



Oman receives RO1.6bn in FDI in Q1, up 8.4% from Q4 2022

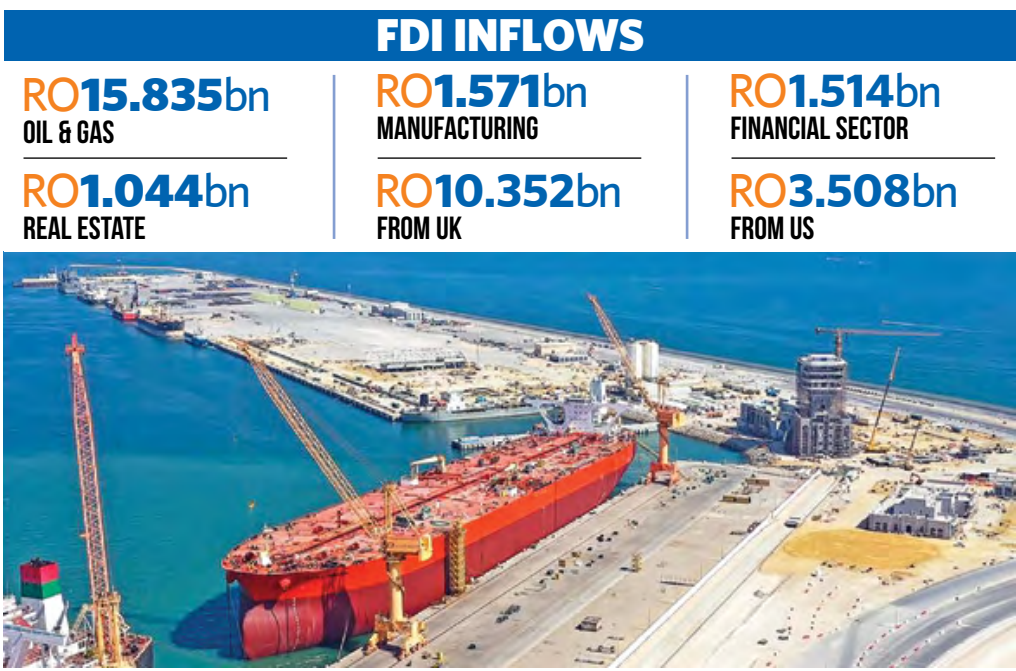
Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman attracted RO1.651bn worth of new foreign direct investment (FDI) in the first quarter of 2023 with the oil and gas sector receiving the majority, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The data indicated that the total FDI stock in the sultanate increased 8.4% to RO21.274bn at the end of Q1 2023 compared to RO19.623bn at the end of December 2022.

The bulk of FDI in the sultanate is directed towards the oil and gas and manufacturing sectors, with lower shares going to the financial, real estate and other sectors.

Total FDI in Oman's oil and gas sector increased 12% to RO15.835bn at the end of Q1 2023 compared to the previous quarter figures, accounting for nearly 75% of the total FDI stock



in the country.

FDI flows in the oil and gas sector grew sharply by 92.9% year-on-year to reach RO4.138bn in the first quarter of 2023.

However, FDI in manufactur-

ing increased slightly to RO1.571bn at the end of Q1 2023 from RO1.549bn at the end of December 2022.

Foreign direct investment in the financial sector increased to RO1.514bn at the end of Q1 2023

against RO1.481bn at the end of December 2022, while total FDI in real estate (renting and business activities) inched up to RO1.044bn in Q1 2023 from RO1.037bn at the end of December 2022.

UK – the biggest source of FDI

The United Kingdom continues to be the biggest source of FDI in Oman. Investments from UK-based entities accounted for nearly half of the total value of FDI in the sultanate.

The total FDI stock from the UK reached a staggering RO10.352bn at the end of Q1 2023, accounting for 48.7% of the total FDI in Oman. FDI flows from the UK jumped more than 44% to RO1.738bn in Q1 2023 against RO1.206bn in the same period of 2022.

The United States emerged as the second biggest foreign direct investor in Oman with total FDI from the US reaching RO3.508bn at the end of Q1 2023. FDI flows from the US jumped more than 73% to RO1.093bn in Q1 2023 against RO630mn recorded in the same period of 2022.

Foreign direct investment from China reached RO1.231bn at the end of Q1 2023.



OIA's Mu'tamad programme to foster local talent

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Committed to cultivating local talent and bridging the skills gap in the labour market, Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has unveiled a new employment and development initiative called 'Mu'tamad'. Announced on Sunday, the programme is the result of a collaboration between OIA, the Ministry of Labour and various higher education institutions in Oman.

Mu'tamad's primary focus is the recruitment and professional development of Omani graduates specialising in finance and accounting. It equips these individuals to qualify for the Chartered Certified Accountants Certificate. The programme aims to recruit 20-25 graduates each year, offering them the chance to secure the certification within three years of their recruitment.

The initiative strives to cultivate a proficient talent pool capable of leading Oman's financial and accounting sectors in the future. The programme will hone various financial and administrative skills, bolster participants' capabilities, expand their knowledge, foster positive values, and elevate their competitiveness on both local and international stages.

Ayad al Balushi, Assistant Deputy President for Finance and Assurance at OIA, remarked that Mu'tamad joins a succession of OIA-initiated training programmes like Nomou and Ea'dad.

Balushi emphasised that such endeavours reflect OIA's commitment to train national talent, preparing them for the labour market. "Encouraging them to

Encouraging national talent to earn professional certificates can help meet the demand for these specialised disciplines

AYAD AL BALUSHI

earn professional certificates can help meet the demand for these specialised disciplines, improve the finance and accounting performance of companies, boost productivity, generate job opportunities, and advance Omanisation."

Omanis with bachelor's or master's degree in accounting or finance can apply. Candidates will be shortlisted via written tests and interviews. Apply through <https://www.linkedin.com/jobs/view/3672305955>

Oman Across Ages Museum vies for global award

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Oman Across Ages Museum, the newest addition to the sultanate's rich list of cultural landmarks, has been nominated for the prestigious World Architecture Festival (WAF) Awards.

It is among 250 projects shortlisted for this year's awards, which will culminate in one being named 'World Building of the Year' in Singapore in December. Nominated in the Culture cat-



egory, the museum is inspired by the extraordinary landscape and geometric profile of the Al Hajar

Mountains and its canyons.

'The Oman Across Ages Museum is a celebration of the coun-

try's rich history, culture and economic growth through time while offering an insight into Oman's tomorrow. The museum is a cultural and educational landmark for all Omanis and visitors. The sheer scale of the building as it rises out of the ground to the horizon is something to behold. It includes various galleries, a library, an auditorium, and educational, social and research spaces,' WAF organisers said.

Designed by COX Architecture of Australia, the museum

uses the full panoply of architecture's potential for expression and communication, including scale, geometry, form, light and vistas both as purely expressive devices and also to offer a wide range of possibilities for installations, displays and performances.

Other notable buildings on the shortlist include Newark Liberty International Airport's recently opened Terminal A, Australia's Holocaust Museum in Melbourne and new national stadiums in Cambodia and Senegal.

► NEWS BRIEF

OMAN PARTICIPATES IN CONFERENCE ON MIGRATION

Rome, Italy - Oman, represented by the Foreign Ministry, participated in the International Conference on Development and Migration, held in Rome, Italy. Italian Prime Minister Georgia Meloni hosted the event.

At the outset of his meeting with the Italian PM, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.

The goal of the conference was to confront migration-related challenges and combat human trafficking while promoting economic development within a multilateral cooperation framework. It sought to address issues such as illegal migration, smuggling and trafficking of migrants.



Duqm - Oman's developing tourism hub



Announcement



The Tax Authority would like to draw the attention of taxpayers who are subject to Excise Tax to submit their returns for the second quarter of 2023, according to the forms prepared for this purpose through Tax Authority's Portal: www.taxoman.gov.om not later than **July 30, 2023**

We hope everyone will abide and commit to the deadline of submitting.



Announcement



The Tax Authority would like to draw the attention of taxpayers who are subject to VAT to submit their returns for the second quarter of 2023, according to the forms prepared for this purpose through Tax Authority's Portal www.taxoman.gov.om not later than **July 30, 2023**

We hope everyone will abide and commit to the deadline of sumbitting.

Hubert Vaz
Muscat

Artists and intellectuals of various nationalities in Oman have welcomed last week's announcement of the introduction of a ten-year cultural visa for writers, artists and intellectuals who wish to visit and collaborate with professionals and institutions in the sultanate.

On July 18, Majlis A'Shura approved the introduction of a decade-long cultural visa, aimed at fostering the sultanate's arts community, aligning with a progressive cultural strategy designed to build and promote creative talent in Oman.

The cultural visa is intended to attract eligible intellectuals and writers to Oman. This move, as proposed by the shura's Media and Culture Committee, underscores the significance of cultural heritage, architecture, language, literature, calligraphy, sculpture, drawing and other artistic fields. The committee emphasised the importance of creating an environment that draws intellectuals, uniting the efforts of cultural authorities and visa and residence departments.

Muscat Daily spoke with citizens and expats, all of who welcomed the announcement -

Dr Nasser Palangi
Australian-Iranian artist and
faculty member of Scientific
College of Design

This is very surprising news for



(Art by Victor Kim)

me. This means, Oman government's cultural strategy is very advanced and updated. I received a Golden Visa last year from the UAE government, and I think it will be great to have the same in Oman, too.

Matti Sirvio
Finnish artist and proprietor of
Matti Sirvio Art Galleria

I'm happy to hear this. In order to excel among the nations, we need to be in touch with them. The more we have contacts with other countries and their cultures, the more we have opportunities to make our own culture known and appreciated.

Hamdah al Shamsi
Writer and CEO of Eisar
Financial Consultancy

learn from their expertise. The decision proves that the government welcomes great minds and truly rewards human talent very highly. This is a wonderful way to enhance creative and intellectual capacities of a nation moving towards a bright future.

Clive Gracey
Irish artist and long-time
resident of Oman

This decision will position Oman as an artistic and cultural hotspot in the region in the near future. It will also have an enriching effect on local artists, writers and intellectuals by exposing them to international trends in arts and in research.

Rebeca Nigrinis
Colombian artist

cess to a greater pool of practitioners.

Dr C Thomas
Reconstructive surgeon and
resident of Oman for nearly five
decades

These talented people (who are eligible for the ten-year visa) understand the beauty of Oman and its hospitality and the outside world will listen to them. It will enhance tourism, foreign investments and help Oman's economy. I support this progressive step.

**Dr Luca Moretti &
Dr Lucia Oliva**
Italian artists and holders
of Dubai Culture and Arts
Authority's Golden Visa

Oman is seen and dreamt of as a land of fairy tales, rich in fascinating history, culture and ancient traditions, besides a majestic natural environment which is a source of inspiration for artists. The ten-year cultural visa is a praiseworthy choice for the patronage of arts that will allow artistic talent to flourish.

Dr Zahra Akbari
Art therapist

This move will bring more artistic businesses to Oman as well as make it the future home of art in the region. Art is a source of inspiration for society to be more innovative and productive. Investment in art and encouraging artists to come to Oman can have a huge impact on the future of the sultanate and its leading role in propagating Islamic culture.



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MTCIT inks two pacts to enhance AI, cybersecurity excellence

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) and the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) signed two memoranda of understanding (MoUs) on Sunday to foster scientific research and innovation in artificial intelligence (AI) and cybersecurity.

The signatories were H E Dr Ali bin Amer al Shidhani, Undersecretary for Communications and Information Technology at MTCIT, and Dr Saeed bin Hamad al Rubaie, Vice-Chancellor of the university.

H E Shidhani provided an overview of the first MoU's intended impact in the realm of AI and advanced technology. The agreement includes provisions for scientific chairs, research centres and laboratories in these



The second MoU aims to fortify the cybersecurity industry in Oman, provide an innovative environment for the university's students, academics and researchers, and encourage public-private-academic sector partnerships in cybersecurity

H E ALI AL SHIDHANI

fields. Joint AI programmes will further qualify academic staff of the university. Additionally, the MoU aims to facilitate research in AI and advanced technologies through incentive programmes.

The MoU extends to enhancing academic programmes via specialised AI courses, collaborating with local and international tech firms for joint research, and enabling faculty to augment their skills through training programmes, workshops and conferences. To further AI and tech awareness, the agreement includes holding public lectures, competitions and seminars.

According to H E Shidhani, the second MoU is geared towards establishing an innovation and excellence centre in cybersecurity. "This aims to fortify the cybersecurity industry in Oman, provide an innovative environ-

ment for the university's students, academics and researchers, and encourage public-private-academic sector partnerships in cybersecurity."

Rubaie stressed the MoUs' importance in enhancing the skills of both faculty and students. He expressed optimism about these acting as the seed for future collaboration between the MTCIT and UTAS and for programmes at other branches of the university.

Both agreements align with the overarching aim to contribute to the national digital economy programme, bolster scientific research and encourage innovation. The collaborative environment these create is intended to facilitate knowledge transfer, skill development and enhance Oman's standing as a leading hub for AI and advanced technologies research and development.

Low pressure to bring rain starting Monday: CAA

Muscat - A low-pressure trough affecting Oman will bring isolated rains in the governorates of South Sharqiyah, Dhofar and Al Wusta from Monday.

The National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre of the Directorate General of Meteorology stated that the sultanate will be affected by a low-pressure trough starting on Monday and last till Wednesday.

'Isolated rain of 10mm to 30mm may cause wadis to overflow, while the state of the sea

will be moderate to rough with maximum wave height of 2.5m,' the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) stated.

The weather will be cloudy to partly cloudy in the rest of the governorates, with the possibility of isolated rain and occasional thunderstorms over the Al Hajar Mountains during this period.

CAA called on everyone to be cautious during thunderstorms, not cross wadis, avoid low areas, and not venture into the sea during the warning period.

Kushk boosts digital transformation of SMEs

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Kushk, an e-commerce platform aimed at small and medium enterprises (SMEs), has successfully registered over 500 businesses since its inception in 2022.

Supervised by the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development, Kushk is a milestone in the e-commerce sector, striving to enhance and streamline the shopping experience.

Haitham bin Abdullah al



Balushi, co-founder and CEO of Kushk, said, "The platform's mission is to enhance the shopping

experience for both merchants and consumers. We strive to increase online sales and help busi-

nesses extend their reach."

Kushk offers entrepreneurs the opportunity to establish new e-commerce websites within a couple of days, equipped with on-line payment capabilities. Furthermore, it provides versatile sales channels and offers customers a smooth shopping journey with delivery facilitated by logistics companies partnered with the platform.

Balushi highlighted the fact that Kushk caters to a wide range of businesses, including retail outlets, traditional stores and e-

commerce merchants.

Its six integral services include comprehensive online store setup, mobile points of sale, an advanced control panel, quick setup, electronic invoicing, and inventory management.

In a world increasingly reliant on digital interactions, Kushk's goal is to provide comprehensive tech solutions to aid and improve online shopping for SMEs. The platform emphasises innovation and continuous service enhancement, with plans for expansion into new markets on the horizon.

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Floward official partner in 'Bloom Festival'



Floward, the go-to online flowers and gifts delivery destination in MENA and UK, joins Taiseer - the Omani commercial platform as an official partner in organising 'Bloom Festival' as part of Salalah Tourism Festival. The Bloom Festival will kick-off on July 27 and will run until August 11 at Hawana Salalah Marina in Dhofar governorate.

This partnership agreement, signed by Floward Oman Country Manager Muhammad Haris and Taiseer CEO Nada Bassam, stems out of Floward's belief that this collaboration among private sector institutions will significantly promote Salalah's Tourism Festival, positioning of Oman as an attractive destination for both in-bound and out-bound tourists.

Bloom Festival is being organised with the goal of creating an unforgettable, immersive experience catered towards all ages, combining creativity and

entertainment in a family friendly environment. Another main goal of this initiative is to spread awareness on environmental preservation and sustainability, which will be showcased at the festival through various events and activities.

As an official partner, Floward will be holding its own floral workshops throughout the duration of the festival, led by the company's florists. Visitors will be taught how to clean the flowers and put them into attractive arrangements, as well as how to take care of them to increase their longevity.

Floward Chairman and CEO, Abdulaziz B. Al Loughani said, "We are excited to be joining hands with Taiseer platform in organising the first edition of Bloom Festival that is being held with significant goals in mind with support from the Ministry of Tourism. Through

this initiative we are also offering our support in boosting Salalah Tourism Festival's status as a top tourist attraction."

He added, "We consider such collaborations between the public and private sectors to be equally fruitful for both parties, and we place high importance on supporting the government in achieving their objectives to drive growth in society."

Taiseer CEO Nada Bassam said: "We are pleased to announce the launch of the first edition of Bloom Festival, the festival of flowers and life, in collaboration with Floward, and with the support of multiple government entities and a number of sponsors from the private sector. Bloom, occurring during Salalah's annual tourism festival, is an educational entertainment festival catered towards all ages, and remarkably represents a significant milestone for tourism in Oman."

Send your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om

مجلس الوحدة الخليجية
United GCC Fund

المندقة الأوراق المالية
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Chairman's Report

Dear Investors,

We are excited to present a recap of the United GCC Fund's performance for the first half of 2023. We achieved a remarkable return of 15.14%, significantly outperforming the S&P GCC benchmark by over 1200 basis points.

The first half of 2023 was characterized by significant volatility in the global economic environment. Key highlights of this period included a surge in tech stocks driven by AI advancements, a considerable downturn in commodity markets, inflation moderating, and a resurgence in cryptocurrency value. We also managed to successfully evade a potential banking crisis, thanks to the swift and decisive action of global central banks. Despite increased instability and rising interest rates, the MSCI World Index showed significant growth, yielding a 12% return, translating into a phenomenal \$8 trillion increase in global market capitalization.

The commodities market experienced an 11% decrease in Brent crude prices in the first half due to concerns about a global economic slowdown. However, Saudi Arabia's decision to decrease its daily oil production by 1 million barrels in July and August, coupled with Russia's 500,000 barrels reduction, demonstrates OPEC's dedication to maintaining oil price stability in the face of falling demand predictions. The nearing completion of the US's final release from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR), with bids for an additional 6 million barrels being prepared for the upcoming months, will likely prevent further price decline. Furthermore, EIA (Energy Information Administration) expects that global oil inventories will decline in each quarter from the third quarter of 2023 until third quarter of 2024. As a result, EIA forecasts that the Brent crude oil price will increase from an average of US\$ 79 per barrel in the second half of 2023 to an average of US\$ 84 per barrel for 2024 which augurs well for the GCC.

In the first half of the year, the S&P GCC index returned 2.9%, lagging global and Emerging indices. Within the regional space, Dubai indices led their GCC counterparts, achieving a respectable 13.7% in first half of 2023. This impressive performance was underpinned by a favorable macro-outlook, a resurgence in tourism to pre-pandemic levels, and a robust real estate market attracting wealthy European and Russian investors. Moreover, Dubai's valuation remains on the lower end compared to its peers.

Saudi Arabia and Bahrain followed suit with notable gains of 9.4% and 3.3%, respectively. However, Abu Dhabi, Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman were the laggards and declined by 6.5%, 5.7%, 3.6%, and 1.9%, respectively. In terms of IPOs in the GCC region, the outlook remains positive, with most newly listed companies reporting double-digit returns on their first day of trading.

As we venture into second half of 2023, the GCC region remains resilient amidst the evolving global financial landscape shaped by rising interest rates. Thanks to stable oil prices, effective non-oil GDP growth initiatives, and well-managed inflation under the US-pegged regime makes the GCC region an enticing prospect. Its impressive resilience and recovery in the first half of the year testifies to this potential.

Our performance thus far, with more than 15% return, stands as a solid testament to our investment approach and deep understanding of the market dynamics. We are excitedly looking forward to the rest of the year, which we see as a field ripe with new opportunities. Our goal is to seize these opportunities and ensure optimal returns for all our valued investors.

Finally, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to all our clients, investors, and stakeholders for their trust and unwavering confidence in us. Your continued faith propels our determination to excel in delivering remarkable investment performances

Yours sincerely,

Mustafa Ahmed Salman
Chairman - Management Body, UGCC Fund

Unaudited condensed interim statement of Comprehensive Income for the six-month period ended 30th June 2023

	Six months ended 30 June 2023 RO Unaudited	Six months ended 30 June 2022 RO Unaudited
Income		
Interest income	1,065	529
Dividend income	449,984	318,673
Fair value change on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	1,069,159	(573,673)
Realized gain/(loss) on sale of financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	1,119,889	1,122,259
Foreign exchange (loss)/gain	13,360	(41,610)
Other Income	-	-
Net investment income/(loss)	2,653,457	826,178
Expenses		
Management fees	(80,323)	(86,740)
Custody and administration fees	(14,057)	(15,179)
General and administrative expenses	(154,725)	(129,990)
Incentive Fee Provision	(61,210)	(183)
Profit and total comprehensive income/(loss) for the period and increase/(decrease) in net assets attributable to the unit holders	2,343,142	594,086
Profit/(loss) per unit	0.200	0.051

Unaudited condensed interim statement of Financial Position at 30th June 2023

	As at 30 June 2023 RO Unaudited	As at 31st December 2022 RO Unaudited
ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	783,883	2,385,921
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	16,767,879	13,042,143
Other receivables	57,423	13,723
Total assets	17,609,185	15,441,787
LIABILITIES		
Payables and accruals	151,785	139,272
Net assets attributable to unitholders	17,457,400	15,302,515
Total liabilities and assets attributable to unitholders	17,609,185	15,441,787
Net assets attributable to the unitholders per unit	1.479	1.311

To get the complete financials kindly contact us on : 24763300
Or email us on : info@usoman.com

For subscription details please contact UGCC Fund@ 24763362 or email ugccfund@usoman.com

Mineral sector sees 11% rise in revenue

Total sale value of mineral ores - both metallic and non-metallic - reached almost RO98mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MEM) reported 11% rise in revenue from the mineral sector in 2022 as compared to the figures of the previous year.

The total sale value of mineral ores - both metallic and non-metallic - reached almost RO98mn, the ministry informed.

The production of mineral ores tallied around 63mn tonnes, while local market sales of building materials amounted to 16mn tonnes keeping pace with the local demand in 2022.

These achievements were disclosed during the Energy and Minerals Forum organised by the ministry at the Millennium Resort Salalah in the Dhofar governorate on Sunday.

The event, under the patronage of H H Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, primarily focused on the minerals and the hydrogen sector within Oman, and specifically within the Dhofar governorate.

In his address, H E Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, highlighted the forum's objective.

"Our goal is to introduce attendees to key projects super-



Some of the achievements were disclosed during the Energy and Minerals Forum organised at the Millennium Resort Salalah in the Dhofar governorate on Sunday

vised by the ministry and our preparations for the fall season of 2023. This forum forms part of a larger scheme to develop the sector and attract investment," H E Hadhrami said.

He further outlined the ministry's efforts to accelerate procedures for regulating the

hydrogen sector, establish legal frameworks for its growth, and allocate suitable production sites. This initiative, aimed at broadening energy sources, reducing carbon emissions, and promoting economic growth, is a significant stride towards achieving carbon neutrality, thereby

balancing sustainable development and climate change repercussions.

The forum featured a presentation on mining in Oman, detailing the historical and geographical aspects of minerals, the geology of Oman, and its principal minerals. The ministry's

strategy to encourage local and foreign investment in the mineral sector was also discussed.

Other topics covered included new investment mechanisms in the sector, focusing on concession areas and public sites for sustainable development, and an overview of the renewable en-

ergy and hydrogen sector's role in achieving economic diversification.

The OQ Group presented its plan for the Dhofar Autumn Season 2023. This included plans for the production, processing, and transportation of expected petroleum products.



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**CHAIRMAN'S REPORT
FOR THE 30thJune 2023.**

Dear Shareholders,

It is my privilege to present to you the company's operating report for the half year ended 30thJune 2023.

Overview of operations and financial performance

During the period we registered a gross revenue of RO 11.5 million and pretax profit of RO 3.48 million. Revenue declined by 20.9% and pretax profit by 15.1 % respectively.

Other income was buoyed by a fair value gain of RO 1.053 million on our investments. Profit after tax stood at RO 3.112 million.

The revenue and profitability were impacted mainly on account of the imposition of customs duty in KSA. This duty is restricting our access to that vital market and is prevailing despite repeated assurances that the duties collected so far will be refunded and the duty revoked going forward. Resolution of this issue in one of our largest markets which has been going on since July last year is vital to our interests. In addition to this, business was affected by the holidays in the second quarter.

To compensate for the loss of business in KSA, we have increased our emphasis in other markets, notably Yemen and Jordan and in both these markets we have registered significant growths. However this is inadequate to make up for the loss of business in KSA which remains by far the largest market in the region. **A quick resolution of the customs duty in KSA remains key to our growth and profitability.**

We are doing satisfactorily in the other GCC markets and are pleased to state that we continue to be market leaders in our home market in Oman.

Future Outlook

We are working closely with the authorities in KSA, providing them with all the information that they need to provide us the necessary exemptions. We are hoping for a satisfactory resolution soon, enabling free and fair access to the Saudi market. Our priority continues to be expanding in other markets.

The enhancement of our capability to produce larger format tiles will improve our realisation and the additional volumes will help amortise our fixed costs more optimally. A better realisation and a lower cost will help us to improve our profitability as we go forward.

Corporate Governance

I am pleased to report that your company has adhered to all the regulations covering Corporate Governance in Oman. We remain committed and aspire to becoming model corporate citizens.

We are grateful to the government of Oman for their support and encouragement.

We are confident that Oman will continue to grow and prosper under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and we hope to play our part in this.

**Hussain Ali Habib Sajwani
Chairman**

**STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION
(Unaudited) - at 30th June 2023**

	30th June 2023 RO	30th June 2022 RO
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	19,933,258	11,135,233
Capital Work in progress	-	8,195,732
Right of use of Asset	3,573,815	3,706,178
Fair value through other comprehensive income investment	1,834,079	2,347,700
Deferred Tax Asset	335,765	-
Total non-current assets	25,676,917	25,384,843
Current assets		
Debt instruments at amortised cost	4,815,569	10,399,051
Inventories	6,195,007	3,766,916
Trade & Other receivables	12,468,172	10,626,705
Bank balances and cash	(303,857)	1,681,630
Total current assets	23,174,891	26,474,302
Total assets	48,851,808	51,859,145
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Share capital	22,000,000	22,000,000
Legal reserve	7,333,333	7,333,333
Retained earnings	4,562,643	4,210,837
Equity Investment reserve	(884,449)	(927,817)
Total equity	33,011,527	32,616,353
Liabilities		
Non-current liabilities		
Non current portion of lease liabilities	3,669,472	3,667,314
Employees' end of service benefits	1,159,455	1,037,322
Deferred tax liability	-	240,261
Term Loan	2,834,517	4,123,421
Total non-current liabilities	7,663,444	9,068,318
Current liabilities		
Current portion of lease liabilities	207,222	207,222
Current portion of term loan	1,031,123	-
Short Term loan	1,500,000	2,000,000
Accounts and other payables	5,075,282	4,290,922
Taxation	363,210	620,996
Bank overdraft	-	3,055,334
Total current liabilities	8,176,837	10,174,474
Total liabilities	15,840,281	19,242,792
Total equity and liabilities	48,851,808	51,859,145
Net assets per share	0.150	0.148

**STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME
(unaudited)for the half year ended 30th June 2023**

	2023 RO	2022 RO
INCOME		
Revenue from contract with customers	11,500,575	14,545,619
Cost of Revenue	(7,863,767)	(8,324,305)
Gross profit	3,636,808	6,221,314
Other income	9,545	24,454
	3,646,353	6,245,768
EXPENSES		
General and Administrative Expenses	(1,309,436)	(1,288,370)
Selling and distribution Expenses	(907,438)	(1,531,673)
Net finance charges	(148,754)	(26,793)
	(2,365,628)	(2,846,836)
Profit from Operation	1,280,725	3,398,932
Investment Income	1,146,856	702,046
Fair value gain in investment thru Profit & Loss Account	1,053,613	-
Profit for the year before taxation	3,481,194	4,100,978
Taxation	(369,384)	(615,147)
Net profit for the year	3,111,810	3,485,831
Fair value changes in fair value through other comprehensive income investments	159,305	(104,873)
Total comprehensive income for the year	3,271,115	3,380,958
Basic earnings per share	0.014	0.016

Daleel Petroleum achieves Zero Routine Flaring

Our Correspondent
Muscat



Daleel Petroleum - one of the leading oil producers in Oman - has achieved Zero Routine Flaring, seven years ahead of the World Bank's target.

"This remarkable achievement early this year is a demonstration of the company's dedication to Oman's vision, the future of our planet, and our children's right for a brighter future," the company stated.

Daleel was flaring all the produced associated gas until 2008 when the first gas processing train was commissioned to extract valuable liquids such as LPG and NGL that resulted in 28% total flare reduction.

In 2012, Daleel commissioned the power plant to generate the required field power demand, utilising gas as fuel and significantly reducing diesel consumption.

The second gas processing train was commissioned in 2018 to maximise the extraction of LPG and NGL and export the sur-

plus gas, which resulted in 80% reduction in total flared gas.

In early 2023, Zero Routine Flaring was successfully achieved by further eliminating all atmospheric pressure flaring.

"The company dedicates its efforts to reducing emissions at both local and global levels, working towards a healthier and cleaner environment for the community," Marash al Kalbani, Operation Director at Daleel Petroleum, said.

To date, Daleel has recovered 440,000 tonnes of LPG, 2.8mn barrels of NGL, and exported 28bn standard cubic feet of Lean Gas.

"These numbers speak vol-

umes about our dedication and the environment positive impact we have made based on operational excellence as a core value. As we celebrate this milestone, we still have eco-friendly plans and projects for the future."

Daleel Petroleum aims to further reduce non-routine flaring, minimise fuel-gas consumption, enhance safety-flaring requirements, improve energy efficiency, and increase utilization of renewable energy sources.

These goals will pave the way towards eco-friendly achievements, reinforcing Daleel Petroleum positioning as industry leaders and pioneers of sustainability.

ECB for tougher monitoring of banks

Berlin, Germany - The European Central Bank (ECB) on Saturday said it wants to monitor the liquidity of banks in the eurozone more frequently to reduce the future risk of a financial crisis.

"We decided to send banks, starting in September, a request for information on a weekly basis, in order to have more recent data to allow us to better monitor liquidity developments," said the chair of the body in charge of supervising banks in Europe, which is part of the ECB, in an interview published on the ECB site.

"It's a question of sending, with greater frequency, the information on liquidity that banks already send us on a monthly basis," Andrea Enria said.

The data include details such as the maturity of liquidity in the



Andrea Enria

bank's accounts, their counterparties and refinancing transactions with the ECB.

This should make it possible to better control the development of "the most liquid assets and liabilities, like deposits", Enria added.

The shift comes just after the bankruptcy of regional banks in

the United States in March, followed by the collapse of Credit Suisse, which triggered fears of a global financial crisis.

The measure responds to a June recommendation by the European Banking Authority (ABE), the regulator for the sector.

The European Union also adopted at the end of June new stricter regulations on banks to avoid a repeat of the 2008 financial crisis.

In this context, the chair of the supervisory board called for greater cross-border consolidation of the European banking sector

"A more integrated market" of European banks "would be beneficial because it would be more capable of withstanding possible shocks", he said.

AFP



ahlibank celebrates ‘future leaders’ coming through Etimad

In line with its continuous efforts to empower the youth through significant initiatives that add value, ahlbank proudly announces the graduation of a new batch of its employees who enrolled in the Etimad programme.

Through such programmes, the bank aims to develop leadership skills and support the careers of its employees, furthering its investment in the future of national talents.

During the ceremony, five employees from ahlbank graduated from the Etimad Leadership Development programme. These talented individuals were recognised for their exceptional zeal, enthusiasm, and commitment to reaching new heights. This falls in line with the country’s objectives to support the youth as well as further the goals of the Omanisation strategy.

The employees were felicitated by the senior management of ahlbank. The Etimad programme serves as a platform to instill leadership competencies in young Omani professionals in middle and senior management positions within the private sector.

As a collaborative effort between the public and private sectors, ahlbank remains steadfast in its commitment to upskill young Omani nationals and equip them for future competitive roles.

During the celebration, the graduates were honoured with certificates and a range of valuable gifts, symbolising the joyous moment of acknowledging their hard work and dedication.

The Etimad programme aims to enhance Omani youth’s leadership skills, as it is part of the future goals of Oman. Etimad falls under a comprehensive suite of programs created in partnership with international and local institutions which aim to empower the youth and future leaders of the country under The Royal Academy of Management.

ahlibank has launched a number of initiatives alongside the Etimad programme. The bank’s unwavering efforts are aimed at building a confident and capable workforce, and to achieving Oman Vision 2040.

For the first time in the country, Oman International Hospital (OIH) has successfully performed an Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT)-guided corneal endothelial transplant on a child suffering from a congenital corneal disease.

The pioneering procedure was performed by Dr Ahmed al Maskari, Senior Consultant Cornea, Cataract and Refractive Surgeon and Head of Oman Vision Centre at OIH.

The innovative approach utilizes the latest advancements in Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) technology to precisely guide the transplantation of corneal endothelial cells. The corneal endothelium is a single layer of cells located at the inner surface of the cornea, responsible for maintaining its clarity and proper function.

By selectively replacing only the damaged endothelial cells, this procedure offers enhanced visual outcomes and faster recovery times compared to traditional techniques.

“We are proud to be the first hospital in Oman to conduct an OCT-guided corneal endothelial transplant, especially for a paediatric case. This achievement is a testament to our continuous commitment to leveraging advanced technologies and treatments to provide the highest standard of care for our patients,” said Dr Maskari.

“Oman Vision Centre at Oman International Hospital has a state-of-the-art combination of cutting-edge technology, a comprehensive medical environment, and expertise to provide our patients with the great possible care.”

This successful operation opens a new chapter in Oman’s healthcare landscape.

Oman International Hospital CEO Marcelo Pereira said, “We at Oman International Hospital believe in providing the best available medical care to our patients using the advanced technology and employing the well experienced physicians. With great pride and satisfaction, we announce the successful completion of this landmark medical procedure in Oman.”



Dr Ahmed al Maskari

Hydrom presents future plans at green hydrogen conference

Hydrogen Oman (Hydrom), a subsidiary of Energy Development Oman (EDO), recently participated in the recent Green Hydrogen Conference and Exhibition - Europe 2023, held in Madrid, Spain.

As part of its participation, Hydrom presented the ambitious vision and strategic plans of the Sultanate of Oman in fostering the growth of the green hydrogen industry, with the aim of becoming a global hub for its production in the near future.

Hydrom general manager Abdul Aziz Said al Shidhani took part in the conference, where he presented the results of the first public auction round in phase A.

The event witnessed the signing of agreements to initiate the development of five projects in Al Wusta Governorate, spanning an area exceeding 1,600 km2 and with a total investment of more than US\$30bn.

Additionally, Shidhani discussed the second round of the public auction within the same phase, as well as the promising investment opportunities it offers companies interested in entering this industry.

Commenting on Hydrom’s participation in the conference, Shidhani said, “The Green Hydrogen Conference and Exhibition in Europe is a prominent global event that focuses on the future of renewable energy in the hydrogen sector. Hydrom decided to participate in sponsoring this event with the purpose of informing major companies operating in this field about Oman’s visionary plans for the green hydrogen economy and the joint infrastructure being developed to support these projects, which will open doors for various industries to transition towards green production methods. Our primary goal for participating was to encourage international companies to engage with us and take advantage of the excellent opportunities currently offered by the Sultanate through the second round of public auction, which will also offer numerous plots of land in the Dhofar governorate. Our participation in this event was highly successful, as several companies expressed a keen interest in learning more about these investment opportunities.”

He added, “We are moving in the right direction to put the Sultanate of Oman on the list of the world’s leading green hydrogen producers, thus making it an attractive destination for foreign industrial investments seeking to transition to clean energy. We are confident in our ability to attract leading companies in this sector as partners as we work together to create a more sustainable future for Oman’s energy industry.”

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MHD Leasing opens at Muscat airport

MHD Leasing, Oman’s leading vehicle rental company, has opened a new branch at Muscat airport. This expansion aims to provide people with a seamless and convenient car rental experience as soon as they arrive in Muscat.

With a diverse fleet ranging from affordable sedans to high-end luxury vehicles, MHD Leasing ensures customers can find the perfect car to match their preferences and travel requirements. The company also prioritises the safety of its customers and has implemented rigorous cleaning and sanitisation protocols to ensure the cleanliness of its vehicles.

The new airport branch of MHD Leasing provides customers with a convenient and quick pick-up and drop-off service. The rental counter is easily accessible upon arrival, and the vehicles are parked nearby. Customers can choose from a variety of flexible rental options, including short-term and long-term rentals.

The company’s friendly and knowledgeable staff are committed to providing excellent customer service throughout the rental process, from reservation to return, ensuring a seamless rental experience.

“Our expansion to the airport is a testament to our commitment to providing convenient, quality, and affordable vehicle rental services,” said Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE. “We look forward to being an easily accessible option for tourists and residents, and promoting tourism for Oman with our exceptional service and diverse fleet.”

MHD Leasing’s best-in-class services deliver the most innovative solutions in the field of vehicle leasing, catering not only to the needs of individual customers but to those of corporate clients as well. Lease options are competitive and hassle-free and apply to the complete range of vehicles - from basic models and premium vehicles to high-performance marques and commercial vehicles.

While leases are typically drawn up against long-term contracts, MHD’s superb line-up of vehicles is also available against daily, weekly, and monthly rentals. MHD Leasing currently operates a fleet of approximately 2000 vehicles.



OAB addresses industry changes, opportunities in key roundtable meeting

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) took part in roundtable talks on shaping the future of the financial and banking industry with representatives of the National Program for Financial Sustainability and Financial Sector Development (Estidamah), alongside other industry experts from Alizz Islamic Bank (AIB) and National Bank of Oman (NBO).

The discussions addressed the opportunities and challenges in the banking sector, and highlighted how Estidamah can play a role in catalysing alignment, and creating opportunities for growth and development.

Discussions covered supporting SMEs, innovation in the banking sector, growing the fintech ecosystem, financial literacy, talent management and green financing.

Sulaiman al Harthi, CEO of Oman Arab Bank, said, “We are confident that our discussions with Estidamah will help provide a crucial blueprint for the development of the industry, and our counterparts in the banking sector.

“OAB’s commitment to Oman’s socioeconomic growth agenda and Vision 2040 remains steadfast as we continue harnessing innovation to enhance our product offerings and deliver an overall superior banking experience. Understanding the key role, the SME sector is playing, we have also introduced many initiatives and solutions tailored for them, starting with workshops and training programs to credit facilities and exclusive offers. In addition, we financed several strategic green projects and continue to develop local talent through various programs designed for the local market.”

Ali al Maani, General Manager of Alizz Islamic Bank, said, “Considering the banking sector’s crucial role as a fundamental pillar of the Sultanate’s economic progress, these dialogues carry immense significance. They provide a platform for sharing valuable banking experiences from diverse sectors, foster a deeper understanding, and charter a path for the future.”

Abdullah al Hinaï, CEO of National Bank of Oman said, “I am delighted to have participated in this roundtable discussion, and I thank Oman Arab Bank for the invitation.

“One of the objectives of Estidamah is to enhance the readiness of the financial sector and transform it into a key enabler in achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

“At the National Bank of Oman, we are committed to supporting Estidamah to promote the economy as a whole and the financial sector in particular.”

Mahmood al Aweini, Director of Estidamah stressed on the importance of the engagement and coordination between government units and private sector entities in the Sultanate of Oman to achieve the ambitious goals set for the financial sector.

Aweini further explained, “Estidamah will lead the creation of an advanced green financing framework as well as an attractive innovation hub for financial technology solutions.

“The ultimate goal is to nurture investment opportunities for international and local entrepreneurs,” he added.



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Oman’s first corneal transplant for child conducted at OIH

For the first time in the country, Oman International Hospital (OIH) has successfully performed an Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT)-guided corneal endothelial transplant on a child suffering from a congenital corneal disease.

The pioneering procedure was performed by Dr Ahmed al Maskari, Senior Consultant Cornea, Cataract and Refractive Surgeon and Head of Oman Vision Centre at OIH.

The innovative approach utilizes the latest advancements in Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) technology to precisely guide the transplantation of corneal endothelial cells. The corneal endothelium is a single layer of cells located at the inner surface of the cornea, responsible for maintaining its clarity and proper function.

By selectively replacing only the damaged endothelial cells, this procedure offers enhanced visual outcomes and faster recovery times compared to traditional techniques.

“We are proud to be the first hospital in Oman to conduct an OCT-guided corneal endothelial transplant, especially for a paediatric case. This achievement is a testament to our continuous commitment to leveraging advanced technologies and treatments to provide the highest standard of care for our patients,” said Dr Maskari.

“Oman Vision Centre at Oman International Hospital has a state-of-the-art combination of cutting-edge technology, a comprehensive medical environment, and expertise to provide our patients with the great possible care.”

This successful operation opens a new chapter in Oman’s healthcare landscape.

Oman International Hospital CEO Marcelo Pereira said, “We at Oman International Hospital believe in providing the best available medical care to our patients using the advanced technology and employing the well experienced physicians. With great pride and satisfaction, we announce the successful completion of this landmark medical procedure in Oman.”

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Putin claims Ukrainian counteroffensive ‘failed’: Russian agencies

Moscow, Russia - Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Sunday that Kyiv’s counteroffensive had ‘failed’, as he began two-day talks with his Belarus counterpart and closest ally Alexander Lukashenko.

The longtime leaders met for the first time since Lukashenko helped end a mutiny by Russian Wagner mercenaries in Russia last month, in the biggest threat to Putin’s more than two-decade rule.

“There is no counteroffensive,” Lukashenko said, before being interrupted by Putin:

“There is one, but it has failed.”

The pair met in Putin’s native Saint Petersburg, hours after the Russian army had struck Ukraine’s Black Sea port of Odesa.

In a sign of the importance of the meeting, Putin said he had ‘changed some of my plans’ so that talks with Lukashenko could last two days. The Russian leader said the pair would discuss ‘security in our region’.

The Belarus strongman now hosts Wagner fighters on his territory, after brokering a deal that convinced its leader Yevgeny Prigozhin to end a march on Moscow and exile himself to Belarus.



Vladimir Putin (right) shakes hands with Alexander Lukashenko at the Constantine Palace in Strelna, outside Saint Petersburg, on Sunday (AFP)

Lukashenko said Minsk was ‘controlling’ the situation with the notorious Wagner fighters, and restricting them to staying in the centre of the reclusive country.

Wagner’s presence in Belarus has rattled EU and NATO member Poland, which has strengthened its border.

Both Putin and Lukashenko accused Warsaw of having territorial ambitions on Ukraine and Belarus, with the Belarusian strongman issuing a veiled threat.

“They are asking to go West, ask me for permission... to go on a trip to Warsaw, to Rzeszow,” Lukashenko said, referring to Wagner fighters, to Putin, who smiled. “But of course, I am keeping them in central Belarus, like we agreed”.

“We are controlling what is happening (with Wagner),” he said, adding: “They are in a bad mood.”

He thanked Putin for vowing

to defend Belarus should it be attacked.

The comments came two days after Putin said western Poland was a gift from Stalin.

Lukashenko accused Poland of trying to ‘rip off a western chunk’ of Ukraine.

He also accused Poland of bringing mercenaries to the border, saying he had ‘brought him a map of moving armed forces of Poland to the borders of the union state’.

The comments came after Warsaw summoned the Russian ambassador over Putin’s Poland remarks.

After their talks, Putin and Lukashenko greeted crowds in

the naval town and base of Kronstadt on Kotlin Island in a rare walkabout.

Russia’s *Kommersant* newspaper posted a video of Putin and Lukashenko posing for photographs with people, with bodyguards standing nearby.

Asked about quarantine rules which the Russian leader has been keeping up strictly since the pandemic, Putin replied: “People are more important than quarantine.”

Several days after Wagner had ended its mutiny last month, Putin met with adoring crowds in Dagestan in an apparent show of popularity.

AFP

Spain votes in snap election with right favoured to win

Madrid, Spain - Spain went to the polls on Sunday in an early general election in which the conservative Popular Party (PP) was tipped to beat Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez’s Socialists but likely to need the far-right to govern.

Final opinion polls allowed under Spanish law published on Monday suggest the PP was on track to win the most seats in the 350-seat parliament but fall short of a working parliamentary majority.

That could force the PP to form a coalition with Vox, giving a far-right party a share of power at the national level for the first time since the end of the decades-long dictatorship of General Francisco Franco in 1975.

Anti-immigration and anti-feminist Vox is part of a Europe-wide trend of far-right parties gaining support at the ballot box.

The far-right governs alone in Hungary and in coalition with the centre-right in Italy and Finland.

Polling stations opened at 9am (0700 GMT) and are set to close at 8pm (1800 GMT), with near-final results expected several hours later.

Braulio Munoz, a 53-year-old teacher, said he was hoping the election would result in another coalition government between the Socialists and the far-left.

“I think it is the best option in terms of training for the future of our students,” he told AFP after voting in Barcelona. Sanchez, in office since 2018, appealed for a ‘historic turnout’ to produce a ‘strong government’ after he cast his ballot in Madrid with his wife.



The leader and candidate of conservative Partido Popular (People’s Party) Alberto Nunez Feijoo casts his ballot during Spain’s general election, in Madrid, on Sunday (AFP)

Final opinion polls allowed under Spanish law published on Monday suggest the PP was on track to win the most seats in the 350-seat parliament but fall short of a working parliamentary majority

The election is ‘important not just for us, but also for the world and for Europe’, he added.

With the election being held at the height of summer with many Spaniards on holiday, a record 2.47mn registered voters have cast an absentee ballot, according to Spain’s postal service.

‘Dark time warp’ Sanchez warned during an ill-

tempered TV debate with PP leader Alberto Nunez Feijoo that PP-Vox coalition government would ‘take us into a dark time warp that will leave us who knows where’.

In its electoral programme, Vox pledges to overturn laws on gender violence, LGBTQ rights, abortion and euthanasia as well as outlaw separatist parties and defend traditions such as bull-

fighting. Sanchez called the snap polls after his Socialist party and its far-left junior coalition partners suffered a drubbing in May local and regional elections.

Under his watch the economy has outperformed most of its European Union peers, growing by 5.5 per cent last year, and inflation has dropped below the European Central Bank’s 2.0 per cent target this year, a rarity in Europe.

He has also introduced popular measures such as a sharp rise in the minimum wage, higher pensions and free commuter rail travel to help households cope with the cost of living crises.

But his minority coalition government’s reliance on the votes of Catalan and Basque separatist

parties to pass legislation has hurt his standing.

Many voters are especially angered by his occasional deals with EH Bildu, the heir of the political arm of the disbanded armed separatist group ETA which is blamed for over 850 deaths in its decades-long campaign of bombings and shootings for an independent Basque homeland.

‘New era’ Feijoo, who sells himself as a stable and safe pair of hands, has accused Sanchez of allowing ‘terrorists’ to condition Spain’s future with his reliance on Bildu.

He has vowed to undo many of Sanchez’s laws, including one which allows anyone 16 and over to change their gender on their ID card on the basis of a simple statement.

“Spain can start a new era,” Feijoo told reporters after casting his ballot. Another major blow to Sanchez’s popularity was a botched law on sexual consent approved last year which led to roughly 100 convicted offenders to be released from jail because of the way it redefines offences.

If the PP and Vox fall short of a working majority, that would give the Socialists a chance to form another government because they have more options to create alliances with smaller parties.

Federico Santi, senior analyst for Europe at Eurasia Group, said left-wing parties ‘still have more than a fighting chance at retaining a majority in parliament’.

AFP



Protesters clash with the police during a nationwide demonstration against the government of Dina Boluarte in Lima, last week (AFP)

Peru police clash with protesters demanding president step down

Lima, Peru - Protesters and police clashed over the weekend during renewed demonstrations against Peru’s interim President Dina Boluarte in the capital Lima, where demonstrators are demanding she step down and hold elections.

Boluarte came to power in December after former leftist president Pedro Castillo was ousted and arrested, triggering accusations of power grabbing and setting off months of nationwide demonstrations.

The ensuing crackdown by security forces left almost 50 people dead, according to an estimate by Human Rights Watch, which accused the authorities of extrajudicial and arbitrary killings.

The latest unrest kicked off on Wednesday, when more than 4,000 demonstrators took to Lima’s streets, in part to demand accountability for the protesters’ deaths.

On Saturday, police fired tear

gas to disperse a crowd that was occupying the central San Martin square. Three civilians were detained in scuffles with security forces, according to the ombudsman’s office and human rights organisations.

No injuries were reported.

Saturday’s gathering drew hundreds of protesters from unions and leftist groups, but did not include the centrist and centre-right factions.

Further demonstrations are planned for July 28, a national holiday celebrating Peru’s 1821 independence from Spain.

Boluarte, 61, is being investigated by the public prosecutor’s office for alleged ‘genocide, qualified homicide and serious injuries’, although her political position grants her immunity from prosecution.

Even if Boluarte faces a concrete charge, as president, she could not face a court until her mandate ends in 2026.

AFP

Ukraine vows retaliation to deadly Odesa strikes

Kyiv, Ukraine - Russia’s latest missile attack on Odesa left two dead on Sunday, wounded many and badly damaged a UNESCO-listed Orthodox cathedral, drawing a vow of retaliation from Ukraine’s leader.

The strike on the port city, which Russia has pounded since quitting the Black Sea grain deal, came just hours before Russian President Vladimir Putin met his Belarus counterpart for talks. Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky promised to strike back at Russia for the deadly attack, which involved 19 missiles and also wounded 22 people

“Missiles against peaceful cities, against residential buildings, a cathedral,” Zelensky said. “There will definitely be a retaliation against Russian terrorists for Odesa.”

Kyiv also said the Orthodox Savior and Transfiguration Cathedral under UNESCO protection in the historic city centre was destroyed, calling it a ‘war crime that will never be forgotten and forgiven’.

Andriy Palchuk, archdeacon of the cathedral, told AFP that both people in the cathedral at the time of the attack survived. Moscow said it had hit all its intended targets in the Odesa strike, claiming the sites were being used to prepare ‘terrorist acts’ against Russia.

Odesa has been bombed several times since the start of the invasion, and in January the United Nations cultural agency UNESCO designated the historic centre of the city as a World Heritage in Danger site.

AFP

Cambodia’s ruling party says on course for ‘landslide’

Phnom Penh, Cambodia - Cambodia’s ruling party declared on Sunday that it was on course for a ‘landslide’ victory in an election where all meaningful opposition to long-time ruler Hun Sen was eliminated before polling day.

The 70-year-old former Khmer Rouge cadre has ruled since 1985 and faced no real contest in the vote, with opposition parties banned, challengers forced to flee and freedom of expression stifled.

His Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) is expected to retain all 125 seats in the lower house, prolonging his grip on power and paving the way for him to hand the reigns to his son in a dynastic succession some critics have compared to North Korean politics. The only serious opposition party was disqualified on a technicality in the run-up to the polls, and it will be a surprise if any of the 17 other small, poorly funded



Hun Manet, eldest son of Prime Minister Hun Sen, shows his finger after he casts his vote at a polling station in Phnom Penh on Sunday (AFP)

parties win seats.

“We are winning a landslide,” CPP spokesman Sok Eysan told AFP around two hours after polls closed, with counting under way.

Official results are expected within hours. More than 9.7mn people were registered to vote in Cambodia’s seventh election since the United Nations first

sponsored polls in 1993, after years of conflict - including the era of the genocidal Khmer Rouge - left the country devastated.

Over the last 30 years, whatever hopes the international community might have had for a vibrant multi-party democracy in Cambodia have been flattened by the juggernaut of Hun Sen’s rule.

The veteran PM has begun to look to the future, saying he will hand over to his son, four-star general Hun Manet - possibly even in the coming weeks.

“We have exercised our civil right and responsibility and right... of citizens to vote to choose the party we love to lead the country,” the 45-year-old scion told reporters after casting his ballot.

Many wonder whether Hun Manet, educated in the United States and Britain, might bring change to the country - though Hun Sen has made it clear that he intends to keep pulling strings even after his son takes over.

Asked by AFP what he planned to do for Cambodia when he became prime minister, Hun Manet replied: “I have no comment on that.”

Rights groups have condemned the election.

On the eve of voting, a 17-

strong coalition - including the Asian Network for Free Elections and the International Federation for Human Rights - said the election was of ‘profound concern’.

Voter turnout recorded at 3:16pm (0816 GMT) was 78 per cent, with 7,601,326 votes cast, according to the National Election Committee.

The only real challenge to the CPP had come from the Candlelight Party (CP). But Cambodia’s electoral body refused to register the party in May, rendering it ineligible to compete. The decision came after the CP performed better than expected at last year’s local elections, winning 22 per cent of the popular vote.

Internationally, Hun Sen has played off tensions between the United States and China, racking up huge sums in Chinese investment that came with no demands for democratic reforms.

AFP

IN BRIEF

Arson attack on bar in Mexico leaves 11 dead
Mexico City, Mexico - A man who was thrown out of a bar in Mexico for improper behaviour toward women went back and set fire to it, killing 11 people, authorities said on Saturday.

The arson attack happened overnight on Friday into Saturday in the town of San Luis Rio Colorado, in the northern state of Sonora, which borders the United States.

The fire killed seven men and four women and wounded six others, the state prosecutor's office in Sonora said. The attacker was expelled from the bar 'for treating women disrespectfully', and then returned and threw a flaming object into it, presumably a Molotov cocktail, the prosecutor's office said.

3 hurt in Japan train stabbing attack
Tokyo, Japan - Three people were hurt in a knife attack on a train in western Japan on Sunday, with police saying they had arrested a man for allegedly carrying out the stabbings.

The victims - a train conductor in his 20s and two male passengers aged in their 20s and 70s - were taken to hospital with non-life threatening injuries, Tetsuya Sakagami from a nearby fire department told AFP. The 37-year-old male suspect was armed with three knives when he was arrested at Rinku Town station in the Osaka region, local police told AFP.

He was arrested for attempted murder and has already admitted to carrying out the attack, police said.

Flooding in Canada leaves 4 missing
Montreal, Canada - Four people in Canada, including two children, were reported missing on Saturday in flooding triggered by torrential rains in Nova Scotia, police said.

The children were in a car that was submerged, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police said. The three other people in the car managed to escape. In a separate incident in the eastern province, a youth and a man were reported missing under similar circumstances.

AFP

Netanyahu gets pacemaker ahead of reforms bill vote



Protesters against the Israeli government's judicial overhaul bill form a human chain in front of the Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem that will extend to reach the parliament on Sunday, ahead of a vote (AFP)

Jerusalem - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu underwent surgery to implant a pacemaker on Sunday, just hours before lawmakers began debate on a controversial judicial overhaul bill that has brought tens of thousands of protesters to the streets. Protests have intensified in the days leading up to the debate, which began on Sunday ahead of a parliamentary vote on Monday which could see a key part of the proposals passed into law. Despite his operation, Netanyahu vowed to be there for the vote.

The judicial revamp proposed by his hard-right government has split the nation and, since its unveiling in January, sparked one of the biggest protest movements in Israel's history.

Opponents see the proposed revamp as a threat to Israel's democracy.

"We want to continue to live in a Jewish and a democratic state," opposition leader Yair Lapid said at the start of debate.

"We must stop this legislation," he said.

Sheba Medical Center performed the surgery on Netanyahu, a statement from his office said, while Deputy Prime Minister Yariv Levin stood in for him. Days earlier Netanyahu, 73, had been discharged from the same facility after a night of hospitalisation following complaints of dizziness.

We want to continue to live in a Jewish and a democratic state. We must stop this legislation

YAIR LAPID

"A week ago I had a monitoring device implanted and this device beeped this evening and announced that I needed to get a pacemaker. I have to do this tonight, I feel great and I listen to my doctors," Netanyahu said in a video posted on his Facebook page.

Hours of debate
The hospital confirmed after the surgery that Netanyahu's condition was good.

"He will remain under medical supervision in the cardiology department," it said in a statement.

"The doctors tell me that I will be free and I will be released from the hospital tomorrow afternoon (Sunday) and will be able to go to the Knesset to vote," Netanyahu said prior to the surgery. Debate is expected to last hours, into Monday morning, and more than 20 lawmakers are scheduled to speak against the bill, according to a list provided by parliament.

The final vote on Monday will be on the 'reasonability' clause through which judges can strike down government decisions.

Netanyahu's government, which includes extreme-right and ultra-Orthodox Jewish allies, plans to curb the Supreme Court's powers granted under this clause. They argue the changes are necessary to ensure a better balance of power.

Critics accuse Netanyahu,

who is on trial on corruption charges he denies, of trying to use the reforms to quash possible judgements against him. He rejects the accusation.

The 'reasonability' clause was most recently cited by Israel's top court to force Netanyahu to remove an ultra-Orthodox cabinet member over a previous tax evasion conviction.

If approved on Monday, it would be the first major component of the proposed legal overhaul to become law. Other proposed changes include giving the government a greater say in the appointment of judges.

Protests have drawn support from across political and social strata, from both the left and the right, secular and religious groups, peace activists and military reservists, as well as blue-collar and workers in the tech sector crucial to the country's economy. Early on Sunday, hundreds of protesters prayed at the Western Wall in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, the holiest place where Jews can pray.

AFP



Kurds dance during a protest to mark 100th anniversary of the Treaty of Lausanne, in Lausanne, on Saturday (AFP)

Kurds demonstrate against Lausanne treaty in Swiss city

Lausanne, Switzerland - Around 6,000 Kurds rallied on Saturday to demonstrate against the 100th anniversary of the Treaty of Lausanne which defined the borders of modern Turkey but shattered aspirations for a Kurdish state.

The demonstrators marched through the Swiss city in opposition to the 1923 treaty, while organisers urged the international community to reconsider the agreement and its consequences for the Kurdish people. The demonstrators, who came from across Europe, gathered by Lake Geneva before marching uphill to the Palais de Rumine where the treaty was signed.

Several carried flags representing the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is outlawed in Turkey and blacklisted as a terror organisation in the European Union. The Kurdistan Cultural Centre in Lausanne said the treaty 'enacted the separation of the Kurdish people between four states - Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria - whose democratic record over the past century is largely negative'.

Berivan Firat, a spokeswoman for the Kurdish Democratic Council of France, told AFP: "The Kurdish people, like all the peoples of the world, claim a right to be able to live with their identity

on their own lands.

"This treaty opened the door to all sorts of bullying, all sorts of massacres towards the Kurdish people," she said. "Our detractors are the worst dictators in the Middle East and it is time to decriminalise the Kurdish movement and especially to review the Treaty of Lausanne, which has no value for us. It is null and void."

Months of talks
The Conference of Lausanne opened in November 1922 to negotiate a new agreement to replace the 1920 Treaty of Sevres between the Allies and the Ottoman empire, which Turkey no longer recognised under its new leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

Lausanne was chosen primarily due to Swiss neutrality, but also because it was easily accessible by the Orient Express train which linked Paris with Istanbul.

The conference, with Britain, France, Italy and Turkey as the main players, ran from November to February, and again from April to July. The new Italian leader Benito Mussolini addressed the talks.

The treaty resulted in forced population exchanges between Turkey and Greece. It allowed for unrestricted civilian passage through the Turkish Straits.

AFP

UN chief Guterres exhorts Guatemala to respect the will of voters

United Nations, US - The UN secretary-general on Saturday voiced 'great concern' surrounding elections in Guatemala and called on the Central American nation to respect the will of voters in free and fair balloting.

Guatemalan voters go to the polls August 20 for a runoff presidential election that will veer the country to the political left, unsettling right-wing powerbrokers.

A brief statement on behalf of Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called 'on the



People take part in a demonstration against an investigation into the party of Bernardo Arevalo outside AG's office in Guatemala City on Thursday (AFP)

Guatemalan authorities to respect the human rights of its population, including the right to vote at genuine periodic elections which guarantee the free expression of the will of the electors'. Voters, he said, 'should be protected from any form of coercion and from any unlawful or arbitrary interference with the voting process'.

In the first round elections in June, Guatemalans sent two center-left candidates to a runoff, marking the first time the nation

will have a leftist leader in more than a decade.

But since then, a prosecutor has sought to suspend the party of one of the candidates, Bernardo Arevalo, and state agents on Friday raided his party offices allegedly in pursuit of documents showing irregularities in its formation.

Arevalo's shock arrival in the runoff has distressed right-wing parties and led to efforts to scuttle the electoral process.

Prosecutors have twice sent

agents to search the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, prompting the nation's highest court to issue an injunction to protect the vote.

Guterres said UN member states 'are responsible for ensuring transparent, free and fair elections, free of intimidation and coercion'.

Arevalo, son of a reformist former president, finished second behind Sandra Torres, a former first lady who leads a social democratic party.

AFP

Iran's Zoroastrians keep ancient, sacred flame burning for centuries

Yazd, Iran - A Zoroastrian priest dressed in white carefully added wood to a fire that has burned for centuries inside an Iranian temple, sacred to one of the world's oldest religions.

The fragrant holy fire, kept in a large bronze goblet, 'has been burning for more than 1,500 years', said Simin, a tour guide welcoming visitors to the Zoroastrian fire temple in Iran's central Yazd province.

Zoroastrianism dates back some 3,500 years, but centuries of persecution have dwindled its numbers and a fast-changing modern world has left it struggling to adjust.

Founded by the prophet Zarathustra, it was the predominant religion of the ancient Persian empire, until the rise of Islam with the Arab conquests of the seventh century.

Today, the Zoroastrian community is estimated at around 200,000 people who live mainly in Iran and India.

They venerate fire as a supreme form of purity.

Alongside water, air and earth, the elements must not be contaminated by human activity, according to their faith.

Only Zoroastrian priests are allowed in the Yazd sanctum, covering their faces to prevent vapour and breath from contaminating the sacred fire, as they take turns during the day to keep the flame burning.

The fire 'can never die out', said the tour guide.

Visitors can only observe the rituals from behind tinted glass.

In Iran, Zoroastrian leaders say the community nowadays counts about 50,000 members. The latest national census, conducted in 2016 and excluding converts, put their number at 24,000. Over the centuries, faithful have undergone forced conversions, with many of their temples destroyed, libraries set ablaze, and much of their cultural heritage lost.



A Zoroastrian priest adds wood to the Atash Bahram ('Fire of Victory' or Eternal Flame) in the sanctum at the Fire Temple of Yazd in central Iran on July 4 (AFP)

But 'our religion still occupies a place in the history of the world, and it will continue to exist', said Bahram Demehri, a 76-year-old faithful from Yazd.

"The essence of Zoroastrianism, like other religions, is based on monotheism, prophecy, belief

in the afterlife and benevolence," he told AFP.

'Joy' at the core
Zoroastrians believe that 'good thoughts, good words, good deeds' are the key to happiness and spirituality.

A messiah called Saoshyant will one day return and save the world by fighting wrongs, they believe.

Their teachings are embodied in Faravahar, an ancient symbol of a man emerging from a winged disc while holding a ring,

which is carved on the pediments of ancient Persian temples. "Joy is essential in the practice of our religion," Simin, the tour guide, noted, mentioning multiple religious celebrations.

One of those festivals, Nowruz, marks the new Persian year and is celebrated to this day by Iran's overwhelmingly Shiite Muslim majority.

Tehran recognises Zoroastrians as a religious minority, granting them freedom of worship and representation in parliament, which also reserves seats for other minorities including Armenians, Assyrians and Jews.

Some other religious minorities, like followers of the Bahai faith - Iran's largest non-Muslim group - are not recognised by the state. But for Zoroastrians like Demehri, 'the laws protect us', he said.

'Zoroastrians are active members of Iranian society', and include 'university professors and government employees', De-

mehri added. They are, however, barred from careers in Iran's armed forces and cannot run for president.

Waning traditions
Some Zoroastrian rituals were lost as followers were forced to practise their faith discreetly.

A funerary rite known as 'dakhma' was banned in Iran since the late 1960s for sanitary reasons.

It involves exposing the dead bodies atop a platform known as 'the tower of silence' to be devoured by scavenging birds.

Instead, Zoroastrians have opted to lay their deceased to rest in cemeteries. Other traditions are challenged by modernity, with many followers scattered around the world.

Among the community's most famous exiles is legendary Queen lead vocalist Freddie Mercury, born to a Zoroastrian family originally from India.

AFP

Wildfires in Rhodes island prompt biggest ever Greek fire evacuation

Athens, Greece - High winds forecast for Sunday are expected to hamper firefighters' battle to contain a blaze burning out of control on the Greek island of Rhodes, sparking the biggest ever fire evacuation in Greece.

The island of Rhodes is one of Greece's most popular tourist destinations, particularly with British, German and French tourists - many of whom are now being rapidly moved out of the path of the flames.

As Greece has been battered by an extended spell of extreme heat, flames have burned for nearly a week on the island.

"This is the biggest fire evacuation ever in Greece," Konstantia Dimoglidou, Greek police spokeswoman told AFP.

"We had to evacuate an area of 30,000 people."

Police said that authorities had transported some 16,000 people across land, with 3,000 evacuated by sea, and others fleeing by road or under their own transport after being told to leave the area.

German travel giant Tui said it was suspending all its inbound passenger flights to Rhodes until Tuesday but would fly in empty planes to help evacuate tourists.

Spokesperson Linda Jonczyk told AFP that Tui had some 40,000 tourists in Rhodes, of



Tourists are evacuated from hotels during a wildfire on the Greek island of Rhodes on Saturday (AFP)

which 7,800 are affected by the fires.

The low-cost British carrier Jet2 also said it had cancelled 'all flights and holidays' to the island.

One German tourist told AFP they were 'saved from the fire at the last moment' after returning

from the beach on Saturday to a deserted hotel. "We had embers flying around our heads and no help was in sight," said 23-year-old Paul from Bielefeld.

"I had the feeling of being on my own, it was so hot and the smoke was already so thick we

couldn't have survived another ten minutes."

He said buses then arrived to evacuate the tourists, but some were so panicked they were trying to find boats to escape on from the beach.

Authorities have warned that

the battle to contain the flames - raging in the middle of peak tourism season - will take several days.

Fire department spokesman Vassilis Vathrakoyiannis warned winds were set to become 'more intense' through Sunday, which could further fan the flames.

Last year Rhodes, which has a population of over 100,000, welcomed some 2.5mn tourist arrivals. The fires reached the village of Laerma during the night, engulfing houses and a church, while many hotels were damaged by flames that had reached to the coast.

On Sunday the blaze was burning in three active fronts - including on the southeast coast of the island where firefighters tried to prevent the fire from crossing a creek. Efforts are focusing on preventing the fire from spreading further north into the dense forest.

'Leave everything'

Tourists and some locals spent the night in gyms, schools and hotel conference centres on the island as firefighters battled the blaze. "It is an unprecedented situation for the island," Panagiotis Dimelis, head of the Archangelos village council, told Skai TV.

The Greek foreign ministry and embassies in Greece were

setting up a station at the Rhodes airport to help tourists that have lost travel documents in the scramble to evacuate.

TV footage broadcast by ERT on Saturday showed a solo woman carrying her luggage through the smoke, looking disorientated. Firefighters were heard shouting at her: "Madam, your life! Come here! Leave everything behind."

Cedric Guisset, a Belgian tourist who took shelter on Saturday, said he left his hotel by foot with nowhere to go.

"We told the hotel about the messages we had received on our phones to evacuate the area, but they didn't even know about it," he told public radio station RTBF.

"We really just took our identity cards, water and something to cover our faces and heads."

A large part of the island was without electricity as the public power utility PPC shut down the local plant in the south for safety reasons.

"This is a special fire here because the heart of Rhodes and its environment is affected," Efthymios Lekkas, a professor specialising in natural disasters told ERT TV on Sunday, warning of a severe impact to the island's tourist industry.

AFP

IN BRIEF

26 killed in Afghanistan flash floods

Kabul, Afghanistan - The death toll from overnight flash floods caused by torrential rain in central Afghanistan has risen to 26, with more than 40 people missing, officials said on Sunday. Shafiullah Rahimi, spokesman for the State Ministry for Disaster Management, said a total of 31 people had been killed nationwide in floods since Friday and extensive damage had been caused to property and farmland.

Government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said urgent aid was being rushed to the main disaster zone in the Jalrez district of Maidan Wardak province.

Although Afghanistan lies on the western edge of the Asian monsoon footprint, flash floods happen regularly during the wet season as heavy rain courses down dry riverbeds.

Greece bridge collapse kills 1, injures 8

Athens, Greece - The collapse of a bridge undergoing works in western Greece on Sunday killed one person and wounded eight others, Greek authorities said.

The fire department said it was called out shortly after midday local time when part of a bridge collapsed in Patras, in the Proastio area on the road to the capital Athens.

Eight injured had been sent to hospitals and one person was killed in the collapse, the fire department said. Some 35 firefighters and 12 vehicles were dispatched to the scene, as well as drones and special rescue vehicles.

Iran says 4 cops shot dead in southeast

Tehran, Iran - Four Iranian policemen were killed on Sunday after attackers fired on a patrol in the restive southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan near the border with Pakistan, state media reported. "Three policemen were martyred in a terrorist attack on a police patrol unit," state news agency IRNA reported.

A fourth died later after succumbing to his wounds, state television reported.

The circumstances of the attack were not immediately clear. Unrest in the impoverished Sistan-Baluchistan province has involved drugs-smuggling gangs.

AFP

Indian child who fell into 40-ft borewell rescued after hours

Bihar, India - A three-year-old boy, who fell into a 40-ft borewell in Kul village in Bihar's Nalanda district on Sunday, was pulled out alive by National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) personnel.

Teams from the NDRF, which were deployed at the site, led the rescue mission that lasted a few hours.

"The boy has been rescued and is doing fine. He was rushed to a hospital. It took us about five hours to pull him out alive," Ranjeet Kumar, an NDRF officer, said.

Officials informed further that the rescued 3-year-old was identified as Shivam Kumar.

According to officials, a farmer had dug the borewell and had left it uncovered, resulting in the mishap.

The children, who were playing with little Shivam be-

fore he fell into the borewell, informed his parents after which the rescue operation was launched.

JCB machines or earth-movers were deployed in the operation, which focussed on providing oxygen support to the child and rescuing him.

Further details are awaited. Recently, a two-and-a-half-year-old girl, who fell into a 20-foot-deep borewell in Kajari Barkheda village in Madhya Pradesh's Vidisha, was declared dead by doctors after being rescued.

In another similar incident earlier, a two-and-a-half-year-old toddler lost her life after falling into a 300-feet-deep borewell in Madhya Pradesh's Sehore district on June 6.

The girl was pulled out alive but was later pronounced dead from suffocation.

ANI

India landslide toll jumps to 27, 60 missing

New Delhi, India - The death toll from a massive landslide in India's Maharashtra state jumped to 27 on Sunday, with at least 50 people still missing as rescue teams struggle in lashing rain, officials said.

The landslide was triggered by monsoon rains on Thursday, smashing into a village in Raigad district, a hilly and forested site about 100km (62 miles) from Mumbai.

Emergency teams have been digging for bodies under the mounds of earth and rubble.

"We've so far counted 27 bodies, and about 50 to 60 people are still missing, but there are multiple challenges for rescue work at the site," Raigad official Yogesh Mhase told AFP on Sunday.

Mhase said the remote hamlet was about five kilometres from the nearest road. "No heavy equipment can reach this site, we only have small machines and most work has to be done manually," he added. "Non-stop heavy rains in the region are also making the entire operation much more challenging".



NDRF personnel search for victims at the site of a landslide at Irshalwadi village of Raigad district in Maharashtra state on Saturday (AFP)

The top district official said he was not optimistic about finding survivors on the fourth day of the ongoing rescue.

Local media reports said that several families were entirely wiped out, while other survivors were the only ones left alive

We've so far counted 27 bodies, and about 50 to 60 people are still missing, but there are multiple challenges for rescue work

YOGESH MHASE

among their relatives.

India has been battered by rains since the start of the monsoon season in June, and flooding and landslides have killed scores of people.

Monsoon rains are vital to replenishing rivers and groundwater, but the deluge also causes widespread destruction every year. Experts say climate change is increasing the number of extreme weather events around the world, with damming, deforestation and development projects in India exacerbating the human toll.

AFP

Gender trumps tribe for Indian mothers

Pechi Awang Leikai, India - Gender trumped tribe for a group of furious Indian mothers who torched the homes of two men from their own community who were accused of abusing women in a video that sparked outrage.

At least 120 people have been killed during months of ethnic conflict between the predominantly Hindu Meitei majority and the mainly Christian Kuki in India's troubled northeastern state of Manipur.

The women from the Meitei community decided to show their anger after the humiliating video surfaced on Wednesday, which reportedly shows two Kuki women being forced to strip naked and then jeered at and harassed by Meitei men in May.

Police arrested four suspects



Women burning the house of one of the men accused of parading two women naked in India's Manipur state, on Thursday (AFP)

on Thursday but, on the same day, a powerful group of Meitei women known as the 'Meira Paibis', or the Mothers of Manipur, set out to burn the homes of two of the accused.

"We condemn the violence

against the women and that is why we want capital punishment," Sumati, who gave only her first name, told AFP.

"That is why we destroyed his house."

India is generally traditional,

conservative and patriarchal but the Meitei have a history of women's activism, with women having a more prominent role in society than elsewhere.

Tens of thousands of people have fled to government-run camps since the violence erupted in May but the video clip has shone a spotlight on the conflict.

'Shamed India'

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said after the video clip emerged that the incident had 'shamed India'.

Manipur's state government is led by Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party and has said it is investigating the 'heinous' incident.

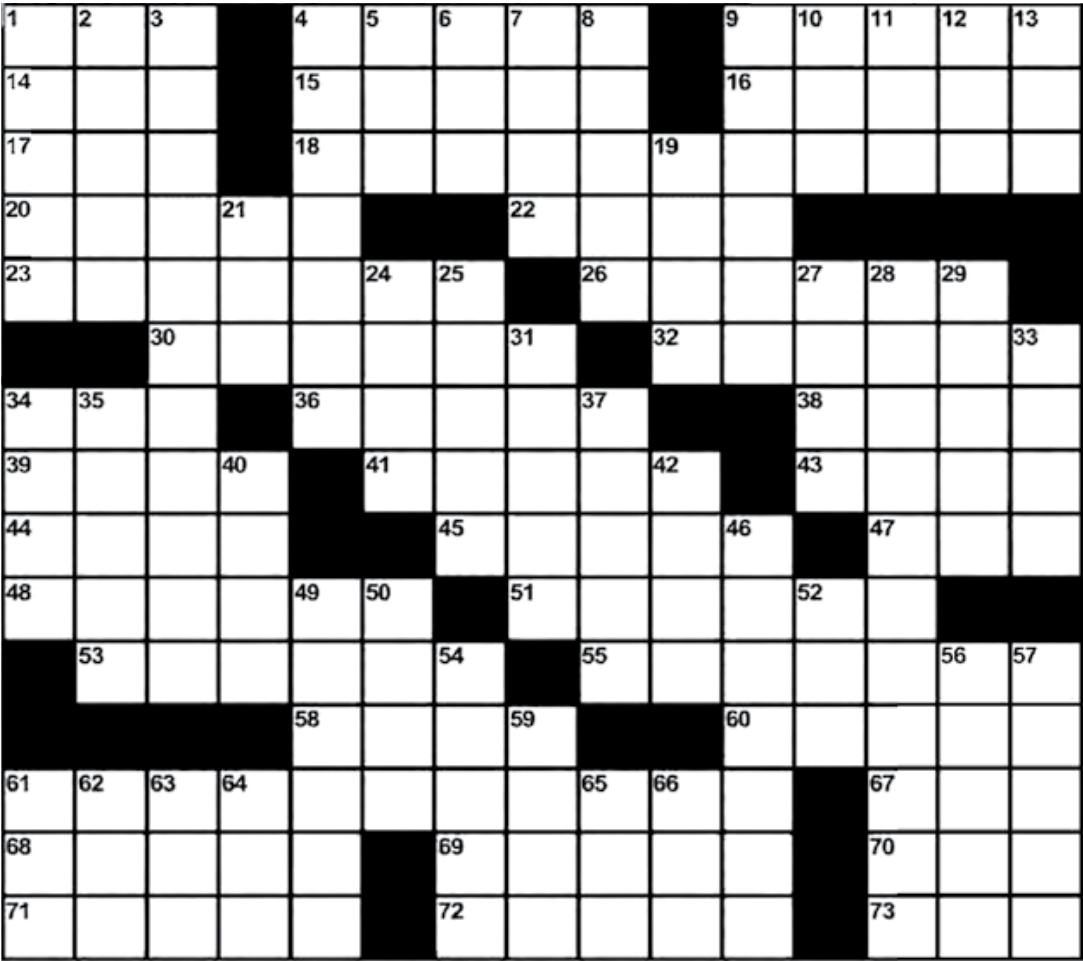
AFP

A DAY FOR ELDERLY



Pope Francis speaks with Lucilla Macelli, 100 years old, during the mass for World Day of Grandparents and the elderly in St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican on Sunday (AFP)

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS
- 1) Navigational aid
4) "FoxTrot" cartoonist Bill
9) Bondservant
14) 90-degree letter
15) Achier
16) Place for the highborn?
17) Vast grassy area
18) Celebrator to the ex-treme
20) Banana cluster
22) Mall lure
23) Opposites do it
26) Renounce, as a family member
30) More replete
32) Channel of the sea
34) Daisy of "Li'l Abner"
36) LaGuardia lineup
38) Beginning of a famous conclusion
39) Yemeni city
41) Dry riverbeds
43) Sign of things to come
44) Took a horse
45) Roomy four-door auto
47) Fury
48) Bring into existence
51) Come back
53) Book corrections
- DOWN
- 1) Type of toast
2) Alaska Peninsula native
3) Time-saver for a gardener
4) Driveway material
5) Bygone bird of New Zealand
6) Make a goof
7) Butterfly snarers
8) Tree nymph in Greek myth
9) Most mentally fit
10) Souvenir from Hawaii
11) What you have up your sleeve
- 12) By way of
13) "Electric" fish
19) Boxers Muhammad and Laila, for two
21) Grand_ (wine bottle words)
24) Hammerhead part
25) Things are bigger there
27) Nabisco item
28) Some utensils for chefs
29) African river or country
31) Revere at midnight, historically
33) Voicemail sound
34) Antony of antiquity
35) Like a whole lot
37) Ending with "blind" or "broad"
40) Able to get to quickly
42) Fill beyond full
46) Group with no members, in math
49) South China Sea island
50) Volcano in Italy
52) Christ the Redeemer city, briefly
54) Opening poker stakes
56) Prefix meaning "sun"
57) Mine vehicles
59) Hearty soup

NOTE PAD

LAUDS
INFRA
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BISTRO
TAROT
YARER
BISON
PAPIS
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OREO
RIFLE
SATES

WET
NUN
CEDE
EPODE
SLAV
EVA
MADRID
MATISSE
NECKS
SYKES

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Getting into an argument is a choice, and it's one you don't have to make if you don't want to. If someone pushes your buttons or annoys you or is just plain rude to you, you can turn the other cheek if you really want to. If you don't, then make sure your words are objective. Don't hit below the belt. Cheap shots demean you far more than they demean the person you're mad at. Don't let them get the better of you.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Social energy is coming into your life today, and it will have you looking around for the nearest party! But before you start celebrating, make sure you haven't left anything undone that needs to be done. There is at least one person depending on you to fulfill your end of a bargain, and you need to consider them before you consider yourself. Besides, once you get that last piece of business off your plate, you'll be all more prepared to have a seriously good time tonight.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

Big changes are coming in your life, and it might feel like they're all coming at once! This onslaught of activity could be a little overwhelming, but at least you won't be bored! You have control over things, so use your voice and push back if you feel like you're being pushed too far too fast. People will listen to you. They care about you and don't want to send you over the edge. Be open and don't worry that you'll look like you can't handle it.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Obey your gut instinct today when it tells you to avoid something that's usually a part of your routine. Sometimes it's the most familiar tasks and chores that create the most havoc in your life. Of course, other people might be confused about your behavior, but not for long. Don't let anyone else push you into doing anything that doesn't feel right, especially if it involves any legal documents. Make sure you're comfortable with everything you do.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

There could be a lot of uncertainty in your day. The people in charge don't quite know how to get a handle on things, and it shows. You'll have to do your best to embrace the chaotic energy of what's going on, and it can be fun if you don't get too hung up on details and schedules. By the end of the day, all the turmoil should be over and you'll be able to have some spontaneous laughter with a good friend who knows how to have fun.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Any confusion you've been experiencing over someone else's intentions is frustrating, but it's also a totally normal part of getting to know someone, so don't worry too much about it. When you allow yourself to have some doubts here and there, you'll immediately get more comfortable with things and start to see them more clearly. You've been attracting some flighty people lately, but this person probably isn't one of them, despite a recent misunderstanding.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

What does it mean to be a friend? The answer to that question is a little bit different for everyone, which will become all too apparent today when someone you relied on lets you down one more time. You two need to have a talk, and you need to have it today. Honest communication doesn't always feel that pleasant, but it is the only way to get things back on track. If you have expectations that they aren't fulfilling, they need to know about it.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You need to get organized early in the day. There are lots of things coming your way that you'll definitely want to get involved with, and you'll have to prepare your schedule for them. Finish up your boring little tasks and big projects as quickly as you possibly can. You need to create more time for the fun, creativity, and exciting drama that's in store for you in the near future. Your energy is growing and you're going to be on a roll!

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

The creativity you need to unleash today won't come as quickly as you'd like. Instead of a gushing torrent of brilliant ideas, you'll probably only get a trickle of half-baked ones. You can't let this discourage you, though. To knock loose the plug in your pipes, get outside and walk around. Fresh air will revive your gray matter, and the outside world will encourage you to think outside of the box. Natural beauty is an effective tool to jump-start to any stalled day, so remember that in the future.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

While working on a project, you have to take extra care in sharing what you know. Sure, you might know the details inside and out, but they're a mystery to others, and you have to be sensitive to that fact. Spend more time explaining things and you'll save yourself a lot of headaches later. Also, by giving people more time, you'll strengthen the team's unity and create a stronger bond with the people you're working with. Don't leave anyone behind.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Your self-control is very strong right now, so don't be worried if you face any temptation today. You can take it. Your strength will not only give you power over the things you're trying to overcome, it will also serve as an inspiration for someone else who's struggling. You should share your story with this person. Don't assume that they can't learn something from your experiences just because your paths are so different. They can and they will.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Getting overwhelmed simply isn't going to be a concern for you today. Your mind is sharp, and you can handle anything that comes your way. From overbearing teachers to micromanaging bosses, the people you'll be dealing with won't be able to frustrate you. You might have no clue why this sudden calmness has come over you, but that doesn't matter. Just enjoy it! This is a great day to take a big social risk. You're feeling confident, and it shows.



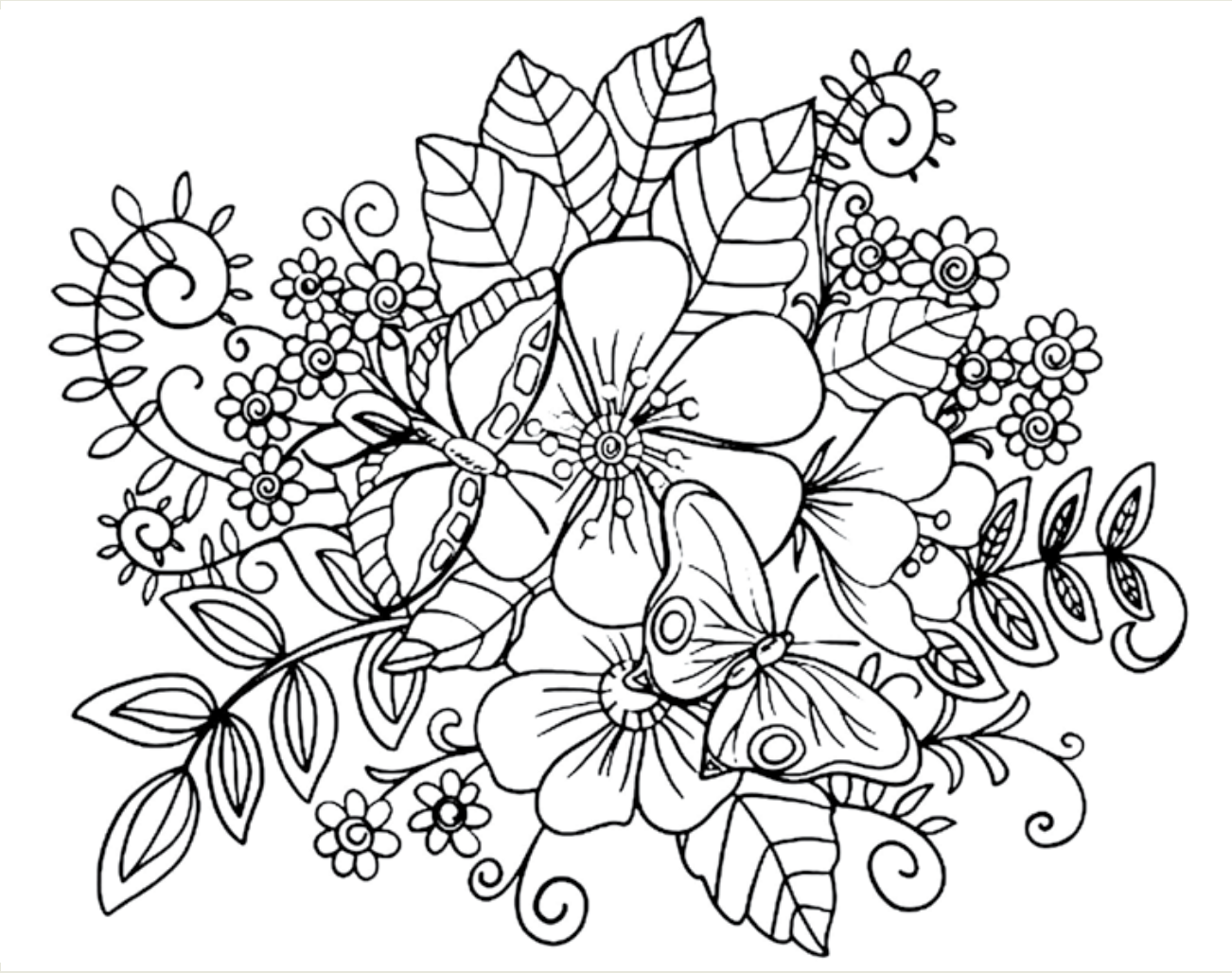
TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Which polemical and lastingly influential book about writing and freedom was published in England in 1644 at the height of the English Civil War by a scholar and philosopher later known and celebrated more for poetry?
A. Oroonoko
B. Some Thoughts Concerning Education
C. Leviathan
D. Areopagitica
02. Which is an official spoken language of China?
A. Pashto
B. Mandarin
C. Tamil
D. Messapian

03. Who choreographed (and directed) the 1972 film "Cabaret"?
A. Martha Graham
B. Jerome Robbins
C. Bob Fosse
D. Merce Cunningham

Answers: 1. D 2. B 3. C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

E	L	T	I
T	B	I	S
H	E	S	R
E	E	D	B

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

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

LOT MORE THAN A POINT

Jamaica celebrate ‘No 1 result ever’ after holding France at World Cup

Sydney, Australia - Jamaica coach Lorne Donaldson hailed their goalless draw at the Women's World Cup against strongly fancied France as the greatest result in the country's football history on Sunday.

In only their second Women's World Cup, and having lost all three games at the 2019 edition, his side celebrated at the end as if they had won.

The only sour note was Manchester City striker Khadija Shaw being sent off near the end, meaning she misses the next match. "I would say it's the number one result we have had so far, men or women - I would put it there," Donaldson said after Jamaica scrapped their way to a 0-0 draw in the Sydney rain.

"You're playing a team like France who are just fantastic. I mean, just looking at the rankings, you would say that result on this stage has to be number one."

France, ranked fifth to Jamaica's 43, were widely expected to advance to the last 16 as Group F winners but after this stalemate to open their title bid that is now in doubt. Jamaica produced a stirring rearguard action to repel waves of second-half attacks and frustrate the French.

Played in front of 39,045 fans at sodden Sydney Football Sta-



Jamaican players celebrate after their draw against France in the Women's World Cup Group F match in Sydney on Sunday (AFP)

You're playing a team like France who are just fantastic. I mean, just looking at the rankings, you would say that result on this stage has to be number one

LORNE DONALDSON

dium, it was a physical and free-flowing affair with three players booked and Shaw shown a red card in the dying minutes for a second silly tackle.

It means Shaw will miss their game against Panama. Kadidiatou Diani almost broke the deadlock in the 88th minute when her header clattered off the

bar for Herve Renard's side. But France were ultimately undone by poor finishing and the courage of a side ranked 38 places below them, spelling a disappointing start for a French team tipped to go far.

"They gave us a good run for our money... but I think we need to keep a cool head. I think we deserved to win, I have full faith in my girls," said Renard.

"It's easy to be negative but I'm focusing on the positives," he

added. "We have just started this competition."

France were hampered by injuries and kicked off without regular defenders Elisa De Almeida and Selma Bacha, who are expected to be fit to play Brazil on July 29.

Estelle Cascarino and Sakina Karchaoui lined up at the back instead, with Maelle Lakrar and veteran captain Wendie Renard to deal with the danger posed by the powerful Shaw, who scored

31 goals for City last season.

The Reggae Girlz started positively with Renard and Shaw needing treatment for an early clash of heads in a feisty opening.

Both recovered with Jamaica the better side in the opening 20 minutes, forcing France into some frantic defending.

Shaw was a constant nuisance and France striker Clara Mateo was booked in the 13th minute for hacking her down.

AFP

New Zealand World Cup players forced down fire exits in hotel blaze

Auckland, New Zealand - New Zealand's Women's World Cup players were forced down fire exits during a blaze at the team hotel, defender CJ Bott said Sunday, but nobody was hurt and they are now focused on football.

A man was arrested and charged with burglary and arson after the incident at the hotel in central Auckland on Saturday night, local media said.

The team were not thought to have been the target but the fire came two days after a deadly shooting in the city on the morning of the opening match, which the co-hosts won 1-0 against Norway.

New Zealand Football CEO Andrew Pragnell said the players took shelter in a nearby restaurant before being given the all-clear to return to the hotel.

Leicester City's Bott called it "not ideal" and "not a situation anyone wants to be in".

"We went down the fire exits. One was a bit smoky but the majority of us got down the other exit," the 28-year-old said.

"We spent the rest of the evening in another location until the hotel was clear and everything was safe to go back. As a team we have no cause for concern. Things are back to normal for us."

‘Nervous’ Sweden survive South Africa scare at World Cup

Wellington, New Zealand - A "nervous" Sweden fought back and struck late on to grab a 2-1 win over South Africa in their Women's World Cup opener on Sunday in the Wellington rain.

The third-ranked Swedes conjured up the winner in the 90th minute through defender Amanda Ilestedt, much to the relief of their fans in the miserable conditions.

A goal early in the second half by Hildah Magaia - in which she suffered a match-ending injury - gave the African champions hope of an upset.

But that was cancelled out by Barcelona star Fridolina Rolfö soon afterwards, before Ilestedt's late intervention, heading home from close range. It denied South Africa a first point ever at the World Cup.

Sweden coach Peter Gerhardsson said "nerves and tension" were behind a shaky start to their World Cup campaign.

The players were also too



Sweden's midfielder Elin Rubensson is challenged by South Africa's Gabriela Salgado during their Women's World Cup Group G match in Wellington on Sunday (AFP)

conservative, he said, something that would be addressed before their second Group G match against Italy.

"It's ok to be nervous but you

need to have the courage to still make that pass," Gerhardsson said.

"Somewhere we need to dare. The players should feel that they

have that courage. Sometimes, like today, they might choose that simpler option rather than a more difficult decision."

AFP

Netherlands ‘not afraid’ of USA for rematch of 2019 World Cup final

Dunedin, New Zealand - Andries Jonker said his Netherlands side do not fear Women's World Cup holders the United States after warming up for a rematch of their 2019 final by beating Portugal 1-0 on Sunday.

Defender Stefanie van der Gragt scored the only goal as the Dutch began their campaign with victory under a closed roof in Dunedin against the World Cup debutants.

It was not an entirely convincing performance but it sets the Netherlands up for a mouthwatering Group E showdown on Thursday with the USA, who began their bid for a third straight title with a 3-0 win over Vietnam.

If beating Portugal means the Oranje Lionesses are already on course to qualify for the last 16, the clash with the United States could now determine who tops the group.

"Winning this game was the most important thing by far," said the Dutch coach Jonker.

"We don't underestimate Vietnam. We respect them. We



Netherlands' coach Andries Jonker (C) speaks to his players on the touchline during their match against Portugal on Sunday (AFP)

are not afraid of the USA, but this was the most important game and Portugal proved they were a difficult opponent."

The Dutch are no longer the force they were four years ago, when they reached the final in France before going down 2-0 to the Americans.

Influential coach Sarina Wiegman has since departed to take the England job and prolific striker Vivianne Miedema is

missing the World Cup as she recovers from a knee injury.

However, Jonker named a line-up that featured seven players who started the 2019 final, plus new Manchester City recruit Jill Roord, who came off the bench in that match.

And it was one of their most experienced players who got the only goal in the 13th minute in front of a crowd of nearly 12,000.

AFP

Women's World Cup never been tougher, warns Germany coach

Melbourne, Australia - Germany coach Martina Voss-Tecklenburg warned Sunday that women's football has never been more competitive as her side chase a third World Cup title.

The Germans are one of the favourites in Australia and New Zealand, and have a serious pedigree, having won the tournament in 2003 and 2007.

But they went out in the quarter-finals four years ago, and with women's football at an all-time high, especially in Europe, Voss-Tecklenburg is wary.

"All the games are tight,

women's football teams have come ever closer," the coach said on the eve of Germany's World Cup opener on Monday against debutants Morocco in Melbourne.

"All the countries coming here are not only proud to be at the World Cup, but they absolutely have the quality to play here and to pose problems.

"We will have the same scenario tomorrow against Morocco."

But Voss-Tecklenburg, a decorated former international player who has been in charge



Martina Voss-Tecklenburg

All the countries coming here are not only proud to be at the World Cup, but they absolutely have the quality to play here and to pose problems. We will have the same scenario tomorrow against Morocco

MARTINA VOSS-TECKLENBURG

since 2019, welcomed the challenge and said it was good for women's football.

"We see this around the world, everybody keeps develop-

ing," she added.

"Women's football is getting ever tighter in an athletic sense, but itself as a sport it is also growing, and we are proud that is happening.

"We live that and we love that, and are up for the challenge.

"It is much more competitive than 20 years ago when I was playing." The United States are chasing an unprecedented third World Cup crown in a row but face a stern challenge from several European teams, Germany among them.

AFP



Chelsea's Mykhaylo Mudryk celebrates after scoring against Brighton

Mudryk on target as Chelsea beat ten-man Brighton

Washington, United States - Mykhailo Mudryk finally found the net for Chelsea and new signings Christopher Nkunku and Nicolas Jackson also scored in a 4-3 friendly win over Brighton in Philadelphia on Saturday.

Brighton took the lead in 13th minute when a short corner routine ended with Kaoru Mitoma heading the ball across the box and Danny Welbeck firing home with a first-time drive.

French forward Nkunku, a recent acquisition from RB Leipzig for a reported £63 million (\$80 million) brought the London club level in the 19th minute for his second goal of pre-season.

Brighton were reduced to ten men in the 59th minute when Dutch full-back Jan Paul van Hecke received a second yellow card after a reckless challenge on Cesare Casadei.

Five minutes later Chelsea went ahead when Ukrainian Mudryk burst in from the left and after a smart exchange with Jackson, unleashed a drive into the bottom corner from outside the box. It was the first Chelsea goal for Mudryk who joined the club in a huge deal, reportedly costing up to 100 million euros (£88 million, \$108 million) in January.

Senegal international Jackson then set up Conor Gallagher to make it 3-1 and got on the score-sheet himself with the fourth for Mauricio Pochettino's team.

A 79th minute penalty from Joao Pedro gave Brighton some hope but although Deniz Undav added a late third for Albion, Chelsea secured the win.

Chelsea's next opponent in the Premier League Summer Series will be Newcastle United in Atlanta on Wednesday.

DREAM MARCHAND

Frenchman smashes Phelps's last remaining world record as Titmus dominates rivals

Fukuoka, Japan - France's Leon Marchand smashed Michael Phelps's last remaining world record on Sunday while Australia's Ariarne Titmus blew her 400m freestyle rivals out of the water at swimming's world championships.

Marchand clocked 4min, 02.50sec to win the 400m individual medley, taking more than a second off Phelps's record.

The 21-year-old is set to be one of the faces of next year's Paris Olympics and he warned that "the best is yet to come".

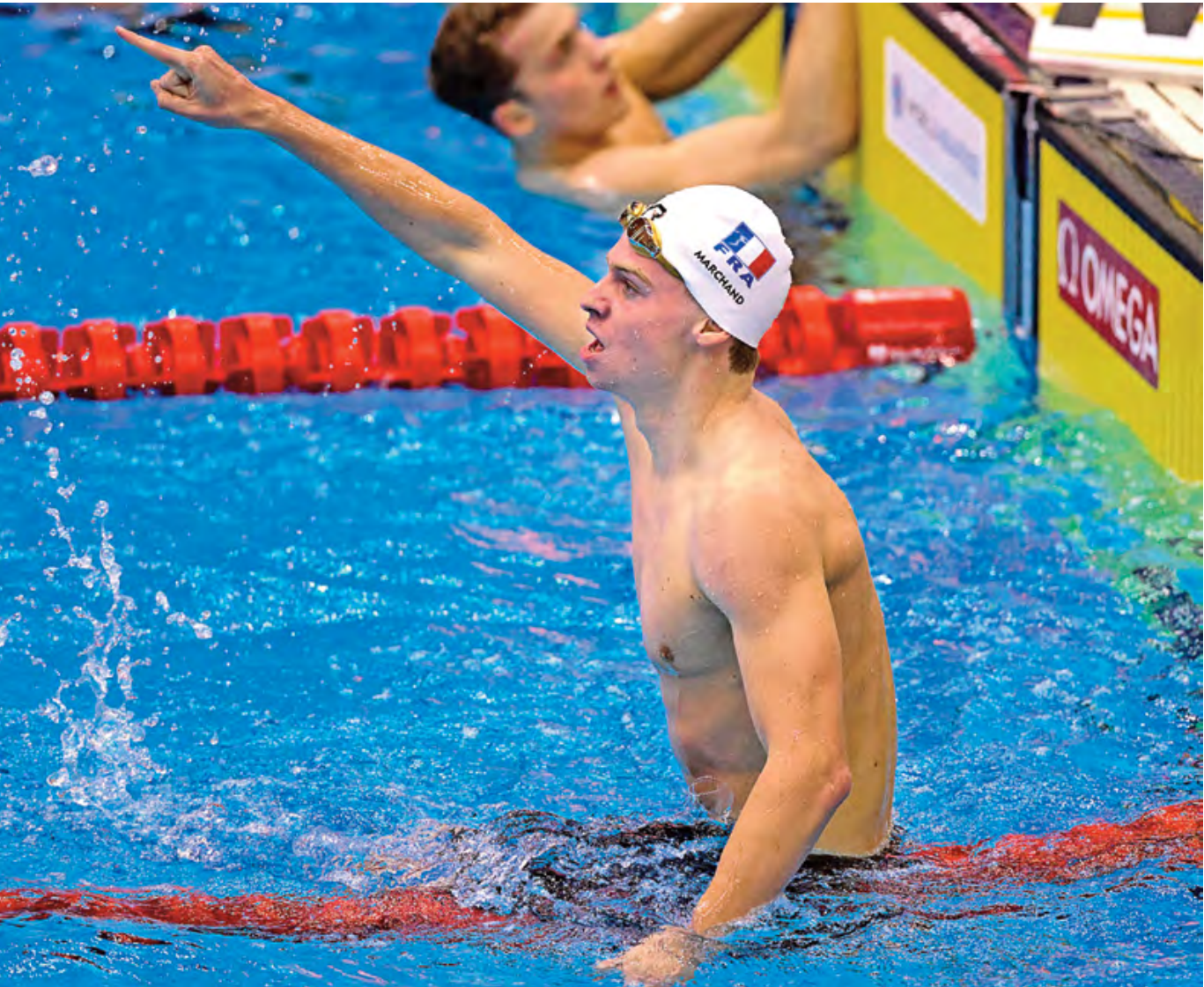
"It was insane," Marchand said.

"That was one of the most painful things I did. That was amazing to do it here. The time is crazy."

Phelps's world record was one of three to fall on a dramatic opening night in the southern Japanese city of Fukuoka.

Titmus reclaimed her world record in the women's 400m freestyle, while Australia's women's 4x100m freestyle team also improved the mark they set two years ago.

Phelps's benchmark of 4:03.84 had stood since the 2008 Beijing Olympics and was



France's Leon Marchand celebrates after winning the men's 400m medley at the World Aquatics Championships in Fukuoka, Japan, on Sunday (AFP)

the longest-held world record in swimming.

Carson Palmer, who finished second behind Marchand in a time of 4:06.56, said it was "pretty cool" to watch the Frenchman break it.

"Obviously the goal is always to win and Leon is a great competitor," said Foster.

"Being the closest person to history was pretty cool, getting a

front-row seat to that."

Japan's Daiya Seto finished third in a time of 4:09.41.

Titmus earlier dominated in one of the most hotly anticipated races of the championships, the women's 400m freestyle.

It pitted Olympic champion Titmus against world record-holder Summer McIntosh and defending world champion Katie Ledecky.

Titmus made short work of her rivals, coming home in 3 min, 55.38 sec to win the title and take back the world record that McIntosh had wrested from her in March. Ledecky finished the race second in 3:58.73 but McIntosh could only place fourth, with New Zealand's Erika Fairweather taking third in 3:59.59.

Titmus said she "honestly did not think about getting the world

record back".

"I just wanted to come here and swim the way that I felt I was capable of swimming," she said.

"It was obviously enough to get the record back."

It was also the first time that Titmus, Ledecky and McIntosh had gone head-to-head since Titmus won at the Tokyo Olympics two years ago. AFP

Haaland scores twice for five star Man City

Tokyo, Japan - Erling Haaland scored a brace as Manchester City roared back from two goals down to beat J-League champions Yokohama F-Marinors 5-3 on Sunday in their first match of a pre-season tour of Japan.

John Stones, Julian Alvarez and Rodri were also on target for Pep Guardiola's side in their first outing since completing a historic treble by winning the Champions League final last month.

Only four of the players who started that game were in the

John Stones, Julian Alvarez and Rodri were also on target for Pep Guardiola's side in their first outing since completing a historic treble by winning the Champions League final last month

initial City XI against Marinors in Tokyo, and after 27 minutes they found themselves a goal down.

Anderson Lopes latched onto the rebound after Stefan Ortega saved his initial shot, converting

crisply into the bottom corner.

Right-back Ken Matsubara made it 2-0 only 10 minutes later, expertly steering home with his first touch after fellow full-back Katsuya Nagato had crossed into his path from the

left wing.

Stones pulled one back for City in the 40th minute, coolly slotting home from just inside the area after Alvarez's lay-off.

Two minutes later City were level as Marinors goalkeeper Jun Ichimori surrendered possession cheaply under pressure from Kalvin Phillips and Alvarez was on hand to stroke home.

Haaland, one of 10 outfield changes made by Guardiola at half-time, didn't take long to put City ahead.

The Norwegian - who scored

52 goals in his debut season at City - fired home from an acute angle after receiving possession from fellow substitute Phil Foden in the 52nd minute. Rodri, whose goal sealed the Champions League title in Istanbul, added a fourth 20 minutes later.

Kenta Inoue struck a late consolation for Marinors with four minutes to play, before Haaland tapped home his second in the second minute of stoppage time.

City will next play Bayern Munich on Wednesday in Tokyo. AFP



Erling Haaland celebrates with Joao Cancelo after scoring against Yokohama F-Marinors on Sunday

Fernandes and Sancho give United friendly victory over Arsenal

New York, United States - Bruno Fernandes and Jadon Sancho were on target as Manchester United beat Arsenal 2-0 in a friendly front of 82,262 fans at MetLife Stadium on Saturday.

The New York and New Jersey fans of the two Premier League clubs saw a lively first half with both goals, but the game lost its way in the second half with mass substitutions from both teams.

United's new Cameroonian goalkeeper Andre Onana, signed from Inter Milan on Thursday in a £44 million deal, did not feature despite flying out to join the team's tour in the United States.

Back-up Tom Heaton started in goal with Fernandes wearing the captain's armband after replacing defender Harry Maguire in that role.

Brazilian winger Antony had the first chance for United when he was found in space in the middle of the box but he scuffed his shot which rolled harmlessly wide.

Arsenal began their tour of the USA with a 5-0 win over the MLS All Stars on Wednesday and



Manchester United's Jadon Sancho scores against Arsenal in their friendly match in East Rutherford, New Jersey, on Saturday (AFP)

went close to an opener through Gabriel Martinelli, but Heaton produced a fine double save to deny the Brazilian.

United took the lead on the half hour mark, with Fernandes cutting in from the right and unleashing a low left-foot drive which deceived Arsenal keeper Aaron Ramsdale.

Seven minutes later, Sancho doubled the lead when Arsenal defender Gabriel mis-kicked on the half-way line and the England

forward burst away before blasting confidently home.

With United still searching for a central striker in the transfer market, Sancho played in a central role, rather than his usual position on the wing, and handled the switch well.

With both Erik Ten Hag and Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta making full use of their squads after the break there was an inevitable loss of intensity and United's lead was never in danger.

PSG captain Marquinhos hopes for solution to Mbappe dispute

Osaka, Japan - Paris Saint-Germain captain Marquinhos said Sunday he hoped the club would solve its dispute with Kylian Mbappe and welcome the France superstar back into the squad for the upcoming season.

Mbappe was left out of a squad of 29 players for the French champions' pre-season tour of Japan and South Korea amid an ongoing contract dispute.

"He is an exceptional player but it is a decision that was taken over our heads, by the management," Marquinhos told reporters in the Japanese city of Osaka.

He admitted it was a "delicate" subject.

"Even in Japan you are here with your questions," he complained, although new coach Luis Enrique, sitting alongside the Brazilian, escaped without being asked about Mbappe.

"We always want to have top players with us and I hope a decision will be taken to allow him to be with us and help us this



Marquinhos with Kylian Mbappe

season," Marquinhos added.

The 24-year-old Mbappe has said he will not extend his existing deal with the Qatar-owned club, which expires next year, and PSG therefore decided not to take him on the trip east.

He has said he wants to remain in Paris for one more year, but PSG say they would prefer to sell him in this transfer window rather than seeing him depart as a free agent in 2024.

The move can therefore be in-

terpreted as PSG putting pressure on the club's all-time top scorer to either sign a new deal or agree a transfer elsewhere.

Luis Enrique therefore faces the prospect of having to do without PSG's leading scorer from last season at least until the transfer window shuts at the start of September.

Mbappe first joined PSG from Monaco in August 2017 and signed a new deal a year ago, that two-year contract including

the option for a third season, to 2025, which the player could take up if he wished.

PSG believe that the player already has an agreement in place with Real Madrid to sign for the Spanish giants as a free agent after the upcoming season.

Sources close to the player also assure that he has a huge offer from a club in Saudi Arabia, although a move there seems highly unlikely. AFP

FAST AND FURIOUS

Pace bowler Mohammed Siraj takes five wickets as India change gears in rain-interrupted second Test

Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago - Mohammed Siraj scythed through the West Indies lower order, completing a five-wicket haul as the home side were bundled out for 255 in their first innings on the fourth morning of the second and final Test against India at Queen's Park Oval in Trinidad on Sunday.

Mindful of the potential threat of inclement weather, the visitors sped to 98 for one off 12 overs in their second innings before the first rain interruption of the day forced an early lunch with their overall lead already at a healthy 281 runs. While Siraj claimed the bowling honours with figures of five for 60, it was debutant seam bowling partner Mukesh Kumar who triggered the slide which saw the West Indies losing their last five wickets for 26 runs.

He trapped Alick Athanaze leg-before with the fourth ball of the day and that opened the door for Siraj at the other end, the pacer bowling a full length and making full use of movement through the air and off the seam in humid conditions to dispose of Jason Holder, Alzarri Joseph, Kemar Roach and Shannon Gabriel.

Those last two wickets came off successive balls which leaves Siraj poised to complete a hat-trick if he strikes with his first delivery of the second innings.

Rohit Sharma then benefited from two simple dropped chances to belt 57 off 44 balls with five fours and three sixes before Joseph held a catch at fine-



Mohammed Siraj of India celebrates the dismissal of Alzarri Joseph of the West Indies on the fourth day of their second Test at Queen's Park Oval in Port of Spain on Sunday (AFP)

leg off Gabriel. Yashasvi Jaiswal (37 not out) and Shubman Gill will continue the push for runs after lunch, weather permitting.

Earlier West Indies ground their way to 229 for five at stumps on Saturday.

In adding 143 runs in 65 overs between seasonal showers the cricket certainly wasn't electrifying, although the determination of the home side to avoid a repeat of the capitulation of the first Test meant survival was prioritised over any attempt at entertainment.

Kraigg Brathwaite's innings of 75 typified the home side's pur-

India sped to 98 for one off 12 overs in their second innings before the first rain interruption of the day forced an early lunch with their overall lead already at a healthy 281 runs

poseful, if unattractive, demeanour in the aftermath of their three-day innings humiliation in Dominica a week earlier.

Never one to be preoccupied with the aesthetics of batsmanship, the West Indies captain spent almost five hours at the crease in facing 235 deliveries, striking five fours and one six before being undone by a familiar foe. Ravichandran Ashwin dismissed him twice at Windsor Park Stadium and he again got the better of the right-hander.

AFP



England captain Ben Stokes looks on from the balcony as rain delays the start of play on day five of the fourth Ashes Test (AFP)

Australia retain Ashes after fourth Test washout

Manchester, United Kingdom - Australia have retained the Ashes after the fourth Test against England at Old Trafford ended in a rain-affected draw, with bad weather meaning no play was possible on Sunday's final day.

The result ensured Australia, as the holders, kept the Ashes at 2-1 up with one match left in the series -- regardless of the result of next week's fifth Test at The Oval. Heavy overnight rain left the outfield sodden and meant play was unable to start as scheduled at 11:00 am (1000 GMT) in Manchester.

No sooner had it been announced that play would resume at 1200 GMT, provided there was no further rain, the ground was subjected to a fresh downpour lasting several hours. The match was officially abandoned by the umpires as a draw at 1624 GMT.

Australia finished on 214-5 in their second innings, 61 runs behind England's first-innings 592, after rain meant only 30

overs' play was possible on Saturday's fourth day.

England managed to take just one wicket in that time when part-time off-spinner Joe Root had Marnus Labuschagne caught behind, but not before the Australian had held up the hosts' victory charge with 111.

Old Trafford is notorious for weather delays -- the ground has now had 25 complete days rained off in Test cricket, plus an additional two entire Tests abandoned.

England restricted world Test champions Australia to 317 in their first innings before racing to 592 all out, thanks largely to opener Zak Crawley's breathtaking 189 and an unbeaten 99 from Jonny Bairstow. Fast bowler Mark Wood ripped through Australia's top order on Friday with three wickets.

But Australia kept England at bay on Saturday during a stand of 103 between Labuschagne and Mitchell Marsh (31 not out).

Verstappen delivers Red Bull record win in Hungarian GP

Budapest, Hungary - Max Verstappen dominated the Hungarian Grand Prix on Sunday to deliver his Red Bull team a record-breaking 12th consecutive Formula One win.

McLaren's Lando Norris took second with Sergio Perez in the other Red Bull completing the podium at the Hungaroring.

Red Bull surpassed the feat of McLaren who won 11 races in 1988 with this latest demonstration of supremacy over the rest of the grid.

"12 in a row, that's history!" Red Bull team boss Christian Horner told Verstappen over the team radio.

Verstappen, who won by over half a second, said: "For the team 12 wins in a row is incredible.

Hopefully we can keep this momentum going for a long time."

Verstappen's seventh straight win stretched the double world champion's lead over Perez to 110 points in the championship.

Lewis Hamilton set off from pole for the first time in 33 races but a poor start dashed the Mercedes driver's hopes of a 104th career win and he had to settle for fourth.

Verstappen, reflecting on his speedy getaway from alongside Hamilton on the front row, added: "I got a really good start, working on that quite a bit. I had the inside, that (first) corner was mine.

"It was amazing from there, today the car was really really quick."



Red Bull's Max Verstappen wins the Hungarian Grand Prix on Sunday (AFP)



Sri Lanka coach Chris Silverwood talks to the players during a practice session in Colombo on Sunday (AFP)

Sri Lanka to push 'harder' in Pakistan Test

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka coach Chris Silverwood believes his team will "come out fighting" to level the two-match series and beat Pakistan in the second Test starting Monday in Colombo.

Pakistan arrived in Sri Lanka without a Test win to their name in 12 months but, despite a wobbly final-innings chase, a four-wicket victory in Galle means the visitors need only a draw to win the two-match series.

"The motivation is there - the players know how important it is to be picking up Test points, and how important it is to win at home," Silverwood told reporters on Sunday.

"Listening to the chat in the dressing room... they are going to come out fighting and push much harder."

In their last Test, other than Dhananjaya de Silva - who made 122 and 82 - their batsmen failed to deliver in Galle, many of them getting into the 20s and 30s but not building on their starts.

But Pakistan coach Grant Bradburn said the team wanted to be "number one" in the world.

"We want to entertain, we want to be dynamic," Bradburn said.

Sri Lanka are playing their first Test match at the Sinhalese Sports Club (SSC) after five years

- a match they lost to England by 42 runs, when Silverwood was England's bowling coach.

"I know what to expect from this venue," said Silverwood.

"If you want to be good and competitive all round the world, you have to learn to play under different conditions", he added.

One of the key areas that Sri Lanka must focus on is their fielding, which proved costly in the first Test at Galle.

"If we analyse the last Test match, if we are honest, we fell short," said Silverwood.

"The dropped catches proved costly. This is not the first time it's happened."

Antonsen wins Korea Open, Indian pair bags doubles title

Seoul, South Korea - Denmark's Anders Antonsen clinched his first title in more than two years after defeating Loh Kean Yew of Singapore in a thrilling final at the Korea Open 2023 badminton on Sunday.

The Dane, who has struggled with a groin strain, stayed composed despite falling behind early in the match at Jinnam stadium in

Yeosu, South Korea. Antonsen finally gained an edge when Loh smashed a shot into the net with the court open, going on to take the match 11-21, 21-11, 21-19 in 68 minutes.

The 26-year-old said he was "emotional" after clinching his first title since the European Championships in May 2021.

"It means absolutely every-

thing to me," Antonsen said.

"It's been such a long time and I've been through so many tough times, injuries, and at times I've doubted myself like never before.

"It's so amazing to finally win a title again," he said.

India's Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty won their second title in a row, beating world number one duo Faja Alfian

and Muhammed Rian Ardianto of Indonesia 17-21, 21-13, 21-14 in the men's doubles final.

In the women's singles final, second seed An Se-young triumphed over Taiwan's Tai Tzu Ying 21-9, 21-15, defending the title she won last year and providing a treat for home fans.

"This is my sixth title this year... every time I win I feel dif-

ferent," the 21-year-old said.

"Initially I felt nervous today too but, as there were a lot of Korean fans out there, I wanted to be at my best."

Korean fans were disappointed earlier when women's doubles duo Kim So-yeong and Kong Hee-yong came up short against China's Chen Qing Chen and Jia Yi Fan.

Harman eyes British Open breakthrough

Hoylake, United Kingdom - Brian Harman faces a career-defining final round at the British Open on Sunday as he tees off in search of his first major with a five-shot lead at soggy Hoylake.

Cameron Young, the runner-up at St Andrews last year, leads the chasing pack, with Masters champion Jon Rahm, who carded a course-record 63 on Saturday, six shots back.

Unheralded American Harman, who was joint second at the 2017 US Open, has not lifted a trophy on the PGA Tour for six years.

But the world number 26, nicknamed the "Butcher of Hoylake" due to his love of hunting, has carved up the Royal Liverpool course during the first three days to pull clear of the field at 12 under par.

"You'd be foolish not to envision (it)," said Harman, who starts his fourth round at 1315 GMT, on the prospect of lifting the Claret Jug.

"I've thought about winning



Brian Harman of the US watches his shot from the 13th tee on day three of the British Open on Saturday (AFP)

majors for my whole entire life. It's the whole reason I work as hard as I do and why I practise as much as I do and why I sacrifice as much as I do.

"If that's going to come to fruition for me, it has to be all about the golf. It has to be execution and just staying in the moment."

But with rain lashing the Wirral coast, the conditions could yet provide a twist in the tale.

Rahm, Hovland find groove

Young, also seeking his first major, shot a seven-under-par round on the final day of last year's British Open, losing out to

Spaniard only narrowly made the cut.

The world number three showed his class on Saturday with six birdies on the back nine in what he described as his best-ever round on a links course.

Rahm will be joined by world number five Victor Hovland, who starts at five under, in the penultimate group.

The Norwegian, who also narrowly missed out last year, finishing in a tie for fourth, found his groove in a third-round 66.

Home favourite Tommy Fleetwood is also seven shots back, but his chance may have gone in a level-par third round as others made their move.

Further back, world number 561 Alex Fitzpatrick is aiming to upstage older brother and 2022 US Open champion Matt as he starts at four under par. The world number nine is at two under, but has instructed his parents to follow his younger sibling in his first major championship.

AFP

I've thought about winning majors for my whole entire life. It's the whole reason I work as hard as I do and why I practise as much as I do and why I sacrifice as much as I do

BRIAN HARMAN

Not since French golfer Jean van de Velde's infamous collapse at the final hole of the 1999 British Open has a player squandered a five-shot lead going into the final round of a major.

Harman showed mental strength on Saturday, bouncing back from two early bogeys to card a two-under-par round.

Cameron Smith by a single stroke.

"With the lead he has right now, it's not necessarily going to be up to me," said Young. "It's just really time for me to focus on myself and see where that gets me."

Rahm had a mountain to climb after rounds of 74 and 70 on the opening two days, meaning the

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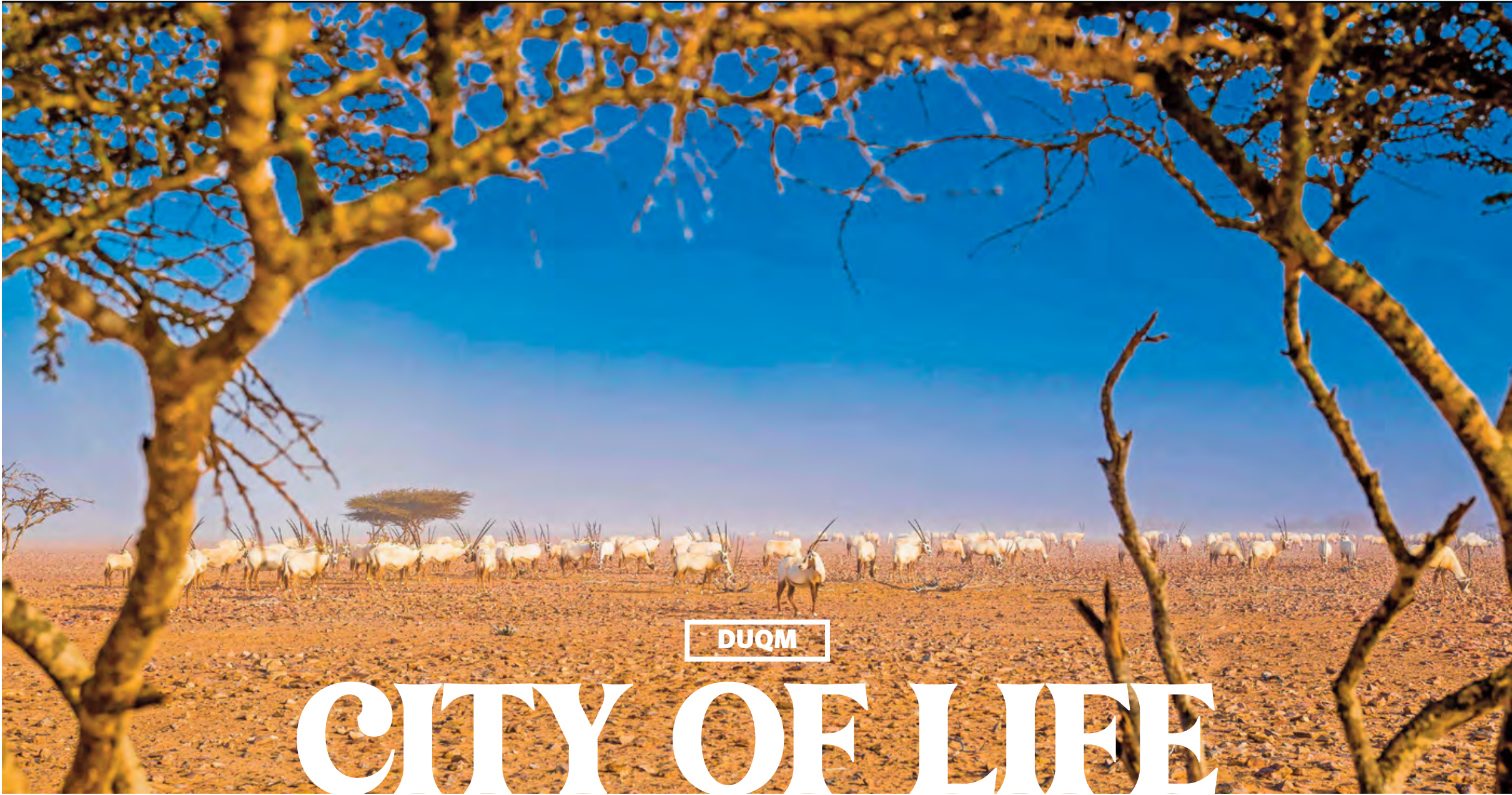
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Oman's developing tourism hub, Duqm provides scores of incentives and competitive edges for tourists and investors

When visiting Duqm, what immediately captures the attention of visitors, after traveling more than 550km from Muscat, is the unique blend of modern amenities and traditional Omani culture, creating a distinct and unforgettable experience.

One can enjoy the privacy and traditional charm of the region while also having access to modern 4-star hotels located off the shore of the Arabian Sea. Visitors can gather with family and friends in an estate during the evening or at night, under the light of the moon or stars, while still being close to the vibrant Bedouin lifestyle.

Here, one can savour Omani coffee and dates, and immerse themselves in the rich cultural heritage of the region. In addition to traditional experiences, visitors can indulge in modern cafes that cater to diverse tastes and preferences.

Diverse cultures

Duqm's unique diversity, climate, and environment are so captivating that visitors often find themselves wanting to prolong their stay in the city. This has led to a significant increase in population and urban growth in recent years.

Today, the city boasts a vibrant mix of nationalities, cultures, and peoples who are all working together to build a modern city and an economic destination that caters to the needs and aspirations of both visitors and residents.

The commercial and tourism sectors in Duqm are committed to meeting the expectations of those who visit or live in the city. This dedication is reflected in the many businesses that have been established by the people of Duqm themselves, who are equally invested in the city's growth and development.

A'Soud Global School is a vital component of Duqm Modern City, providing a modern and inclusive educational community for Omani, Arab, and foreign students. Established three years ago, the school was designed to encourage families to relocate



to Duqm by providing quality education for their children.

Health facilities

In a city where the workforce exceeds 18,000, it is crucial to have adequate health facilities that can provide quality health services to the population. Prior to the establishment of the Special Economic Zone Authority at Duqm (SEZAD), Duqm Hospital served the limited population. However, with the rapid growth of the city, there has been an increasing need to expand the health sector in Duqm.

To address this need, several private health centres were established to cater to the growing population. Over time, the number of these centres has increased, and they now operate 24x7, with outpatient clinics covering all medical specialties and providing a range of scan, examination, and diagnosis devices.

Aside from education and healthcare, there are other amenities and facilities that people consider when choosing a city to reside in. These include the availability of airports, hotels, malls, restaurants, cafes, and recreational and entertainment facilities. In Duqm, many of these amenities have already been realised, even though the city is still in its development phase.

Oman Bowling Center

Said bin Nasser al Jabri, an Omani investor, recognised the importance of having a recreational centre that combines sports and entertainment and so established the Oman Bowling Centre which has 12 bowling tracks with high standard and accuracy screens to display the results.

In addition to the bowling hall, the centre has a variety of other halls that offer video games, modern electronic games, billiards, and snooker. Expansion plans include cafes,

stores, gym facilities, and other sports activities, including two paddle tennis courts.

Beladi Business Centre

Beladi Business Centre, also known as Beladi Plaza, is a mall and business centre located in Duqm that was established by an Arab investor. The centre is situated next to the headquarters of SEZAD, and it is one of a group of modern architectural malls that contribute to the city's urban landscape.

The investor behind the centre aspires to make it a new and outstanding addition to SEZAD, as it is the first centre of its kind in Duqm to provide services to the commercial and corporate sectors. It is a suitable location for organising various exhibitions and events.

Two-way streets

Duqm is known for its well-planned and wide two-way streets, which provide

smooth and easy transfer for those who come through Duqm Airport, travellers, and the movement of goods between the airport and the port. The Sultan Qaboos Road is a significant road that consists of three lanes, connecting Duqm Airport with the port and passing through many investment areas. It facilitates the movement of goods and people between these two essential points in the city.

Another prominent road in Duqm is Said bin Taimur Road, which is located in the centre of the city and is a new urban landmark in Duqm. This road not only connects Duqm to various wilayats of the Sultanate of Oman but also offers a remarkable tourist route that passes near the Arabian Sea.

Hotels and tourism

Duqm has seen a significant increase in the number of hotel options available in recent years. Three years ago, the city had only three hotels, but today there are more than 12 hotel options ranging from four-star hotels with sea views to three-star and two-star hotels located in the central area of Duqm.

The increase in the number of hotel options and the development of tourism infrastructure in Duqm has made it an attractive destination for both domestic and international visitors.

Duqm is also an optimal site for those interested in practising various sports hobbies, including fishing, diving, and other water sports. The city offers a range of sports facilities and activities that cater to different interests and skill levels.

Moreover, Duqm is an important site for those interested in visiting the Arabian Oryx Reserve, which is located nearby. Tourists can also visit Barr Al Hakman or other tourist landmarks in Al Wusta Governorate, making Duqm an excellent base for exploring the region.

Duqm's weather is another attraction that distinguishes it on the summer tourism map in Oman. The city's temperatures stay within the twenties even during the hottest summer months, which makes it a comfortable and enjoyable destination for tourists seeking to escape the summer heat.

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RECREATIONAL VEHICLES

Life on Wheels

Using trailers as 'homes' has become a growing trend in California due to a housing crunch



Beau Beard sits with his dog among his belongings outside the recreational vehicle in which he lives, parked beside the Ballona Wetlands

which runs along the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve.

Many of the vehicles, parked next to 'No Parking' signs, have been here so long that they feature art installations, little gardens, tables and chairs, and stoves for cooking.

Some people have dogs, and the residents are a mix of people born in the US, Europe and Latin America. They have a sense of community, with rules of behaviour, and look after one another. But life here is very hard.

"It takes, like, 10 steps to do one thing," said Hernandez, a makeup artist who moved out of her apartment in Venice when, over the space of just a decade, the rent rose from US\$450 to US\$3,000.

To bathe, for instance, it takes her an

Tamara Hernandez moved into a recreational vehicle when her rent shot up. Beau Beard did it because he lost everything after going to prison.

Stories like theirs abound in California where RVs and trailers, once a symbol of carefree living by the ocean, increasingly reflect a less glamorous slice of life in the Golden State - a housing crisis and the growing number of people without a roof over their heads.

A third of all the homeless people in America live in wealthy California, which, if it were a country, would boast the world's fifth-largest economy.

In Los Angeles County alone more than 75,000 people are homeless, Los Angeles Housing Services Authority statistics say.

While figures are difficult to pin down, those same statistics show that more and more of them are living in recreational vehicles, trailers, vans or cars that have formed makeshift camps in Los Angeles and nearby towns.

"That's all I can afford," Beard said as he points to his recreational vehicle, parked on a narrow street near the busy, touristy



Tamara Hernandez stands at the doorway to her recreational vehicle



Steven stands beside his RV in which he lives beside the Ballona Wetlands

“They say that we're not homeless. But we are homeless.” So, as far as giving out housing and stuff like that, we're last on the list.”

BEAU BEARD

beach in the town of Venice. Beard moved to California seeking a fresh start after he got out of prison nearly eight years ago. But things did not work out as he had hoped.

The average rent in Los Angeles was

US\$2,950 a month in June. And the problem of surging housing costs is not confined to California. In 2021, more than seven million Americans in the United States spent more than 50% of their income on housing - an increase of 25%



Recreational vehicles form a community beside the Ballona Wetlands

since 2007, according to a study by the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

On top of that, says Beard, "There are no jobs." At his age, 57, people don't hire.

When his girlfriend got pregnant in 2020, Beard bought the RV to house his family. But city officials took the baby away shortly after its birth on grounds that an infant cannot live in such meagre lodgings.

"It's been the worst experience of my life," he says. Not only did the vehicle cost him his daughter, it has also left him in a grey area when it comes to any chance of subsidised housing, he continues.

"They say that we're not homeless. But we are homeless," he explains. "So as far as giving out housing and stuff like that, we're last on the list."

No parking

His RV is in a line of vehicles parked on a thoroughfare called Jefferson Boulevard

hour to heat up enough water, she said. Then there is the stress of living with the feeling that people look down on you, or worse. "I don't know why they hate us. It's ridiculous. We are good people," said Hernandez.

The only way

Another resident is Steven who works in a supermarket and parked on Jefferson Boulevard two years ago to live with his wife. They bought the small van they live in for US\$6,000, because their two salaries were not enough to rent a place. It is better than living in areas with gang and drug problems, he said, adding that in order to pay rent of US\$2,000 or US\$3,000 a month and cover basic expenses, he would need to work three jobs.

"This is the only way we would be able to survive after the inflation," he said.

AFP





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