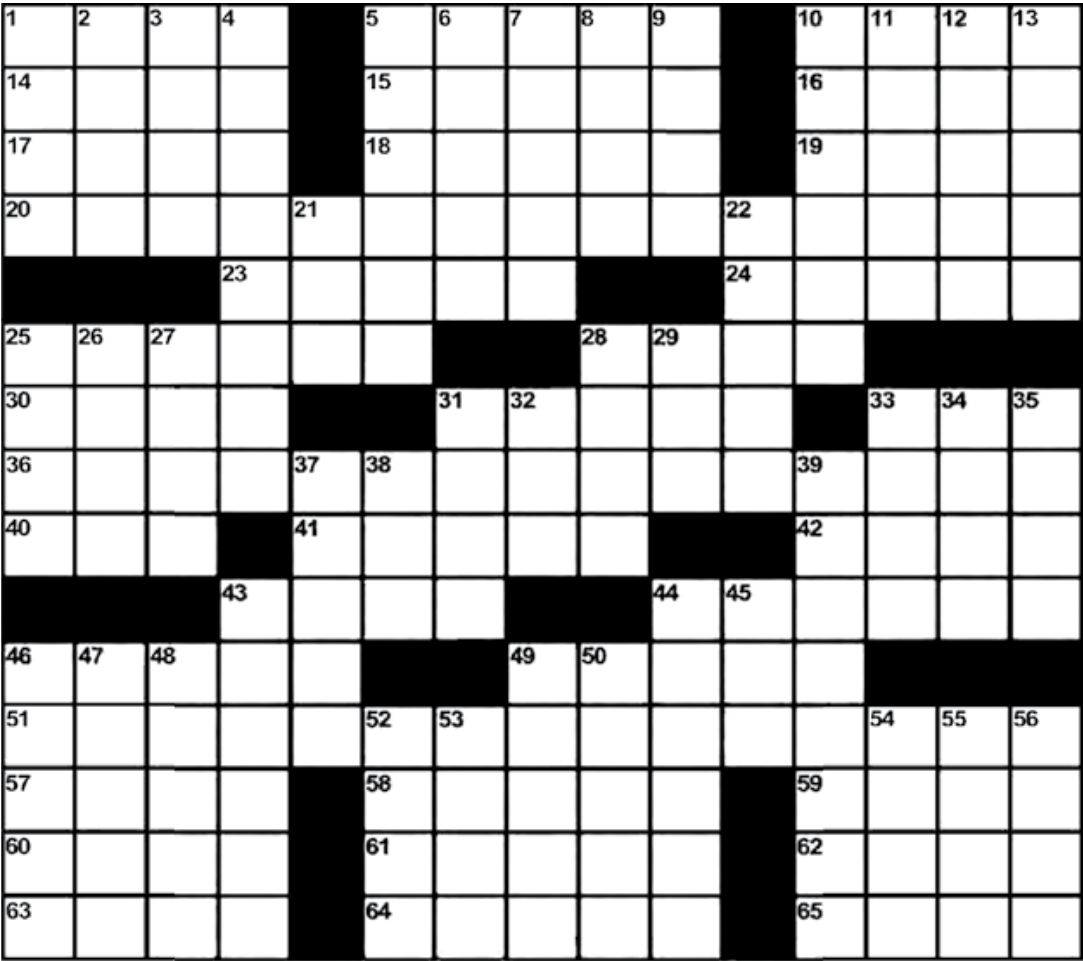
AFP

DEADLY CLASHES



Police personnel check burned vehicles outside the Cyber police station after violent communal clashes in Nuh in Haryana, India, on Tuesday. At least four people have been killed in the violent clashes (AFP)

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS
- 1) Dell competitor

5) Diamond surface

10) Lose an encounter with ice

14) Central part of a church

15) Coffee enticement

16) Disorderly outburst

17) Course with sines

18) Different version of a song

19) Change parts, often

20) Broadway sign make-up

23) Cantrell, Wood and Turner

24) Usher's beat

25) Country with the most lakes

28) Utilized an elevator

30) Word before "loving" and "lasting"

31) Places for human development

33) One tying a knot?

36) Couldn't care less

40) Nip in the bud

41) Year-end seasons

42) One of Napoleon's exile isles

43) It may frequently hit the bottle

44) Wake maker

46) Beach spread

49) Michael Jordan's old position

51) What a good horror film can make one do

57) Far from the bottom

58) Eat away at

59) Word after "Let's try something"

60) Important hotel number

61) X, in math class

62) Strip under a mattress

63) Tireless toy?

64) Like the best guard dogs

65) Temporary fixer

DOWN

1) Not for

2) Psychologist Jung

3) Like a soap opera twin

4) Some men's jacket sizes

5) Hot breakfast fare

6) Venue for a big-time boxing match

7) Sleeping episodes that could last years

8) Send off, as broadcast waves

9) Urban vehicle

10) Inexpensive cigar

11) Step-ups from 4-Dow

12) Epitome of perfection

13) Follower of Western

tracks

21) Insane

22) Comaneci of the balance beam

25) Yield, as property

26) Stratford's waterway

27) On a _-to-know basis

28) Accelerates, as a motor

29) It might require refining

31) Quite unattractive

32) Evening result?

33) Shed feathers

34) Judicial attire

35) Wish recipient

37) African antelope with spiral horns

38) Old, slow ship

39) Item that can be raised in a car's interior

43) Emulated a smoke detector

44) Most inferior

45) Tolkien menace

46) Russian monarchs no more

47) Eight-related

48) Composed, as a text

49) Colorful garden figure

50) Milk dispenser over a pail

52) Prefix with "physical"
- 53) Fleshy seed wrapper

54) "Enchanted" film girl

55) " ... and make it fast!"

56) Allocate (with "out")
- NOTE PAD
-
- YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE
- ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19
There could be some exciting shenanigans going on today, but you need to think twice before getting involved in any of them, as fun as they might seem from your outsider perspective. It's a good time to initiate projects, but only the kind that are safe and on the up and up. Go slowly. Don't get caught up in the moment and lose your head. If there is a golden opportunity in the midst of all of this, it isn't going anywhere soon. There is no need to rush into anything.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
In a group discussion today, others will agree with you, but only up to a point. Just because heads are nodding and people are agreeing with everything you say doesn't mean that they're willing to march into battle with you. Before you assume that you've got some sort of mutiny or revolution on your hands, take a step back and realize that they're truly happy to hear someone like you say what they're feeling, but they just want to vent. They don't necessarily want do anything about it.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21
Life doesn't always go the way you want it to, and you don't always get what you wish for. Today, you'll have to bravely face these truths. In terms of a romantic pursuit, don't get upset if things aren't progressing at the pace you'd like. There are two people here, and you both have to balance what you want with what the other person is willing to give. Apply some patience to this situation, and spend some time away from the person if you're feeling frustrated.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
Have you been having problems with your health? If so, it might be nothing or it might be something. The stress of not knowing is probably much worse than the reality of the situation, so do yourself a favor by make a doctor's appointment. You have to understand that nothing in your life is going to change unless you make a move to change it, and this applies to every aspect of your life, not just your health. The sooner you start something, the sooner you'll be finished.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Your growing sense of self-worth has come from deep within you, and that's why it's so strong and meaningful. If your self-worth were only built only on compliments and other people validating your achievements, it wouldn't be as solid. But you've taken risks and proven to yourself that you are capable and strong. So have no fear that you'll lose your confidence just because you stumble here or there. You're made of stronger stuff than that, so have faith in yourself!

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
You could be greatly entertained by an authority figure today, which will be a nice change of pace. You're both going to be in a novel situation where you're the expert and they're the novice. It's a scenario that they might not know how to handle at first, so you might need to suppress your amusement. More and more, you're seeing this person as human with foibles and quirks, and more and more you're liking them as a real person. Your relationship is becoming healthier.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
You're usually the go-to person for finishing up things: wrapping the presents, polishing the silver, and in general just making things ready for public appreciation. But today you should try to get on the other side of that dynamic. Instead of being focused on the outward appearances or the finished product, get into the core of things. Be a part of coming up with the plans, fixing the problems, and building the machines. Your mind is good for more than just creating window dressing.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Beauty and other aesthetic ideals are important to you today. You could spend more time rearranging furniture or putting together the perfect outfit than on anything else. But this fascination with the way things look isn't shallow. It's going to feed you a lot of creative inspiration that will come in handy later. Soak in the scenery, take a walk in a garden, and try to get to a beautiful location for the sunset. The world is a beautiful place. Enjoy it!

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
You've got the right attitude to experience something new today. Your mind is wide open, your expectations are low, and you're likely to be moving into some interesting, albeit unknown, territory. Just make sure that while you are off delving into some new hobby, discovering a new restaurant, or hitting the social scene you aren't forgetting about a commitment you made to a good friend or relative. You need to keep your priorities straight even when you're playing world explorer.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
When a surge of energy enters you today, use it to help others. Instead of diving into a fun project or working on a favorite hobby or shopping for things you don't need, find out who needs some help. An older family member will be very appreciative of the extra pair of hands. And you'll feel good knowing that you have the right priorities. Giving to others enables you to connect with others, which is something that you should never take for granted.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
In order to reduce the amount of stress in your life, you need to hand things over to someone you trust. Delegate some of your tasks at work or home to another person who could use the experience. You can't worry about adding stress to their life by doing so. Right now, you should just be concerned about creating a few calmer, quieter moments in your own day. Deciding which tasks to give to which people won't be too hard. You know who you can count on.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
If you need to reduce the amount of stress in your life right now, a good step is to reduce your debt. Being financially hindered is never wise, and digging yourself out of that hole is a lot easier than you think. It's a numbers game. Pay off more than the minimum on your monthly statement and little by little you'll get back on top. It's time to tighten your belt and start saying no to those splurges. They're not worth the stress they will cause later.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. A pangolin can extend its long narrow tongue over half the length of its head and body; where in the body is its tongue attached?
- A. On its hyoid bone

B. Just behind the tip of its snout

C. Between the trachea and the sternum, ventral to the opening of the pharynx

D. On the roof of its mouth
02. French actress Catherine Deneuve has been married once, from 1965 to 1972, to whom?
- A. Director Roger Vadim

B. Photographer David Bailey

C. Director François Truffaut

D. Actor Marcello Mastroianni
03. Among the hyped contests in world boxing was the match in October 2021 between heavyweight WBC ex-champion (2015-2020) Dontay Wilder and whom?
- A. Manny Pacquiao

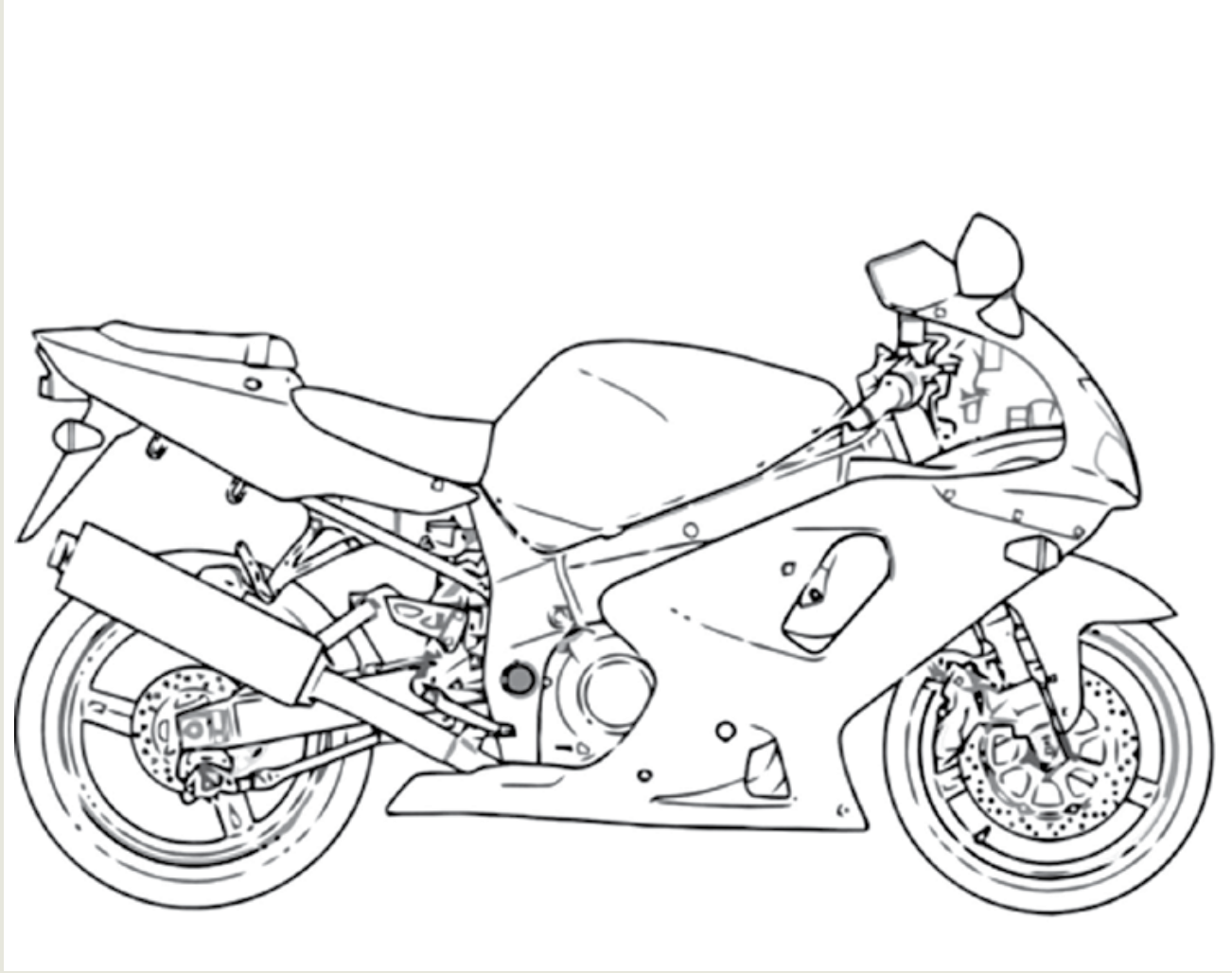
B. Israel Adesanya

C. Joseph Parker

D. Tyson Fury

Answers: 1. C 2. B 3. D

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

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

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



DAZZLING DISPLAY

Electric
England crush
China 6-1 to
book last-16
clash with
Nigeria

Adelaide, Australia - Lauren James scored twice and played a starring role as European champions England swept past shell-shocked China 6-1 on Tuesday and into a Women's World Cup last-16 clash with Nigeria.

It equalled England's biggest-ever World Cup victory and booked them top spot in Group D, while consigning the Asian champions to their earliest-ever exit.

Denmark beat Haiti 2-0 in the other group game to finish second and line up a knockout-round meeting with co-hosts Australia.

Along with Japan, England are the only team to win all three group games so far, reaffirming their status as among the favourites to win the World Cup.

"I am very delighted. What I said before the game, we are going to do things a bit different. It shows how adaptable this team is. I think today it worked really well," said England coach Sarina Wiegman.

"I don't think they expected us to play this way and they didn't find a solution."

England made an explosive start in Adelaide with an instinctive finish from Manchester United striker Alessia Russo in



England's Lauren James (C) celebrates with teammates after scoring against China in their Women's World Cup Group D match on Tuesday (AFP)

I am very delighted. What I said before the game, we are going to do things a bit different. It shows how adaptable this team is. I think today it worked really well

SARINA WIEGMAN

just the fourth minute.

Manchester City's Lauren Hemp and James added further goals before the break.

Wang Shuang converted a second-half penalty for China, but James got her second with a sublime volley, substitute Chloe

Kelly was gifted a fifth after a goalkeeper howler and Rachel Daly got in on the act as the clock ticked down.

Chelsea forward James had a hand in five of the goals and said scoring twice was "what dreams are made of".

"I felt free, whether I am on the wing or the middle I am just happy to be on the pitch. I think like last game I thought, why not hit it and see what happens?" she said.

"Yeah (Nigeria will be) very tough, every team has been tough - teams are catching up with each other."

China's tournament ended at the group stage for the first time and in humbling fashion.

The Steel Roses, an early powerhouse in women's football, made at least the round of 16 in the six previous World Cups they

have played, finishing runners-up in 1999 during their heyday.

Danes ease through

The Danes, playing at their first World Cup since 2007, thought they had scored early against Haiti in front of just under 18,000 in Perth but it was ruled out after a VAR review found Simone Boye was just off-side.

Denmark made their early pressure count when Haiti conceded a penalty - their third at this World Cup - for handball.

Skipper Pernille Harder scored from the spot.



Australia's 20 Sam Kerr (L) celebrates with teammates after their victory against Canada in Women's World Cup on Monday (AFP)

Kerr pep talk inspired co-hosts Australia into World Cup last 16

Melbourne, Australia - A call to arms by injured superstar Sam Kerr provided the inspiration for Australia's 4-0 drubbing of Canada, with coach Tony Gustavsson saying his team was determined to do her proud.

The Chelsea striker and Matildas captain has yet to kick a ball at the Women's World Cup as she struggles with a calf injury sustained before their opening game.

But her animated presence on the bench helped the team in their statement do-or-die win over the Olympic champions which powered them into the last 16 - a resounding answer to the critics after being upset 3-2 by Nigeria.

Kerr had declared herself available if needed, but Australia's all-time leading goalscorer ultimately wasn't risked as her teammates rose to the occasion and gave her extra

time to recover.

A relieved Gustavsson, who was facing the exit door if they had lost, said that Kerr's pre-match pep talk had been vital.

"Part of the reason why I think they were so united and performed the way they did was what Sam said to the team: 'Make sure you win without me so I can get another week to train and recover and get healthy,'" he said. "And the team responded and said: 'Yes we will. You sit on the bench tonight, and we'll win for you'."

"You could see that conviction and commitment from the players so that Sam gets another week of training."

Kerr made her Australia debut aged just 15. Now at her fourth World Cup, she has become one of the best players in women's football, with her profile soaring to new heights since moving to Chelsea.



Portugal's Diana Silva (L) and Naomi Girma of the US fight for the ball (AFP)

Holders United States stumble into World Cup last 16 but Dutch rampant

Auckland, New Zealand - Holders the United States squeezed into the last 16 of the Women's World Cup with a shaky 0-0 draw against debutants Portugal on Tuesday to finish second in Group E behind a rampant Netherlands.

The United States came to Australia and New Zealand as favourites -- ahead of England -- to win an unprecedented third World Cup in a row.

But they have been nothing like the team that has dominated international women's football

for so long and will need to be a lot better if they are to go much farther at the tournament.

Portugal came within inches of the win they needed to progress -- and dump out the Americans -- when substitute Ana Capeta hit the post in injury time in front of almost 41,000 in Auckland.

But the US held on and are likely to face a Sweden team in the last 16 who thrashed Italy 5-0 last time out.

US coach Vlatko Andonovski attempted to put a positive spin

on what was an alarmingly poor performance by the team ranked number one in the FIFA rankings. "The most important thing was to get the job done," he said. "This is a fairly new team that have not been together for a long time."

"The more time they spend together the more chances will go in."

The Netherlands, who drew 1-1 with the US team last week in a rerun of the 2019 final, racked up the biggest win of this World Cup with a 7-0 demolition of al-

ready eliminated Vietnam.

Esmee Brugts and Jill Roord both scored twice for the Dutch, who topped the group with seven points and a goal difference of plus eight.

Netherlands coach Andries Jonker declared they can beat anyone at the Women's World Cup after powering into the last 16 as group winners

The US were second on five points while Portugal were edged out on four. Vietnam failed to get a point.

AFP

Philippines coach Stajcic steps down after Women's World Cup exit

Manila, Philippines - Philippines coach Alen Stajcic has left his post after the national team's exit from their first Women's World Cup, the Philippine Football Federation said on Tuesday.

The Philippines have shaken off their status as regional minnows since Stajcic's appointment as coach in late 2021 - they have jumped from 68 in the FIFA rankings to a best-ever 46th.

The Philippines were not expected to get out of their group, but the Asian side caused a major upset by beating co-hosts New Zealand for a historic first World Cup win before a 6-0 defeat to Norway on Sunday ended their adventure.

The Philippine Football Federation said Stajcic and assistant coach Nahuel Arrarte had "decided to explore other options" at the end of the World Cup campaign.

"Coach Alen Stajcic's appoint-



Alen Stajcic

ment as Philippine Women's National Team head coach brought women's football in the Philippines to new heights and hope," PFF president Mariano Araneta said in a statement.

"Coach Alen showed full dedication to hone the Filipinas into a fighting team. He will long be

remembered as the coach who trained and dared the team to win at any international competition," Araneta said.

Under Stajcic, the Philippines made the semi-finals of the Women's Asian Cup in early 2022, where they lost to South Korea but secured a historic

World Cup berth.

They followed it up with bronze at the Southeast Asian Games last year, then won the regional AFF Women's Championship on home soil.

Stajcic was a major reason for the Philippines' improvement.

He brought a wealth of experience after a playing and coaching career in Australia.

He coached Australia at the 2015 World Cup and took the Matildas to as high as fourth in the FIFA rankings, but was dumped despite guiding them to the 2019 tournament.

After the Philippines' loss to Norway, Stajcic said he was "proud of the heart and spirit" of the team, but ducked questions about his future as coach.

"We will reflect on that for now and in the coming days we will start making plans for the future," he said.

AFP

Sweden aim to keep momentum going into World Cup knockouts

Hamilton, New Zealand - Sweden are already into the knockout phase of the Women's World Cup but are eager to maintain their winning momentum in Wednesday's final group game against Argentina, captain Magdalena Eriksson declared.

Sweden secured their last-16 spot with a 5-0 destruction of Italy on Saturday, following a comeback to beat South Africa 2-1 in their opening game.

Those results mean they have almost certainly sewn up top spot in Group G, with their superior goal difference meaning that even a defeat against Argentina is unlikely to knock them off the summit.

But Eriksson, one of three captains in the Swedish squad, said her team would not relax against the Argentines in Hamilton.

"It's very important. The match on Saturday was not perfect. We can do a lot better, we have a lot to learn," said Eriksson,



Sweden's Magdalena Eriksson (R)

whose central defensive partner Amanda Ilestedt has scored three goals in the two games so far.

She said Colombia's stunning win over Germany serves as a warning of what to expect from South American opposition, especially with Argentina having to win to stand a chance of advancing.

"We are confident, but also very humble. Tomorrow will be a tricky task, as we saw with Colombia beating Germany."

Swedish coach Peter Gerhardsson has named the same starting line-up in both previous games at this World Cup but hinted he might make changes with a last-16 tie looming on Sunday.

ENTER FABINHO

Brazil
midfielder
leaves Liverpool
for Saudi club
Al Ittihad

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Brazil midfielder Fabinho has signed a three-year deal with Saudi Arabian side Al Ittihad after completing his move from Liverpool on Monday.

The lanky 29-year-old was left out of Liverpool's pre-season squads for trips to Germany and Singapore after Al-Ittihad made a £40 million (\$51 million) bid for him.

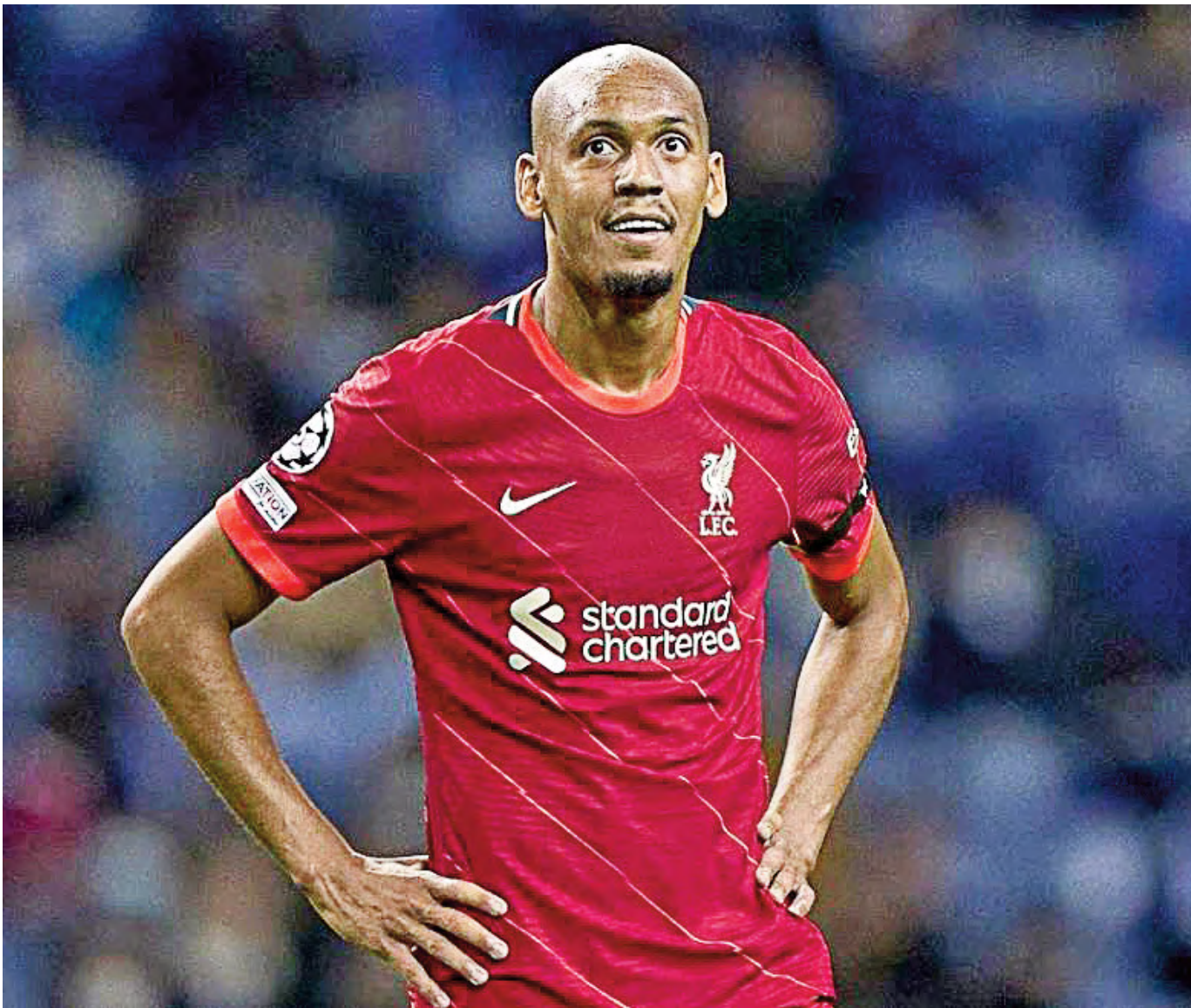
He will join Karim Benzema and N'Golo Kante at Al-Ittihad, one of four Saudi clubs controlled by the Gulf state's sovereign wealth fund.

Fabinho joined Liverpool from Monaco in 2018 and made 219 appearances for the Reds, winning the Champions League, Premier League, FA Cup, League Cup and Club World Cup.

"Today I leave my home. It's been five years wearing this jersey and always with the greatest honor and happiness possible," Fabinho wrote on Twitter, which is being rebranded as X.

"Since day one at Liverpool, I've been embraced by everyone," he added. "In these five years, I grew as a player, as a man, I made dreams come true... With that jersey, I won every title a player can dream of."

His departure comes after Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson



Fabinho

Since day one at Liverpool, I've been embraced by everyone. In these five years, I grew as a player, as a man, I made dreams come true... With that jersey, I won every title a player can dream of

FABINHO

ended his 12-year stay at Anfield last week, moving to Saudi Arabia to play for Al Ettifaq, who are coached by Steven Gerrard.

Fabinho's compatriot Roberto Firmino left Merseyside to sign for Al-Ahli earlier this month.

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp has also seen midfielders

Naby Keita, Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain and James Milner depart on free transfers since the end of last season.

But the club have reinforced that area of the field with the signings of Alexis Mac Allister and Dominik Szoboszlai.

AFP



Wu Yibing

China's Wu collapses while leading ATP Washington opener

Washington, United States - China's Wu Yibing collapsed and was helped off the court on Monday after retiring from his opening match against Japan's Yosuke Watanuki at the ATP and WTA DC Open.

It was the second notable health incident in a match within a month for Wu, who needed a medical timeout after falling ill at the end of the first set in his opening-match Wimbledon loss to American Frances Tiafoe.

On the Washington hardcourts, Wu was leading 4-1 in the first set when he made a wobbly step, went to take a seat and then collapsed forward over the back of a folding chair.

Wu was helped to his feet and eased down onto the

court with an umbrella quickly brought over to provide shade. He was later assisted in walking off the court.

A statement from the tournament said Wu retired due to illness.

The 23-year-old from Hangzhou also played last week in Atlanta, beating France's Corentin Moutet in his first match before losing to eventual champion Taylor Fritz, the world number nine from the United States, in the second round.

World number 90 Wu won his first ATP title in February at Dallas, becoming the first Chinese player to capture an ATP crown and China's highest-ranked player ever, reaching 54th in the world in May.

AFP

No handshake, no problem as Svitolina downs Azarenka

Washington, United States - Ukraine's Elina Svitolina grabbed a second straight victory over Victoria Azarenka of Belarus at the WTA Tour DC Open in Washington on Monday, weeks after the duo's Wimbledon clash was marred by a handshake controversy.

Azarenka was booed off court at Wimbledon earlier this month after her defeat to Svitolina, with fans apparently perceiving she had snubbed her Ukrainian opponent by not advancing to the net for a handshake.

In fact, Svitolina did not offer a handshake - something she has declined to do with players from Russia and Belarus ever since the invasion of her homeland. Belarus is a key military ally of Moscow.

On Monday, tournament organizers in Washington aimed to pre-empt any possible repeat of



Elina Svitolina celebrates after beating Victoria Azarenka (AFP)

the controversy by informing fans before the match there would be no handshakes.

"At the conclusion of the match there will be no handshake between the players," a message on an arena screen said beforehand.

"We appreciate your respect for both athletes during and following the match, and for your understanding during these difficult circumstances."

With that issue settled, it was left to the two rivals to serve up a hard-fought if error-strewn battle that saw no fewer than 17 breaks of serve before Svitolina finally prevailed 7-6 (7/2), 6-4.

Svitolina clinched victory by breaking Azarenka's serve in the 10th game of the second set.

A wild Azarenka backhand presented Svitolina with a match point which she duly converted on the first attempt.

Australian track star Bol cleared of doping

Sydney, Australia - A doping investigation into Australian Olympic 800m runner Peter Bol was dropped Tuesday, with the middle-distance star calling it "a dream come true".

Bol, who narrowly missed bronze when he finished fourth at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, returned a positive result for performance-enhancing Erythropoietin Receptor Agonists (EPO) in January.

He was suspended from all competition, but a later analysis of his B-sample returned an "atypical finding", meaning it did not confirm the original test.

The Sudan-born athlete, who always claimed innocence, has now been cleared, with further testing at a World Anti-Doping Agency-accredited laboratory confirming a negative result.

"As a result, Sport Integrity Australia has taken the decision not to progress an anti-doping rule violation for this sample," the anti-doping agency said. "The investigation into this sample is fi-



Peter Bol

nalised."

Bol said he had been "exonerated" and would now focus on the World Athletics Championships in Hungary later this month. "It was a false positive like I have said all along," he said.

"The news from Sport Integrity Australia today was a dream come true. No one should ever experience what I have gone through this year."

WADA said it was satisfied that Sport Integrity Australia followed all applicable processes, but would conduct a review nevertheless.

"While we have no reason to question the validity of the analytical method used for recombinant EPO, WADA will assess the current review process in light of the particularities of this case," it said.

Coe defends Budapest as worlds venue and hails doping case

Paris, France - World Athletics president Sebastian Coe has defended the choice of Hungary's capital Budapest to host this month's world championships and also said the sport's latest doping case was actually a reason to celebrate.

Hungary's far-right Prime Minister Viktor Orban is strongly opposed to what he calls the European Union's "LGBT+ offensive" and last month the US ambassador to Hungary blasted him for opportunistically stirring up hatred against gay people.

Coe, speaking to selected reporters on a conference call ahead of the August 19-27

championships, said: "The world is a complex place, it's becoming more complex by the year and that isn't going to change.

"So one thing that does need to adapt here is sport and sport is ultimately probably the most adaptable organism that is out there and in an uncertain world sport is the only anchor point."

The International Olympic Committee has argued in the past that taking the Games to countries such as China would help accelerate a greater respect of human rights.

Athletics itself held its world championships in 2019 in Doha, the capital of Qatar, whose own



Sebastian Coe

approach to human rights came under intense scrutiny when it hosted the 2022 men's football World Cup.

Coe, the head of the largest

Olympic sport, said his ideas and those of the IOC "don't always run in parallel" - but he added: "On this one, I agree."

"Do countries use sport? Of course they do?" he said.

"One thing I can tell you is that I have never, ever been involved in sport that has gone anywhere, particularly into challenging environments, where it has left that society politically, culturally, socially worse off for being there."

Doping case 'lends confidence'

Athletics was dealt a blow in July when women's 100m hurdles world record holder Tobi Amusan of Nigeria, the reigning world champion from last year, was charged with an alleged anti-doping whereabouts rule violation.

Amusan is accused of missing three tests in 12 months.

Coe argued that far from tarnishing the sport's reputation, such cases "lend confidence".

"Our sport has improved its reputation more than any other sport in the last two years by a distance because we have been prepared to tackle the issues around doping," he said.

"I would much prefer to have the occasional headline which none of us actually want than the knowledge that we were gently declining into a landscape where we didn't have the systems in place to weed out the people we don't want in the sport."

It was, he said, "not brain surgery" for athletes to identify "one hour a day where they are going to be" so anti-doping testers can locate them.

Looking ahead to the action in Budapest, Coe said the handful of world records set so far this season suggested "these have the potential to be the best world championships performance-wise of all time".

Coe picked out the men's shot put as an event he was looking forward to. Ryan Crouser of the United States set a new world record of 23.56m in May. "He is in the form of his life again," Coe said.

FAIRYTALE FINISH

Stuart Broad bows out with match-winning wicket as England win fifth Test to draw Ashes

London, United Kingdom - Stuart Broad enjoyed a fairytale finish as England beat Australia by 49 runs to win the fifth Test at The Oval on Monday and end the Ashes series all square at 2-2.

Australia, chasing a mammoth 384 to win, slumped from 264-3 to 334 all out, with retiring paceman Broad wrapping up the match with the final two wickets.

England did the bulk of the damage when, after a rain break of more than two hours, they took four Australia wickets for 11 runs in 19 balls.

Off-spinner Moeen Ali (3-76) and all-rounder Chris Woakes

win an Ashes Test match is pretty cool."

'Fair reflection'

England captain Ben Stokes added: "I think 2-2 is a fair reflection of the teams literally going toe to toe. Australia are world Test champions, they are a quality team.

"I don't think many teams would have been able to respond from 2-0 down (like we did)."

Australia captain Pat Cummins agreed a drawn series was a fair result.

"We can be hugely proud of retaining The Ashes. It is no easy

"I thought Chris Woakes and Moeen Ali set the tone absolutely unbelievably. Once we got a couple we really started to believe. The crowd were unbelievable

STUART BROAD

(4-50) led the way before Broad, England's all-time leading Ashes bowler, polished off the tail.

"I thought Chris Woakes and Moeen Ali set the tone absolutely unbelievably," Broad, who announced on Saturday he would be retiring after this match, told Sky Sports.

"Once we got a couple we really started to believe. The crowd were unbelievable. It was so loud and we just jumped on the back of that.

"When you make that decision you wonder what your last ball will be so to take a wicket to

feat against a high-quality side in English conditions," he said.

Cummins's men, as the holders, had already retained the urn but this defeat means Australia remain without an Ashes series win in England since 2001.

"We were over here to win the Ashes," said Cummins. "Unfortunately it was not to be."

When play resumed after the rain delay, Australia were 238-3, needing 146 more runs for victory to finish a tour they started by routing India in last month's World Test Championship final at The Oval.



England's Stuart Broad (R) celebrates with James Anderson (C) and Zak Crawley after taking the final Australian wicket in their fifth Ashes Test in London on Monday (AFP)

Steve Smith, dropped at leg gully by Stokes just before the interval, was 40 not out and left-hander Travis Head 31 not out.

The pair had extended their fourth-wicket stand to 95 when off-spinner Moeen, who later

batsman when Smith fell for 54, edging paceman Woakes to Zak Crawley at second slip.

The tourists slipped to 274-6 when Moeen had Mitchell Marsh caught superbly by diving wicketkeeper Jonny Bairstow.

But with Australia needing 55 to win, Broad produced a brilliant delivery to take tailender Todd Murphy's outside edge, with Bairstow holding another fine diving catch.

AFP

Captain Stokes vindicated as 'Bazball' pays off for England in Ashes thriller

London, United Kingdom - England captain Ben Stokes stuck to his guns despite criticism of his fearless 'Bazball' approach and feels vindicated after his side levelled the Ashes series on a dramatic final day.

Australia were well-placed at 264-3, chasing a mammoth 384 to win, and even had they come away with just a draw, that would have been enough to secure a 2-1 series success.

But instead they suffered a dramatic collapse after a lengthy rain delay on the fifth day at The Oval. Stuart Broad took the final two wickets as England won by 49 runs to pull level at 2-2.

England started the series against Australia confident their gung-ho approach would work even against the newly crowned world Test champions.

They had good reason to be upbeat, with an impressive record of 11 wins in 13 matches since Stokes had teamed up with



England's Moeen Ali (L) celebrates with captain Ben Stokes after taking the wicket of Australia's Travis Head

coach Brendon McCullum, after whom Bazball is named.

From the moment Zak Crawley hit the first ball of the Ashes for four at Edgbaston, it was apparent England had no intention of changing their formula despite

the challenge posed by Australia's pace attack.

But while the fans have thrilled to England's approach at packed grounds, Stokes has been criticised for not applying the brakes at crucial moments.

He raised eyebrows by declaring in the first innings of the first Test at Edgbaston when England were 393-8 with half an hour's play left, leaving Joe Root high and dry on 118 not out in a match they ultimately lost.

Australia captain Cummins falls short of Ashes ambition

London, United Kingdom - When rain kept Australia holed up in The Oval changing rooms for more than two hours, Australia captain Pat Cummins might have thought his side were on their way to a long-awaited Ashes series win in England.

Australia were well-placed at 264-3 after play resumed in pursuit of a mammoth victory target of 384 on Monday's final day of the fifth Test.

Even had they come away with a draw, that would still have been enough for a 2-1 series success and a first Ashes campaign triumph in England since 2001.

But instead Australia lost seven wickets for 70 runs in a dramatic collapse as England won by 49 runs to end the series all square at 2-2 -- the same overall result as the 2019 Ashes.

This was an unusual trip, starting for Australia with a 209-run rout of India in last month's World Test Championship final on the same London ground.



England's Ben Stokes (L) and Australia's Pat Cummins with the trophy after the drawn Ashes Series

But with the WTC in its infancy, Cummins was aware the tour would be judged on the outcome of the Ashes.

'Legacy-defining'

"Whether we like it or not, Ashes series tend to define eras and teams," he said after the final. "If we win, that is legacy-defining stuff."

Yet in an Ashes in which Cummins's tactics were called into question, it was Australia's batting failures that ultimately cost them a series win.

And Nathan Lyon's absence for the final three Tests following the veteran off-spinner's tour-ending calf injury at Lord's also deprived Cummins of much-needed control in the field.

Ben Stokes hits back at Australia drinks snub claim

London, United Kingdom - England captain Ben Stokes has insisted his team did not snub Australia after reports they refused to have post-series drinks with their Ashes rivals.

England beat Australia by 49 runs to win the fifth Test of the series at The Oval on Monday.

Stokes's side, who came from 2-0 down to draw the series 2-2, traditionally join the opposing team in the dressing rooms to socialise at the end of a Test campaign.

But reports in the Australian media suggested the tourists were left disappointed as they waited to be invited into the England dressing room before departing around an hour later.

England Test coach Brendon McCullum had already cast doubt on the socialising when he said "I can't imagine we'll be having a beer with them any time soon" following Jonny Bairstow's controversial stumping by Australia's Alex Carey in the second Test at Lord's.



Usman Khawaja

Khawaja laments 'frustrating' ball change in Ashes finale

London, United Kingdom - Australia batsman Usman Khawaja was left to rue a "frustrating" ball change which he believed played a key role in England's fightback to win the fifth Ashes Test at The Oval.

The tourists started Monday's last day on 135-0, needing just 249 more runs to reach an imposing victory target of 384.

But England's Chris Woakes struck twice early on, taking two wickets in seven balls as he removed both David Warner (60) and Khawaja (72) following their impressive opening stand.

The ball appeared to be moving significantly more in the air and off the pitch than it had on the fourth day.

And while overhead conditions and a rain-freshened pitch may have played their part in making batting conditions more difficult, a change of ball, brought about when England fast bowler Mark Wood hit Khawaja on the helmet late on Sunday, may have been a factor as well.

In these circumstances, the on-field umpires are supposed to select a replacement ball in similar condition to the one being

discarded.

But television pictures suggested the replacement ball was significantly newer than the old ball and that there did not appear to be one of equal wear and tear for the umpires to select from a box of replacement balls.

"I walked straight up to Kumar (Dharmasena, the umpire) and said straightaway, 'That ball looks nothing like the one we were playing with. I can see writing on it'," Khawaja told cricket.com.au after Australia had been bowled out for 334 to give England a 49-run victory.

Hope wins toss and puts India into bat in series decider



Ishan Kishan (L) smashed 77 and and Shubman Gill scored 85 as India made 351 for 5 from their 50 overs. Sanju Samson and Hardik Pandya also shone for India

Tarouba, Trinidad And Tobago - West Indies captain Shai Hope won the toss and put India in to bat in the third and final One-Day International at the Brian Lara Stadium on Tuesday.

In the wake of a series-leveling six-wicket victory in Barbados on Saturday the home side have retained an unchanged team in pursuit of a first ODI series victory over India for 17 years.

Notwithstanding Saturday's setback when regular captain Rohit Sharma and premier batsman Virat Kohli were rested, the tourists continued giving fringe players an opportunity ahead of India's hosting of the World Cup

which begins in October.

Sharma and Kohli remain on the sidelines with Hardik Pandya leading the team for a second match.

Ruturaj Gaikwad comes in for just his second ODI in the middle-order and left-arm seamer Jaydev Unadkat plays his first ODI in ten years.

Axar Patel and Umran Malik are the players omitted from the second ODI.

This is the first men's ODI being played at the venue, which will also host the opening fixture of the five-match T20 International series between the two teams on Thursday.

AFP

KLOPP CONCERNED ABOUT SAUDI TRANSFER WINDOW

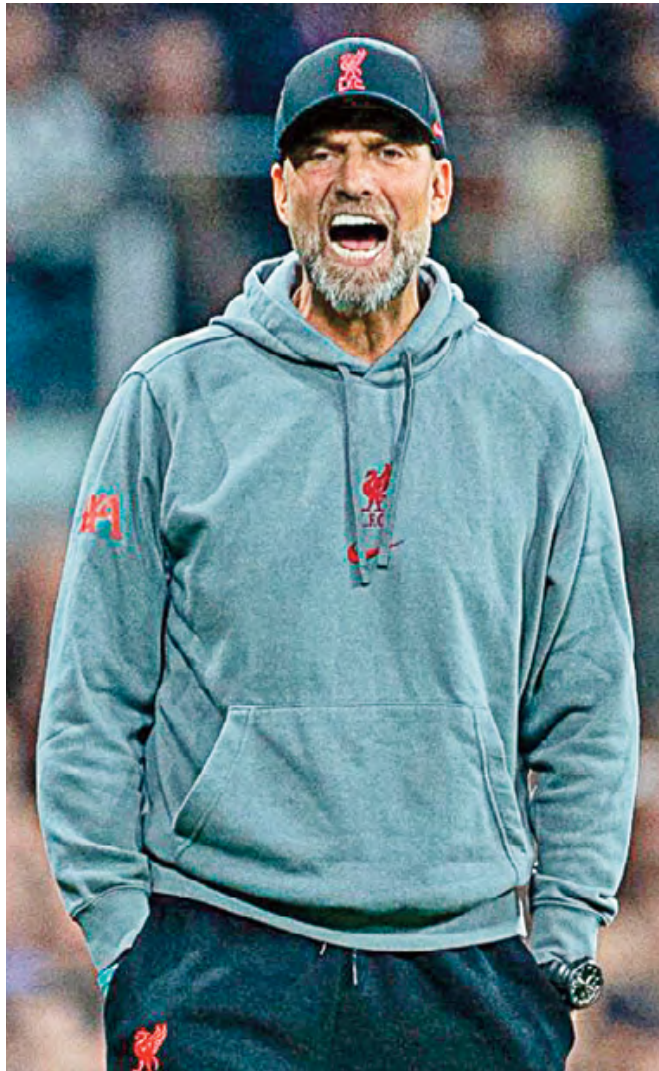
Singapore, Singapore - Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp on Tuesday urged football authorities to address the late closure of the transfer window in the Saudi Arabia league, fearing it may have a detrimental effect on European clubs.

Speaking in Singapore on the eve of his team's pre-season friendly against German champions Bayern Munich, Klopp voiced his concern while reacting to the news that former Liverpool striker Sadio Mane is set to leave Bayern to join Saudi side Al Nassr.

Since the start of the year, clubs in the oil-rich Middle Eastern kingdom have spent generously to sign some of the world's leading players including Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema and N'Golo Kante.

Brazilian midfielder Fabinho on Monday became the third Liverpool player to move to a Saudi club in this close season when he joined Al-Ittihad in a £40 million (\$51 million) deal, hot on the heels of Jordan Henderson and Roberto Firmino.

Klopp appears concerned that the closure of the Saudi transfer window on September 20, three



Jurgen Klopp

weeks after it shuts in Europe, could impact clubs who would be unable to sign suitable replacements.

"The influence of Saudi Arabia? We will see. I don't know. At the moment it looks like they have quite an influence, it is massive," said the German.

"I think that pretty much the worst thing is that the transfer window in Saudi Arabia is open

Bayern Munich manager Thomas Tuchel was also asked about the rising influence of Saudi football and he likened it to the Chinese Super League where clubs also spent heavily on importing footballing talent in the middle of the last decade.

"I'm just observing the situation, which is a very new situation," said the Bayern boss.

"It's maybe a bit similar to the

I think that pretty much the worst thing is that the transfer window in Saudi Arabia is open for three weeks longer. If I am right, I heard something like that

JURGEN KLOPP

for three weeks longer. If I am right, I heard something like that. Then, at least in Europe, that's not helpful. So UEFA and FIFA must find solutions for that.

"But in the end, I don't know at this moment exactly what will happen. It is already influential, for us, for sure. We will have to learn to deal with it, but that's what we do," he added.

"That's pretty much all I can say about it, time will show."

situation when China started their league. It's kind of a similar gold rush there and we're experiencing the next league which tries to become more popular, more famous and tries to build a brand by signing a lot of quality players and coaches," he added.

"It's a completely new situation and a bit too early for me to have a clear opinion. So I'm an observer, a surprised observer."

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Coffee shop employees serve filtered coffee at the shop in Yemen's Huthi-held capital Sanaa

Tucked amid shell-pocked buildings and roadside tributes to fallen fighters, a less obvious byproduct of wartime is spreading across Yemen's capital: speciality coffee houses serving steaming cups of top-rated pour-over.

The Arabian Peninsula's most impoverished country, locked in an eight-year conflict between Iran-backed Huthi rebels and forces supporting the internationally recognised government, has deep ties to coffee.

Legend has it that Sufi mystics on Yemen's western coast were the first people to brew coffee beans back in the 15th century. Yet Yemeni entrepreneurs have until recently focused on exporting their best product to wealthy overseas markets.

The most famous among them is Mokhtar Alkhanshali, whose death-defying bid to ship a container full of speciality beans during the war's early stages was chronicled in Dave Eggers' 2018 best-selling book 'The Monk of Mokha'.

For other Yemenis, however, blocked ports and related restrictions imposed during the war have inspired them to turn inward, giving rise to a cafe scene that today brings flashes of Brooklyn and Paris to Sanaa's war-scarred streets.

"People started to feel like Yemeni coffee was costing a lot and they lost interest in buying it," said Rashed Ahmed Shagea of Durar Coffee, recalling how the export market soured as fighting broke out in 2015.

In response, he opened a cozy shop in central Sanaa where customers can sample beans from all over the country, surrounded by Yemeni art and Yemeni-made wood furniture.

"We had to think of another way to support our farmers," Shagea said.

"Everybody said it's impossible to work in Yemen, that people had no purchasing power... But we insisted."

A magical drink

In southern Sanaa's Hadda neighbourhood, Hussein Ahmed made a similar gamble in 2018, opening his Mocha Hunters cafe on a street dotted with million-dollar villas.

It was the culmination of a long personal

journey with coffee that began when he and his Japanese wife founded a cafe in Tokyo more than a decade ago. After the marriage ended, Ahmed also turned his attention to exporting, but wartime hurdles and a travel ban against Yemenis introduced by former US president Donald Trump spurred him to consider opportunities in his home country.

In the cafe's early days, Ahmed could sometimes count on one hand the number of customers who dropped by. Now, the patio is full most afternoons, with Yemenis

and foreigners drawn to the simple menu - 750 Yemeni rials (around US\$1.50) for pour-over drip and qishr, a traditional drink made from coffee husks, and 1,000 Yemeni rials (around US\$2) for cold brew.

"It's like a wave," Ahmed said, adding this was only natural for a country of coffee 'pioneers' who transformed it from seeds to a magical drink.

The speciality offerings are a far cry from the commercial-grade coffee, often loaded with milk and sugar, that many Yemenis are

used to consuming, Ahmed said.

"This movement, it reintroduces what is good taste," he said, with a touch of the haughtiness required of any self-respecting trend-setter.

"We tell customers, 'Your taste or preference doesn't matter for us. We drink what we think is good.'"

'Angels singing' in a cup

Both Durar and Mocha Hunters still depend heavily on their export business, which became easier after a truce was announced in April last year.

Yemeni coffee is world-renowned - James Freeman, founder of Blue Bottle Coffee, once said of Alkhanshali's Port of Mokha product that 'this is what 'angels singing' tastes like'.

Sales abroad have been boosted further by Yemeni diaspora communities wracked with nostalgia for their homeland but reluctant to return because of the fighting, Ahmed said.

"I think our expats, our people who live abroad, because of the hardness of travel, they become more emotional about their land. So they buy local products," he said. "It's a global movement, speciality coffee, but in Yemen it's more emotional."

Back home, meanwhile, entrepreneurs are bullish on local consumption, especially if a durable ceasefire were to take hold and improve the economy. More than two-thirds of the population currently depend on aid to survive.

"This place will grow in the future to become the largest coffee centre in the Middle East," predicted Ghaleb Yahya Alharazi, manager of Haraz, a coffee house that opened last year and can accommodate 1,000 people.

"We have a goal, which is a journey back to the glory, culture and authenticity of Yemeni coffee."

AFP



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KENZO SHOW



Hong Kong singers Gillian Chung (L) and Charlene Choi pose on the red carpet ahead of the Kenzo fashion show



Against Shanghai's glittering river skyline, Kenzo-clad models strutted down a breezy open-air runway on Friday for the French fashion brand's first-ever show in China.

The country's vast pool of consumers is critical to the luxury market, and top brands like Kenzo are turning to wooing them on their own turf as domestic high-end shopping rises. Kenzo already operates 40 stores in mainland China, and the show is part of its policy of reinforcing its strong commitment and growing presence in the Chinese market, a statement announcing the show said. "Despite the slowing economy, China is sending positive signs (to design houses)," said Lisa Nan, correspondent for Jing Daily, a publication which reports on the luxury sector in the country.

Consequently, 'brands are engaging with local consumers through their highest standard of presentation, runways... Consumers really appreciate these exclusive events'. On Friday, dozens of models in dark blues and pastels paraded down the riverfront catwalk that took Shanghai's

Oriental Pearl Tower as a backdrop, with bemused tourists scrambling to take pictures as they sailed past on LED-lit cruise boats. Creative director Nigo's Spring/Summer 2024 collection - which has already shown in Paris - was presented with small changes to underscore a symbolic yet natural 'East



Models present creations for Kenzo by Japanese fashion designer Tomoaki Nagao aka Nigo during Kenzo fashion show at the North Bund Bay in Shanghai. (AFP)

Meets West' bridge, Kenzo said. The Shanghai venue was chosen to match that of the Paris show, which took place on the footbridge that links to the Eiffel Tower over the River Seine in June. Kenzo is part of the LVMH group,

which includes dozens of brands like Louis Vuitton, Dior and Tiffany. Its head, French billionaire Bernard Arnault, visited China in late June and has said he is 'optimistic about the Chinese market'. "The Chinese clientele is much more important than it was in 2019," LVMH's financial director Jean-



Jacques Guiony recently told journalists. Analysts at UBS, meanwhile, have said that 2023 will be the 'year of the Chinese consumer'. Chinese consumers' spending on personal luxury goods had already sur-

passed pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2022 and has continued to grow year-on year, according to market research company Euromonitor - largely thanks to domestic shopping that took off while zero-Covid kept the country largely cut off from the world. The figure is projected to reach US\$59bn by 2023, with the growth set to continue, although at a slower rate, in the short to medium term. "Post-pandemic repatriation of luxury spending is unlikely to budge any time soon," said Fflur Roberts, Head of Luxury Goods at Euromonitor. "These new-found shopping habits and major improvements in the local shopping options and customer journey are set to stick, and a notable share of luxury purchases by Chinese customers will continue to occur within the mainland." Despite China's slowing economy, Roberts said, "the future overall for luxury goods in China nonetheless continues to look bright" and brands are jostling to take advantage. Nan said 2023 was the 'year of replica fashion shows'. "Bottega Veneta, Chanel, Dior have or will be showcasing in China this year. So, no wonder why Kenzo decided to showcase this year," she said. AFP

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